

## PART B.

# THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS TOTEM IN A POLYTOTEMIC COMMUNITY

### 1. CONCEPTION, REINCARNATION AND THE DOCTRINE OF TWO SOULS

The foregoing summary of Central Australian mythology has been given in some detail in order to facilitate understanding of Aranda ritual which sought to establish links between mortal men and the eternal beings who influenced human life at every point. These links rested upon the much-discussed Aranda beliefs about reincarnation and conception.

Throughout the Aranda-speaking area it was believed that the totemic ancestors and ancestresses had left a trail of "life" behind them throughout the landscape that they had shaped and over which their feet had passed. According to the reincarnation beliefs, some part of this "life" could enter into the body of a human mother who crossed these trails, and could then take on a fresh existence as her human infant.<sup>8</sup> The Aranda reincarnation beliefs therefore tie up with the much-discussed (and misunderstood) Aranda conception beliefs. It has so often been stated in anthropological literature that the Aranda (and other Australian tribes) used to be completely ignorant of physiological paternity that it is necessary to describe the actual complicated conception beliefs

in some detail. From a personal view, too, this is desirable, since in my own "Aranda Traditions" (written in 1934) I was not entirely clear in my own mind about certain aspects of the conception beliefs; and my later writings on this subject have not yet been printed.<sup>9</sup>

Briefly, the Aranda doctrine of conception involves a belief in two souls possessed by every human being. Intercourse between a man and a woman results in a foetus which has a mortal human "life" (or "soul") of its own; in other words, man comes into being initially like the animals, whose existence also results from mating between male and female parents. But man differs from the animals in acquiring an all-important second "life" (or "soul") which is immortal. This second soul is part of the "life" of one of the immortal supernatural ancestors, which entered the body of an already pregnant woman at some definite point of the landscape. All the instances I have given in "Aranda Traditions" make it clear that the totemic ancestor seeking rebirth chose not just a *married* woman, but rather a *pregnant* woman as his mother. Hence the time of his entry into her womb was delayed until she was pregnant beyond any doubts: the first attack of morning sickness, the first pains of pregnancy, and the first daydream visions of babies, are all experiences of women who have been pregnant for some weeks.

The unmistakable nature of these experiences, moreover, enabled the identity of the supernatural being, some of whose life has passed into the future mother, to be determined beyond any doubts. In Aranda eyes, this was of the utmost importance; for it was this second (and immortal) soul which decided the personality of the child after birth: the totem of each individual and his personal links with the world of Eternity were determined by the soul that took up residence in him at his *pmāra kṇānintja* (or *pmāra kṇānakāla*), – a term which I have translated as "conception site". Actually it was the place where the future mother suffered either her first attack of morning sickness in that particular pregnancy (through eating food that

was impregnated with the life of a totemic ancestor), or felt the first pains of that pregnancy (caused by a bullroarer hurled at her by a totemic ancestor and bearing part of his life), or experienced her daydream vision of a baby (produced by the totemic ancestor who was seeking reincarnation). The foetus that had resulted from the physical union of two parents was believed not only to receive its second soul from a supernatural being, but also to acquire the physical characteristics and the whole personality of the latter.<sup>10</sup> In that sense, all Aranda men, women, and children were believed to have been completely *recreated* in the images of those totemic ancestors who had become reincarnated in them. It must be added at once that the second soul possessed by each human being was only a *part* of the "life" of the totemic ancestor from whom it had come: even a totemic ancestor who had become reincarnated in a human being still continued to slumber at the sacred site where he had finally ceased from his labours. All the trails that he had left behind carried portions of his "life", and human children could come into being at all places situated along these trails. Normally, of course, the major trails of the most common totems had been made by large groups of totemic ancestors - for instance, by parties of honey-ant ancestors (all of whom had originated from a single *pmāra kūtaṭa*) or by hordes of native cat ancestors (among whom the younger males had originated from bullroarers swung by their supernatural sires). In such cases it was easy to assign a different totemic ancestor to each child reincarnated along the trail of a wandering party. But since no human being could contain more than a small part of the infinite life of a totemic ancestor, no difficulty was experienced when more than one child had to be regarded as having been reincarnated from a single totemic ancestor. Hence when Hermannsburg was established as a mission station, and scores of children born at Hermannsburg laid claim to it as their conception site, no difficulty was felt by any of the older native men and women about regarding *all* of these children as having sprung from the *Rāṭapa* Twins

of *Nt̄ārea* – the only two totemic ancestors that had ever wandered over the area surrounding the native camp and the station buildings.<sup>11</sup>

At birth, every human being that came into the world was no longer regarded merely as the offspring of human parents, but as a reborn part of a supernatural being. It was believed that anyone looking at a man or a woman could see before him the original totemic ancestor or ancestress.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes even abnormal physical characteristics were advanced as proofs of reincarnation from specified supernatural personages. A Hale River man called *Kōlbar̄nja*, for instance, used to display proudly the unusually large metatarsophalangeal joints on both of his feet as a proof of his being the reincarnation of the grim native cat Sire of *Kōlba*, who had developed swollen "bunions" when he had angrily thrust his feet into the camp fires of the sons who had left him. An Unmatjera man called *Tōpint̄ira* similarly displayed an irregularly shaped and light-brown patch of skin on his back as a proof that he belonged to the possum totem of *Erult̄ja*: for the male possums often have some coppery-coloured fur on their bodies.

The second soul of every person was not only thought to have given definite shape to the human body into which it had entered: it was also believed to act as a kind of guardian spirit for its possessor, and to have the power of becoming separately visible on certain occasions to spectators with whom it was not linked physically. Thus it was claimed among the Western Aranda that a hunter returning in the distance sometimes appeared like two persons to men watching him from the camp. These two persons looked like exact doubles or identical twins. But when they drew close to the camp, the "other self" would vanish, and the watchers in the camp would realize what they had been looking at. Among the Western Aranda men a man's "other self" (or spirit double) was termed his *āt̄ya njält̄ja* (= *njält̄ja* man; the term *njält̄ja* can possibly be explained etymologically as meaning "self-father").

Since every human being had two souls, and therefore a twin personality, it was possible for either of these souls to leave its home in the body for a short time. Not only was it possible for the *njältja* part of a human personality to become visible separately, but it was possible also for the mortal "soul" (called *gūrūna*) to leave its body and to wander away on its own. It did so regularly when its owner was dreaming: dreams were, in fact, regarded as actual adventures experienced by a *gūrūna* while it was wandering about in the strange and often frightening world of unknown shapes and sounds that normally lay beyond the ken of men. The Aranda term for "to dream" is *altjira rāma*, which literally means "to see *altjira*", "to see eternal things", to perceive sights and shapes beyond the comprehension of human eyes, — sights and shapes which had existed from all eternity and which could be seen only by a soul that had left its human body behind temporarily. This concept was used also as an explanation for the terror and exhaustion resulting from nightmares: in such experiences the wandering *gūrūna* of the sleeper was believed actually to have been chased by the malevolent shapes seen in the dream, and to have avoided destruction only by rushing back into the sleeping body.

However, from the aboriginal viewpoint, the most important effects of the Aranda conception and reincarnation beliefs were the totemic relationships that they established and the links which they forged between mortal man, the helpless creature of Time, and the changeless forces of Eternity.

Firstly, it must be emphasized that it was reincarnation from a totemic ancestor that established the decisive link between a man and his totem. The crude (and by now, it is hoped, completely exploded) views that the aboriginal Australians had remained at such a low level in their mental evolution that they had no knowledge whatever of physiological paternity, and that their thought-processes were so a-logical that they were incapable of seeing the difference between themselves and the animals (or plants or

natural phenomena) that constituted their totems, have no foundation in fact. When an Aranda man declared to a white questioner that he *was* a honey-ant, a kangaroo, an emu, and so on, he was merely using a normal abridged formula for stating his totem, relying - as he could among his own tribesmen - on the commonsense of his white interrogator to interpret his answer. It did not occur to him that any white man could be so stupid as to regard him as a moron incapable of knowing the difference between men and animals. What the Aranda man meant - if, for instance, he had called himself a kangaroo man - was that he had been reincarnated at a certain place from the trail of life left there by a supernatural being from whose body kangaroos had also originated at the beginning of time. Human beings were hence linked with animals (also plants and natural phenomena) only through the supernatural beings that had given life to them both.

Secondly, men performing their sacred ritual believed that they could exert vital influences upon the animals, the plants, and the natural phenomena that constituted their totems only through the common supernatural beings that linked them. To promote the increase of animals and plants, to summon winds or rain, it was hence necessary that the ritual first instituted by the appropriate totemic ancestors should be performed again without any deviations, and that the creative words first intoned by these personages be sung again in their unaltered original form. These things, moreover, had to be done at the original sacred sites where they had been instituted; and the human persons who did them had to be - by reason of reincarnation - of the same substance as the supernatural personages who had first performed this ritual and intoned these verses. To avoid all danger of committing sacrilege, only men who had been born into the appropriate totem, or who were patrilineally related to the totemites, could participate in the most sacred parts of the ritual. The totemites could, however, be helped in the less sacred parts by specially invited ceremonial assistants (*kūṭuṅula*), most of whom were associated with the totem by matrilineal inheritance.

It is these deeply personal relationships linking human individuals to natural species (or phenomena) and to local sacred sites which distinguish the Central Australian beliefs sharply from both totemistic systems and nature religions found in other parts of the world: Central Australian religion may be summarized and defined as personal monototemism in a polytotemic community. Because the whole landscape of Central Australia was studded with a multitude of sacred sites where supernatural beings had lived and moved and gone to rest, and because these sacred sites were in turn linked by an interesting network of mythological trails left behind by these supernatural beings, every tribal subgroup area, and even every *nj̄n̄ana* section area, was filled with a large number of sacred sites associated with a diversity of totems. The conception and reincarnation beliefs hence ensured that all Central Australian communities were constituted of men and women who belonged to a variety of totems, and that even the members of one family generally belonged to different individual totems. But every individual had only one personal totem; and it was this personal totem that mainly determined the nature of his rights, duties, and functions in the religious sphere.

## 2. THE TOTEMIC CEREMONIAL CYCLES

As an instance let us take the case of an Aranda man who was regarded as the reincarnation of one of the kangaroo totemic ancestors of *Kṛāntji*. As a young man he was, after passing through the physical manhood rites of circumcision and subincision, assigned a definite position in the kangaroo clan of *Kṛāntji*. He was told which one of the kangaroo totemic ancestors of *Kṛāntji* had taken on new life in his person, and he was given a tjurunga object of his own as a visible token of his totemic status. He was shown at some time the dramatic act in which his personal kangaroo totemic ancestor had always been depicted; and this act (or these acts, if there were several) thereafter

became his personal property, together with the verses associated with it. From now on until his death only he could perform this act and sing these verses, or authorize his *kútuṅṅula* assistants to do so. Any assistants who performed this act at his direction had to pay him with gifts of meat; and they remained under a ban of silence towards him until he had released them from it. In association with the other members of the *Kṛántji* kangaroo clan, he had to allow blood from his own arm veins to saturate the ground when the sacred *Kṛántji* ground-painting was being laid down in a kangaroo increase ceremony. For it was held that new kangaroo life could come out of the ground only after some of the "life" of the original kangaroo totemic ancestors had been poured down upon it; and the blood which flowed from a man of the *Kṛántji* kangaroo totem was regarded as sacred in this special sense when the appropriate *Kṛántji* kangaroo charms were being sung during the laying down of the ground-painting: during such an act the blood of the totemite was no longer regarded merely as human blood, but was held to contain some of the "life" of his original kangaroo totemic ancestor.<sup>13</sup>

After the completion of the ground-painting, a ceremonial phallus (called *pára*) was fashioned by the joint labours of all men who belonged to the kangaroo totemic clan of *Kṛántji*, and this *pára* was fastened in turn upon the head of every kangaroo performer who approached the *Kṛántji* ground-painting in order to blow into its central hole. This procedure was repeated for a number of weeks, until all the kangaroo totemic ancestors who featured in the *Kṛántji* ceremonial cycle had been revealed to the assembled members of the *Kṛántji* totemic clan. Finally, this phallus was brought into contact with the ground-painting by the whole group of assembled kangaroo men; and the down from it was stripped into the central hole of the ground-painting. It was covered with the down stripped from the ground-painting itself; and finally branches were heaped upon the down-filled hole. After that the men left the ceremonial ground, confident that, through the re-enacting of the original *Kṛántji* creative rite by the human reincarnations of the *Kṛántji* kangaroo totemic



ancestors to the singing of the *Kṛántji* sacred verses, the ground-painting would once again give birth to hundreds of kangaroos after the next heavy summer rains had fallen.

However, the kangaroo totemites whose conception sites lay in the *Kṛántji*: area were not associated together merely in the kangaroo totemic clan of *Kṛántji*: they were bound together also, though more distantly, with the men of all other kangaroo clans whose ceremonial sites were linked by myths with *Kṛántji*. The human reincarnations of these various ancestors had to preserve these links. A look at Map I will make these links clearer. All the kangaroo centres shown on it are linked by the trails of wandering kangaroo ancestors; and hence the Northern Aranda kangaroo men of *Kṛántji* had to keep in touch not only with the men from the two other main Northern Aranda kangaroo centres of *Tj̄lpap̄ura* and *Ar̄aberka*, but also with the Southern Aranda kangaroo clansmen of *Int̄era*, and with the Kukatja kangaroo clansmen of *Ājii*: all of these centres were linked together directly with *Kṛántji*, by myths. "Keeping in touch" here means that at least some of the *Kṛántji*. kangaroo clansmen had to attend the performances of the complete local kangaroo cycles of *Tj̄lpap̄ura*, *Ar̄aberka*, *Int̄era*, and *Ājii*, whenever these were being held. In turn, they had to send out invitations to the kangaroo clansmen of these centres and ask them to send representatives along to performances of the complete kangaroo cycle of *Kṛántji*.

*Ājii*, again, was linked by separate myths not only with *Kṛántji*, but also with the Pitjantjara kangaroo site of *M̄alup̄iti*; *Int̄era* was linked by its own myths with the Hale River Aranda kangaroo site of *R̄ar'Ība*: and *Ar̄aberka* was linked with the Eastern Aranda kangaroo site of *Kṝnka*. Because of these additional myths, any kangaroo clansman from *Kṛántji* was, in theory at any rate, eligible to see at least some of the acts of kangaroo sites as widely apart as *M̄alup̄iti*, *R̄ar'Ība*, and *Kṝnka*, if opportunities ever presented themselves for travelling such long distances. But even if no such opportunities had ever come their way, all of the

older clansmen of *Krāntiji* would certainly have at least known of the existence of these "foreign" kangaroo centres.

Not all ceremonial cycles had the increase of a totem animal or plant as their avowed object: some of the most important of them – such as the numerous native cat ceremonial cycles – had as their main purpose the reverent commemoration of the supernatural personages who had left their mark behind so prominently in the Central Australian landscape. But all cycles fitted into the monototemic framework. Even in the native cat cycles, whose performance necessitated the enlisting of *kūtunūla* by the score from places many of which had no totemic connection at all with any native cat centre,<sup>14</sup> all the important acts were performed by men who were regarded as the reincarnations of the native cat totemic ancestors of the sacred site whose cycle was being performed. Generally speaking, the young men were excluded from many of the more sacred daytime performances. All *kūtunūla* who acted in dramatic performances were under a ban of silence to the proper owners, and had to pay heavily in gifts of meat for being allowed to take part in them. Because of the unusually "heterototemic" nature of the audience, it often happened that some of the most secret native cat acts were not performed at all at such major ceremonial gatherings: they were frequently shown on their own and in secret to members of the appropriate native cat totemic clan on separate occasions. This certainly happened at Alice Springs in 1896-7, when certain of the most sacred *Imāṇḍa* bat, frog, and native cat acts were deliberately withheld from the assembled spectators, not because their number included two white visitors, but because the *Imāṇḍa* cycle was being performed far away from its proper *pmāra kutata*, and in the presence of scores of dark visitors whose totemic centres were not linked by myths with *Imāṇḍa*.

The range and variety of the Central Australian totemic cycles does not permit short and easy summaries of all their numerous features. In "Aranda Traditions", and in the still unprinted "Songs of

Central Australia", I have described them at considerable length; and eventually colour films taken of numerous ceremonial cycles in the Aranda-speaking and adjoining areas may help to clarify certain theoretical details about their nature and purpose still further. Certain observations may, however, be made immediately. Each cycle was tied to a definite sacred site. It revealed, in a graded series of separate dramatic acts, all the important personages found in the myth associated with that site. The performers were either reincarnations of these mythical personages or relatives (patrilineally) of men who were regarded as such reincarnations. In each cycle the least important figures of the myth were shown in the early acts, while the most important figures and the most sacred objects were reserved for the later acts. The final scene, which was regarded as the climax and the most sacred act of the cycle, generally revealed the source of life itself at the *pmāra kūtata* whence the totemic ancestors had first emerged at the dawn of Time.

Since the aboriginal Central Australians were fully aware that life among both animals and human beings was the result of the union of the two sexes, it is easy to understand why the final act of a cycle, which aimed at revealing the source of life whence the supernatural beings shown in the previous acts had emanated, normally sought to unveil this final mystery by means of sexual symbolism. I accordingly agree in a large measure with Josef Winthuis in his views about sexual symbolism as forming a considerable part of the Central Australian sacred ritual. I also agree wholeheartedly with him in his constant reiteration of the principle that "only an investigation which is based strictly on the thinking, psychology, and manner of speech of men living in a state of nature will provide a key to their culture, which is so foreign to us".<sup>15</sup> Winthuis hence strongly attacked the erroneous deductions made by scholars who, misled by their own European cultural prejudices, had, when discussing the concepts of men living close to a state of nature, come to unwarranted conclusions about "the poverty of their concepts, their a-logical

mentality, their shadowy belief in God, their poverty-stricken ritual, their confused view of the world, etc." (Mythos und Kult, p.149). Unfortunately, Winthuis himself was also a man with a thoroughly and incurably European mentality. His obsession to discover running through the whole wealth of Central Australian myths, songs, and ritual the one basic concept of "a single, august, incomparable, powerful, eternally fertile Original Being ('Urwesen')" whose home was in the sky, clearly emanated from his passionate European desire to prove that aboriginal Australian religion was a clearly-formulated variety of monotheism (Mythos und Kult, p.269). Similarly, his claim that the aboriginal Central Australian in his ritual received his feeling of happiness from the "father-mother-kindness and condescension of this male-female God-Creator" (Mythos und Kult, p.149) is so charged with what may be described - in conformity with Winthuis's own style of expression - as "European - Christian - classical - imperialistic - caste - superiority sentiments", that the Central Australian tribesmen would have found it difficult either to comprehend or to appreciate such a conclusion.<sup>16</sup>

Let us first examine Winthuis's concept of an androgynous being as the origin of life in Central Australian religious thought. I have purposely described earlier the final act of the *Kṛāntji* kangaroo cycle, since the whole purpose of this act (and indeed of all other acts in this cycle) is to create kangaroos *by recreating the conditions that existed at Kṛāntji at the beginning of time*. This final act is the most secret ritual performance of any that I have seen or heard of in the Aranda-speaking area: only members of the *Kṛāntji* kangaroo clan were ever allowed to be present at its enactment, but never any visitors. In this act three of the objects were revealed that symbolized the male and female "principles" in the Aranda-speaking area (the fourth was the *wāninga*) - the ground-painting (female), the painted shield (female), and the *tnātantja* (male). The *tnātantja* used in the *Kṛāntji* acts was called *pāra*, a word which can only mean "phallus" in this context. The painted shield, which was the normal Eastern Aranda symbol for the

*pmāra kūtata* whence totemic ancestors had issued forth, was left on the *Krāntji* ground-painting throughout the series of acts, which showed the male kangaroo totemic ancestors coming one after the other to the ground-painting. Each of these male totemic ancestors bore the *tnātantja-pāra* on his head while blowing into the central hole. On the last day the *tnātantja-pāra*, held by all men belonging to the *Krāntji* kangaroo clan, was twisted about over the central hole in the ground-painting; and the down-tufts stripped from both the *tnātantja-pāra* and the ground-painting mingled with one another as they were thrust down into this opening. It was from these mingled down-tufts – undoubtedly representing the secretions released by the male and female generative organs during their union – that the kangaroos were believed to issue.

It follows from this account that in the final *Krāntji* act there was no revelation of an androgynous being: the totemites were engaged in a reverent miming of the act of intercourse – the mingling of the male and female "principles" in nature to produce jointly a new form of life. The term "principle" here has been used in order to indicate that, in Central Australian mythology, the earth was not only the "mother", but also the "father" of all plants, animals, and human beings, in short, of all life known to men. These two separate "principles" were not personalized in any way, but were merely suggested by ceremonial objects symbolizing maleness and femaleness. In many non-Australian mythologies it was the sky that symbolized the male principle, while the earth was regarded as the Great Mother; but, as has been shown earlier, among the Central Australian tribes (and probably over most of Australia), the sky and its dwellers had no influence upon the earth nor any interest in it. Hence maleness as well as femaleness were believed to have co-existed side by side in the Central Australian landscape.

Not all Aranda centres revealed three or even two male and female symbols in their final acts. In many Eastern Aranda increase acts (and these included the *utnūrunṭita* green caterpillar acts of the

Alice Springs area, which have been described by Spencer and Gillen) only a human actor impersonating a male totemic ancestor crept slowly towards the painted shield which symbolized the sacred site from which he had emerged. At many Northern Aranda centres which used the ground-painting as their symbol of feminine fertility, the final act of the ceremonial cycle revealed the original "earth-born *tnātantja* pole", which had always stood at the site of the ground-painting. In the Southern Aranda area, where no ground-paintings were laid down, the final "earth-born pole", in the three cycles that I have witnessed, was stood upright in a hollow representing the birthplace of the totemic ancestor or ancestors who had emerged from it. In all the Aranda myths giving details of the descent of the supernatural beings to their final resting places (symbolized in later ritual by ground-paintings or hollows) it was also mentioned that the local great earth-born *tnātantja* pole had slowly twisted its way down into the ground-painting or the hollow till it had sunk out of sight.

It is clear from all these instances that the great mystery revealed to the human totemites in the final acts of their ceremonial cycles was the eternal union, in an unbreakable embrace, of the separate male and female "principles" which had always coexisted at each sacred site. Whereas human unions were only of a brief and transient nature, the supernatural union of the male and female "principles" was eternal and immutable. That was the reason why life continued to emanate from these all-important major sacred sites, and why they were called *pmāra kūtata*— a term which has been translated earlier as "everlasting home".

A second major objection to Winthuis's theories relates to the attitude of Central Australian human totemites towards their totemic ancestors — an attitude which was a very different one from the reverent humility attributed to them by Winthuis, who described the totemites as passive mortals humbly receiving gifts from "condescending", if kindly, supernatural beings. The Central Australian totemites certainly spoke of their totemic ancestors with an air

of deep reverence and respect. But they had no need of prayer or sacrifice when approaching them: they themselves, after all, were composed in a large part of the same substance as the supernatural beings whom they honoured in their totemic ritual. During the performance of totemic ritual, transient Time and timeless Eternity became completely fused into a single Reality in the minds of all participants. Hence there was to be found in Central Australian religious ritual a situation similar to that suggested by Paul Tillich in his thoughts about the theological term "Kairos". Tillich has written about the idea of "Kairos" as follows: <sup>17</sup>

Kairos is fulfilled time, the moment of time which is invaded by eternity. But Kairos is not perfect completion in time. To act and wait in the sense of Kairos means to wait upon the invasion of the eternal and to act accordingly, not to wait and act as though the eternal were a fixed quantity which could be introduced into time, as a social structure which represents the end and goal of history for instance. The eternal is that which invades; it is not something tangible and objective. There are societies which are turned away from the eternal, which rest content in time and finiteness, and there are other societies which are turned toward the eternal and which express in their forms the judgment which they have experienced as proceeding from it. But there are no societies which possess the eternal.

### 3. DEATH

Before the invasion of his home country by the Europeans, the Central Australian totemite certainly believed that he "possessed the eternal" in his own lifetime. If, as has been stated by theologians, it is

the Christian *ideal* that "we are to think, will, and act like Him", then the aboriginal totemite believed that he could readily achieve this ideal relationship with his personal totemic ancestor: the second soul that gave him his true personality *was* a part of the living supernatural being whose totemic appellation he bore. Throughout his life he regarded himself as being in perpetual union with the world of Eternity, and hence he felt no need of waiting for a future union with a supernatural being in a life after death. Somewhat paradoxically to our European way of thinking, but perfectly naturally in the Central Australian world view, it was in the present, in the limitations of evanescent Time, that a man lived in union with Eternity. Death was hence the great tragedy which dissolved that union; for it meant the destruction of the mortal body and the irrevocable separation of the two souls in man. At death the mortal "life" or soul turned into a departed spirit (or a "ghost", *l̥t̥ana*), which balefully hovered around the place where the body had died, and keenly watched the surviving members of its late community, drawing comfort from the show of deep sorrow made by its late relatives and friends in the form of loud lamentations and self-inflicted wounds. After some months of shadowy existence this mortal soul either ceased to exist, or – particularly according to the beliefs of the Western Aranda – was destroyed by lightning. The second (and immortal) soul returned to the dead man's conception site whence it had first emerged in order to be incarnated in a human being: this immortal spark became reabsorbed into the "life" of the totemic ancestors, and was hence taken up once more by the eternal landscape. <sup>18</sup>

There was little fear of the act of dying as such among the aboriginal Central Australians – if there was no hope of heaven for them, neither did they have any fear of hell. I agree therefore with those Australian anthropologists (like R.M. Berndt) who have maintained that the concept of fear was not strong in aboriginal Australian religion. In this respect it differed strongly from the religious beliefs found, for instance, in New Guinea, where fear seems to have constituted a very significant religious element.



Of course, no human society, not even the most enlightened one, is ever free from a strong measure of fear. Paradoxical though it may sound, a certain measure of rational fear (as distinguished from helpless terror) is probably indispensable for the well-being of most individuals and certainly of all ordered communities. Man, being naturally imperfect and inclined to indolence, often makes his greatest exertions and rises to his noblest heights at the sharp stimulus of fear. In Central Australia fears were directed mainly towards other human beings, especially towards personal enemies and towards malicious men who were capable of dealing in death-charms. The kind of death that was most feared was death by violence or magic<sup>19</sup> – the cutting off of a human life before the body in which it was residing had completed its natural cycle of growth and decline.

Again, it is impossible for any kind of religion to be maintained without some form of punishment, physical or spiritual, for offences committed against the personages venerated in it. In most religions the severity of the punishment seems to match the intensity of the religious fervour of the believers. Where the ties between human beings and the supernatural personages were as powerful and as intimate as in Central Australia, death seemed to be the only appropriate punishment for these offences; for they disrupted and dissolved the links between Time and Eternity. Hence death was imposed as the penalty for every kind of "sacrilege" in Central Australia. Although the performers in the sacred rites were regarded as reincarnations of supernatural beings, they were nevertheless also mortal human beings. They consequently had to be retaught, after their initiation period, all the songs and all the ritual that they had composed in their original existence. Moreover, mortal human beings had also a human soul, a human mind, and human passions. They could commit errors unwittingly; they could deliberately break the social laws necessary for the smooth running of the human community of which they were individual members; they could also commit sacrilege, both unwittingly and deliberately,<sup>20</sup> and thereby

bring down not only upon themselves but also upon the community to which they belonged the wrath of the offended supernatural beings: for the totemic ancestors, though resting in perpetual slumber, were not unmindful of what went on around them, nor had they lost their original powers of creation, of preservation, and of destruction.

If young men had been found guilty of sacrilege, their own elders authorized their death. If the old leaders of a totemic clan had committed sacrilege, then members of other totemic clans whose ceremonial centres were linked with the *pmāra kūtata* of the guilty men had the right to make a raid upon the offending centre and inflict upon its inhabitants what slaughter they wished. A historical instance of the punishment meted out by their elders to performers who had unintentionally committed sacrilege on a ceremonial ground was the killing of two or three young men and their burial at the foot of the eagle *tnātantja* pole – as a testimony that it was this pole which had demanded their death – during the performance of the eagle *wāriara* festival at *Urālawūraka* in the lower Southern Aranda area, some time in the middle of the last century. One of the grimmest instances of the second kind of punishment – the raiding of an important centre by groups from other ceremonial sites linked with it by myths – was the slaughter of a camp of men, women, and children at *Irbmāṅkara* somewhere about 1876, after an accusation had been made that the aged leaders of *Irbmāṅkara* totemic clan had committed sacrilege of a particularly grave nature. *Irbmāṅkara*, situated on the border of the Western Aranda area, was linked by myths with *Tnāūutaṅara* on the Palmer River; and *Tnāūutaṅaru* was a centre sacred both to Southern Aranda and Matuntara groups. The raiding party that fell upon *Irbmāṅkara* consisted of men from the Matuntara area, assisted by Southern Aranda men from the Finke below *Irbmāṅkara*.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. WOMEN AND THE SACRED

The position of the Central Australian aboriginal women differed considerably from that of the men in the sacred sphere (Aranda Traditions, pp.93-4). Women were excluded from taking part in their own personal totemic ceremonies, and they were rather less aware than the men of the exact nature of their links with the world of Eternity.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, they too had personal tjurunga and special verses, even if they were not allowed to see their tjurunga or sing their verses: only their fathers and brothers could do this service for them. However, women did know their totems and their conception sites. Again, at many ceremonial festivals the decorated male actors, at the conclusion of their acts, had to show themselves to their women-folk from a distance; and hence all the older women were well aware of many of the sacred totemic patterns.

Unfortunately it is too late for us to find out now the full extent of the knowledge that the Central Australian women once possessed of the sacred lore of their community. All the older women that I have known obviously had much more knowledge of sacred matters than their husbands and male relatives were prepared to admit; and the pride taken by these women in their totems and their homeland was in no way inferior to that of the men. Women also had certain secret charms of their own which they did not share with the men. Again, the sacred possessions of the women were of considerable importance to their sons. While men could not inherit the *tjūrūṅa* (i.e. the myths, songs, ritual, and sacred objects) of their deceased mothers in the same way in which they inherited the *tjūrūṅa* of their deceased fathers (Aranda Traditions, pp.133-7), they did have the right at all times to be present as *kūtunūḷa kṇāra* (important ceremonial assistants) at the performances of totemic acts that belonged to their mothers; and when a man

died, he was buried (generally in a sitting position) in such a way that his face was turned towards the conception site of his mother: for that was his *pmāra altjira*, his "eternal home".

A Central Australian aboriginal community was thus made up of men and women for whom the whole landscape in which they lived represented the work of supernatural beings who had become reincarnated in their own persons and in those of living and dead forebears, relatives, and friends. In such a community the life of every person was of importance and value. The sacred songs that a man sang and the totemic rites that he performed were believed to have the power of sustaining the universe about him and of promoting the life of the plants and animals that provided food for the community. In other words, an important function of Time-bound man was to assist in the sustaining processes of a world that had begun in Eternity and that was continuing without any changes into Eternity.

## 5. HOW RELIGIOUS UNITY IS ACHIEVED IN A POLYTOTEMIC COMMUNITY

Up to this point of my outline of Central Australian aboriginal religion attention has been concentrated mainly upon the *individual*; and for the individual, personal monototemism has been shown to be the basis of all religious thought and ceremonial activity.

Such an analysis leads to a complete negation of the religious functions assigned to the individual by Frazer in the definition quoted at the beginning of this paper. If we were to accept Frazer's division of all human religious beliefs and observances into two clearly separated categories labelled "magic" and "religion", we should now be forced to say that "roughly speaking, not one man in Central Australia is a magician, but all men are priests - with a difference".<sup>23</sup> Even though probably no one today

any longer supports Frazer's division in its original form, such a restatement would at least show that, because of the very nature of the reincarnation and conception beliefs, all individuals of every Central Australian group were regarded as "self-centred persons" – separate sparks of the life-fire of individual supernatural beings – when they were practising their personal totemic ritual. Even the members of a single family generally belonged to different totems. But religion exercises its strongest hold upon individuals when it possesses the power to knit them together into a large community of men and women, united by a common body of beliefs. The question hence presents itself:

*how could the indispensable feeling of strong religious unity be achieved within a polytotemic community that occupied a geographically well-defined common tract of country?*

The answer has already been given in "Aranda Traditions" (p.139), where it has been stated "the inevitable disruptive effect exercised upon a native community by the doctrine of the conception site is deliberately counterbalanced by the strong emphasis laid upon the unifying ties represented by the allegiance claims of the *pm̄ara kūtata* and by membership obligations to the local *n̄j̄n̄ana* section".

I shall not repeat here the various points set down in the pages which follow that sentence. However, a perusal of the accompanying documents – two maps and an abbreviated genealogy – may illustrate briefly the unifying role of the *pm̄ara kūtata* (in addition to its being the conception site of a few individuals) and the membership obligations of the local *n̄j̄n̄ana* section. The abbreviated genealogical extract gives a picture of an extended family group belonging to the Ellery Creek *Baṇaṭa-Panaṅka n̄j̄n̄ana* section area, whose main ceremonial centre was the honey-ant *pm̄ara kūtata* of *Rōuḷbmaūḷbma*. To obviate any distorting effects caused by the white occupation of this area since 1877, only that portion of the full genealogy has been selected which gives the names of persons born prior to this date. The only exception is Sarah, who

was born in April, 1892: her name has been left in as a convenient check on the time-scale adopted in dating the earliest names given in the genealogy. *Rāūwirāka* was born about 1871, *Tnāťjalbūka* about 1869, and *Utnādata* about 1875. From these dates it may be estimated that *Lūťiāka* was born about 1830, and *Pmālkara* about 1800.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that of the twenty persons in this extended family belonging to the Ellery Creek *Baŋata-Panaŋka* group, only three men (*Jālakāka*, *Tnāťjalbūka*, *Utnādata*) and six women (*Pālintjā*, *Lūtantjā*, *Tnāmatjījā*, *Ljāiāka*, *Urėrbuka*, *Sarah*) belonged to the honey-ant (*jīramba*) totem; and these nine persons all had their conception sites along the mythical trail of the wandering ancestral honey-ant horde which went from *Ljāba* to *Rōulbmaūlbma*: not one of them had been reincarnated from the *jīramba* ancestors that had emerged from the *Rōulbmaūlbma pmāra kūtata*.<sup>25</sup> Of the remaining eleven persons, three men (*Ilbālerāka*, *Lūťiāka*, *Ljūlkareŋaka*) and one woman (*Kwātjaruŋŋja*) were either *Baŋata* or *Panaŋka*, and had their conception sites in the Ellery Creek area, but belonged to other totems: three men (*Pmālkara*, *Iliā*, *Tnāpiwūka*) and one woman (*Tjāntjikalbāka*) were either *Baŋata* or *Panaŋka*, but belonged to other totems, and had their conception sites in other Western Aranda *njīnaŋa* section areas; and two (*Kararīŋja* and *Ndārtjika*), who belonged to this *Panaŋka-Baŋata* group by class, had their conception sites in the Central Aranda area. Finally, the *Baŋata* man *Rāūwirāka* belonged to the carpet snake totem of *Mūtjuka*, in the Unmatjera area: he accordingly, when a young man, spent a considerable time with an Unmatjera group, while he was being inducted into membership of the carpet snake totemic clan of *Mūtjuka*,

The religious obligations imposed by personal monototemism sharply divided these twenty members of an extended family group from one another. They were held together, however, firstly, by the ordinary human ties of blood relationship, secondly, by their common membership obligations to the Ellery Creek

*Baṇaṭa-Panaṅka njiṇaṇa* section (except for *Utnāḍaṭa*, a ṇala man, who voluntarily decided to live in his mother's rather than in his father's area), and thirdly, by the allegiance claims of their common *pmāra kūtaṭa*: the honey-ant (*jiramba*) centre of *Rōḷbmaūlbma*.

*Rōḷbmaūlbma* was by far the most important *pmāra kūtaṭa* site in the Ellery Creek area. It was the mythical birthplace of hundreds of ancestral honey-ants; and the individual acts in which these were revealed formed parts of the longest and most spectacular ceremonial cycle in the local group area – a cycle whose complete performance required the presence of *all* males belonging to the Ellery Creek *Baṇaṭa-Panaṅka njiṇaṇa* section. At such full performances males who belonged personally to the *jiramba* totem of *Rōḷbmaūlbma* ranked highest. Next came the males belonging to the various *jiramba* centres linking *Rōḷbmaūlbma* with *Ljāba*. After that came the remaining males of the Ellery Creek *Baṇaṭa-Panaṅka njiṇaṇa* section, whose conception sites were associated with non-*jiramba* totems. In the case of these men it did not matter whether their conception sites were situated inside or outside the Ellery Creek area. For all of them had the right to be present only because of their "inherited" *jiramba tjuṛuṇa*, i.e. because of their ownership of the *jiramba* verses and acts that they had inherited from deceased fathers, fathers' brothers, father's father, father's father's brothers, and older brothers.<sup>26</sup> Every man present at the staging of the *Rōḷbmaūlbma* cycle had to reveal at least one of the *jiramba* acts that was his personal property. The final ground-painting and *dāna* pole – as the *jiramba tnāṭantja* pole was called – could be revealed only at such a full-scale ceremonial festival. For they were symbolic objects of the male and female "principles" of *Rōḷbmaūlbma* itself, and because of their very nature they belonged to *all* living members who formed the *jiramba* totemic clan of *Rōḷbmaūlbma*. In addition, those men present who belonged to non-*jiramba* totems were expected to contribute also at least one or two of their own totemic acts. Hence a number of carpet snake, dingo, eagle, and other acts were always performed at a *Rōḷbmaūlbma* ceremonial festival.

Since *Rōulbmaǔlbma* was linked by its myth with *Ljāba*, men both from *Ljāba* and from other honey-ant centres linked with *Ljāba* also had the right to attend the *Rōulbmaǔlbma* festival. The visitors from *Ljāba* ranked immediately below the three categories of men present who belonged to the Ellery Creek *Baṇaṭa-Panaṅka nṅṅana* section; for *Ljāba* had been the home of the mythical honey-ant horde which had come down to *Rōulbmaǔlbma*. Any visitors who came from honey-ant centres linked directly only with *Ljāba*, but not with *Rōulbmaǔlbma* <sup>27</sup> could be present only as *kūtunūla* i.e. as ceremonial assistants to the men from the four *jṛamba* categories already listed. In return for being permitted to see the sacred acts performed by the men belonging to these four categories, the *kūtunūla* had to present gifts of meat to the owners whom they had helped. These *kūtunūla* also customarily showed a few of the minor acts from their own honey-ant cycles, partly to demonstrate the bonds linking all men in Central Australia who were regarded as reincarnations of honey-ant ancestors, and partly as a sign of their friendship and goodwill. For these honey-ant *kūtunūla*, though acting only as ceremonial assistants at *Rōulbmaǔlbma*, were present also as the official *tāntja* or ceremonial guardians of the *Rōulbmaǔlbma* festival. Had any accusations of serious sacrilege been raised at such a festival against any of the older Ellery Creek men – in particular, against any man entitled to the designation of *inḱāta* (ceremonial chief) of *Rōulbmaǔlbma* – then it would have been the privilege and the grim duty of the leaders of the honey-ant visitors from *Ljāba* and the honey-ant *kūtunūla* from places like *Kōrbuḷa*, *Pōpanji*, and the rest, to punish the sacrilegious act by killing the offender (or the offenders).

The death penalty for sacrilege, which loomed over all proceedings on the sacred ceremonial ground, was a constant silent reminder of the high solemnity of the festival celebrated on it. Every full-scale ceremonial festival was, in fact, regarded as an occasion when Time and Eternity became one, when the border line dividing visible human beings and



invisible totemic ancestors became temporarily obliterated, and when, in a sense, even the dead once more joined the company of the living: for the sacred stone and wooden tjurunga, which had been brought out of their sacred storehouses and which were being stored temporarily on trees at the edge of the ceremonial ground, represented "the other bodies" not only of all men and women who were still living in the *nj̄n̄ana section* area, but also of those who had died. Hence the verses belonging to the deceased men and women of the group were once more sung reverently over their tjurunga on the ceremonial ground.

## 6. SECURITY BASED ON PERSONAL LAND OWNERSHIP

My final comment on personal monototemism relates to the sense of security, based upon an inalienable right of personal land ownership, which every individual derived from his conception site. To every Aranda adult in the old days, his conception site was his "*pm̄ara n̄uka*" - "my home"; and "my home" was a place from which no-one could be debarred: it was his home, his possession, for as long as he lived. A criminal who had fled from his group was still referred to as a master of his conception site; nor could anyone remove from its storage place the tjurunga of any man who had been killed for any crime whatever, not excepting sacrilege. No raiding band of blood avengers dared to touch the sacred sites in a raided area. Among the Aranda, at any rate, no hunting grounds could be seized by force from the men who owned them by reincarnation. For the totemic ancestors who slumbered under the soil continued to watch over all property rights, both for themselves and for their reincarnations.

In Central Australia, then, (and probably in most other parts of the continent as well) every man, woman, and child was able to call some part of the country forever his or her own. The aboriginal Central Australian was thus in a more fortunate

position than the modern white Australian, who has to acquire a house, a farm, a station, a flat, or even a rented room, before he can be regarded as legally domiciled in the land of his birth. In this respect the white Australian is at birth in the homeless position of most other citizens who belong to the so-called "civilized" and "advanced" nations of the world. None of these citizens have a "home" conferred on them at birth as an inalienable right unless they have been born into the propertied classes. The remainder – who form the great majority – are forced to acquire a home for themselves by purchase. It is only in times of war that the discovery is made in "civilized" countries – possibly a little belatedly – that *all* members of a community have a vital personal interest in the country in which they are living; and it is at such times that *all* males, propertied and otherwise, are passionately urged to risk their wealth and their lives in the defence of *their* "homeland".