

CHAPTER 6

THE MOTHER-DOMINATED RESERVE AND MOTHER-  
INFLUENCE BEYOND THE RESERVE

In the previous chapter we examined the household on the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve and found it to be mother-dominated. The members of the 16 households, however, do not confine their activities to the household group. As we saw in Chapter 3 when discussing the social structure of these part-Aborigines, the household, as important as it is, is only one of the groups in which residents of the Reserve participate. Other important groups in their lives are those comprising two or more households linked by kinship and functioning for some purposes as discrete units, fluid cliques that have developed on the basis of various common interests and activities, formal voluntary associations, and, of course, the Reserve itself.

It is our purpose in the first part of this chapter to examine these several groups and to illustrate what part mother-figures play in them. Our concern is to determine if life outside the household but within the Reserve itself is as matri-centred as the household. In the second part of the chapter we

will examine mother-influence beyond the Reserve and attempt to assess the part that mother-figures play in linking the Reserve to the wider community.

### Linked Households

As we saw in Chapter 5 households on the Reserve are generally not discrete units. The extensive system of kinship relationships that characterizes the Reserve links most of the households together and, as we shall see below, is an important factor in the overall integration of the group. Within this network, however, we find small knots of two or three households that interact among themselves more frequently than they do with other households and by so doing constitute groups in their own right.

These groups of linked households are invariably headed by a mother-figure and the households that are linked to her household may be regarded for all intents and purposes as extensions of her own. This is not to deny that each of the linked households may have its own mother-figure, but it is to say that there are households in which the mother-figures and other members subordinate themselves to a woman in another household upon whom they are in some ways dependent. What this means is that there are two grades of mother-figures: those whose influence is confined to their own particular households

and those whose influence is felt in a number of related households. These latter, for want of a better term, we will call "matriarchs".<sup>1</sup>

The matriarchs on the Armidale Reserve have achieved their status through a combination of factors such as kinship, age, personality and organizing ability. The links forged among the clustered households remain as long as the matriarch is capable of giving the adherent households what they need: leadership. Upon the death of a matriarch a reorganization of household clusterings takes place and given time a new matriarch or matriarchs emerge with their own clusters of dependent households. Such a reorganization of household linkages is, of course, a process in time and demonstrates that the system is a dynamic one. Let us illustrate the structure of linked households on the Reserve and the dynamic nature of the system.

During the period immediately prior to the fieldwork the structure of linked households, by all accounts, was different from that encountered during the fieldwork. Data taken from interviews and cross-checked with informants show that up to the beginning of 1969 the principal matriarch on the Reserve was Mrs. Susie Balderson. "Gran to everyone", largely because she was related to everyone, Mrs. Balderson commanded great respect from adults and children stood in awe of her. Her own household was

linked with those of her three daughters, Mrs. Nelly Thomas, Mrs. Laura Burrell and Mrs. Daisy Norton, those of her three granddaughters and a niece as well. When each of these women left Mrs. Balderson's household to establish households of their own her influence went with them. Mrs. Balderson had been and remained up to the time of her death the most influential person in their lives and all admitted their subordination to her.

The structure of these linked households under Mrs. Balderson's regime is shown in Diagram 3.

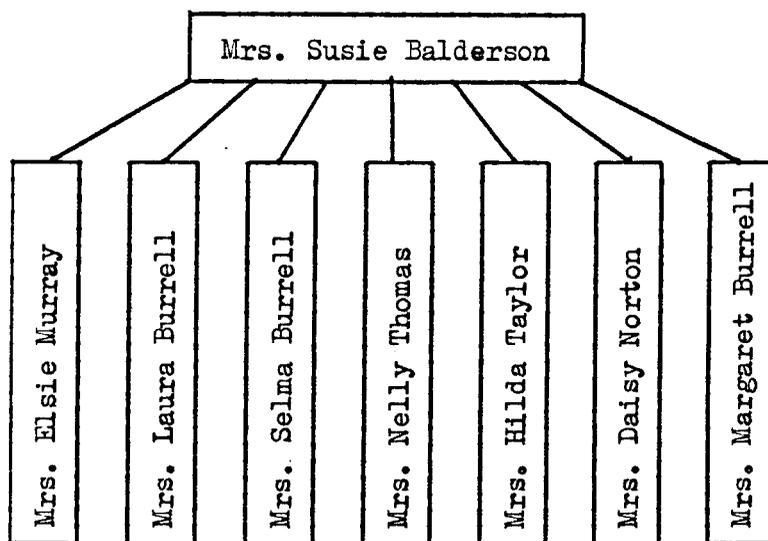


Diagram 3. Households Linked Together Under Mrs. Susie Balderson's Regime

Following Mrs. Balderson's death a reorganization of the household links took place with the emergence of three matriarchs to take Mrs. Balderson's place. These women were her three

daughters around whose households a new structure of linked households developed. Mrs. Nelly Thomas became the mother-figure for households represented by Mrs. Elsie Murray and Mrs. Margaret Burrell; Mrs. Laura Burrell became the mother-figure for households represented by Mrs. Selma Burrell and Mrs. Janie Balderson; and Mrs. Daisy Norton became the mother-figure for households represented by Mrs. Hilda Taylor and Mrs. Marlene Thomas. This new structure is depicted in Diagram 4.

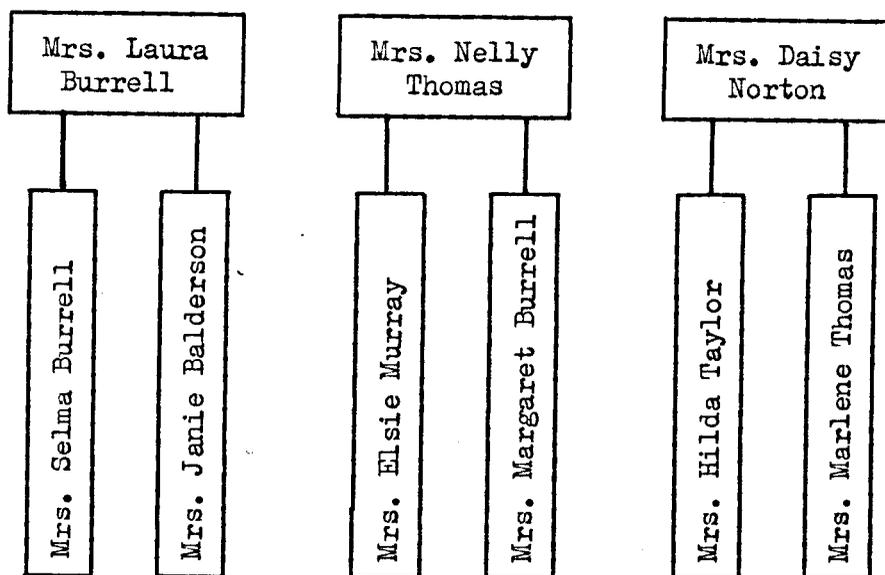


Diagram 4. Reorganization of Household Links  
Following Mrs. Susie Balderson's Death

During the fieldwork, however, this structure proved to be in a state of flux and exhibited signs that Mrs. Nelly Thomas was improving her position as a matriarch relative to her sisters. Increasingly her younger sister, Mrs. Laura Burrell, was coming under her influence together with her dependent households. Mrs.

Selma Burrell was beginning to look more to Mrs. Thomas for advice as was her sister, Mrs. Janie Balderson. Similarly, Mrs. Thomas showed signs of displacing her sister, Mrs. Norton, as Mrs. Hilda Taylor's mother-figure. This incipient rearrangement of influence indicated a possible new structure in linked households as shown in Diagram 5. In other words, Mrs. Nelly Thomas seemed to be

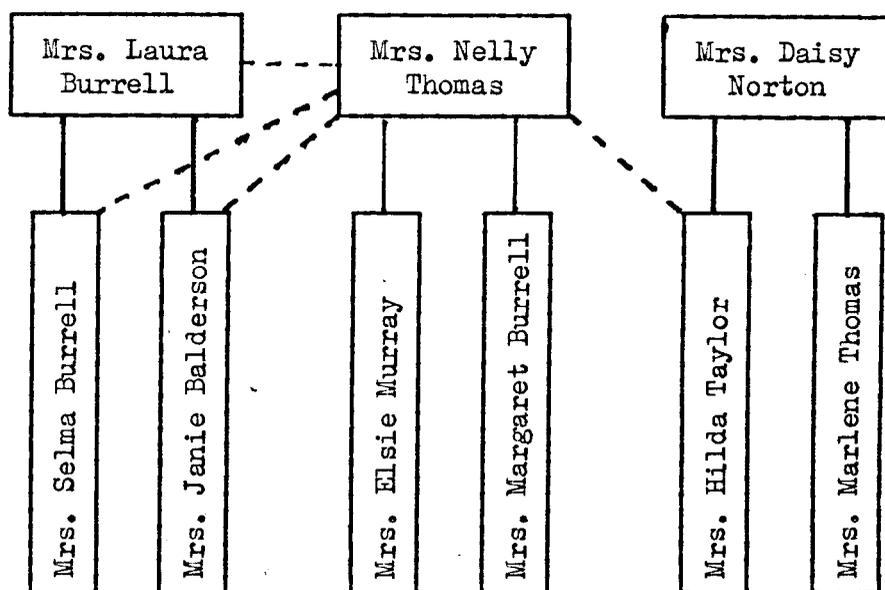


Diagram 5. Incipient Rearrangement of Linked Households Indicating a Possible New Structure

emerging as the principal matriarch in this particular structure and one is tempted to predict that given time she will take her mother's place.

Another matriarch on the Reserve, but outside the structure of linked households just described, is Mrs. Jane Ridgley who is in authority not only over her four adult offspring and their

children but also over two of her nieces' households. This structure of linked households is a simple one and is depicted in Diagram 6.

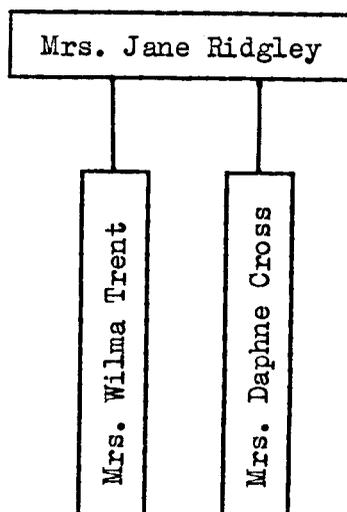


Diagram 6. Households Linked Together Under Mrs. Jane Ridgley's Regime

So far this accounts for 12 of the 16 households on the Reserve. The remaining four households are not linked to other households and operate as discrete units. The mother-figures in each of these households control their own affairs and are not in subordinate relationships to other mother-figures. Two of these women who under normal circumstances would have the makings of matriarchs are precluded from entering the matriarchal stakes by old age and bad health. The remaining two women have no close relatives on the Reserve beyond their own households and are too young to have much influence.

The structure of linked households on the Reserve is depicted in Diagram 7.

Each of the four matriarchs influence the households linked to their own. Mrs. Nelly Thomas, for example, is very important in the lives of her daughters, Mrs. Elsie Murray and Mrs. Margaret Burrell, and their respective households. These women accept the mother-figure's authority in all matters and all decisions, however trivial, are made only after consultation with "mummy". Mrs. Thomas said that her daughters are "in and out" of her house "all the time" and that she visits them several times a day. As we have seen, moreover, Mrs. Thomas' influence is extending into the households of her younger sisters as well as into those of some of her nieces.

The four matriarchs have age on their side. Younger women whose households are linked to the matriarchs' households believe that older women "should run things" because they have more experience. Mrs. Janie Balderson said that the younger women should show respect to the older women and heed their advice and Mrs. Marlene Thomas said that she was "happy" that the older women were available to turn to for advice.

But it is not only for advice that the younger women link their households to those of the matriarchs. The matriarch is a woman of proven reliability to whom one can turn in time of

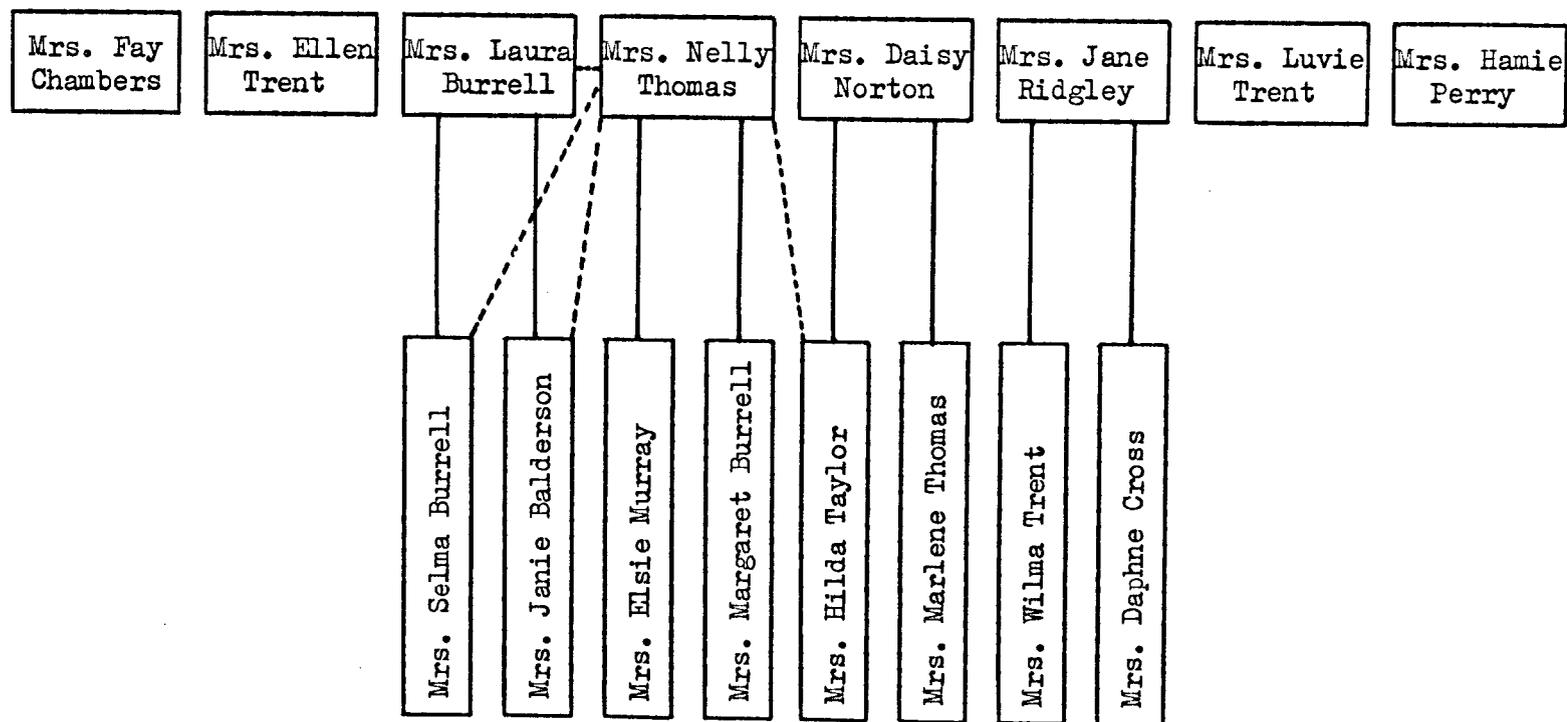


Diagram 7. Structure of Linked Households on the Ammidale Aboriginal Reserve

trouble. She will "mind" children from the households tied to her own, will feed them and assume a general oversight over them. It is not unusual for the matriarch to have more control over these children than their own mothers have. The matriarch's house is a place to visit whenever one feels like it and where one is always welcome. Visiting, which is an important leisure-time activity on the Reserve, is not confined to the mother-figure's house but is certainly the house most frequently visited.

Relations between the households linked together are close and the members of the group so formed have an intimate knowledge of what is going on in their respective households. It is this intimacy which affords this group its social warmth. The members of the households do things together and come to rely on each other. Shopping expeditions are common among women from linked households and they will shop for each other. The relationship is, then, reciprocal and this is further evidenced in the patterns of borrowing between the households. The borrower today will be the giver tomorrow. Anything movable may be borrowed: cooking utensils, furniture, food, clothing and money are among the main items borrowed. The relationship between linked households has an economic content which is a feature of this group every bit as important as the kinship basis. To know that in time of economic need one can always fall back on a mother-figure for help provides a feeling of security.



Plate 7. Borrowing from "Gran".

Cliques

Another important informal social grouping in the lives of people on the Reserve are cliques. Cliques may be formed on a number of different bases and among the part-Aborigines these are particular interests, religious affiliation and age. The members of the cliques discussed below are related to each other, some closely and others distantly, and although not unimportant in this context kinship is not the chief recruiting factor in clique membership. It is worth saying that it is impossible to name any group on the Reserve whose members are not in some way related.

The card-playing clique is the most obvious clique on the Reserve and is composed of women. There are six core members in the group (Mrs. Nelly Thomas, Mrs. Daisy Norton, Mrs. Laura Burrell, Mrs. Luvvie Trent, Mrs. Margaret Burrell and Mrs. Selma Burrell) and two peripheral members (Mrs. Marlene Thomas and Mrs. Hilda Taylor). These women play euchre and "hundred up". When "pups" (a brand of poker) is played and a ring of ten players required three other women (Mrs. Elsie Murray, Wendy Thomas and Mrs. Janie Balderson) can be relied upon to "help out". If any of the women are not available men may be invited to play, but as Mrs. Luvvie Trent indicated this is a rare occurrence.

Another clique consisting of three core members (Lena Bolton, Mrs. Daisy Norton and Mrs. Margaret Burrell) frequent the Bingo and Housie parties held in the city, and they are sometimes joined by four peripheral members (Mrs. Nelly Thomas, Mrs. Laura Burrell, Mrs. Lily Murray and Mrs. Marlene Thomas).

There is another clique of women who claim adherence to the Seventh Day Adventist Church and who disapprove of gambling. The core members are Mrs. Daphne Cross and Mrs. Jane Ridgley and the peripheral members are Mrs. Wilma Trent together with Mrs. Lily Murray who, despite the stricture that is placed on gambling, is also a peripheral member of the Bingo/Housie clique.

A clique consisting of three core members in their mid-twenties (Mrs. Elsie Murray, Mrs. Marlene Thomas and Mrs. Janie Balderson) is a recognized group on the Reserve. They engage in different activities together such as going to town to shop, sitting around the Reserve gossiping or styling each other's hair. They are sometimes joined by Teddy Burrell, an invalid pensioner in his mid-twenties, who does not work.

When the membership of these four cliques is categorized as in Table 14 it is seen that the gambling cliques attract most of the 16 women members. Card-playing attracts 11 and Bingo/Housie 7; in all 13 of the 16 women are core or peripheral members of the two gambling cliques. The 3 subjects in the

TABLE 14

MEMBERSHIP OF FOUR CLIQUES ON THE ARMIDALE  
ABORIGINAL RESERVE

| Member                | Card-Playing<br>Clique | Bingo/Housie<br>Playing Clique | Religious<br>Clique | Twenties'<br>Clique |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Mrs. Nelly Thomas     | X                      | /                              |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Daisy Norton     | X                      | X                              |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Laura Burrell    | X                      | /                              |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Luvvie Trent     | X                      |                                |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Margaret Burrell | X                      | X                              |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Selma Burrell    | X                      |                                |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Marlene Thomas   | /                      | /                              |                     | X                   |
| Mrs. Hilda Taylor     | /                      |                                |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Elsie Murray     | /                      |                                |                     | X                   |
| Miss Wendy Thomas     | /                      |                                |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Janie Balderson  | /                      |                                |                     | X                   |
| Miss Lena Bolton      |                        | X                              |                     |                     |
| Mrs. Lily Murray      |                        | /                              | /                   |                     |
| Mrs. Daphne Cross     |                        |                                | X                   |                     |
| Mrs. Jane Ridgley     |                        |                                | X                   |                     |
| Mrs. Wilma Trent      |                        |                                | /                   |                     |

(X indicates core member and / peripheral member)

twenties' clique are all peripheral members of a gambling clique.

Only one member of the religious clique is also a member of a gambling clique; she is a peripheral member of both.

Unlike these all-female cliques, all-male cliques do not exist on the Reserve because the men are so mobile and are frequently away. Men may sometimes go to the football or to the hotel in groups but it is never on any regular basis. Generally, men tend more to be individuals and to get round in pairs at most. By all accounts, the main social life of adult males takes place away from the Reserve when they are living in official work camps or when visiting unofficial Aboriginal camps and Reserves on the coast.

#### Voluntary Associations

There are few formally organized voluntary associations on the Reserve and those that exist are run by women. Generally speaking, the associations are marred by infrequent meetings and poor attendance. Regardless of the meeting held women far outnumber men who, their wives say, have to be "dragged along".

Two of the associations, the Aboriginal Pre-School Kindergarten Mothers' Club and the Aboriginal Women's Progress Association are exclusively for women. The Mothers' Club meets monthly at the kindergarten on the Reserve and the meetings are largely organized by the white teacher. Six Aboriginal women (mothers and grandmothers of the children) attend meetings regularly and four attend irregularly. The executive positions are held by Aboriginal women and under the teacher's guidance take

decisions in accordance with the general policy laid down by The Save the Children Fund which financially sponsors the kindergarten. The Aboriginal women are led by Mrs. Nelly Thomas who is supported by her sisters, Mrs. Daisy Norton and Mrs. Laura Burrell. At a meeting I attended when the teacher complained about the general tardiness of many of the children and about one persistent offender in particular, Mrs. Thomas said that she would see that the children arrived on time. She also reprimanded the mother of the offending child who accepted the criticism without offence.

The Aboriginal Women's Progress Association is virtually defunct. It has held very few meetings. Both Mrs. Nelly Thomas and Mrs. Daisy Norton believe the association should be revitalized with the aim not of seeking to improve the position of part-Aboriginal women but rather to secure amenities for the Reserve.

The Aboriginal Advancement League which has branches throughout the country formed a branch on the Reserve some years ago. The residents, however, showed little interest in its activities and this association, too, is virtually moribund. Mrs. Nelly Thomas played a leading part in the League's short life. It is clear that one of the factors explaining the League's failure on the Reserve was that the outside organizers tried to work through the men who were largely absent from the Reserve.

The Rural Youth Club was designed to cater for the part-Aboriginal youth of both the Reserve and the city. The club, however, has been taken over by the Reserve people. Ironically, young people who attend the irregular meetings are usually outnumbered by the women who attend and dominate the proceedings. Mrs. Nelly Thomas always takes the Chair and is supported by her sisters, Mrs. Daisy Norton and Mrs. Laura Burrell. When a teenage boy proposed a certain line of action at a meeting that I attended a woman rebuked him and told him to listen to his aunt, Mrs. Thomas. This association successfully runs the Aboriginal Ball and the Aboriginal Sports Day.

### The Reserve

The groups so far discussed (the household, linked households, cliques and voluntary associations) are constituent subgroups within the overall groups of which these part-Aborigines are members: the Reserve itself. That the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve is a group will be illustrated in the next few pages and it will be seen that it, too, is mother-dominated. To demonstrate the group quality of the Reserve it is necessary to draw together many of the points already made.

Every group has members and degrees of both durability and stability. The size of a group, which may range from two to any number of members, affects the relations between its members

and the overall pattern of these relationships. A group's duration, the length of time it exists, may be temporary or have some degree of permanence. This duration, which is determined by the group's purpose, provides the opportunity for norms to develop. Stability, the group's persistence in time with essentially the same properties, is reflected in the constancy of size and the rate of membership turnover. A group can persist though members leave and others take their place. Nadel<sup>2</sup> says that "the group . . . [is] independent of the concrete individuals who, at any given moment, are its members. Thus groups renew their human material in some manner, which poses the problem of recruitment". Group recruitment may be "open" or "closed" and conditions of entry imposed. These conditions may be "vested", attributes which a person cannot change such as sex, age and race, or "contingent", attributes which can be acquired such as wealth and occupational skill.<sup>3</sup>

As used here a group is a plural number of persons among whom interaction takes place over time, the interaction being visible only through the coordinated activities of the members.<sup>4</sup> In addition to interaction between members and their coordinated activities, the presence of a common purpose, values, and norms governing the behaviour of members, and status and role differentiation are the criteria by which groups are distinguished. A

group has a structure and its members are integrated. Nadel<sup>5</sup> defines integration as "the observable enduring disposition of individuals in any given group to coordinate their actions closely towards each other or in respect of each other. It is meaningless to speak of integration unless it is understood to exist in degrees".

We have seen that the Reserve numbers 127 people and that the turnover is not high. Employment opportunities, the availability of homes and the fact that Armidale is a "good town" for Aborigines helps to explain the small turnover. We have also seen that the Aborigines of the Reserve live together in a compact, isolated fashion in one area of Armidale which is generally spoken of as the "Aboriginal Reserve". In other words, the Aborigines have a common local home.<sup>6</sup> Most of the residents want to continue to live on the Reserve and only four (Mrs. Wilma Trent, Mrs. Daphne Cross, Mrs. Ellen Trent and Mrs. Fay Chambers) said they would like to live in the city. The vast majority of the residents have lived on the Reserve since its establishment in 1959. Despite a limited interest taken in the Aborigines by some townspeople the residents of the Reserve have been left substantially to themselves, and, dependent on one another, have within eleven years worked out an effective group life. Residential contiguity (none is separated from another by more than a

couple of minutes' walk) provides the opportunity for interaction. Spatial proximity and comfortable size are conditions favourable to the development of intimate group life.

Living a life characterized by continuous face-to-face, inclusive relationships of equality (there are no class divisions obvious) the Aborigines qualify as a primary group in Cooley's terms.<sup>7</sup> There is a wide use of personal names, nick-names, kinship and quasi-kinship terms implying informality. The residents are familiar with intimate details of each other's lives for there is little privacy. Dwellings are small and much time is spent outdoors in public view, there is continuous visiting, gossiping is a chief leisure-time activity, and the residents have known each other most of their lives.

Kinship is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the group and as such is an important source of integration.<sup>8</sup> None of the 127 residents is without a relative on the Reserve and the claim often made by the Aborigines that "we are all related here" is no idle exaggeration. When put to the test adults had no difficulty in precisely describing how they were related to any other person nominated even if the relationship was a distant one. These relationships, of course, have not all developed in the eleven years since the Reserve was established and many of them had existed long before. To illustrate the kinship network

that covers the Reserve Diagrams 8 and 9 have been prepared. The first shows sibling links and the second aunt-niece ties among the 16 households. Other kinship relationships could be similarly illustrated.

Although everyone is related to everyone else, for practical purposes it is not possible to treat everyone in the same way. For this reason a person selects from among his many relatives those with whom he will have close dealings. We saw examples of this in our discussion of linked households. This is not to say that obligations towards other relatives are ignored.

But in addition to kinship solidarity there is the solidarity of group membership. The residents of the Reserve see themselves as constituting a group and are well aware of its boundaries in space and membership. They are conscious of themselves as an "in-group" distinct from all other Aborigines and whites.<sup>9</sup> Ethnocentrism characterizes the group and, as we have seen, the members are suspicious of strange Aborigines. The residents of the Reserve, it has been noted, have a homogeneity of birthplace which is important in this regard.

Residents identify themselves with the Reserve and there is no reluctance to acknowledge membership. They are aware of their allegiance to the group and loyalty to their fellows. An

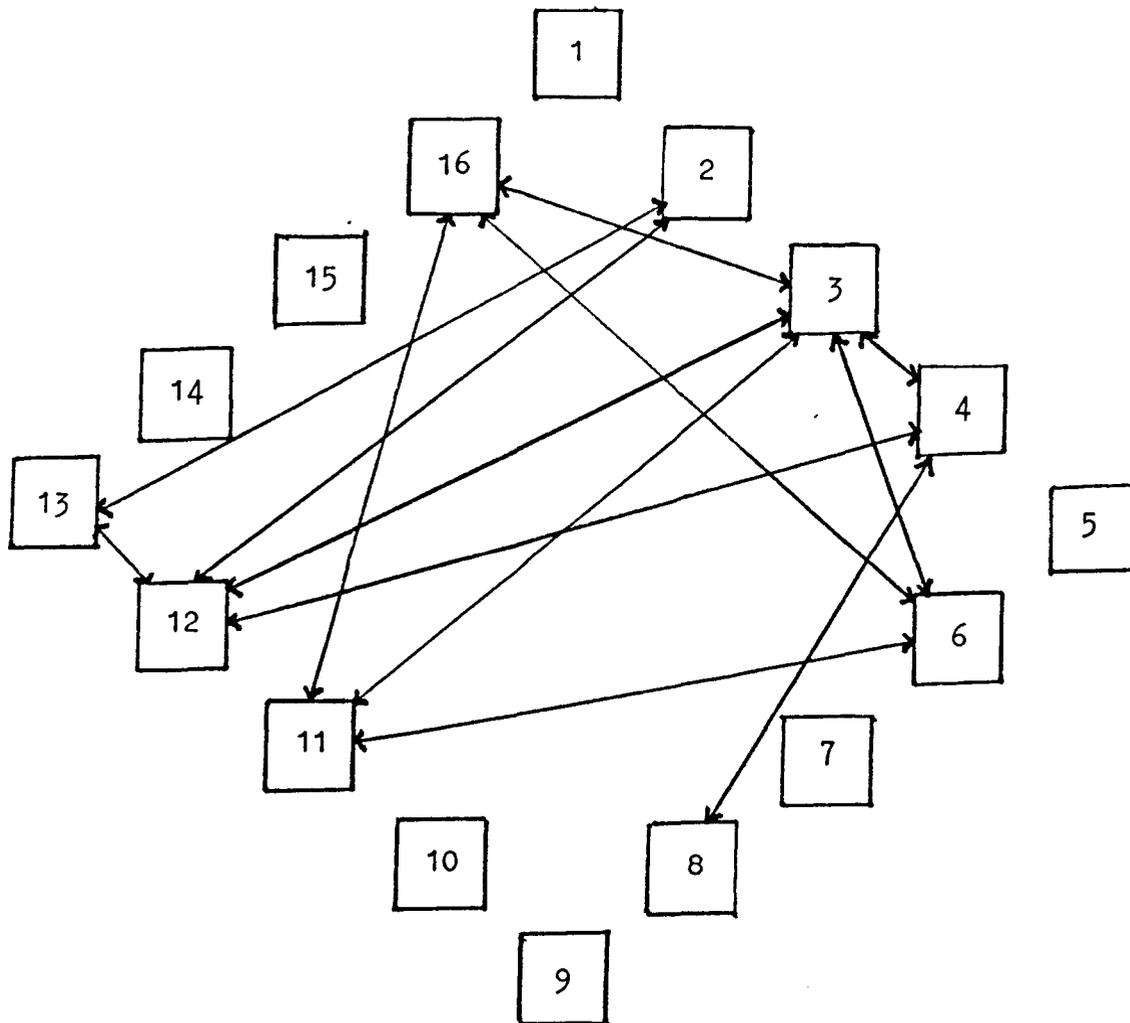


Diagram 8. Sibling Relationships Among Reserve Households

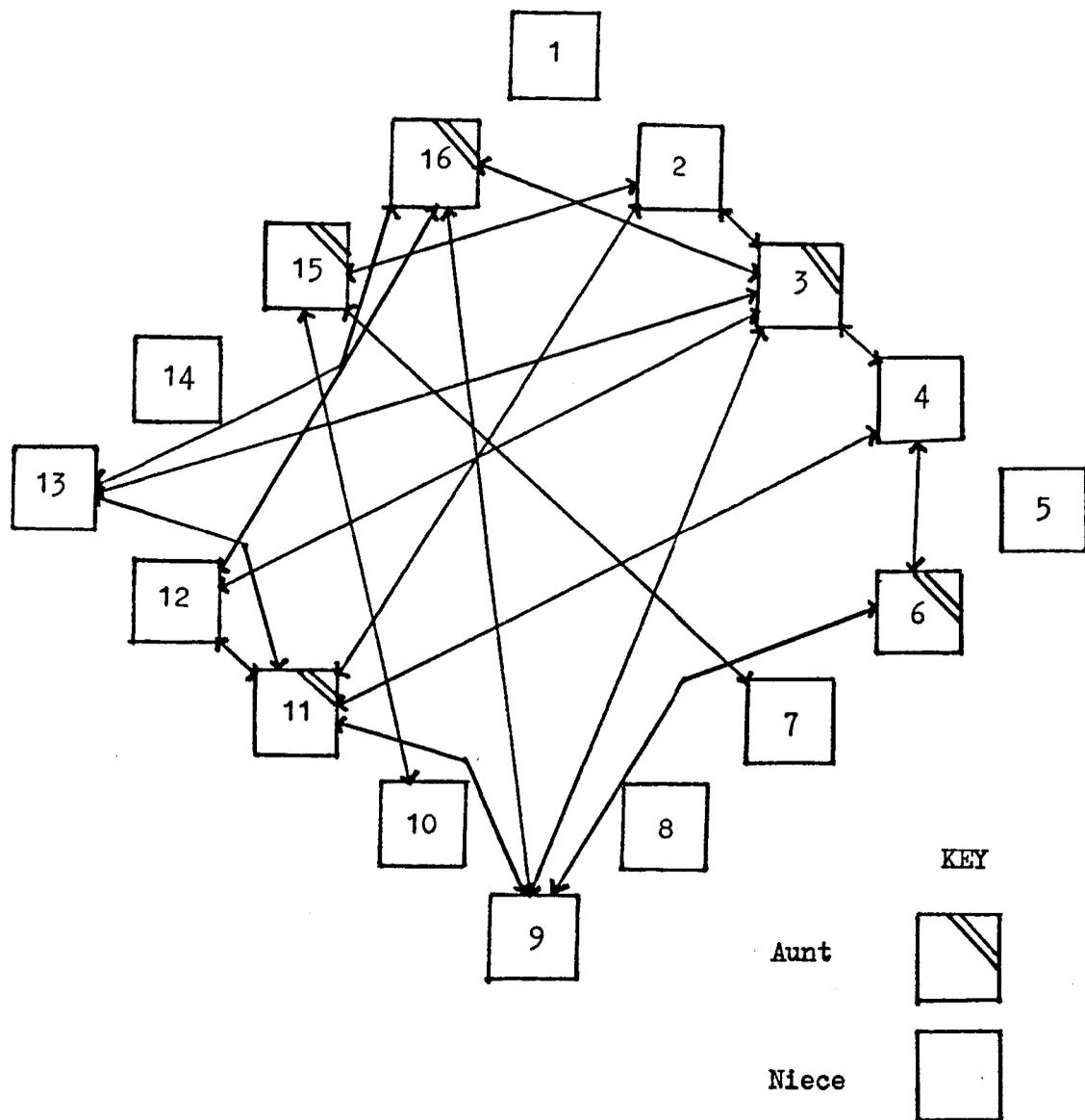


Diagram 9. Aunt-Niece Relationships Among Reserve Households

attack on one is an attack on all. If any member is discriminated against he is sure of getting the Reserve's sympathy. The Reserve offers its residents security from what is sometimes an unfriendly white world.<sup>10</sup> Life on the Reserve is characterized by a strong spirit of cooperation. No member in need of help is ignored and in times of illness help is immediate. We have already referred to the important system of borrowing and lending that operates.

The Aborigines, who constitute a "multipurpose" group are rarely all mobilized at any one time. Few "multipurpose" groups ever are. The Aborigines live together and are in continuous interaction and do not have to hold meetings to affirm that they are a group, hence the poor reception given by the residents to voluntary associations.<sup>11</sup> The activities of the residents of the Reserve include all the daily and routine activities of living together and these are carried out through the series of interlocking sub-groups to which we have already referred: households, linked households, cliques and voluntary associations. These sub-groups are part of the overall Reserve's structure. In Nadel's terms the Reserve is the "widest compass" group and its internal sub-groups the "narrowest compass" groups and the "external order" of the sub-groups is the "internal order" of the embracing group.<sup>12</sup>

There is a relationship between the coordinated activities of the Aborigines and the basic values to which they are committed. Their value system stresses cooperation between members rather than competition and there is a high conformity to this on the action level. Their value system is diametrically opposed to that of the local whites which stresses individual achievement and economic independence and as such is one of the chief factors distinguishing them from whites.

The Reserve is a "multipurpose" group whose purposes are not precisely formulated. However, it has been indicated that cooperation is highly developed and this is certainly a group purpose. Cooperation is part of the general purpose of the group to afford its members security. The group is effective in achieving its purposes because members are closely identified with them. There is a feeling among the vast majority of members that the group should stay together so that the satisfactions it offers may continue.

The Reserve has spontaneously developed a body of norms which govern members' behaviour in conformity with the group's purposes and values. Acceptance of these norms contribute to the security offered by the group by making the behaviour of members predictable. The existence of norms, informal as they may be, implies that the members are agreed as to how the group

should function. Members who fail to conform are seen as threats to the group and are subject to various diffuse mechanisms of social control. Gossip and ridicule are effective control devices.

Status and role differentiation are found on the Reserve. There are distinctive roles for the sexes qualified by the age factor. There is a marked sexual division of labour; adult males are the breadwinners and women are responsible for house-keeping and child care. We have seen that few women work and only for brief periods when they do.

The Reserve has no one leader but rather a lot of "little leaders" who organize and control things within their restricted spheres of activity. We have spoken of the importance of the mother-figure in household control and in the groups of linked households. We have shown how cliques are organized around female core members and how the very few voluntary associations are led by two or three women. The person who comes closest to being the leader of the Reserve is Mrs. Nelly Thomas whose activities have been mentioned in various contexts. But any assertion that Mrs. Thomas is leader of the Reserve would not be accepted by all the members. Although they are willing to have her act as spokeswoman when the occasion arises some find her "pushy", scorn her behind her back and do not participate in the

(u.s.)

activities that she organizes on the Reserve.<sup>13</sup> Be this as it may, there are signs that Mrs. Thomas' influence over members of the Reserve is increasing and she is gradually stepping into the role of "mum of mums" vacated by her mother, Mrs. Susie Balderson. Mrs. Thomas is supported in this emerging role by her sisters, daughters and nieces.

Although we have spoken of the Reserve being strongly integrated it does not mean that it is free from internal strife. Residents have their differences and arguments and fights sometimes occur. Arguments flare up over a number of matters but apart from those occurring over domestic matters those caused by children are probably the most numerous. A woman takes no offence if her children are reprimanded by women within her close circle but she will be highly offended if any woman outside this circle interferes even though they may be related. Children "cheeking" women or fighting with other children are the chief causes of friction. When one woman hit a boy for "cheeking" her when she told him to go home, the boy's mother entered the picture. The women abused each other. When the boy's father told his wife "to come inside" she told him to "shut up" and added that it was none of his business. The man went inside and never appeared again even though the women came to blows. Female relatives raced to the scene and after some time got the protagonists back into

their homes. Bad feelings continued between the women for some weeks. Apart from the brief unsuccessful appearance of the boy's father none of the men on the Reserve at the time participated in the fracas. They regarded the matter as none of their business and virtually admitted that they had no control over what the women did.

The Reserve is not only a group in its own right but exhibits a typical example of what has been called "part-Aboriginal culture".<sup>14</sup> This is a culture peculiar to the part-Aborigines. Sharing in this culture further integrates the members of the Reserve. The culture supports the position of women and the mother-figure role specifically. The Reserve revolves around the women and the mother-figure is the focus of solidarity.

#### Mother-Influence Beyond The Reserve

Although from one point of view the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve can be regarded as relatively isolated, it is nevertheless part of a wider social system. As indicated in Chapter 3 the Reserve has relationships with the City of Armidale and with different centres along the North Coast and in other parts of New South Wales. The men find much of their work on the North Coast and there is a considerable amount of time spent visiting relatives on the coast. Men more than women engage in this activity. We also

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saw in Chapter 3 that the Reserve, through a variety of relationships, is associated with nation-wide organizations. In short, we can say that the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve is part of the overall Australian social system.

In the final pages of this chapter we will focus attention on some of the relationships that the Aborigines have with the City of Armidale itself and how most of these relationships are controlled by women of the Reserve.

Aboriginal men find some employment in Armidale and in its hinterland and on the brief occasions that the women work they, too, find jobs in Armidale. The residents of the Reserve spend a considerable amount of time in downtown Armidale, the women mainly shopping and the men visiting the hotels. Armidale is important for recreational purposes. Women attend the Housie and Bingo sessions at the Armidale Ambulance Station and at the R.S.L. Hall, children attend the local pictures and, in season, the men attend football matches. Occasionally, Aboriginal women attend Mass at the Roman Catholic Cathedral and a couple attend Seventh Day Adventist services. Aboriginal children attend local schools, the Aboriginal Homework Centre and coaching sessions organized by the Armidale Aboriginal Assimilation Committee. The women of the Reserve also have relationships with charitable organizations with branches in Armidale. These include

the Armidale Aboriginal Assimilation Committee, the local committee representing The Save the Children Fund which financially sponsors the kindergarten on the Reserve, and the local St. Vincent de Paul Society. Furthermore, when the residents of the Reserve organize social activities themselves they make use of town facilities because there is no hall on the Reserve to take large numbers.

The contact that the members of the Reserve have with Armidale is largely on an individual basis but there are occasions when the Reserve is represented as a whole. Two of these occasions are the Aboriginal Ball and the Aboriginal Sports Day. Representation of the Reserve is invariably by the Aboriginal women and if any menfolk are present it is because the women have "dragged them along". The men make no bones about the fact that they feel decidedly out of place at formally organized functions in the city and do their best to avoid them. Any city organization that wants to interest the Reserve people in its activities will succeed only if it works through the women. Attempts by townspeople to work through the men of the Reserve have always ended in failure.

It is the mothers of Reserve children who take most interest in the education of their children. Although the mothers cannot help their children with their school work they encourage them to attend school, the Aboriginal Home Work Centre

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Plate 8. Two Children at the Aboriginal  
Home Work Centre.

and coaching sessions organized by the Armidale Aboriginal Assimilation Committee, at least until legal leaving age is reached. By that time, pressed as they so often are by financial worries, mothers are happy for their sons to leave school and go to work. Discussing the subject of her children's education Mrs. Margaret Burrell stated that her husband was typical of the fathers on the Reserve in that "he couldn't care less". If the children have any trouble at school it is always the mother, accompanied by an older female relative, who has to visit the school to sort things out.

When a woman has to visit the school, the Clerk of Petty Sessions, the police, the Departments of Social Services or Child Welfare, the doctor or the hospital, or the Aboriginal Authority she is more often than not accompanied by Mrs. Nelly Thomas who acts as spokeswoman.

Mrs. Thomas represents the Reserve at town meetings, deals with the Aboriginal Authority when necessary, dealt successfully with the New England County Council in an attempt to get better street lighting for the Reserve, was responsible for having the school bus re-routed to pick up school children at the Reserve, and will accompany any of the boys of the Reserve when they go looking for work in the city. Mrs. Thomas acted as spokeswoman for the Aborigines when the new pre-school kindergarten was

opened on the Reserve and as spokeswoman for the mothers of school children on the Reserve when it was decided to oppose the opening of a segregated class for Aboriginal children at a local school. She was also Chair-woman of the Aboriginal Ball Committee, made arrangements for the Mayoress to judge the Belle-of-the-Ball, and acted as "bouncer" when the Ball took place. Whenever the Reserve needs to be represented at a city function Mrs. Thomas is approached to make the necessary arrangements. Her first move is to call together an ad hoc committee of Reserve women which then assumes responsibility for the matter. Among other matters that she takes charge of are organizing funerals for Aborigines with the city's funeral director and keeping the local press informed of events involving the Reserve. Mrs. Thomas believes that the Reserve's reputation must be protected and that the residents must play their part to achieve this. In her efforts, Mrs. Thomas is supported by her sisters, Mrs. Daisy Norton, Mrs. Laura Burrell and Mrs. Janie Balderson together with her own daughters and nieces. When taken together these women represent a formidable backing.

The women of the Reserve, then, are the key personnel with regard to the informal and formal relationships that the Reserve has with the City of Armidale. Whenever men are found participating in any activity involving Reserve and townspeople it is

because they have been forced to do so by their womenfolk and even the most superficial observation will detect that on these occasions the men are only peripherally involved.

Notes and References

1. Reay, 1947, p.73, uses this term to describe a similar phenomenon among the part-Aborigines of north western New South Wales.
2. Nadel, 1951, p.147.
3. Ibid., pp.151-156.
4. Homans, 1950, p.84.
5. Nadel, op.cit., pp.185-186.
6. Reay, op.cit., p.4 and Bell, 1959a, p.141 discuss geographical isolation as a factor contributing to the development of local groups among part-Aborigines.
7. Cooley, 1909, p.7.
8. Most students of part-Aborigines have spoken of the important part that kinship plays in integrating local groups. cf., Barwick, 1962, p.21.
9. In her study of part-Aboriginal groups in Melbourne Barwick draws attention to the fact that whites are never members of these groups, ibid., p.21.
10. Reay, op.cit., p.5 makes the point that "colour-consciousness" and the awareness of prejudice against Aborigines heightens their dependence upon their local groups.
11. Warner and Srole, 1949, p.50 have indicated that when an ethnic group lives in spatial proximity there is an absence of voluntary associations.
12. Nadel, op.cit., pp.176-181.

- (13)
13. The fact that part-Aboriginal leaders are frequently targets for criticism and jealousy by members of their own local groups has been commented upon by writers on part-Aboriginal matters. cf., Barwick, op.cit., pp.20, 22 and Berndt, 1962, p.87.
  14. See Bell, op.cit., pp.99-131.

(17)

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

(10)

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION

The observation that part-Aboriginal societies display certain matrifocal tendencies has previously been made by different Australian sociologists and social anthropologists. In the 1961 proceedings of the Research Conference which set up the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies reference is made to the "matri-central" family among the part-Aborigines.<sup>1</sup> Bell<sup>2</sup> has mentioned the matrifocal features of life among the La Perouse part-Aborigines and in a recently-published general paper on Aboriginal education states that part-Aboriginal groups are generally mother-centred. Families on part-Aboriginal Reserves on the North Coast of New South Wales, Calley<sup>3</sup> reports, are often female-led, and in the part-Aboriginal groups in western New South Wales studied by Beckett<sup>4</sup> "the mum" has a most important role. Likewise, both Fink<sup>5</sup> and Reay<sup>6</sup> refer to the dominating part that women take in their households in north-western New South Wales.

But although these scholars have mentioned the matri-central features of part-Aboriginal social life no detailed

study of mother-leadership in these groups has been made. This study of a part-Aboriginal group - the residents of the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve - is an attempt to examine matrifocality in some depth and to offer some explanation for the phenomenon among these people. On the bases of the data collected in this study and comparisons made with the work of other Australian scholars in this field it seems reasonable to assume that other part-Aboriginal groups in similar circumstances would also exhibit strong matrifocal social organizations. Further investigations of part-Aboriginal groups from this point of view are warranted.

#### Explanations of Matrifocality

As indicated in Chapter 1 most empirical studies of matrifocality have been made in the West Indies, Latin America, Africa and to a lesser extent in the southern United States and Britain, and the theories explaining the phenomenon have been based on these studies. It is the purpose of this chapter to determine if these theoretical frameworks fit the situation described in the foregoing chapters of this report.

As we have seen, Solien,<sup>7</sup> after comparing the available literature on matricentrality, enunciated four criteria which she regards as both significant features of, and contributive factors in the formation of mother-dominated households regard-

less of the societies in which they are found.

The first of these criteria is that in such households the wife-mother, who is usually the most stable member of the group, is dominant and plays the leading psychological role. Among the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve the mother-figure is the stable member of the household and the stable parental figure. Her stability is reflected partly in the fact that, unlike her husband who is geographically mobile and frequently absent for varying periods of time,<sup>8</sup> she is always "at home". Her absences are few and of short duration. She rarely takes a job and if she does it is only for brief periods. Anchored to the household and the Reserve by her acknowledged responsibilities to her children and other household members and by the knowledge that, because of the housing shortage on the Reserve, she will lose tenancy of her house if she were absent for long periods, the mother-figure leads a relatively settled life. Of these anchors children are the most important. Women, regardless of the society in which they live, have always been less mobile than men because of the dependence of children on them. We have seen in earlier chapters that once a part-Aboriginal woman starts a family she seeks a settled existence for them and stops roaming around with her husband. If the husband cannot provide permanent accommodation the woman will

return to her mother who usually can. Women said that children "can't be carted all over the place" and to attempt to do so placed great strain on the mothers. One importance of housing to the women is seen in that even the probability of their husbands "playing up" when away from home will not motivate them to give up their tenancies. Indeed, they might be said to value their houses more than their husbands' fidelity. The relatively cheap rent paid on the Reserve is also an inducement to keep the house. Beasley<sup>9</sup> in her study of part-Aborigines in the Sydney metropolitan area makes this point, too.

The mother-figure is also stable in the sense of being dependable and reliable. Members of her own and other households linked to hers know that she is always there to advise on their problems and to help them materially when they are in need. The husband-father is the unstable parental figure and both his children and other members of the household recognize this. This knowledge weakens the father's image in their eyes and he is almost ignored. We have seen how the husband-father has abdicated most of his responsibilities as father and husband. Faced with his instability and often his drunkenness the children look beyond him to the mother and she recognizes that someone has to take charge.

What we find in the 16 households of the Reserve is that

regardless of whether the husband-father or some other adult male is present a mother-figure takes the lead. She is the pivot around whom "a constellation . . . of effective kinsfolk"<sup>10</sup> revolve. She is the decision-maker in all matters concerning the household and any other households linked to her own. Her authority is recognized both by the children and the men. "She's the boss", is a fact that is underlined by the support she obtains from the various authorities because they, too, recognize her stability. Calley,<sup>11</sup> in his study of part-Aboriginal Reserves on the North Coast of New South Wales, confirms our findings when he describes how the wife-mother gets support against the husband-father from the police, the Aborigines' Welfare Officer and the Reserve managers. He writes:

It is significant that a complaint by a wife often initiates intervention by the [Reserve] manager . . . . Aboriginal women have learned to exploit these peculiar circumstances, and endeavour to enlist the support of the [Reserve] manager in even the most trivial marital disputes. They are adept at manipulating the [Aborigines'] Act to their own advantage.

Armed with such authority the mother-figure is in a position to dominate psychologically those dependent on her. This psychological power is particularly noticeable in the case of children in whose socialization the mother-figure is the principal agent. She sets the standards and rears the children

to conform to them. A daughter's dependence on her mother to which we have previously referred is largely of a psychological type. A girl grows up depending on her mother and the idea that the mother is her best friend is inculcated by the mother from an early age. However, there are also many occasions in a girl's life when the truth of this is demonstrated: when she is pregnant, when she has children, when her husband proves unreliable, when her husband deserts her and so on. One is left with the impression that many women have not learned to think for themselves and that without some mother-figure standing by to make decisions for them they would be lost. Invariably, these women preface their statements with "mumme says" or "mum thinks". Any decision taken by the mother or any advice given by her is accepted and acted upon. The mother-figure is never questioned and daughters will run their marital relationships according to their mothers' wishes. Kerr's statement<sup>12</sup> in relation to the matral tendency of the people of Ship Street, Liverpool, that the marital relationship "frequently . . . remains at an immature level because of the power of the Mum" is equally true of the conjugal tie on the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve. No man can hope to compete with his mother-in-law for psychological control of his wife because more often than not he has forfeited his chances by repeatedly demonstrating his unreliability.

Because of his failure to prove reliable in early married life the husband is never given a second chance. Having missed his opportunity to replace the mother-in-law in his wife's affection at a time when, as we have seen, she is more critical of her mother's domination than she ever will be again he is relegated to a subordinate position in his wife's estimation. Women exhibit a marked sentimental attachment to their mothers.

"Mumnee means everything to me" sums up the daughter's relationship with her mother and is a telling commentary on the relationship with her husband. The mother-daughter relationship is the strongest in the matrix of social relationships, endures through time and is strongly reciprocal. In her study of matricentrality in Ship Street, Liverpool, Kerr<sup>13</sup> also refers to the husband's drunkenness, the unhappy marital relationship that can result from this and the way in which the husband's behaviour is a factor in explaining the strong mother-married daughter relationship which characterizes these people. In other words, the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve are not alone as far as this phenomenon is concerned.

During childhood boys, too, are psychologically dominated by their mothers but whereas daughters remain so even in adult life boys break away from their mother's control, firstly, when they leave home to work and, secondly, when they marry. Although

when working away from home boys send their mothers money to help her household's finances showing, as Smith<sup>14</sup> puts it in reference to a similar situation in British Guiana, that they retain a nominal membership in their mothers' households, they nevertheless begin to cast off the mother's spell. When men marry they are, as Kerr<sup>15</sup> has phrased it for the matrifocal people of Ship Street, Liverpool, "absorbed into their wives' matrilocal family units" and their mothers' influence disappears. Although a woman "is recognized to have authority over her daughter's children . . . she does not have parallel rights over her son's children who are within the sphere of influence of some other matri-focal unit". With these words Smith<sup>16</sup> refers to the mother's waning influence over her married sons among the mother-centred Negroes of British Guiana but he could be describing a similar phenomenon on the Arrindale Aboriginal Reserve.

But it is not only the children who are psychologically dominated by the mother-figure. Every member of her household is influenced by her in some way. It would be no exaggeration to say that the households think how the mother thinks. The members repeat her opinions on every subject discussed. Again, the part-Aboriginal mother is not alone in this for Kerr<sup>17</sup> sees "the psychological power of the Mum" as one of the chief factors

in explaining the mother's dominant position in the household of Ship Street, Liverpool. Similarly, Beckett<sup>18</sup> writes of the part-Aborigines of western New South Wales:

In terms of stability and sentiment the relationship between mother and children is by far the strongest. Women scarcely ever desert their children, and most never leave home at all: their lives are very largely taken up with domestic duties and it is they who obtain and prepare the food - an important consideration in a society where the supply of meals is often uncertain. In short, the mother is the pivot of the home. The bond is continued in later life, and old women . . . often exercise considerable authority over the next generation.

It would seem, then, that the mother's stability and psychological control of her children and other dependents is not confined to the matrifocal Armidale Reserve.

Solien's second criterion to explain mother-dominated households is that the wife-mother may or may not be the economic mainstay of the group but even if she is not she probably exercises authority over income and expenditure.

Because few women on the Armidale Reserve work they cannot be called the economic mainstay of the group. Men are supposed to be the breadwinners and they perform this role with varying degrees of success. Even when women are employed it is only on a casual basis and rarely lasts more than a few weeks and the wages they earn do not form a significant part of the household's total income. Although they do not contribute very

much to the household's wages-pool women, nevertheless, may make considerable contributions to it by means of social service payments such as child endowment and deserted wives' pensions. Social service payments, as we have seen, constitute an important part of many a household's income.

We have seen that the mother-figure has full control over the household's income. Wages are handed to her and she spends them on behalf of the household as she sees fit. In this she has a responsibility and as there never seems to be any criticism of the way in which she expends the income it can be assumed that the pattern of expenditure is acceptable to the other members. Like "the mum" in Ship Street, Liverpool, the part-Aboriginal mother, then, controls "the purse"<sup>19</sup> which in turn gives her a control over members of the household who must rely on her for whatever money or purchases they require. Similarly, in British Guiana married women do not work but they control their husbands' wages which, according to Smith,<sup>20</sup> is a factor in explaining the matricentrality of that society.

The third criterion that Solien suggests contributes to a matrifocal household system is that the wife-mother exerts the greatest influence upon the development of the children. This is certainly true of the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve. In discussing the first criterion, the importance of the mother-

figure as the principal socializing agent in the lives of the children was mentioned. Fathers have abdicated their responsibility to their children. Children are "woman's work" is the justification trotted out by men when questioned on their relationships to their children. Clarke<sup>21</sup> offers the same example when discussing the father-child relationship in matral Jamaica. It is obvious from a very early age that part-Aboriginal children realise the mother-figure is the chief force in their lives and in the household. They defer to her and ignore their father even if he is present. They are loyal to their mother and support her against their father. Clarke<sup>22</sup> records a similar situation in Jamaica where the children take the mother's side and where there is no strong feeling between a man and his children. Clarke's words<sup>23</sup> are pertinent to the Armidale Reserve situation. She says that in Jamaica children in their "most impressionable years" come to feel the "strain and tension between their parents". She continues:

There is no privacy . . . and children overhear and see the quarrels and even fights which occur between their parents . . . They overhear the mother's conversation with neighbours or kin. Inevitably they side with her rather than with the father who is rarely in the home long enough to establish any intimacy . . . In those circumstances the child learns to regard the mother as the person with whom he has the most, if not the only, stable relationship.

On the Armidale Reserve it is the mother to whom children look

when hungry and tired and it is to her that they run when frightened or in need of comfort. It is true that in all societies mother-child relationships are intimate ones and that there is nothing unique in the Armidale Reserve situation in this. The uniqueness of the situation, however, lies in the fact that it is the mother-figure who determines the pattern of socialization. The father plays little or no part. Smith<sup>24</sup> sees the mother's child-rearing role as a cause of matrifocality in British Guiana.

Solien's fourth criterion that makes for a mother-dominated domestic scene is that the husband-father may be absent for long periods and even when present does not adequately perform his role expectations.

Again, the data collected on the residents of the Armidale Reserve support this contention. The husband-father is frequently absent from the Reserve and the absences are often for long periods. Indeed, these absences are often so frequent that they are tantamount to the husband-father being permanently absent. Men absent themselves for economic and social reasons. It has been indicated that the men regard themselves as rural workers primarily and even though they might find jobs of a permanent nature they will give them up when casual rural work offers. The men are also attracted to coastal employment centres by the

sociability generated in them. This mobility is learned and has become a habit for many, but it is also a form of escape for some from what for them is an unattractive home environment. The men travel without their wives and children who remain on the Reserve. Because of this the women are charged with responsibility for themselves and their children and because this responsibility is often beyond their capacity they seek out mother-figures upon whom they come to rely. These mother-figures who because of age, experience and the self-reliance they have learnt are more able to cope. In time women learn that their own mother or some mother-figure is more reliable than their husband and turn to them increasingly for the help and guidance that the men are expected but have failed to give. When the husband-father returns home it is because employment opportunities have dried up or because he has worn his welcome out and not because he feels obliged to fulfil his role as husband-father.

Another factor in understanding the matrifocal situation is that the dual role of mother and pseudo-father that the wife-mother has to assume when the men are away is not easily dropped when the men return. It is partly this reason why women resent the husband-father interfering in either household or child management when he returns home. Because of this the men have learnt not to interfere in these two spheres of activity. To

do so only leads to more marital strife. And yet, as we have seen, the women are ambivalent in their attitude to the men. They criticize their menfolk for not fulfilling their roles as husbands and fathers and for generally shirking their responsibilities, which illustrates that in the ideal situation the men are expected to play an important part, but they resent it when the men attempt to do so and may even invoke the authorities to prevent the men from "causing trouble". To avoid trouble with the authorities, which could lead to gaol or expulsion from the Reserve, the men accept the mother-dominated system and mind their own business. This is not to say, however, that the men always resent the system, for it frees them from responsibility and subsequent blame should the mother-figure upset things and it also affords them a more carefree existence.

It is, then, the absences of the men and their inability when at home to fulfil their roles that make the women leaders by default. In her study of part-Aborigines in Sydney Beasley<sup>25</sup> indicates that because of the men's absences the wife-mother and not the husband-father is the decision-maker in the household as well as being the children's disciplinarian. Likewise, Smith<sup>26</sup> sees the man's weak position in matrifocal British Guiana as a result of his frequent absences from home and also as a contributing factor to the instability of the marital bond.

Solien has a further contribution to make to our understanding of matrifocality. From her comparative analysis of the published literature on mother-domination she contends that mother-centred social systems appear to be associated with "mixed-blood" societies in which the traditional culture and social structure have been disrupted or dissolved by the impact of Western civilization or when the "mixed-blood" people are marginal to both of the societies from which they are derived.

The material presented on the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve would support Solien's hypothesis. The traditional Aboriginal culture and social structure of the regions from which the present part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve originated have disappeared under the impact of European settlement. Other features of the contact situation were the marked decline of the Aboriginal population and the disappearance of full-blood Aborigines because of introduced diseases and violent death. Although a close watch was kept in order to detect any aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture and social structure among the part-Aborigines of the Reserve, none which could be legitimately related back to the traditional past was found. One could perhaps speculate that the superstitions and the belief in spirits discovered among the residents might have their origin in traditional times but there is no evidence to support this notion.

But although the traditional Aboriginal organisation and culture have disappeared and although the part-Aborigines of the Reserve now live under the influence of European culture exclusively and participate in various aspects of its social organisation, they have not been assimilated into it. This is clear especially with regard to the non-material aspects of European culture: the values, beliefs and sentiments that are generally held to be characteristic of the Western way of life.

In other words, the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve are a marginal people who participate in certain aspects of the host society's culture and organisation but who cannot be said to have been incorporated into it. Like part-Aboriginal peoples in other regions of Australia they have partly solved their dilemma by developing what students have come to call a "mixed-blood" or "part-Aboriginal" culture,<sup>27</sup> and "which exists as a unique form within white society".<sup>28</sup> Mother-domination, which seems to be a feature of part-Aboriginal life, cannot be said to be a principle of their peculiar culture. Rather, it has arisen because an important aspect of that culture, the husband-father's ideal role as head of the household, has so often failed.

Although this particular aspect of Solien's theory of matrifocality is supported by evidence from the detribalised

Negro peoples of the West Indies, Africa and the southern United States as well as by data collected on the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve, it falls down in the face of increasing evidence of the existence of matrifocal societies among non-native peoples such as the British. The mother-dominated groups of Bethnal Green<sup>29</sup> and Ship Street, Liverpool,<sup>30</sup> are not composed of people whose traditional culture has broken down or who are in any way marginal to the prevailing cultural theme of the society in which they live. Rather, they are Englishmen who for certain reasons live a mother-dominated way of life. In other words, matral groups are not confined to deculturated native peoples.

Does Winch's hypothesis<sup>31</sup> (already referred to in Chapter 1 and which states that the lower a family is positioned on a scale of socio-economically based classes the greater is the probability that the marital union will be less stable and that the wife-mother will play a more dominant role in family life) come to the rescue in the face of this dilemma? As far as we can ascertain all the groups reported in the published literature as matrifocal - whether they be composed of deculturated Negroes in the West Indies, Africa and in the southern United States or of Englishmen in London and Liverpool - have a low socio-economic status within the total societies of which they are part. Like-

wise, the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve are found on the lower reaches of the socio-economic scale. Again, it is clear from the published literature on the matricentred, socio-economically depressed Negro groups of the Caribbean and in the Deep South of the United States, just as it is from data presented here on the mother-dominated and socio-economically depressed residents of the Armidale Reserve, that the marital union in all cases is characteristically unstable. However, the matrifocal groups of London and Liverpool which are also at the lower end of the socio-economic scale are not characterized by unstable conjugal relationships. Indeed, the reverse is true. From figures given by Young and Willmott<sup>32</sup> on divorce and separation in Bethnal Green it can be said that marital unions are markedly stable. In 1955 from a sample of 294 people in Bethnal Green less than 3 (1 per cent) had parents who were separated or divorced.

It seems, then, that there must be some other factor which is common to all these groups and which will help to account for their matrifocal nature. Analysis both of the published material and the material presented here on the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve suggests that the factor sought could be the absence of the husband-father. The absence of the husband-father

in these societies may be for a variety of reasons and it may be permanent or temporary. Some men may be permanently absent because they have deserted their wives or are separated or divorced from them or because they have died. All the societies surveyed have cases of this. Other men may be temporarily absent for employment purposes and spend days or weeks away from home. The Caribbean groups and the part-Aborigines are illustrative of this. Even men who sleep at home every night, nevertheless, might spend little of their waking hours with their wives and children. At work all day, they adjourn to "the pub" in the evenings and spend their weekends there too. Bethnal Green and Ship Street, Liverpool, are the societies we have in mind here. Kerr's statement<sup>33</sup> concerning the people of Ship Street, Liverpool, typifies husband-father behaviour in these societies:

Mrs. W. mentioned that her husband comes home from work . . . has his tea and goes out. She never goes with him.

The particular reason for the absence of the husband-father is not important. It is the absence itself which is to be emphasized. Furthermore, a permanently absent husband-father is no worse than a temporarily absent one because, as we have seen, when the temporary absences are frequent the effect is cumulative and will ultimately produce the same result: the assumption by the less mobile wife-mother of the husband-father's role. The

mother by default becomes a type of "female" father or pseudo-father<sup>34</sup> which is the clue to the cryptic title of Edith Clarke's book, My Mother Who Fathered Me, which deals with matrifocality in the West Indies. It would seem, then, that matrifocality is likely to occur in groups on the lower end of the socio-economic scale where the husband-father figures are permanently or frequently absent from their wives and children.

There have been many other attempts by students of matrifocality to explain the phenomenon and the number of attempts highlights the disagreement among scholars as to its explanation.<sup>35</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1 these explanations have chiefly been demographic, historical, valuational, functional and psychological. Does the data presented here on the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve support any of these several explanations?

Some students<sup>36</sup> have attempted to explain matrifocality in terms of certain demographic factors such as late marriage for men, their early deaths relative to women and their migration. These factors add up to the fact that there are always more women than men and fewer males of marriageable age in these societies than is normal. Because there are fewer men than women, the explanation goes, the women have no alternative but to take the

lead. Late marriage for men and their early deaths relative to women are not important in explaining the matricentred nature of the Armidale Reserve. Men on the Reserve marry or establish de facto relationships at an early age and although they might not live as long as women in general this is not a significant factor in explaining the matral bias of the household and the Reserve itself. Matricentred households exist even when the husband-father is present, and Mrs. Nelly Thomas who, as we have seen, is gradually establishing herself as the leader and spokeswoman of the Reserve, nevertheless, has a husband. Her mother, Mrs. Susie Balderson, who was undisputed leader of the Reserve predeceased her husband. In other words, the matrifocal bias so apparent in the household and on the Reserve itself is not to be explained in terms of the relatively early deaths of the men.

The frequent absences of the men from the Reserve for economic and other reasons, as we have seen, is a factor of considerable importance in explaining mother-domination and, of course, has some demographic significance in that at any one time there are more women on the Reserve than men. Furthermore, as far as the total permanent population of the Reserve is concerned there are three more females than males and in the permanent adult population 15 years of age and over there are

ten more females than males. Because power and authority are always concentrated in adults this imbalance in the adult sex ratio may be one factor in the multifaceted explanation of the Reserve's matral theme.

Matrifocality in the West Indies and in the southern United States has often been explained in historical terms.<sup>37</sup> Invariably, the historical explanation offered has centred on either the institution of slavery in which the Negro family was not regarded by the slave owners as inviolate, or on the polygynous nature of the traditional Negro family in Africa.<sup>38</sup> Negroes were frequently forcibly separated from their wives and children<sup>39</sup> by being sold off the plantations and their children became the sole responsibility of the mother. Gottlieb and Ramsay<sup>40</sup> write of this:

The mother inevitably emerged as the dominant and dependable (rather than dependent) figure in the Negro family. A child . . . became part of her [matriarchal] 'family' . . . feeling kinship only with the maternal line.

Herskovits<sup>41</sup> argues in historical-cultural terms to explain the matral family in the New World in terms of traditional African family life which was characterised by polygyny and in which each wife had her own hut and looked after her own children. The husband was a remote figure, according to Herskovits, and his remoteness is believed to have continued in slavery. Clarke<sup>42</sup>

adds to this by pointing out that on some plantations marriage between slaves was sometimes discouraged or even disallowed.

It is easy to speculate about possible historical explanations for matrifocality among the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve. Going back to traditional Aboriginal times we could argue that the germ of matrifocality lay in the custom of polygyny according to which a man could have more than one wife and that in sharing his time among them had little real time to devote to his children. It could be argued that the children would then become the mothers' responsibility. The argument, however, would contain factual errors. To begin with few men would have had more than a couple of wives and, if we can assess this situation in light of figures presented on polygyny from different parts of Australia,<sup>43</sup> it is safe to assume that many would have had only one wife. Again, as polygyny was practised in Aboriginal Australia the wives and their children were not geographically dispersed but rather lived together with their husband who directed the day-to-day activities of his wives and children.

The origin of present-day matrifocality on the Armidale Reserve might likewise, perhaps, be traced back to early contact times when traditional Aboriginal society was destroyed by European settlement and when, among other things, traditional

forms of marriage broke down and irregular unions and the prostitution of Aboriginal women became the way of life. One might speculate that this freed the Aboriginal men from all responsibility for their womenfolk and children and threw the responsibility onto the women themselves. Similarly, one might hypothesize that the children who resulted from the cohabitation of itinerant white men and Aboriginal women in the frontier settlements were not recognized by their fathers and having no Aboriginal pater had to be reared by their mothers who sooner or later were deserted by their white lovers. All of this, however, would be in the realm of speculation because there is very little documentary evidence to support it.

History, of course, cannot be ignored because it is always a factor in understanding any present-day phenomenon. But in trying to understand matrifocality on the Armidale Reserve we must not be misled into accepting pseudo-historical explanations for genuine history. Although it is possible that there are germs of truth in the speculations made above there is little objective documentary evidence to support the contentions. We must guard against hypothetical historical explanations for which there is no supporting empirically-documented evidence.<sup>44</sup>

Other writers believe that matrifocality can be explained

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in valuational terms. This type of explanation is offered by scholars who have studied the Caribbean situation. Krieselman,<sup>45</sup> who investigated matrifocality in Martinique, argues that in that society as in other West Indian societies with matricentred social systems, the people accept illegitimacy and irregular marital unions as the functional equivalents of legitimate birth and marriage. His argument is that in any society where the value system accepts illegitimacy as the normative pattern it must be and is accepted that women who bear children must take social and economic responsibility for them. This contention is supported by King,<sup>46</sup> Henriques,<sup>47</sup> Kerr,<sup>48</sup> and Simey.<sup>49</sup>

Evidence collected from the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve on illegitimacy and irregular unions does not support this thesis. As we have seen, women expressed much concern about illegitimacy and care is exercised by mothers and other females responsible for the moral care of girls to try to prevent unmarried girls from becoming pregnant. Although it is true that girls who did become pregnant were never turned out of the house by their female guardians they were, nevertheless, severely and often publicly reprimanded. Some mothers who had had no illegitimate children themselves were obviously shocked and distressed when their unmarried female charges announced their pregnancies. The

fact that mothers often desperately tried to get pregnant daughters married is further evidence of the shame that is felt by these women when the moral code is broken by their own offspring. Some mothers rear the illegitimate child as their own in order to remove the stigma from their daughters. If more evidence is needed we have only to mention the fact that women who have had illegitimate children were conscious of their transgressions and insisted that they would make certain that the same did not happen to their daughters. Men, we have seen, are less concerned about illegitimacy and irregular unions than the women, but because it is the women who set the standards on the Reserve it is safe to say that legitimacy and marriage are valued.

Our findings on the Armidale Reserve are supported by Kunstadter<sup>50</sup> and Blake<sup>51</sup> who have studied maternal tendencies in the West Indies. Kunstadter rejects Krieselman's contention that illegitimacy and de facto unions are regarded as normal and as the functional equivalents of legitimacy and marriage in Martinique. They are not, he argues, regarded as the ideal among the people with whom Krieselman worked on the island. Blake maintains that writers who in studying the West Indies have made claims of functional equivalence between illegitimacy and legitimacy and between de facto unions and marriage have

misinterpreted their data. She demonstrates that much of what these writers say is not based on objective data but on "inferences from what is thought to be the behaviour" of the people studied.<sup>52</sup> Pertinently, she asks that if de facto unions are the equivalent of marriage to these people why do "the majority of them eventually . . . marry?". If irregular unions provide what marriage can provide why bother getting married? Blake<sup>53</sup> argues that if what these writers claim "is true, then much of the theory of the family as a social institution must go by the board". She continues:

We are left with the difficult task of explaining why the legal family has been so widespread in society, why it is so carefully distinguished from illicit sexuality and illegitimate reproduction. Murdock's data on the universality of the nuclear family bear out in a systematic fashion the following crucial uniformity already noted by Malinowski: 'Broadly speaking . . . it may be said that freedom of intercourse though not universally is yet generally prevalent in human societies. Freedom of conception outside marriage is, however, never allowed, or at least in extremely few communities and under very exceptional circumstances'.

The argument that we support is not that illegitimacy does not partly foster matrifocality by requiring women to assume social and economic responsibility for their illegitimate children, but that illegitimacy and irregular unions are not regarded by people in whose midst they are found as being as good as legitimacy and marriage. Rather, these people always regard them as second best.

Some writers on matrifocality are critical of historical explanations of the phenomenon and seek to explain it in functional, synchronic terms without any preconceptions as to the family's former state. Smith<sup>54</sup> is one who takes this view. He writes:

There is always a danger that the prior task of sociological analysis may be side-stepped when historical factors are prematurely introduced as 'explanatory' devices.

In his writings on matrifocality Smith attempts to replace diachronic speculations by synchronic analyses of functioning matral systems.

For these writers matricentred families are the result of men failing to fulfil the social and economic roles normally associated with the husband-father status. That this is so of the husband-father in the part-Aboriginal household on the Armidale Reserve has already been commented upon. Because of frequent absences the husband-father cannot fulfil his social role and often because he is unemployed for periods between jobs he cannot adequately fulfil his economic role. It has also been shown that because the women are so entrenched as household managers and have such a tight hold on Reserve activities that the men meet resistance from the women whenever they attempt to act the roles that they are criticised for not

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fulfilling. It is a vicious circle for the men who, rather than face the possible consequences of interfering with the way the women have organized things and which could include trouble with the police and other authorities, accept their impotency in domestic and Reserve matters and opt out, allowing the women to run things their way. When questioned on this the women justified their stand with remarks like "'E 'ad 'is chance", implying that because the husband-father had never met his obligations in the past it was unlikely that he would change.

The attitude just mentioned is a commentary on the husband-wife relationship and helps to explain why the marital bond is not as durable as it might be. The relationship is weakened by the women having lost faith in their husbands who have failed to provide adequately for their families, by their continuous absences and by their drunkenness. Having to have someone to rely on the women cling to their mothers (and vice versa) and the mother-daughter relationship which becomes very strong is substituted for the conjugal relationship. Sometimes men reject this second-class status and desert their wives and children. For the already critical and embittered wife to be deserted is the final proof that the husband-father was "no good" after all and because of this she feels justified in having behaved towards him as she did. Deserted wives are particularly vicious in

their criticisms of their husbands and delight in serving maintenance orders on them and causing them as much trouble with the authorities as they can. This same bitter resentment to husbands was found among deserted wives in Jamaican matral groups.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, there are those who would explain matrifocality in psychological terms. Kerr<sup>55</sup> is one such scholar who explains mother-domination in both Liverpool and Jamaica partly in terms of "the psychological power" that the Mum has over the members of her household. Firth and Djamour<sup>56</sup> in their study of Bethnal Green say that the matral family there is to be explained partly in terms of the mother's "emotional relationship" with the members of her family. Shaw<sup>57</sup> agrees that the phenomenon of matricentrality is explained by the mother's close emotional tie with her dependents, and, in so far as they offer any explanation for the matrally-inclined East Londoners that they studied, Young and Willmott<sup>58</sup> have mentioned close emotional attachments between the mother and the members of her household as being important.

With regard to the residents of the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve it has already been commented upon that the mother-figure does have a strong emotional hold over her charges. Some women are quite lost without their mother-figures and if they do not actually live with them there are marked patterns of compulsive visiting. The mother's psychological power, as we have seen,

extends beyond her daughters to include all members of her own household and the members of those households that are linked to her. The mother-figure is not only regarded as "boss" but the actual term is used in reference to her. Before any decision is made or any activity undertaken the mother-figure is consulted. Statements like "I belong to mum" and "I don't know what I'd do without mummy" virtually sum up the psychological hold that the mother-figure has over those who cluster around her.

Kunstadter,<sup>59</sup> as we have seen, rejects most of these explanations as pseudo-explanations at best and as accidental features of matrifocality and not causes of it. For Kunstadter the only valid explanations for the phenomenon are synchronic, functional explanations and he is strongly supported by Blake.<sup>60</sup> Our interpretation of the data collected on the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve would support these writers in part but we have also tried to show that other explanations are feasible. Historians will attempt to explain things historically, psychologists will explain phenomena psychologically, sociologists will offer structural and cultural explanations of the same phenomena and so on. Furthermore, there is no point in arguing that one explanation is any better than another. It seems to us, then, that matrifocality on the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve being the many-faceted phenomenon that it is calls for a multi-

factored explanation. We have shown that demographic, historical, valuational, functional and psychological explanations all have a part to play in our understanding of this phenomenon.

In this thesis we have taken matrifocality beyond the confines of the household and we have reflected upon its influence in linked households and in other extra-household groups, and we have proclaimed the Reserve itself to be matricentred. The explanations offered for the matrifocal bias of the Reserve are those already stated above. No claim is made that the part-Aboriginal culture of which the Armidale Reserve is a local variant values matrifocality as such. Indeed, as we have already stated, mother-domination among the Reserve residents has arisen because certain obstacles have prevented the actual pattern of behaviour from reflecting the acknowledged ideal pattern which is based on the central position of the husband-father in the household and, by extension, the men on the Reserve. Criticism by the women of the men's failure to take the lead is evidence that this ideal pattern of life exists. Indeed, we can say that the matral life on the Reserve is regarded by the women most of all as an abnormal, artificial and second-best way of life. The mother dominates the scene

not because of any superior or legitimized power accorded women in part-Aboriginal culture but rather because as a parent she has acquired the status of a pseudo-father by default because of the absences of the father (for employment and other reasons) which requires her to take over the economic and social roles which ideally he should fulfil.

On the basis of the evidence presented it seems reasonable to assume that matrifocality on the Armidale Reserve will continue to perpetuate itself at least until the distortion of family roles caused largely by absent and weak fathers is corrected. Until then, girls will continue to pattern themselves on their mothers and conjure up a self concept of a dominant woman who, irrespective of any ideal pattern to the contrary, will have to fend for herself and her children. Likewise, boys accept this concept of the woman and for themselves a concept of the transient male. Clarke's words<sup>61</sup> in commenting on a similar situation in Jamaica are pertinent here. She writes:

Nothing in [a boy's] own experience has enabled him to learn the meaning of the paternal relationship, nor has the society helped by example or precept.

#### Notes and References

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57. Shaw, 1954, pp.179-194.
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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

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CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to present the results of the ethnographic observations made in our fieldwork among the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Aboriginal Reserve on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. The observations have been presented in such a way that they would illuminate the central theme of the paper which concerns the matrifocal tendencies of the residents of the Reserve. In addition to this ethnographic description an attempt has been made to explain why mother-leadership has developed among these part-Aborigines.

The approach has been comparative in that empirical similarities described both by other Australian scholars, who have studied part-Aboriginal groups in different parts of Australia, and by overseas scholars, who have studied matrifocal societies in different parts of the world have been drawn on. Because of this comparative approach we have seen that matrifocal tendencies in the way the part-Aborigines of the Armidale Reserve live are not peculiar to them alone but are

shared by other part-Aboriginal groups as well as by societies in the Americas, Africa and Britain. On the basis of this comparison we can conclude that matricentrality, an abnormal way of life even in the societies practising it, is, nevertheless, a wide-spread social phenomenon. But our interest in matrifocality has not been confined to its ethnographic aspects. We have also wanted to know why such a social phenomenon, which is admitted by all who have studied it to be pathological, is able to develop at all. In order to explain mother-domination we have considered the situation on the Armidale Reserve in the light of the theories constructed by scholars of matrifocality in other parts of the world in order to determine whether any common causes, irrespective of geography, can be isolated.

In our study of the Armidale Reserve we have attempted to elucidate the social structure by the method of approach generally employed by social anthropologists and sociologists who work with whole societies. The Reserve itself was seen as but a part of a larger society which was taken to be the whole of Australia. In other words, Australia was taken as constituting the total social system. But in accordance with the theoretical principles of this approach the focus was limited to particular aspects of the total social system which was isolated according to Barnes' "three fields" theoretical scheme. It is recognized that it would have

been impossible to analyse even the formal aspects of the total social system in full. Starting with the part-Aboriginal household on the Armidale Reserve we worked outwards isolating the structure's group components as we went beyond the Reserve itself into the City of Armidale and into the wider State and Nation (Chapter 3). Although it is true that the personal relationships that the part-Aborigines have beyond the Reserve are more restricted than this scheme implies, nevertheless, indirect relationships through voluntary associations with which some are connected broaden the scope of the social matrix.

Enough has been clarified to state that on the Reserve with which we are most concerned we find that the majority of the residents constitute an integrated group bound by ties of kinship and locality, and occupy a low position in the overall status system because of the position of its members in the scale of values relating to racial characteristics, and because of the nature of the occupational and other functions which they fulfil. In this particular study, racial characteristics are merely a convenient factor by which status and functions can be ascribed to individuals and groups. The same applies to the matrifocal Negro groups of the New World and Africa. However, on the basis of our comparisons with white matrifocal groups in Britain it is clear that integrated low status groups can exist without distinguishing racial characteristics.

In Chapter 2 we described the history of the Armidale Reserve and of its inhabitants and considered the Reserve's geographical setting relative to the City of Armidale. Chapter 4 was devoted to an examination of the demographic background of the mother-dominated household, and Chapter 5 explored the structure and workings of the household itself in terms of its matrix of constituent social relationships and status. In Chapter 6 mother-leadership was taken beyond the household into the Reserve itself and the chapter ended with an examination of mother-influence beyond the Reserve.

We have shown that matrifocality among the residents of the Armidale Reserve is the abnormality that it is in other societies in which it is found. On the Armidale Reserve matri-centrality has grown out of the malfunctioning of the domestic household and other groups in which the husband-father is ideally the core-figure. Absent frequently and for varying periods of time the husband-father does not perform the roles expected of him and his inadequacy has a telling effect on his relationship with both his wife and children. The children learn to ignore him even when he is present and the wife draws closer to her children and her mother or to some mother-figure who takes the place in the wife's scheme of things which should ideally be occupied by the husband. A strong mother-daughter

relationship makes for a relatively weak husband-wife relationship. The typical solidary unit that results because of this consists of a woman, her daughters and their children. The husband-father is either excluded from this group or is marginal to it. His functions are minimal and are almost solely confined to providing income for his wife and children and very often the husband-father fails to perform this function adequately with the result that it is the mother who, with help from her mother, other kinsmen and the authorities, must fend for herself and her children.

Our interpretation of the evidence collected from residents of the Armidale Reserve about illegitimacy and de facto conjugal unions finds support in the general literature. It is our contention that the part-Aborigines do not value illegitimacy or de facto unions and that they, like matrifocality, are abnormal results of a malfunctioning system. It is clear to us that those writers on lower-class family life in the West Indies who argue that these people see illegitimacy and irregular unions as equivalent to legitimacy and marriage have misread the signs.

The comparisons that have been made with other societies exhibiting matral tendencies have shown that similar structural principles may be isolated in societies with different cultural traditions and historical backgrounds. If nothing else, our

study has broadened the range of societies in which matricentrality is now known to exist and it has indicated that further study along these same lines with regard to other part-Aboriginal groups would probably be rewarding. That matral biases exist in other part-Aboriginal groups is established by the comparisons that have been made, but no depth-studies of their matrifocal nature have hitherto been undertaken.

We have shown that many explanations of matrifocality are to be found in the relevant literature on the subject and although they are not all sociological we have emphasised that it does not follow that because of this they are invalid or without value to us. Sociologists, of course, look for sociological explanations and we ourselves have shown how matrifocality is to be explained in terms of structural principles. Nevertheless, it would be foolish of us to ignore the help that non-structural explanations may afford the student of sociology.

This study has been confined to the power of the maternal figure in groups acknowledged to be low in socio-economic status. But in Chapter 1 we referred to groups higher up the socio-economic status-ladder in which the mother played an abnormally important role relative to the husband-father. It seems that in these upper middle-class families the mother becomes a pseudo-father in that she makes important decisions on behalf of the family

without consultation with her husband who, during the week, spends most of his time either at the office or in commuting between home and office and who, at weekends, has to play social golf or entertain business associates. In other words, in this social bracket the mother's power also seems to be derived from the husband-father's absence. Perhaps, after sufficient work has been done among higher socio-economic status groups it will be necessary for our hypothesis concerning matrifocality which is at present confined to low status groups to be reformulated. But that is for the future.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| I N T E R V I E W   S C H E D U L E |
|-------------------------------------|

SOCIAL FACTORS

FAMILY DETAILS

| Name of Informant | Date of Birth | Place of Birth |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                   |               |                |

| Name of Other Adult H.H.<br>Members | Rel. to Informant | D. of B. | P. of B. |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|
|                                     |                   |          |          |

Total Number of Adults:

| Name of Child<br>(indicate deceased) | Rel. to Informant | D. of B. | P. of B. |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|
|                                      |                   |          |          |

Total Number of Children:

HOUSEHOLD DETAILSHousehold Head:  

---

Total Number of Children:

Real:            Adopted:            Relations:            Friends:

Total Number of Adults:

Parents:            Grandparents:            Relatives:            Others:  

---

Address:

Period in this House:  

---

Total Number of Occupants:

Beginning of Fieldwork -

End of Fieldwork -

Actual Changes:  

---

MOBILITY PATTERN

Previous moves in and away from Armidale

| Move time | Where | Length of Time |
|-----------|-------|----------------|
|           |       |                |

Time spent in Armidale:

Why did you come to Armidale?

---

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Have you relatives nearby?

| Name | Address | Type of Relationship |
|------|---------|----------------------|
|      |         |                      |

Who are your specific friends?

| Name | Address |
|------|---------|
|      |         |

Whom do you visit?

---

Who visits you?

---

With whom do you go to town?

---

With whom do you play cards ("pups")?

---

Who do you keep away from?

Why?

---

LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

What do you do in your spare time?

---

What does your husband do?

---

Does he drink or gamble?

What do you think about him drinking and/or gambling?

---

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What do other adult members of your household do?

| Person | Activity |
|--------|----------|
|        |          |

What do the children do?

---

Does any member belong to any of the following:

| Church Club | Town Club | Youth Club | Home Work Centre | Misc. |
|-------------|-----------|------------|------------------|-------|
|             |           |            |                  |       |

ASPIRATION LEVELS

Are you content with your lot in life here?

Would you like changes?

If so what:

Do you think these can be achieved?

---

What would you like your children to do?

| Amount of Ed. | Occupation | Marriage | Residence<br>(after marriage) |
|---------------|------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| Boys          |            |          |                               |
| Girls         |            |          |                               |

WOMAN INFORMANT'S CONSCIOUS MODEL

What part do you play in your life here?

Where do you think you fit?

Do you think women are more important than men in:

- (i) social life?
- (ii) economic life?

Have you responsibilities in Armidale?

To whom?

Have you responsibilities to anyone else anywhere?

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DAILY ROUTINE : What jobs have to be done each day?

---

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PATTERNS

Who brought you up?

Mum      Dad      Grandmother      Grandfather      Other relative

Which other relative . . . . .      Family Friend . . . . .

---

Did your parent or guardian decide upon a marriage partner?

Who will decide for your children?

---

Briefly describe engagement practices:

---

Marriages:

What constitutes a legal marriage?

Residence after marriage:

Should marriage be regarded as a life-long tie?

How close a relative can you marry?

---

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Who minds illegitimate children (i.e., unmarried daughter's children)?

---

Are notices of desertion made?

By whom?

---

Is it a husband's responsibility to maintain his wife after he has left her?

---

What qualities or possessions must a man have when entering marriage?

---

What qualities or possessions must a woman have when entering marriage?

---

How many children have you?      Real . . . .      Adopted . . . .

Where did you have your children?

| Place  | Home | Local Hospital | City Hospital | Other |
|--------|------|----------------|---------------|-------|
| Number |      |                |               |       |

How many children would you consider a good sized family?

How old were you when your first child was born?

---

HEALTH

Do you have a medicine cupboard?

Stock:

What if someone is really ill . . . . .

Who gives help when someone is sick:

|               |           |        |   |        |
|---------------|-----------|--------|---|--------|
| older woman   | neighbour | friend | mum                                       | sister |
| ambulance man | chemist   | doctor | casualty/out-patients<br>ward at hospital |        |
| no-one        | other     | who:   |   |        |

---

Are your children immunised?

Do your children often get sick?

Do you give children any sex education?

If someone dies what arrangements are made?

By whom?

---

DISCIPLINE AND GENERAL FAMILY ORGANISATION

Do you make your children go to school?

Do you make your children go to church?

Do your children do what you tell them?

Do you or your husband punish your children?

About the children, is your husband -

too hard  
too easy  
couldn't care less?

Does your husband leave the responsibility of the children to  
you?

Yes  
No  
Takes his share

Would your husband back you up against the children?

---

Who is the boss of your house?

you  
your husband  
other                      who

Who do you think should be the boss?

Do you influence your husband in making decisions?

Do you do what your husband decides?

Who bosses the kids?

you  
your husband  
other                      who

---

Whom do you take most notice of?

mother  
sister  
husband  
another woman      who  
anyone else        who

Do your grown up children take notice of you?

Sons  
Daughters

---

Are men interested in their children and their activities?

If so, how?

(economic factors, schooling, church, etc.)

Are men more interested in -

gambling  
drinking  
other activities  
homelife

Are men really interested in homelife?

Does your husband help in the house or leave it all to you?

Are children "women's business"?

---

Do you organise the children to help you with household chores,  
running messages, etc.?

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GENEALOGY

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OTHER COMMENTS

ECONOMIC FACTORSOUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

|                 |      |                 |
|-----------------|------|-----------------|
| Your employment | Wage | Period employed |
|-----------------|------|-----------------|

Previous employment

|                      |      |                 |
|----------------------|------|-----------------|
| Husband's employment | Wage | Period employed |
|----------------------|------|-----------------|

Previous employment

|                          |      |                 |
|--------------------------|------|-----------------|
| Other Adults' employment | Wage | Period employed |
|--------------------------|------|-----------------|

|                       |      |                 |
|-----------------------|------|-----------------|
| Children's employment | Wage | Period employed |
|-----------------------|------|-----------------|

Does your husband bring wages home?

Do your children bring wages home?

Other wages?

How are the wages divided among the adults?

Who decides how money is to be spent?

You  
Your husband

Do your children receive pocket money?

How much?

Who decides?

Do women have to work because husbands won't?

---

### SPENDING

How do women spend their money?

(food, clothes, rent, children's needs, heating, furniture,  
leisure)

How do men spend their money?

(household items, clothes, beer, gambling, cigarettes)

What do children and adolescents buy?

(sweets, chips, toys)

Do you and your husband agree about how money is to be spent?

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1000000

Are you paying anything off?

(H.P., time payments)

What if you can't pay things off or run short of money?

Have you any credit accounts?

Do you owe money to anyone?

What things just must be paid for?

What can wait?

Do you ever eat out or buy take-away meals?

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EXTRA INCIDENTAL INCOME

Do any of your children have scholarships?

What other money comes into the home?

What other "hand outs"?

If you need food who would you go to?

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GENERAL

Is your husband away from home a lot?

Does your husband hang round the house or spend his time in town when he is not working?

If your husband left you for good what would you do?

POLITICAL FACTORSINTERNAL POLITICS

Are any meetings held out here?                      Where?

Who goes?

Who speaks?    Do you have a leader?

List types of meetings:

Should (or do) women take an active part in these meetings?

Should they leave it to the men?

---

LOCAL TOWN POLITICS

Are there meetings in town to which anyone goes?

Where?

Who goes?

Who speaks?

Are you getting a "fair go" in Armidale?

---

WIDER POLITICS

Do you vote?                      Who else on the Reserve votes?

On voting day where do you vote?

How do you get there?

---

Have you any comments on our present government?

Any comments on current world affairs?

---

What do you think about the abolishing of the Aboriginal  
Welfare Board?

Was it any use?

---

What do you think the future holds for you and your people?

---

RELIGIOUS FACTORSGENERAL

Religious denomination:

Do any of your relatives and/or friends belong to a different church?

Do you or your husband go to church or church meetings?

Do your children go to Sunday School?  
Church groups?

In your opinion are any of the churches particularly helpful?

---

Where are weddings held?

Where are funerals held?

---

Are any of your babies baptised or christened?

Who would decide this, you or your husband?

---

OTHER SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS

Do you believe in luck?

Do you believe in ghosts or spirits?

Where and when do you or have you seen them?

What are they like?

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but  
(continued)

Is there anything else you look out for?

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Do women believe in these sorts of things more than men?

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