INTRODUCTION

IN HIS MAJOR PAPER “Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: a Functional Study”, T.G.H. Strehlow discusses the enforcement by the death penalty of the authority of the old men in traditional aboriginal society in Central Australia. He documents actual instances where the death penalty had been carried out in Central Australia, stating:

. . . since all effective authority ultimately rests on force, and since the power of inflicting capital punishment represents the ultimate use of force, some historical examples of the use of this power will show clearly one of the foundations of authority in Central Australia. Most of my examples are drawn from the history of the large Aranda-speaking area – by far the most populous territory of the pre-European days; but similar killings were carried out also among the other Central Australian tribes. The use of sorcery (‘black magic’) was always available for the punishment of offenders, and the fear of its use by the old men of authority was everywhere a powerful deterrent to possible wrongdoers. But the fear of this was strongly reinforced by the terror produced in the Aboriginal communities by the occasional killings of actual offenders.²

There is no need to repeat here all that Strehlow has written, but rather to discuss the operation of fear from the point of view of some of the rituals in Central Australian aboriginal society as an agency of social control in a situation where no prison system existed to contain and to punish offences against the old tribal code.

In fact, fear acted as a strong deterrent from earliest childhood through puberty, the various initiatory stages of manhood, and persisted until the prerogative of old age (and/or in certain cases of strong and outstanding characters) guaranteed at least some measure of immunity (see Aranda Traditions, pages 163-172).

² Australian Aboriginal Anthropology, University of Western Australia Press, 1970, pages 107-135.
Offences against the old code included certain sexual transgressions, taboos concerning food and the sanctity of sacred objects. Above all, the rules and rituals governing the ownership of the sacred tjurunga were jealously guarded also by the death penalty or the threat of its use. Here will be considered aspects of traditional aboriginal society in Central Australia in the light of Scholz’s observation cited above.

3 Chiefest of which was mother-in-law avoidance because sexual relationships with actual and classificatory mothers-in-law represented the worst type of incest.

4 A general term used for sacred paraphernalia: tjurunga = sacred object of wood or stone.
EARLIEST CHILDHOOD

The following account of some of the fears attending birth (of twins) and early childhood was set down by T.G.H. Strehlow in April 1978 for Pamphlet No. 3, Vol. 1 of The Strehlow Research Foundation:

“There are no simple terms for ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ – they are always either older or younger than the speaker – a fact that has worried many translators of biblical texts. The reason is that there were never any persons absolutely the identical age in any family. If twins were born, one of the twins was always ‘disposed of’ after birth, generally by having sand thrust into its mouth. The reason for this killing was almost certainly that in a country where all babies (because of the non-availability of animal milk) had to be breastfed till the age of at least two (and sometimes three and even four), no aboriginal mother could have reared two infants successfully; and it thus became necessary to limit the offspring from each birth to one baby. The official excuse given was, however, that only one of a pair of twins was the reincarnation of the totemic ancestor or ancestoress; the other was the reincarnation of an evil spirit. To make sure that no such evil spirits survived, generally both twins were disposed of. The early Hermannsburg records contain several such incidents. The mothers of such murdered twins were never noted for their viciousness. In fact one of them, Lydia Lutanta (whose twins were killed at birth allegedly because they were ‘deformed’) was one of the gentlest and most motherly women I have know: she was a perfect children’s nurse to my own older siblings. Amanda, a Hermannsburg girl, who miraculously survived her twin brother at the end of 1909 probably because of the mission influence, later had to be reared by a white lady, Mrs. O. Liebler, the wife of one of the Hermannsburg missionaries.

Another infant was not so lucky. In July 1932 the sturdy Mary Ntjuiamba, wife of the blacktracker Peter ?telowuka gave birth to a healthy male infant, some of whose toes were joined. It was promptly dubbed by all to be the
reincarnation of some evil spirit (*arintja*) because of its alleged deformed and hairy face – ‘it has the feet of a duck and a face like the devil’, (the deformation did not seem very striking to the write): though it was her first child, the mother refused to rear it; and after a few days the infant’s hungry wails were silenced by death. Forty years later the aged and decrepit parents passed away, unmourned by any children.

“Here it must be added that life in the pre-white days was always tough, and often cruel in Central Australia. But it appears to be that, in a moral sense, the destruction of newly-born life is not very different from the destruction of unborn human life, which is thought to be a prized maternal right in white Australian society. And in Aboriginal Central Australia, thanks to the classificatory kinship system and other social norms, there were never any un-provided for orphans or strays; every child was aware that it had fathers, mothers, uncles (i.e. mother’s brothers) and aunts (i.e. father’s sisters) either by blood or classification. Even nomadic Pitjantjara tribesmen up to thirty or forty years ago sometimes dumped their surplus offspring on the Matuntara folk of Tempe Downs and Angus Downs when returning to their own incredibly inhospitable country in the Petermann Ranges after visits to their neighbours. According to Mr. Jack Coulthard, the young Pitjantjara man Kaijuni (Kei-Umen in the legal records) who was killed by a Pitjantjara party at Mt. Connor in 1934 for alleged sacrilege had been one of these Matuntara ‘foster’ children.

“The final point in this account of ‘secondary aboriginal education’ concerns the transmission of the religious beliefs. Since the full knowledge of these was reserved for the adult initiated males, no aboriginal children ever received any direct religious instruction.

“The few children’s songs were simple and virtually pointless, according to the older folk. The children’s stories appear to have been designed to keep children straying away from fires at night: certainly most children were afraid
of going out into the darkness (even I, who was brought up solely with aboriginal children kept my fear of the dark till my later teenage years). One of the favourite stories told by older children (especially girls) to frighten small boys concerned the cannibalistic activities of a female ogre called *njunju* (the name sounds non-Aranda) who chased and killed small boys. The only entertainments at which children could be present were the so-called corroborees or folk dances (Aranda *ltata*) at which miming was done by the younger males with older males, the women and children singing simple verses, declared by the initiated men to be worthless rubbish.

“These dances were nevertheless greatly enjoyed by all those who were present, and often lasted for many hours. My old friend Rauwiraka once told me that as a young man he had danced in the *ltata gura* (bandicoot dance) at Owen Springs for so many hours one night that his feet became swollen. These *ltata* dances were connected so loosely with the totemic sites that the connection was hard to discern. Unlike sacred acts, which in pre-white days could not lawfully be performed at any but the correct sacred sites to which they were tied by the myths underlying them, these *ltata* dances could be freely carried from place to place by visitors who had seen them; and many of the *ltata* acts in the Western Aranda area had thus been introduced from the Walbri area, as the language of their poor quality verses showed. On rare occasions children (together with women) saw *tarabulja* performances by male actors, which served as preludes to the major sacred ceremonial cycles from whose performance women and children were excluded on pain of death. Among the Western Aranda boys waiting circumcision (and also all the women) were systematically terrified by men telling them that the low droning noises made by the large bullroarers of

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5 Cf. with a creature from the north-west of Western Australia called “*djuna*”, who ate those who Strayed away from the campfires at night and who always walked “a little bit off the ground” so that he left no tracks.
the old Western Aranda circumcision grounds (*pula*) were the voices of one-legged Tuanjiraka beings who had assembled to cut off the heads of the initiands; these were later stuck back on with porcupine resin; and the dead boys then revived to new life as initiated men. Finally, all the older children knew their personal totems, and in many cases the names of the places with which these totems were associated. This information was passed on correctly, though it was very vague.

“of a more impressive nature were the constant warnings to children not to pry into sacred traditions or go near the sacred sites. Thus during my own childhood, I noticed that none of my dark playmates would go west of the hill of Alkumbadora (which marked the limits of the Manangananga sacred cave area, as I later found out). The actual site of the cave was still almost a mile further on; but even adult hunters would not go closer to Manangananga than this hill, lest their footprints should reveal that they had committed sacrilege by approaching the sacred site too closely; only the ceremonial chief (*ingkata*) of Ntarea could do so, and it was he who would take other initiated men with him on such occasions. Before white missionaries had come to Ntarea, the warning given to the Aranda children had been of the grimmest nature; they had been told never to play near Alkumbadora, lest their dead bodies should be found there. Similar grim warnings kept women, children, and all unauthorised males from venturing close to any sacred sites. Only in present-day Central Australia, after the virtual death of the old religion do the modern “aboriginal leaders” put out land claims asserting that the aboriginal population must have the “right” to camp at or near sacred site to “protect” them: in the pre-white days the sacred sites were protected by curt warnings to all people (except the *ingkata*) not to approach them at all; any such breach of this warning would have been punished by death.

“Even the *tjauerilja* – the gift offerings of meat paid for months (even years, by young male novices who had passed through the “man-making” ceremonies to the old men before these gave them any religious instruction) were sacrosanct. For decades after the event, in 1953, two aged Western Aranda
men at Hermannsburg still remembered how some time before in 1877, a big but not yet initiated boy called Lupa had been caught thieving portions of the tjauerilja meat near Maŋama. Being a hardened offender, he was flung into the boiling waters of the flooded Ormiston River near Maŋama. Some time later other relatives of the drowned boy came from a place forty miles away and killed the boy’s unfortunate mother Napana – on the excuse that she should have kept a closer watch over the boy so that he could not have thieved any tjauerilja. These Panaŋka men rated as Lupa’s mother’s brothers.

“Though incidents of this kind occurred only rarely, the news about them was widely spread. Children everywhere acquired, if little knowledge about sacred things, a deep awe of them and of the ingkata who were the religious leaders. In our own days when the popular cry is being raised by the ignorant everywhere, that knowledge of aboriginal religion should be taught to Australian children in the schools, it should be remembered these cries would have sounded blasphemous in the days when aboriginal religion was still a living reality. Clearly, most of the present clamour for the restoration of “tribal law” comes from persons who have no idea of its major provisions.
INITIATION AND YOUNG MANHOOD: The Iliara or Novices

IN HIS totemic Geography paper, Strehlow writes:

“In spite of the modern doubts case upon the authority wielded by the Aranda ceremonial chiefs outside the religious sphere, I cannot repeat too strongly at this point, from my own personal knowledge of this matter, that men like Gura and Makarinja, and their counterparts in other local groups, were not merely venerated, but also feared. So was the Loatjira, the grand old man of Hermannsburg in my father’s day who had as a young man taken part in avenging expeditions. He had not only been an important ṇŋarkara (medicine man), but had possessed full knowledge of the dreaded death charms as well. All of my older Aranda informants gave me unasked the names of deceased ceremonial chiefs and elders whose decisions no one dated to query in their lifetime. There were good grounds for this respect in the pre-European days. Among the Aranda, initiation into the sacred mysteries was a long drawn-out and highly painful process. Circumcision and subincision were the inescapable entrance requirements for gaining knowledge of the spiritual world. Then came head-biting and, in most Aranda-speaking areas outside the Hale River territory, evulsion of the finger nails. All these excruciating operations were carried out on special grounds, to the singing of sacred verses, and with the ritual authorization of the supernatural beings of the appropriate totemic centre. Thus the ground-paintings of the honey-ant centre of Ljaba and the possum centre of Emalkŋa used to be spotted with the blood from the ripped-off finger nails of all young men who had caught their first glimpses of them. Recalcitrant young men could be made to perform ceremonial acts celebrating minor totemic ancestors in a way calculated to make such performances highly painful. For instance, in the Southern and Eastern Aranda areas, arrogant young men used to be decorated for minor totemic acts in the blazing heat of midsummer, and then led to perform their acts in a sitting or kneeling position on hard or stony soil which burnt and lacerated their buttocks or their knees. These acts had to be performed for as long as the chorus of old men saw
fit to chant the ceremonial verses proper to them. The singers naturally sat in the shade and took pleasure in prolonging the agony of the young men as long as they wished. In addition, most (perhaps all) Aranda subgroup areas included at least one totemic site associated with an act (or acts) in which fires were lit and live coals scattered over persons of the actors. The latter were not allowed to dodge the sparks or brush off any live coals that landed on them. The resulting burns sometimes festered, and took several days to heal.

“Again, when the sacred tjurunga were taken out of their caves of down from their storehouse tree platforms, the young men detailed for this task had to exercise extreme care: any unfortunate culprit who dropped or broke a stone tjurunga was later on speared to death at the behest of the elders entrusted with the care of the sacred objects. Thus a Western Aranda youth, who was the son of an Ellery Creek man called Kutakuta, was speared to death some months after he dropped a stone tjurunga belonging to Lurkŋalurkŋa, a euro totem elder of Indata, while bringing it down from a high mountain cave (T.G.H. Strehlow, 1970: pages 339-340). An Unmatjera ragia (native plum) stone tjurunga lost a chip from one edge when it slipped from the hands of a man called Ndabuta who was carrying it to a Hanson River local group. The unfortunate bearer – he was the elder brother of my Unmatjera informant Tommy Kaltjirbuka, who eventually gave me the chipped tjurunga in 1932 – was later killed at Ljilapuntja, and no one was permitted to smoothen the damaged edge of the tjurunga. In

6 The actors impersonating the Northern Aranda hawk ancestor of Kerenbenŋa and the Upper Southern Aranda sandhill wallaby (kwalba) ancestor respectively squatted between burning fires and swished live coals over themselves and over the young warkuntuma dancers that were racing around them. The Eastern Aranda putia rat-kangaroo sire of Bejapuŋa advanced at blazing fires with two crouching putia novices moving on their knees in front of him: sometimes he pushed these youths almost into the circle of the wind-blown blaze while beating the fire with long branches till sparks and small live coals flew into their faces and on their bodies.
This case the *tjurunga* was regarded as the actual changed body of a *ragia* ancestor; and the chipped edge hence represented an injury done to his personage. Another damaged Unmatjera *ragia tjurunga* in my possession came from Ulalaŋa, where it had been broken on its storehouse tree platform a blazing limb fell upon it during a bushfire several generations ago. Four men who had the duty of guarding the area around the storehouse site were subsequently killed for their failure to protect this object, which symbolized the most important *ragia* ancestor of their local group. In this last case, however, the relatives of the executed men refused to accept the verdict of the elders, maintaining that the unfortunate guardians should not have been blamed for the damage that had been caused by the bushfire. These relatives accordingly proceeded to avenge their kinsmen by killing some of the young men who had carried out the instructions of their elders. In this way a lengthy vendetta was started, and a number of men lost their lives because of this tragic accident.”

(pages 116-117)

**The Role of Women in Initiation Ceremonies**

The theme of initiation is also dealt with in connection with the sacred songs involved on pages 395-417 of *Songs of Central Australia*. Much of what is written there is not of concern in this present paper. Only those parts in which the woman’s role is alluded to (without of course any actual eye-witness accounts) will be quoted here. Among the Aranda the male initiation ceremonies are five in number (excluding tooth evulsion which has no latter-day significance discernable to science): they are in order *alkiraka iwuma* (= toss up to the sky), circumcision, head-beating and smoking, and initiation into the sacred traditions of the *iŋkura* ground. In some groups a sixth ceremony involves the tearing out of the finger nails from mature men in order to “make them fit to fashion new *tjurunga* objects”.

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7 ceremonial (ground)
The *alkiraka iwuma* ceremony marks a definite break in the native boy’s life. It is carried out as he approaches puberty and warns him that his childhood days (spent mainly in the company of girls and women) are all but over. He is taken apart and told to avoid females in future. Stripes are painted on his chest and back by certain relatives while the old men chant the verse:

To the very vault of the sky let him reach;  
Into the very vault of the sky let him penetrate;

The boy is tossed into the air several times by the men and he is hit whilst in the air on the breast and back, sometimes until he begins to bleed from the nose and mouth. The role of the women in this rite is that “meanwhile they perform a special dance”. The account is given by C. Strehlow and gives no details of this dance naturally enough. A few years later comes the rite of circumcision (on the *pula* ground). This gruesome ceremony had in Aranda-speaking territory been instituted by the fierce *lakabara* hawk-men who flew from their mountain home from Atmetarkua in Southern Eastern Aranda territory to Mount Urtera in the MacDonnell Ranges north of Alice Springs. Here on the nearby *pula* ground they seized all the uncircumcised boys – according to legend – and dealt with them mercilessly, being utterly furious in their anger towards them. The legend recounts how the *lakabara* hawk-men flew up into the air. A single male dog kept travelling below on the ground continuously disturbing quails and when they flew up the *lakabara* men seized them and broke off their heads. When they were still up in the air they heard a shield sounding while the women were doing their *ndaperama* dance, upon which they flew down, seized their stone knives and painted themselves. They killed a woman who came in covered in smoke in order to burn off the boys’ prepuces with her burning bark. Then they dealt with the boys. They let them go. They freed them from their ban on silence. To this day out of sight of the *pula* ground – but near by – the women perform their *ndaperama* dances as part of the rites of circumcision.
However, the fierce *lakabara* hawks have long since departed the scene in Central Australia. This form of initiation still continues, but according to the rites of the Pitja-pitja intruders into the ancient territory of the *lakabara* – rites that will not be gone into here.
THE ILIARA AND FOOD TABOOS

IN DISCUSSING the role of fear as a motivating force in pre-white aboriginal society in Central Australia, it seems opportune to publish for the first time my translation of the Myth of Ultunta illustrating as it does so chillingly how transgressors were dealt with in the old days: Maliera and Mulapitjipitji have been done to death on a mythological ceremonial ground for daring to touch the meat of the hunt before the old men have taken their share and this serves as an object lesson for their latter-day human counterparts. As older iliara, too they should know better.

(a) Introduction

Ultunta – which means literally “limestone” in the Western Aranda dialect – is a Kukatja site somewhere south of Merini (or Merina).

To the writer’s knowledge only T.G.H. Strehlow and his father, C. Strehlow have ever successfully translated aboriginal myths in Central Australia. They are certainly the only ones who ever successfully translated (into English and German respectively) the sacred chants. The writer does not claim an intimate knowledge of the Aranda language. Nevertheless in the absence of other more competent translators of which death itself has deprived us of an attempt is offered below of a translation of the Myth of Ultunta with apologies for any inadequacies that may occur. In giving the outline of the myth forming sub-paragraph (b) below it must be clear that the myth has had to be translated in order to do so.

(b) Outline of the Myth of Ultunta

Ultunta’s myth is associated with death: the deaths of Mulapitjipitji and Maliera. Both the legend and the chant – entitled Tatjiti(na) and Pmalbuŋka(na) at Ultunta are associated with the two tjurunga of Mulapitjipitji and Maliera and as could be expected from its Loritja title it is really an episode from a longer legend dealing with the march of the Loritja tjilpa (= native cat) men who passed through Merina.
As seems to be the case with *tjipa* men everywhere, they are carrying with them on their travels a giant ceremonial pole. The *tjilpa* men have come from Angarantati, and as they travel on their way they sorrow for their old home. As they go along they hunt for and cook game and indeed the greater part of the Myth is concerned with these acts. At Ulyunta they perform a sacred ceremony. As they do so blood is extracted from the veins of two older *iliara* or novices who or novices who form part of the travelling host. But it is apparent from the results that instead of opening the veins, the arteries are opened \(^8\) and the two older *iliara* – called Mulapitjipitji and Maliera \(^9\) – bleed to death in spite of efforts to revive them by emitting the *raiankama* call. Their bodies turn into two immortal stone *tjurunga* slabs which could be seen there in the sacred cave at Ultunta had their owners not removed them. Weeping for their lost mates the *tjilpa* host continues on its way northwards.

(c) **Approximate Translation of the Myth of Ultunta** \(^{10}\)

The two leaders of the *tjilpa* host are Sire Tatjiti, a Taηala \(^{11}\) man, the father of \(( = njekua)\) and Pmalbuηka, a Tambitjina \(^{12}\) man and the eldest son of Tatjiti \(( = kηarirbekua)\).

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\(^8\) The myth does not seem to give an actual reason for this “error”; the word for veins is used, not arteries. But from the preamble, reading between the lines the two older *iliara* had breached by sitting down to eat before their elders and betters (reference is made to their putting down the meat for the elders to eat, untouched).

\(^9\) The words mean “the sore-nosed one”, “nose \(( = mula)\) covered with knobs and sores”; “maliera \(( is\) the Western Desert word for the Aranda “*iliara*” or novice.

\(^{10}\) Actually the translation is fairly exact: the use of “approximate” is to leave margin for error.

\(^{11}\) The class “Taṇala” – the Aranda class “\(η\)ala” (both are 8-class systems): the former is from the Ilpira-Kaititja linguistic areas.

\(^{12}\) See note 9; \(( =\) Aranda class Mbitjina. (note 11?)
From Alininningamala – the place where the sun is standing they set out on a journey, journeying they set out, Sire Pmalbuŋka the father of Tatjiti, his eldest son, and many iliara. Together they journey on their way northwards. They have come from Alininningamala and as they go they sorrow for their old home. They kept on hunting unitedly as they went on; the father speaks: “Keep on hunting game until you reach Ultunta.”

The tjilpa men are marching north. One of the iliara sees a very fat man immediately in front of him. They pass over soil covered with a salty crust; their feet noisily break through the raised surface. Their feet cover the ground quickly and they sing:

With toes spread out widely I travel along splendidly,
With toes spread out widely I travel along splendidly.

With strong legs they hurry on in the quest of game. They head for water; the day is waning; the sun is going down. They turn towards Ultunta laden with game. They emerge from a thicket with rock wallabies.

They put down the killed animals on their backs. They prepare the game for cooking. They put one skewer through both hind legs (of each beast). They light a fire with dried brushwood. They throw brushwood on the fire. They scrape off the fur. They spread out the coals ready for the game. They put down the animals on their backs and place them side by side in a row to cook. The amount of game is great indeed. They heap the glowing coals over the animals that are to be cooked. With a slender long stick they heap on the coals. They wait only for a short time. They sit down to eat, to

13 A place south-west of Tnorula (= Gosses Range)
14 I think they do this before it is cooked and not afterwards; but the writer – who has never seen kangaroos cooked in this manner – thought it was the other way around.
eat the intestines. They were wrong to receive the meat (first). They move away. The two leaders, Tatjiti and Pmalbuŋka speak to the two of them: “Initiated men, (you) two old men, cut up the meat!” Whereupon they say: “We do not dare, white-haired old men, we have left it still untouched as you (two) see.” The old ceremonial chiefs receive the meat. The two old ceremonial chiefs ask: “Let us take council on behalf of our sons.” They then tell them: “Spread out to form a net yonder, close by, and kill game for a short while longer.” The iliara pass over rough fissured ground. They carry the ceremonial pole laid across their shoulders. The two white-haired chiefs have tied a plume of eagles’ feathers to the tip of the pole. As the pole sways up and down its feather tip spreads out in the wind, and they chant a sacred verse to celebrate it.

One man carries all the game to the camp. He goes ahead. The other iliara follow behind. The man in front is one of the older iliara. They return all the game and unload it untouched.

The white-haired old chiefs set up the tnatantja pole for a sacred ceremony. First Tatjina then his eldest son Pmalbuŋka. Close by are the iliara, close by indeed. After placing the killed game in rows they form a circle and dance warkuntuma crying “Wa! wa! wa!” They grasp the shoulders of both the actors and give the raianje call. This concludes the ceremony. The two white-haired old ceremonial chiefs lay down the tnatantja pole. They confess: “Come close by the meat.” They come close by: they assemble. They make a sharp stone splitter by breaking them together. They assemble together. The two old white-haired ceremonial chiefs Tatjiti and Pmalbuŋka order:

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15 See note in the Introduction to this paragraph: this seems to be the reason the old men bleed the iliara to death; there is certainly no other reason that could be even guessed at.
16 = a shuffling dance, performed in a circle.
17 Literally “this rubs out the ceremony.”
18 Actually two stone knives, or two stones; by pressure flaking.
“You come close by!” They seize the upper arms of the two older iliara Mulapitjipitji the sore-nosed one and Maliera the wearer of a nose bone. The two tjilpa chiefs tie up the arms of the two older iliara. The operator pulls towards him the arm of the victim. They then cut the veins. The (arteries) of the two victims having been cut they hold the arms over a standing shield. They let the blood spurt into the shield, both iliara together and in the same manner, always always, always, one of the older iliara first, always, the two. Mulapitjipitji and Maliera the two ηala men . . . thus. They stagger; they totter like two men drunk, they say: “I feel light-headed, I feel faint.” Soon the blood of the two men fills a deep hollow: they are faint with loss of blood. In vain they try to rise; they fall down again. The weeping novices hold in their laps the heads and shoulders of the dying older iliara. They die. They utter the raiañkama call to bring back to life the two men who have been bled to death. It is in vain. They cry: “We have committed something evil. We have done a great wrong.” (Cf. War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy, page 1153, “they (= the French military hierarchy) all felt that they . . . had done a great wrong (against the Russians)”.) They weep for the two Taŋala men, Mulapitjipitji the sore-nosed one and Maliera, dead at Ultunta. The two dead men vanish; they have turned into tjurunga, they are transformed into tjurunga, each one into a tjurunga. They gather together an underspread of bloodwood branches and leaves. They lay them together side by side belly upwards (on the leaves). They cover them, crying bitterly all the while, rending the whole air with their weeping and crying they cover them as they lie placed side by side.

19 Although it says “veins” they severed arteries in view of the fatal results.
20 “It is interesting that the raiañkama was here employed (unsuccessfully) for the purpose of bringing them back to life, for Gurra . . . told me that the Northern Aranda men used the raiañkama cry as the sole remedy for restoring men who had fainted because too much blood had been drawn from them for a ceremony.” (T.G.H. Strehlow note.)
Weeping for the loss of their two brothers the other iliara once more shoulder the nmatantiŋa pole. They resume the march northwards. Weeping they go back. Sire Tatji and Pmalbuŋka,22 the two of them weep also as they go on their journey.

They buried them inside a cave. They buried the two tjurunga that represented the bodies of these two men. The two tjurunga bodies rest to this day in a cave at Ultunta.

22 Cf: Songs of Central Australia, pages 190, 347, 379, 387-8, 404-9, 507, 515-9, 520, 524-5, 537, 543, 646, 675.
ARUŋKULTA, THE SITE OF A ARUŋKULTA, AND BLACK MAGIC

“Aruŋkulta” is the name and the totem of the site four miles downstream from Ndilkŋama, the site which guards the exit of the Hugh River from the Waterhouse Range. Aruŋkulta lies in the Hugh River on the outside border of the Range itself where a small unnamed creek flows into the Hugh from the Range, and where the Hugh bends in its short eastward course to run once more directly south towards the James Range.23

But “Aruŋkulta” is not only the name of this site. It is the Aranda word meaning literally “death-dealing magic”, or secret poison that kills from afar. It was hence the word used for all poison, including snake poison, ant poison, and the sun’s heat rays24. It is the effective principle summoned by the power of the dreaded “death charms” (= retņja aruŋkulta) or literally “name poison”25. Aruŋkulta was also the deadly magic inherent in sacred objects that killed people who did things against them.

So deadly were the death charms believed to be that they were known only to a handful of people in Central Australia. Strehlow discusses this problem. It is here quoted in a slightly re-written form:

The well-known aboriginal rite of “bone-pointing” is associated with singing of charms against enemies. The charms are themselves, intelligibly enough, rather difficult to obtain by white students, since even in the old days only a few native men in each community used to know in full these dangerous, death-dealing spells; and such men rarely parted with their prized knowledge to an outsider who was not a recognised sorcerer. Also, since the blame for most deaths in an aboriginal community used to be laid upon such “black magic”, few sorcerers ever admitted to having used these curses. Spencer and Gillen give an

23 Pota Ulamba
24 see page 57a of Strehlow’s 1933 Diary.
25 see also the Myth of Kotitja, Section 11, para. (v) above; the verses the writer has given out in this myth of Kotitja are believed to be the only apart from those of C. Strehlow and T.G.H. Strehlow.
account of the charming of the “bone” and its pointing at the enemy. Evil
magic was believed to enter the body of the doomed man, who began to waste
away and finally died.
The western Aranda procedure has been recorded by C. Strehlow as follows:
The pointing bones (called “ntjala” which have been made from the leg bones
of kangaroos or emus) are first put into an anthill in order to acquire the
magic poison (arunjkulta) of the ants. After a few days a string made from
human hair is fastened to the blunt ends of the bones by means of spinifex
resin. Then the men familiar with the right charms cut their tongues with a
stone knife and spit their blood-stained saliva upon the bones, uttering these
charms:
1. His life id being torn apart into shreds;
   His bones are being broken.
2. He (= the victim) is sinking to his knees;
   He is sinking to his knees, never to rise again.

The bones are decorated by parallel lines cut into them (in groups of three or
four lines). They are then stuck into a nest of savage bull-ants. After that it is
believed that the magic venom now reposing in the bones will devour the flesh
of any future human victim with the same savageness with which the vicious
bull-ants have attacked the pointing bones. Finally birds’ down is glued to the
bones by means of blood drawn from the subincised urethra.

Death charms figures as highly-secret sections of the son attached to certain
pmara kutata such as Aruŋkulta in the Central Aranda area, and others. These
arunjkulta verses were carefully guarded from the knowledge of all the younger and
many of the middle-aged men of the appropriate totemic clans. Even some of the
aged medicine men whom Strelhow had known personally had claimed that they had
always refused to accept

26 Strehlow told the writer that after performing this ceremony a blood-avenger was actually sent
out into the Illaara country where a man was killed hence paying – like a Racehorse who
forced to betray the location of the sacred cave at Karkiljarkilja to the Horn expedition which
plundered its tjurunga for museums of Victoria and South Australia – the supreme sacrifice
for furthering scientific knowledge.

27 Cf. the Myth of Kotitja

28 Songs of Australia, page 262.
any instruction whatever in the learning of *aruŋkula* verses so that no bereaved relatives could ever point suspicious fingers at them in case of a sudden death which might occur in their area. A medicine man such as Loatjira was not merely respected but also feared in the Western Aranda area because it was known that he “possessed” death charms in addition to his “healing magic” or “*tiurŋa maliŋga*”.  

The bandicoot site of Ilbalintja in Northern Aranda territory was linked by myth to the bandicoot sites of the Owen Springs area whose names do not seem to survive. But according to the bandicoot myth the sun originated at Ilbalintja in the form of a man who was standing on white-hot soil. It was the sun’s glow falling upon the sacred rock that first raised up Sire Karora from his sleep. The two stones represented the sun. When these stones had been rubbed together whilst being dusted by bandicoot tails and chanted over by the sun verses they could produce unbelievable magic – this rubbing of the sun’s immortal body and the simultaneous utterance of his secret name – that brought about a burst of summer heat such as might injure men and animals; they could even be killed by the new fierceness of the sun’s rays. Hence the old men of Ilbalintja had for many generations past refused to rub these stones. They were “*aruŋkula kŋara*” – stones filled with deadly magic which would inevitably be released by the ceremonial act and the chanting of the appropriate verses. In the informant Gura’s own days no one was any longer allowed to meddle with them. The singing of the sun verses was permitted only on the ceremonial ground when the actor representing the sun ancestor was being shown to the members of the Ilbalintja totemic clan. At the end of the myth mention was made of the two bandicoot visitors who came to Ilbalintja from the east. They fared badly at the soak:

The sun sees that the two gura men have arrived from the east . . . When they arrived, they were afraid of the sun, of that great sire the sun. They were afraid of him, they crept away on hands and knees,

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29 *Songs of Central Australia*, after note 37, page 262.
turning into a thicket of trees. Thereupon the sun burns them, and blood flows from their noses. All the ground, all the trees are in flames:

- The sun is exulting in his might;
- The sun is hurling its spears of fire.

They are sliding away in a sitting position;
- The (sun’s) flaming face is torturing them.

They stumble and sneak away on hands and knees;
- Blood in a gushing stream flows from their noses.

The sun spears them with its rays;
- The sun speeds them on their way.  

Finally, there is the deadly aruŋkulta – the magic virtue – inherent in sacred objects.  

When the sacred tjuruŋa passed into an individual’s possession he exercised certain rights over them. They were regarded as his personal property. No change of sex or class on the part of the totemic ancestor was allowed to influence the views of the old trustees once they had surrendered the tjuruŋa to the young man. He could, if he wished, show his private stone or wooden objects to any other man. He may even dispose of them, though the sale of tjuruŋa began to take place only after the disruption of the old native system of society by white intruders. Under the old order no man would have been so foolhardy as to disregard the advice of his elders even after the stones and the ceremonies and the chants had become his private property. All tjuruŋa are aruŋkulta, dangerous death-dealing agents if treated with contempt or carelessness.

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30 slightly re-written from pages 137-138, Songs of Central Australia.
31 Aranda Traditions, page 115.
32 after Strehlow, Aranda Traditions, pages 131-132.
WOMEN, TJURUNGA AND MAGIC

IN THE SECTION dealing with conception beliefs in *Aranda Traditions*, pages 87-91, under the heading Sex of the Child the problems associated with the female possession of *tjuruna* were raised. The treatment of this topic here however is by no means exhaustive. Strehlow himself was only too well aware that his knowledge of the female knowledge of the sacred *tjuruna* was restricted by his own sex and his comparative lack of access to the really valid sources – that of their female owners. He laments this fact on page 93 of *Aranda Traditions*:

> There are, however, certain traditions and chant verses which are the exclusive property of the native women, and of which the men are kept in ignorance. Far too little research has been made into this fascinating treasure of native folk-lore.

How he first became aware of the existence is not related in *Aranda Traditions*, but is to be found on page 392 of *Songs of Central Australia*:

> Gura, a Northern Aranda informant in 1933 on one occasion, when speaking of a certain female white investigator33, said to me – “Why don’t she go and ask our women folk instead of coming to us men? We are ashamed to tell our secrets fully to a white woman. She could easily question my sisters: they have verses of their own and also sacred ceremonies (*andata*) which we men are no allowed to see.”

For native etiquette precludes the interrogation of males by females (and vice versa) about their sacred *tjuruna* although within the writer’s experience this etiquette does not preclude the exchange of information on a voluntary basis. Above all however, the virtue of silence and mutual respect in all matters is prized – and rewarded.

> At the time of birth the totemic ancestor who had undergone reincarnation was totally unaware of his former glorious existence. If he had been born a boy the old men

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33 I can now reveal the woman’s name: Olive Pink.
would later on have initiated him and re-introduced him into the ancient ceremonies which he himself had instituted in his previous existence. If he had elected to bear female form no such enlightenment ever took place. Aranda women remained uninitiated and passed their days in comparative ignorance. No sacred myth ever reached their ears. Their lips never uttered the words of the traditional chants. The ceremonies centring around the lives of their ancestors were carefully hidden from their eyes. A woman by reason of her conception site may have been entitled to a position of supreme authority in her own community; she may have been the owner of the most sacred tjuruna treasured by her clan but all knowledge of them was carefully hidden from her. For many years Ljabarinja was in theory one of the ceremonial chiefs of the greatest honey-pot centre in Aranda territory. The tjurunga stone representing her body was held in deep and affectionate respect by the guardians of the sacred storehouse. Her ceremonies were performed and treated with reverence. But paradoxically the woman never learned the secrets of the rich heritage which was hers indisputably by native right. She died in Hermannsburg many years before 1933, a pitiful despised figure decayed by premature old age, her life embittered by a long series of harsh experiences. Once reverently proud of the powerful feminine characters described in their ancient legends – women who were frequently more powerful beings than their male associates – latter-day Aranda men looked down upon their own women with a certain measure of pitying contempt:

Our women are of no use at our ceremonial gatherings. They are altogether ignorant of the sacred tjuruna. They have fallen from the estate of our great feminine ancestors. Why, we do not know.

(Aranda Traditions, page 94.)

There seems to the writer then, that there were two types of female tjuruna ownership: that passed on by the men of which women stood – overtly at least – in complete ignorance, and that passed on by women of which men stood in complete ignorance.
Songs of Central Australia is less uncompromising on the question of female tjurunga ownership than Aranda Traditions, and in various sections it deals with practices mutually carried out by men and women such as evidenced in rites carried out to promote the development of a young girl’s breasts, for among the chief beauty attributes of the girls were well-formed legs and shapely breasts (pages 469-473):

Come, let the girlish breasts ever swell and ripen:
Come, let the rounded breasts ever swell and ripen:

The rounded breasts are swelling and ripening,
The girlish breasts are swelling and ripening,

The thighs, be round and shapely;
Knees, be round and shapely;

At the very fork let them be round and sturdy;
Like desert oaks let them be round and sturdy;

Knees, be round and shapely;
Spear bushes, be round and shapely;

These preceding verses were once chanted by the Hale River men, but out west on the border of the Western Aranda and Kukatja the rite was carried out thus:
The old men met secretly, well out of hearing of women and made a kanta (a thick ring of hairstring) which they anointed with fat and ochre. They then gathered in a circle, put their heads closely together and chanted the following charm verses while the kanta lies in the middle of them on an underspread of leaves:

Quickly the nipples are appearing;
On the breasts the nipples are appearing.

The breast are young and undeveloped;
The breast are beginning to form.

On the twin breasts the nipples are budding forth, -
Swelling with milk they are budding forth.

On the twin breasts the nipples are standing out firmly, -
Swelling with milk they are standing out firmly.

The inmate of the women’s camp avoids the company of men;
The inmate of the women’s camp is sitting apart.
“The twisted thick headband -
My elder sister places the band upon my head.”

In rounded curves her bosom is standing out;
On her downward sweeping breasts her nipples are quickly standing out.

In rounded curves her bosom is standing out,-
Sweeping downward, her breasts are standing out.

While this had been done several times, the girl herself was anointed with fat and red ochre and then her elder brother or mother’s brother took this kanta, all glistening with fat and red ochre, to the women’s camp and put it on the head of the young girl. He told her not to remove it until her breasts were fully developed. The girl wore this kanta day and night as her body grew so her breasts developed. The charmed ring “passed to her chest” and caused her figure to ripen into maturity lest she have grown up “flat chested like a boy”. Other beauty practices related to the carving of cicatrices (body scarification) and nose-boring.

Other themes likely to relate to the possession of women’s tjuruŋa would have been love charms (= ilpintja) or the charming of men so that they would become their husband against love rivals (such as the tjimbarkŋa plait verses), childbirth, initiation, and contraception and menstruation. Women also assisted in special rites concerning the sending out of tenŋka or blood avengers on their dreadful errands when a “selected group” of “wise women” (= arugutja ınąŋkala) wetted the men with their milk so as to render them proof against the weapons of their enemies.34

C. Strehlow has recorded an interesting women’s ceremony in Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral Australien (IV, II, page 35) carried out by a “wronged” wife who wishes to punish her rival (re-told by T.G.M. Strehlow on pages 393-394 of Songs of Central Australia under the heading of “tjimbarkŋa”

34 Songs of Central Australia, pages 622-625.
or plait women’s verses”): “Normally”, writes T.G.H. Strehlow, “the two women
would fight it out with clubs or sticks. It may happen however that the unfaithful
husband has gone to live with his new love in a different district, or that the first wife
is an old or weak woman, incapable of chastising her rival. She may then have
recourse to magic, generally with the assistance of one of her friends. The following
account of the procedure used for this purpose has been taken in a condensed form
from C. Strehlow’s book”:

The two women fashion two long digging sticks. They cut off their own locks
and public hair and work it into plaits, at the tips of which they fasten some
kangaroo leg bones and teeth by means of porcupine resin. The plaits are tied
to two neckbands, and these are fastened to the two digging sticks. These now
represent mythical plait women (tjimbarkŋa). A large fire is then lit. The
sticks representing the plait women are pushed into the ground close to the
fire; and the women execute the women’s dance around these crude images.
The image-sticks are pulled up, moved up and down, and put back in the
ground. They are then rubbed with lime. The outlines of a snake are drawn to
the intonation of the following verses of execration:

The tjimbarkŋa plaits are lying there;35
She is continually wasting away without hope.

With bleaching teeth she is lying there,
With (shrivelling) brain she is lying there.

Her eyeballs are projecting from their sockets;
Her head has grown too large for her.36

The plait woman keeps on crying and crying;
In her loneliness she keeps on crying and crying.

The tjimbarkŋa plaits are breaking her life;
The avenging woman is breaking her life.

35 It was believed that after the ceremony the plaits would wind themselves around the spirit or “life”
of the rival, tightening their hold on her till she wasted away and died.
36 because her body has been wasted by a mysterious disease.
Should the wronged wife seek her satisfaction merely in the illness of her rival, she will now rub the image-sticks with fat and red ochre, immerse them briefly in water, and then hide them in a secure spot. Should she seek the death of the other woman she will burn the image-sticks. This is believed to result in the death of her rival.
BLOOD AVENGERS

OTHER RITES in which women apparently played a vital role were those associated with the sending out of the revenge expeditions (= ritual murders) styled “leltja” in the Western Aranda-speaking area (for single blood avengers) and “tneŋka” or “atneŋka” where a whole party was involved. In modern times, particularly in western society these revenge expeditions seem to have aroused curiosity and the chief protagonists are popularly referred to as “kudaitja” or “kadaitja” or “feather-boot men” after an expression used for them in the writings of Spencer and Gillen.

Accounts of how blood avengers go about their deadly errands are to be found in Spencer and Gillen (see note 37). Byrne,38 Stuart,39 T.G.H Strehlow, C.F.T Strehlow, and K.S. Strehlow. Henrietta Drake-Brockman also wrote a short story entitled “Kaditcha” published in her collection of short stories entitled Sydney or the Bush.40

In the account dealing with the sending out of a revenge party, The Arunta explains that it is organized to carry out the death penalty for breaches of “tribal law”, and cites an instance of this as a man’s being “in possession of a woman of the wrong class”. The authors voice their scepticism about aspects of these practices, pointing out that “the quarrel may be confined to a wordy warfare lasting perhaps for an hour or two, after which things quiet down and all is over”. (page 443) and on page 453: “in this way, year after year, and endless kind of vendetta is maintained amongst these tribes, though, fortunately, it sometimes happens there is more noise than bloodshed.”

37 Spencer and Gillen spelt those words as “kurdaitcha” and “atninga”: see The Arunta (1927), pages 443-453 and pages 454-461 for accounts of these practices.
40 Angus and Robertson, 1948.
Spencer and Gillen also voice scepticism about the claims of men who have become “atua kurdaitcha” by having their toes painfully and permanently dislocated allegedly to help conceal their tracks and later sight of which “proves” they have achieved this status as had the character in Mr. Stuart’s story: (Ngandhanoo) never would . . . be so proud as now. He had gone out as Malboo (= leltja or Kadaitcha) and had accomplished his mission and returned. He was proud.” Spencer and Gillen write that there is “a certain amount of truth underlying a good deal that this is, of course, a matter of pure imagination. “ (pages 548, ff) and conclude on page 549: Our impression with regard to the Kurdaitcha is that at the present day it is merely a matter of myth, though at the same time every native is firmly convinced that some other native does actually ‘go Kurdaitcha’ and is quite prepared, as a general rule, to allow others to think that he himself does . . . . To those who are personally acquainted with the Australian native there will be not be anything at all improbable in this. He delights in mystery, and for the purpose of standing high in the estimation of his fellow man will submit to inconveniences and discomforts which perhaps appear to a white man to be ludicrously out of all proportion to the advantages gained . . . ”

Commenting on the divination ritual C. Strehlow has written:

How much innocent blood must have flowed in former times because of this ceaseless vendetta: It may, of course, be assumed with confidence that the annihilation of a whole camp took place only rarely; it was certainly not carried out when children, women,
And old folk had died, as the natives themselves admit. Even on the occasion of the deaths of men in the prime of their life this dangerous obligation was often pushed aside; otherwise no natives would have survived to the present day. It is, however, certain that many natives became victims of this cruel custom which – as far as I know – no longer exists today.

For another account of the divination ritual one should read The Law and the Lost by Donald R. Stuart. Originally entitled Inquest it is, like Malboo, one of the best samples of Mr. Stuart’s writing: chilling and terse in its language that suits perfectly the vindictive and vengeful nature of the subject matter.  

The divination ritual took place in order to divine by – to us – exceedingly haphazard means the alleged identity of murderers (by proxy or sorcery) which natives once believed provided conclusive proof necessary for the sending out of revenge expeditions. In Mr. Stuart’s words this was what was done:

They (the friends of the dead man) came after sunrise to the place where he (the murdered man) had been put on a platform of sticks, and they were red-eyed and weary. There was not much to be done; there were stones close at hand, and soon they had them arranged in the inquest circle round the base of the tree, far enough out that nothing of the noisome pooka that dripped down could fall on them. That being finished, they stood back and looked for long minutes at the scene, filling their eyes, their minds, with the picture. From the body of their friend the exudations dripped down, fouling the ground at the base of the tree, and with them came down the anger and rage of their friend. By and by that anger, that vengeful rage, would make its way into the ground and travel underground to one of the stones in the circle, to well up below that one stone, a tiny well of foul-smelling grease. Each stone was named for a man, and Manmanganning was there. Yes, he was there, and the yoondree, the dreadful anger of their friend, would seek his stone, to prove his guilt, and when

42 Modern Australian Short Stories edited by John K. Ewers, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1965, pages 127-134. It is understood that the account of the inquest circle is also given in J.R.B. Love, but the precise reference is not yet available.
The four men brought the others to see, they would know that Manmanganning must be dealt with. Once shown his guilt, the rest would be simple. A man would come forward, and be sent to deal with the guilty one. He would be follow Manmanganning secretly and would take him by night from the campfire, and would open him and take out his kidney fat, and replace it a twisted pad of spinifex, dry soft spinifex, and the long narrow hole in the back muscles over the kidneys would be healed up with a wipe of the ball of the hand, and Manmanganning would be left sleeping in the darkness away from the fire. He would wake in the daylight, confused and lightheaded, and for two or three days he would sicken and at last he would finish, and the man who had been chosen to bring him low would be safely back in his own country.

C. Strehlow and Spencer and Gillen describe procedure employed to ascertain a deceased person’s “murderers”, but in Songs of Central Australia Strehlow quotes his first-hand account from Rauwiraka’s account of the Ellery Creek ritual in which a spindle is fashioned by the relatives of the dead man: “Let the spindle be cut full speedily!” Hair from the dead man is then spun into hair-string. All present “keep their eyes fixed firmly on the man who is sitting in their midst (the spinner), for they want to see in what direction the spun hair (-string) is going to break. For when the hair (-string) breaks, they will be able to see whence the murderer had come: it is in this way that the murderer is indicated beyond doubt. For when the string breaks, the spindle flies off (the leg of the spinner). If it does not travel far, the (men present) know: ‘One of the men from his own camp killed him’. If it travels a considerable distance, (they know): ‘The murderer came from a distant place; and that too is the direction from which the murderer came’. During the whole procedure they keep singing –

The sting is beginning to stretch out, it is
beginning to stretch further and further;

The string is beginning to grow into a ball, - it
is beginning to grow into a ball on the spindle.

43 pages 607-610
If the spinning goes smoothly, and if the string does not break, but collects as a ball (on the spindle), then (those present) reach this conclusion: It was one of his friends, one of the men from his own camp, who killed him.

Another verse sung on such an occasion related to the bird of Death –

The birds of Death are screaming and calling to each other from all sides; Under the open sky they are screaming and calling each other from all sides.’

The bird of Death is the strangest of birds. From the very beginning no one has ever seen him: he has always been heard only. This bird comes only to a relative (of a dead man): he may even press himself against his body. If this happens, then such a man will know for certain that a relative of his has been murdered: and the bird has shown him that the murder has been committed close at hand. Men look to see from what direction the bird is soaring upwards, for that is where the murderer lives. The friends (of the dead man) will now remark: ‘That is the direction from which the bird keeps on coming.’ After that they will say no more; but some day they will kill the murderer when he has gone out hunting. After all the hairs have been spun into a string, all the men will stand up and grasp this hairstring cord with their hands, singing –

Stretched out, (the cord) runs on and on; Drawn out, (the cord) runs on and on.

Then, while the spindle keeps on turning (the men at the furthest point) come back towards (the man who is holding the spindle), moving very slowly so that the string will not slip from their hands; for should the string fall from their hands, they would be doomed to die. And now the string had been twisted double:

The string is beginning to stretch out, - it is beginning to stretch further and further;

The string is beginning to grow into a ball, - it is beginning to grow into a ball on the spindle.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cf. The three Norns in Norse mythology
thereupon all men standing in a group around the spinner watch him carefully while he makes the *gururkŋa* (or double) band after bandicoot tailtips are fastened to it and these tailtips are now called ‘teeth’: for it is these teeth alone that will devour the murderer. Then the (completed) band is pushed (in turn) into the mouth of every man present in such a way that it will hang down from his teeth while (the ends are) being pressed against his stomach. All the men present grasp the band in this manner; in this way the men are calmed down again, after they have sorrowed so deeply for the dead man. Finally one man remain sitting (the dead man’s son-in-law). After the band has been pressed against his body by the others he alone takes permanent possession of it; it heats the heart. Wearing it he will go out to kill the guilty man. For only after the murderer has been killed can his heart grow calm once more (slightly re-written from *Songs of Central Australia*, pages 607-610).

The ritual executioner in doing his tribal thing, helps keep law and order in a land that traditionally knew no means otherwise of removing persistent and dangerous offenders against the old code, particularly when the charges were of sacrilege or trumped-up charges of sacrilege. For this is largely a question of authority, and all temporal authority, as Strehlow points out, ultimately rests on force – or fear of force. As stated above, the best exposition of authority in aboriginal society is obtained in Strehlow’s paper *Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia: a Functional Study*. He has also written extensively about this aspect of “the good old days (i.e., under tribal law)” for the Law Reform Commission and for the Strehlow Research Foundation in papers on the operation of aboriginal law in Central Australia.

In fact, after reading the accounts given by Spencer and Gillen, Mr D.R. Stuart, and Henrietta Drake-Brockman as well as the Strehlows, it would be no exaggeration to say
that the system worked as one of pure terror\textsuperscript{45} in the days before the white man came. This terror was instilled from earliest childhood and continued unabated through life until the extremity of old age and white hairs seemed to guarantee at least some degree of immunity from the attentions of blood avenger and sorcerer alike for wrongs real or imaginary. Thus at Hermannsburg itself the sacred cave of Manaŋanaŋa was kept inviolable by the threatened spectre of the iliaka njemba that had been “the legendary grim emu-shaped phantoms that stalked over the sandhill wastes at night and devoured the children who dared to move too far away from the campfires of their parents” thereby terrifying the minds of the younger Western Aranda children\textsuperscript{46} and children were not exempted from capital punishment for persistent offences against old tribal code as instanced above in the drowning of Lupa in the Ormiston River for thieving tjauerilja meat. Nor could the plea of “mena rea” be raised on behalf of unwitting culprits under tribal law, for accidental transgressions were punished just as ruthlessly (see page above). The wrath that brings about such retribution is attributed not to their earthly reincarnations, but to the totemic ancestors themselves, and against this there could be no argument:

“Reverence, mingled with fear, is probably the strongest emotion felt by the privileged men who are visiting (their) sacred sites. Great care must be taken not to do anything that will bring down the wrath of the ancestral beings whose presence still fills the scenes where they laboured at the beginning of time. Nothing must be left undone that they once instituted. There is danger, too, that someone’s carelessness may cause harm to the sacred tjurunga slabs that are being kept stored at these pmara kutata. A bush fire may destroy the tree

\textsuperscript{45} Since penning these lines and after reading Terror and resistance by E.V. Walters, I am convinced that this terror was not of the same order as that, for instance, in the Zulu State under Dingiswayo, Shaka, Dingane, Mpando and Catchwayo: Australian Aboriginal Society was “far too democratic” for that.

\textsuperscript{46} Journey to Horseshoe Bend, T.G.H. Strehlow, page 88.
bearing the *tjurunga*, which will then fall down and be broken: such an accident once happened at Inuŋamala. Again, a stone *tjurunga* slab may slip out of its bundle while it is being taken from a sacred cave or put back into it. Death is the penalty set down for men whose carelessness has caused the destruction of a *tjurunga*. The burning of the storehouse tree at Inuŋamala took place so long ago that the Hale River men no longer remember whether any of the younger men who had been told to keep watch over the storehouse on their wanderings in the vicinity of the mountain were killed because of its destruction. I have, however, two broken stone *tjurunga* in my possession, whose accidental breakage cost men their lives. Utnadata, who gave me one of them, related its tragic story in those terse and pregnant sentences that are characteristic of the Aranda art of suggesting rather than describing violent happenings.

‘This broken *tjurunga* once belonged to Lurkŋalurkŋa. He was of the euro totem, from Indata. A party of *iliara* was sent up to the mountain cave to bring down all of the *tjurunga*. The old men did not climb up themselves because the cave was high up on the mountain. The *iliara* brought down the *tjurunga* in bundles tied together with hairstring. This *tjurunga* slipped out of its bundle and fell upon a stone; it broke in halves while one of the *iliara* were bringing them down from the cave to the old men, who were waiting to red-ochre them. The old men saw the broken *tjurunga*. They grieved for it. They asked the *iliara*, who had broken it. They did not kill the (guilty) one immediately: they could not kill him on sacred ground. He went back to his own father Kutakuta Thata. His father kept watch over him.

“But time was against him. The doomed young man could not always stay in camp. He had to go out hunting, and probably thought himself safe at his own home, many miles from the scene of the accident. But he could not escape death.

One morning, when he was alone, he looked up. Blood avengers were standing around him. He was looking at the points of their spears.

For his fault this mere youth was killed by the old men . . . I do not remember his name. I was told when I was a young man – ‘Kutakuta’s son has now been killed.’ Later, when the old men showed me this broken *tjurunga* they said to me merely – ‘This is a euro (*tjurunga*) which broke in halves, - it is that of Lurkŋalurkŋa.’
The death of the culprit alone could atone even for the accidental destruction of a *tjurunga*. (*Songs of Australia*, pages 339-340)

As Strehlow sums up in his *Totemic Geography* paper:

> a few selected instances of executions noted out in the Aranda-speaking area in the old days (makes it) clear to the reader the ultimate power over life and death possessed by the ceremonial chief (*inkata*) supported by what has been termed in anthropological treatises, his ‘council’ of elders (*kŋaribata*) in cases of sacrilege. (page 112)

These examples of capital punishment in pre-white Central Australia demonstrate and emphasis the very very real fears people had of blood avengers in the old days, a fear that I believe is evident to this day but which is a matter not to be gone into here. For instance Kotitja, the largest mountain that lies brooding out over the Western Aranda-speaking area from the western end of the Waterhouse in Central Australia, is still feared and respected by the people of the Wallis Rockhole who live virtually in its shadow. Before summing up with the role of women in the blood-avenging rituals – about which so little is known – I have accordingly set out below the Myth of the Leltja or blood avenger of Kotitja[^1] , translated by Strehlow, I have distilled from its esoteric context.

The Myth of the Leltja of Kotitja survives as one fragment of a longer tradition that has obviously been lost. The section recorded below once belonged to Ellery Creek stock of Western Aranda traditions and deals with the problem arising from violent death; for the Kotitja Myth purports to lay down the pattern for the legitimate cause for killing their victim – at least that is stated in this recorded fragment – their human counterparts would have gone out on similar death-

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[^1]: Leltja = blood avenger, a ritual killer sent out in reprisal; grid reference for Kotitja: map “*Aboriginal Central Australia*” SG15; R 502 National Mapping series 645010; this myth forms Part V of Section II of my book on Aboriginal Land Ownership in Central Australia.
dealing errands only in order to punish an alleged or real murder or some crime involving sacrilege. It was generally believed by the Aranda – particularly by those who had never taken part in revenge expeditions – that the victims of such raids could be revived temporarily by medicine men in the manner described below. That was in fact the only form of “resurrection” believed to be possible for human beings: the temporary revival of men who had died violent deaths.

The first four couplets of the Kotitja tradition were important to a party of blood avengers, for they used to be chanted over the men before they went out on their murderous errand. The first couplet relating to the eyelids was sung to blind the intended victims: this verse was credited with having the power of drawing down the eyelids of the victims and of turning their eyeballs right around so that they could not see their murderers approaching. The next three verses were sung to make the avengers invisible. Even if they approached their victims over bare and windswept plain devoid of grass and trees, the victim allegedly could not see them; for the avengers looked to them at most like shrubs or tussocks of grass. In fact, it was believed that the avengers, thirsty from their long journey, could sit down and drink from the same vessel as their intended victim without being seen or even suspected.

The two leltja of Kotitja kill their victim while he is hunting by himself. The lonely hunter has always been the traditional favourite target of the wandering human blood avengers until quite recent years in Central Australia: nowadays of course people no longer hunt, and different methods - no less efficacious – are employed, such as getting drunk and laying them out across the railway lines before oncoming trains, and/or filling their eyes and noses and mouths with sand, this latter instance as a punishment for a woman for allegedly persistently “bad-mouthing” men when drunk, for the demon drink has reached almost plague proportions in some areas of Australia.
The Leltja of Kotitja Myth

“Two avengers were filled with keen desire to go south. Where was their home? They were men from Kotitja: it was from Kotitja that they set out. They set out and passed through Paltala Tuatja\textsuperscript{48} yes, through Paltala Tuatja. They continued on their way; they went on and sat down at Tarkatarka, \textsuperscript{49} right at Tarkatarka itself. After they had rested one of them said: ‘Listen: Let’s go still further south, yonder, just where I am pointing: Yonder, from Ungwatja.\textsuperscript{50}

And so they went there. After they had gone there they went right to Mutikutara\textsuperscript{51} itself. They walked over a wide flat plain and as they walked they saw three men approaching. As the three men approached, the leltja went forward to meet them and having drawn close to them the leltja charmed the eyes of these three men with spells, singing the verse translated as follows:

We draw the lids to dim the eyes, -
We draw the lids to turn the eyes

until the men surely could no longer see; then they continued their way over the great plain there, over the face of the wide flat plain, and they sang;

Across the barren windswept waste in not desire let’s wander and range at large:
Let’s wander and range at large:

Then they wrapped brushwood around their own bodies by singing spells to conceal their presence from sight:

By a thicket we are hidden:
Safe from searching sharp glances we are hidden.

\textsuperscript{48} Grid reference unknown; tuatja = gap (in ranges): almost certainly this is a gap in the Waterhouse Range between Kotitja and Terkaterka; although the myth does not mention this as recorded, it is more likely than that they also visited Ntjipinja on their way for there is allegedly a cave there for this major arintja (= man-eating monster) site.

\textsuperscript{49} = Terkaterka (literally “green” or “yellow”; “terka” = “grass”)

\textsuperscript{50} A place name in the river at the confluence of one of the Palmer River distributaries and the Finke River; an important ilia or emu totemic centre.

\textsuperscript{51} = “two knees”
Thus they passed over the windswept ground, chanting this spell:

‘Cross the bare windswept waste let us roam, let us range full and fast:
Hid in the grass waving high let us go.’

By singing these spells they were able to walk about looking just like tussocks of grass because the *letja* had apparently been covered by grass and thus it was quite impossible now for those three men to see these three avengers, although the two avengers could see their victims. The victims saw merely brushwood. But some crows betrayed their presence by cawing at the approach of the two avengers, for their vision had not been affected by the spells: the translated verse goes as follows:

Cawing crows cry warnings,
Cawing crows scream in warning cries.

At this the avengers flung themselves down upon the windswept, exposed ground for it was a vast plain completely without any grass or bush cover.

But the proceeding verses have been something of a blind, for the three men are not the intended victims, another man, a lone hunter, strays in their direction after game; he comes toward them by mistake as he is hunting at the very moment when the other three have arrived on the scene. The *letja* chase him and they kill him; they spear him with their spears. Having speared him they leave him for his belly to swell as he lies in the hot sun.

After he has been lying there long enough for his belly to have become very swollen the *letja* draw out their *ntjala* bones, the sharp bones often known as ‘pointing bones’ made from the leg bones of kangaroos and used extensively by medicine men in various medical rites; they used to be carried by medicine men stuck under the hairsting used for tying back their hair. They open with these bones the navel of the dead man lying on his thick bed of fallen mulga leaves. After they sweep the leaves away from around him his blood and juices of putrefaction escape so that the body can return to its normal size. The blood spurts out and streams through the mulga leaves under the corpse: it keeps on turning back time and again as
soon as it reaches the edges where the mulga leaves have been banked up.

Then they take up a burning firebrand made from a little *tnjilaṇa* shrub; it is green. With this firebrand they apply it to the edges of the wound that they might draw together again and seal up the wound, singing two life-bringing verses which bring the dead back to life:

![Verse](https://example.com/verse.png)

Arabarā grass tussocks; come, draw the deep gash together;
Come, draw the deep gash together:
You spider, now lifting your trapdoor:
Come, draw the deep gash together.

The dead man’s wound closes up. He still lies there as before. The two murderers withdraw to the shade of another tree a good distance away that their victim might lie there on his own, scorch by the hot sun. They begin to speak to the dead man himself in tones of hypocritical solicitude: Don’t you think you should be getting up to go home? For the sun is now low in

52 the *tnjilaṇa* or *tnjilaṇa* a shrub is a fairly common shrub with red flowers which exude a considerable amount of sweet nectar; and these flowers were once sucked eagerly by the sugar-hungry natives. As firewood *tnjilaṇa* wood is quite useless, since it does not burn well even when dry and gives very little heat. To make a firebrand out of green *tnjilaṇa* a wood would be a ridiculous procedure in normal life. Such a torch would go out almost immediately. The “flame” of a green *tnjilaṇa* brand would therefore have no real effect upon closing the wound: this would have to be done entirely by the magic spells sung during the revival ritual. To use green *tnjilaṇa* for making a torch is an act rather similar to the fashioning a spear from mistletoe as is done in a Germanic myth.

53 the two *leltja* know that their victim will soon be revived by their spells. They don’t wish to be discovered by his side when he wakes up; for they want him to think that they are two strangers who had found him lying unconscientious out in the sun, affected merely by sunstroke. They expect that he will not remember the circumstances of his own death, and hope that he will be unable to reveal their identities to his friends when he returns to his camp. Otherwise his kinsmen would be under an obligation to avenge his death upon the murderers.

54 a species of grass with cat-like bluish ears.
in the west.’ They are trying to bring the dead man back to life. They then see movement in two of his fingers, then in his little toes, then in all of his toes. The avengers move, and while they are moving they call out to him: It’s high time to go home for water to quench your thirst, and for meat to satisfy your hunger; it’s time to wake up.’

And now he begins to wake up and rise, drawing in breath once more with a snort and rubbing his eyes. Sitting up he sees those two men sitting there and says: ‘Oh, a heavy sleep must have over-whelmed me!’, for he had rested there in a deep sleep. And now he rises and goes home, home to his camp. The other two vanish after first walking as companions of their victim; they hide themselves. Then they go on ahead and pick up large tree stumps\textsuperscript{55} Then as the dead man comes by on his way home they hiss at him: ‘Wa!’ He is startled by this sudden shock, being now in full possession of his mental faculties even though he be only a ‘dead’ man who will die again in a few days’ time. ‘Excellent! Excellent!’ proclaim the blood avengers.\textsuperscript{56}

As soon as he returns he flings himself down at the camp for the last time. He lies there the whole time, but only for a few nights.\textsuperscript{57} And now he is merely able to move his fingers: no longer is he able to speak a word. In order that many might see him he spreads out two fingers, as many fingers as there had been \textit{leltja} who had attacked him. And now the other men at the \textit{pmara kuata}\textsuperscript{58} recognise what he is telling them with those fingers: strange men have struck him down. Having thus told them what has happened he dies.

\textsuperscript{55} Why they are gathering large tree stumps is not explained; but perhaps it is part of the subterfuge in note 51 on the previous page; perhaps they are masquerading as firewood gatherers?

\textsuperscript{56} Again it is not explained why they hiss at their revived victim to give him a fright and to test his faculties; perhaps it is to test the success of their plans so far and when he does react they realize that the plans are going accordingly.

\textsuperscript{57} The Aradna – like the Germanic tribesmen in the days of \textit{?citus} – normally counted their time in nights and not in days; in modern English “fortnight” alone survives.

\textsuperscript{58} The “everlasting home”
The same thing happens to humans to this day: the victim indicates what happened to other men by the same method and is thus able to tell them how many men struck him down. They say: “It is clear that that is number of men who struck him down.” And so it is in this way that he points them out with his fingers alone: he does not speak. 59

(b) “Malboo”

Mr D.R. Stuart’s account of the blood avenger is worth reading in full. Originally published in a popular magazine as a short story his account is to be found in his book Yandy (Georgian House, Melbourne, 1959, pages 23-27). Although the account and names have been fictionalised I understand that this is an actual account of a “malboo” or “leltja” incident given out to Mr. Stuart in the early 1950s by Manapoortja, “A fullblood from the Mangala country, of late middle-age. A man of high degree. A great Dancer”, see list of Characters preceding page 1, op. cit. According to N.B. Tindale (Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, Australian National University Press, 1975), the Mangala (or Maŋala) were once located “on the desert plateau about the McLarty Hills; north to Geegully Creek and headwaters of Edgar Range; north-west to plateau above Damper Downs, extending no nearer than 50 miles to the coast; south to a known E-W line of salty waters along 21° latitude, east to a line about 40 miles east of Joanna Springs. Co-ordinates:124° 0'E x 19°50’S, Area: 15,600 sq.m” (slightly emendated).

59 an interesting observation on the myth is an added note to note 56 from the previous page; the leltja do not appear to have sung the concealing verses to the real victims, hence, probably, their concern that they not be recognised and their identity revealed to avenging relatives of the deceased in turn.
BLOOD AVENGERS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

BEFORE LEAVING THE SUBJECT of blood avengers and their role in the fear process in Central Australia, there follows a discussion of the role of women in the sending out of avengers be they tneŋka (= large parties) or leltja (= single blood avengers).

In the account given by Mr. D.R. Stuart, the role of women is thus described:

“All his days had been leading to this day. Every lesson his mother taught ... “ (Yandy, page 23). Mr. Stuart does not say exactly what these lessons consisted of, but they probably relate to tracking skills that were at least as highly developed as if not superior to those of men if only because the woman’s role in hunting game concerned hunting down minor creatures whose tracks might be reasonably assumed to be less apparent than those of large game such as emus and kangaroos.

The next hint is given on page 24 (op. cit.) when a special dance is performed: 

... under the stars, stiff grotesque dance. Bloodshed in mime, stab and stop back, gloat, this is the enemy, our brother is going on a far journey of hardship and danger, we will dance him success, with a dance of our own, a dance we made, set to a song brought from the far country to the north by the songmen who trade songs, a powerful song that ensures success for our brother Ngandhanoo.

Mr. Stuart gives no verses or their translations as for instance, the Strehlows do. He does not actually state who takes part in this dance, nor does he state whether the women actually sing the song too. We are left to make certain assumptions. But that there are women present at this ceremony is revealed in the following sentence:

Almost inaudible the cupped hands of the women slapping their thighs, almost invisible Ngandhanoo standing aloof watching the dance, faint against the night the flickering of the single fire...
Their role is soon to emerge:

... sharper the mounting tension as each women steals out to him, posturing, gesturing, offering, using the words women must not use, until all have capered for him, and the one only his choice fades with him into the night. No matter that she is forbidden woman for him, this night his lusting over her is his lust for them all; he may never return to lie warm with his own woman Jeddera, and this night he is free to break all the Law that deals with the subject of lying with women.

When she creeps back to the fire they know he has gone, and they are silent, heavy with dread, the night air chilling them.

The semi-sacred nature of the *tnenka* verses is confirmed by Strehlow in *Songs of Central Australia*:

There existed, however, an interesting group of border-line songs in Central Australia. These were men’s songs, associated with a number of the sacred totems, which were sung in the hearing of the women and children; the women and children, however, were permitted merely to listen; on no account were they allowed to take part in the actual singing. (page 622)

Pages 265-266 give the actual verses used in the ritual:

“In Central Australia, while the practice of ‘pointing the bone’ was not only feared but also regarded with horror, there was no similar feeling of revulsion against different sets of couplets which were sung on the occasions when avengers or warriors were preparing to set out on their murderous errands. The following outline has been taken from C. Strehlow’s account of the appropriate Western Aranda procedure (*Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral Australien*, pages 6-8). The young men selected for the warlike expedition, during the night prior to their departure, were permitted to have sexual intercourse with women who were otherwise strictly forbidden to them, for instance with women who belonged to the same classes as their sisters or their mother-in-law. The warriors drew blood from their sub-incised urethras and allowed it to flow over one another’s right shoulders so that their arms might be strengthened for battle. Finally the danced around a blazing fire singing a special warriors’ song in
couplets composed almost entirely in the Loritja language. A few explanatory remarks will make the meaning of the individual couplets clearer. In verse 1 the imaginary questioners are the intended victims who are being surprised by the warriors; it is the latter who have blackened their faces and bodies with charcoal. Verses and 3 describe how blood was taken from the urethra prior to setting out. Verses 4-10 relate the actual stack that is to take place when the warriors have come upon their enemies’ camp. Verse 10 tells how the bellies of the slain are opened in order that their killers may eat some of their raw kidney fat.

1. Whence have come the distant wanderers, -
   Bodies black with charcoal?

2. Stab your penis (with a sharp bone),
   Set its point against the edge of the wound:

3. Like a spring it (= blood) gushed forth from the strong penis.
   And poured down like a stream:

4. The spearthrower, the inseparable friend:
   I am fitting my spear to it, I am fitting my spear to it

5. The spearthrower is hurling the beam, - the spearthrower is hurling the beam:
   The spear is piercing him (= the enemy), it is piercing him.

6. The barbed spear with its long hook
   has ripped his flesh.

7. It (= the spear) has struck him with a loud thud, -
   It has resounded with the blow.

8. It has struck a fatal blow, a fatal blow;
   Never will it come out again.

9. Like a magpie it swooped suddenly upon him;
   From the sky it swooped suddenly upon him.

10. Let us cut them open, draw back the skin, and taste of their fat;
    Let us cut them into pieces, let us cut them into pieces.

Many of C. Strehlow’s verses are identical with verses occurring in the Western Aranda Tneŋka Song given to Strehlow by Rauwiraka and quoted below. A further two verses that come from a
different Aranda area clearly expressed the desire that the intended victims were to be lacking in strength to defend themselves:

11. In blind stupor they are lying asleep;
The hairs of their heads are glued to the ground.

12. Their right arms are powerless, their right arms are powerless;
They are unable to move their shoulders.

Having killed their enemies and devouring some of their kidney fat the men then cleaned their spears with water; and some of this blood-mingled water was drunk by the young warriors ‘in order to increase their strength’, a practice to imbue the eater with the qualities of the original owner and a common custom in many parts of the world (see instances in The *Golden Bough* by James Frazer).

This above song is the Western Aranda *Tneŋka Song* sung around a blazing watchfire by the warriors selected to go out on a murder expedition into hostile tribal territory. Not all the verses could be sung in female company; the verse referring to the rite of penis-stabbing (verses 2 and 3) could not be uttered in the hearing of women, just as the latter were never permitted to see and blood issuing from the sub-incised male urethra. But the remaining verses used to be chanted freely by the Western Aranda men in the presence of a selected group of ‘wise women’ (or *arugutja inaŋkala*). The latter were permitted to dance around the fire with the men; for it was claimed that their presence helped to make the warriors magically immune against the spears and weapons of their enemies. C. Strehlow does not appear to have mentioned this fact; but Strehlow’s own Western Aranda informants Rauwiraku, Utnadata, and Namatjira - all agreed that the presence of women had been regarded as essential to promote the efficaciousness of these charms. Strehlow quotes Rauwiraka’s account and sets down his *tjŋka* verses (many of them identical with those supplied by C. Strehlow) as sung in the Ellery Creek portion of the Western Aranda district. The verses are given in their chanted form: since they are in Loritja, they give a good idea of some of the asymmetric verse types used in Loritja songs:
“Before the go out as tjepka, the men light a huge watchfire at night; and the women look at them. Then they (i.e. the men) thrust their spears into the ground, at the edge of the fire. They thrust their spears into the (ground near the) fire, chanting as follows:

1. The barbed spear with its long hook
   Has ripped into his flesh

Then they circle around the fire with this song:

2. They danced around in circles,
   They practiced avoiding (their enemies’) spears.

3. Like a willy wagtail dodge the flight of the spears;
   Turn your eyes carefully from side to side.\(^{60}\)

4. The spearthrower, the inseparable friend;\(^{61}\)
   Fit the spear upon its hook:

The whole host now call out ‘pala, pala, pala, pala!’ The women also call out, pala, pala, pala, pala!’ by way of proofing\(^{62}\) (the warriors) against the weapons; and they also perform evading motions like the men – in order that spears may not touch the (charmed) men.

(Then the men sing:)

5. It has struck him a fatal blow;
   Never will he draw it out again.

Again they call out, ‘pala pala!’

6. Whence have come the distant wanderers, -
   Bodies black with charcoal?

\(^{60}\) Verse 3: Each warrior is to imitate the actions of the willy wagtail – which incessantly turns its body from side to side and looks around without pausing – so that no enemy’s spear may surprise it.

\(^{61}\) Verse 4: The spearthrower is called ‘the inseparable friend’ because the dancing warrior must take care not to drop it: should he do so, it would be taken as an omen of his impending death. (Cf. Aranda Traditions, page 79, where the Southern Aranda belief is quoted, that any young ndarattwa who dropped his blazing torch would be doomed to die in the near future.

\(^{62}\) Between verses 4 and 5: “by proofing (the warriors) against weapons”: the word used is terbilama which literally means ‘to make smooth or slippery, to polish’: the charms and the ritual are intended to make the bodies of the warriors smooth and slippery so that weapons hurled at them may, as it were, glance off them harmlessly. In more recent times it was believed that men could be charmed against bullets in this way, or that bullets could be ‘sung’ to cause them to miss their intended victims.
For they have already blackened their foreheads and chests with charcoal.

7. It (= the spear) has struck him with a loud thud,
   It has resounded with a blow.

8. The magpie calls softly, -
   Messenger of death.

Singing thus they send the magpie in advance, so that he, travelling alone, will cry out at them (i.e. the intended victims) – will disturb the inhabitants of the pmara kutata (of the enemies).

“They also do the following. The wise women render the men proof against weapons by wetting them with their milk: they squeeze their breasts and wet the men. Only wise women render men invulnerable lest others kill them: these wise women have been trained by the wise women of olden days, and what training they received was not known by Strehlow’s informants, that being a women’s secret.

9. The women send forth in gushes
   The spraying milk.

Up to this point the women had shared in the tnenka ritual. The next two verses, however, were withheld from their hearing: for the ritual stabbing of the sub-incised urethra had to be kept an inviolable secret from all women’s eyes.

“Stabbing their penes, (the men) pour blood upon the watchfire: they all pour their blood on it til it extinguishes the fire like a flood of water.

10. Stab your penis (with a sharp bone).
    Set its point against the edge of the wound:

11. Stab your gaping-mouthed penis (with a sharp bone),
    Set its point against the edge of the wound:
Then the men stab their penes when they are already on their way, travelling as tnenka: no woman (may) ever see this.”

From the above account it would appear that, among the Western Aranda at any rate, the presence of women was regarded as being indispensable during the magic ritual to ensure the protection of warriors against the weapons of their enemies;
and in this ritual the milk of the ‘wise women’ took the place of the water with which apparently the Germanic thanes were once besprinkled before battle. (Songs of Central Australia, pages 622-625.)

Spencer and Gillen in The Arunta, Chapters XVII (Atninga\(^{63}\) or “Avenging Party”) and XIX (“The Customs of Kurdaitcha and Illapurinja”) give two first-hand accounts of the sending out of blood avenging expeditions, the first to Iliaura country by the men of Alice Springs which actually resulted in the demise of two men, whilst a third condemned man growing “suspicious during the night” has escaped, “taking his women with him”.

The role of women in this instance was interesting, for it appears that they were in some degree responsible for the avengers having been sent out in the first place, two of them having married men who were “within the forbidden degrees of relationship” (called “Iturka” by Spencer and Gillen and translated as incestuous by the writer). The third proposed victim had been a bad character whom the Iliaura wanted out of the way anyway. When the avenging party had been travelling for several days they had come upon a group of Iliaura men “consisting of about a dozen families, near to whom they camped for two days”:

As usual on such occasions, the Iliaura sent some of their women over to the strangers’ camp, but the fact that the use of the women was declined by the visitors at once indicated that the mission of the latter was not a friendly one. The women are offered with a view of conciliating the Atninga men, who, if they accept the favour, indicate by so doing that the quarrel will not be pursued any further.

The murder took place as reprisal for continuous “sending in (of) threatening messages” or reports of same, causing some “northern groups of the Arunta tribe” to live “in fear of the Iliaura”. The three victims were handed over by the Iliaura themselves. After the deed “the Arunta went to the main camp

\(^{63}\) = tneŋka or atneŋka
of the Iliaura and took the Anua of one dead man, and she became and is now the property of the old man who seized her, she being a woman of the section into which he could lawfully marry. One girl child was annexed by one of the younger men, who carried her on his back for the greater part of the return journey for about 100 miles. The two women who belonged to the Iturka man Were away, but no attempt was made to capture them, as, being themselves Iturka they could not be taken as wives by the men of the avenging party. They would, when captured, meet with severe punishment at the hands of the Iliaura men, and in all probability would be put to death. Had they been the proper Anua of the dead man, they would, if present, have been appropriated by the men of the Atninga party to whom they were also Anua.”

Another instance is given from Charlotte Waters of avengers being sent after a sexual transgressor (pages 445-447, op. cit.) who “had carried off a woman who was not his lawful Anua, (since) both the man and the woman belong(ed) to the Purula section” and therefore stood as cousins to each other, their mothers being the daughter of the same woman by different husbands. However, in this instance since the intended victim was “a man strong enough to resist”, his being ‘one of the finest men of the group’, and a “formidable antagonist of well-known prowess” who “killed two of the men who attempted to punish him and nearly kill(ed) the proper husband of the woman” and was therefore “thought best to be left alone, though . . . when quarrels occur(red) in which he (was) concerned he (was) often taunted with being (incestuous)”.

The third instance of tnenka parties being sent out concerns itself in detail with ritual involved (pages 447-453, ibid.) and the account should be read for this reason alone, as well as to find out what magical procedures are employed to

64 this may be Western Aranda “noah” or “wife”
65 should this read “men”?
66 or men, see above
67 Purula woman could also have been a sister.
“avoid spears” (should the intended victims retaliate). What is certain however in all accounts is that great lengths are gone to ensure that the condemned are so paralyzed with fear (such as in Mr. Stuart’s account) that they offer little resistance to their murderers. The appearance of the avenger, for instance, in his charcoal with white stripes would probably be sufficient to bring about cardiac arrest on sight. (“His body gleams in the waning sunlight; he is painted with the device of the blood-avengers”.68) For the victims knew full well also the ritual and knew what was in store for them. Remarkable indeed would have been a man with the wits and confidence to bring himself around in time when confronted by his executioner (see instance two, above). Spencer and Gillen insist that these rituals were “out of sight of the main camp and the women and children” (cf. Strehlow and Stuart accounts).

In a note on page 452, ibid., Spencer and Gillen point out: “The widow of a dead man has to paint her body white, so that the spirit of the dead man can see that she is properly mourning for him”, and it is this statement that leads us to believe that she is the “old woman who, being in mourning, was debaubed from head to foot with white pipeclay” who met the avenging party on its return to camp. “(W)ith a fighting club in her hand (she) went through a series of grotesque dancing movements in front of them. As she did so they stood still in perfect silence. But after a minute or two danced on and then came to a final halt in the bed of a creek. Once more the old woman pranced about expostulating with them” and addressing remarks to them which non-linguists Spencer and Gillen attempt to set down and translate. “When this was over, without speaking a word the . . . men who have actually taken part in the killing (as opposed to the onlookers) came forward and stood in the front line, each man with his spear resting on the ground and his shield held with its convex side outwards. The old woman and a younger one struck each of them in turn with a fighting club” in a ceremony called alkuta tuma69 which was “of

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68 Aranda Traditions, page 32
69 alkuta = shield; tuma = to hit or strike
considerable importance” since “the spirit of the dead man is supposed to be following up the party in the form of a little bird . . . which is watching its opportunity to injure the men by evil magic”, for those whose shields give out a hollow sound are destined not to live long.

This chapter concludes on page 453 with the observation that “There is a somewhat strange custom sometimes followed in connection with avenging the death of a man. If the special Gammona whose duty it is to organise the avenging party does not do so, the widow of the dead man goes to perhaps two or three other Gammonas, and . . . invites them to have marital relations with her” while at the same time advising them to “walk and kill the man”. They say something to the effect that “this is the wrong woman for us to take, but we will go and kill him.” They are supposed to be obliged to comply with her request, and must afterwards go out and kill the man.

Details of Spencer and Gillen’s account of the letija (or Kurdaitcha), particularly concerning the concealment of the fatal wound, temporary revival of the victim and loss of memory to pre-empt identification of the murderer and hence reprisals, the divination of the culprit and the use of tjurunga as magical weapons coincide with those given by Mr. Stuart and the Strehlows. The passages on the use of feather boots, tracking abilities, and the dislocating of the little toes (pages 455-459, op. cit.) are excellent reading. They also mention the magical chants (page 458), although, unlike the Strehlows, no hint is given of their meaning and content. “(T)he fear of the Kurdaitcha man lurking around is always present with the native” (page458, ibid.), they conclude, and “that the fear of the magic power of the dreaded Kurdaitcha causes him, if he catches sight of such a track, to avoid as much as possible the spot

70 = kamuna; actually mother’s brother; here it is given as “brother”
71 if these are indeed the original victims’ “brothers” (either blood or classificatory) then they should be “straight” for his widow; in other words, a man and his brothers stand in the same relationship to a woman who is marriageable for him, there therefore seems something wrong with Spencer and Gillen’s account of this detail or perhaps they misunderstood the terms.
where he has seen it, in just the same way in which an ordinary European peasant will avoid the spot haunted by a ghost.” To our eyes tracking itself is magic.

Of interest in this context is however “The Custom of Illapurinja”, or “the changed one”, a sort of female Kurdaitcha “whom we may regard” say Spencer and Gillen (page 461, *ibid*) “at all events at the present day, as being entirely a mythical personage whose existence in the mind of the native is concerned mainly with the observance of certain customs in connection with mourning for dead relative”. This is “another case of what Stanner might call ‘brilliant improvisation’ in northern Australia”, 72 and about which von Leonhardi in his preface to *Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral-Australien*, Part 3, pages V-VII, probably slightly sarcastically, “In that case it is difficult to understand what relevance is to be given to an exact description of an alleged custom, still less to a picture of this (female) avenger”. However, Spencer and Gillen themselves voice their scepticism of the alleged practice. They write: “The natives’ idea with regard to her is as follows :-

“On very rare occasions a woman may, at her own request, be sent out by her husband to avenge some injury done, or supposed to be done, to one of her own kindred. There is no such thing as any consultation with the old men in connection with this; in fact, if they knew of its being prepared they would prevent her going, so the affair is a secret one, known only to the woman and her husband. It seems as if the Illapurinja has never been very popular form of avenging an injury, and it is very rarely mentioned except when a medicine man discovers one of his patients, who has been seized with a sudden and unaccountable illness, is suffering from an attack of Illapurinja. As usual, the natives when questioned on the subject said that though they knew all about it, yet, it was a custom which they did not practise, or, rather, had not practiced it for many years, but that it was prevalent somewhere

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72 from Strehlow and Central Australia by Mrs. T.G.H. Strehlow, pages 10-11.
else. It is only a few years since a man was out hunting euros near Alice Springs, and was attacked by an Illapurinja who had come from an out-lying group. He was picked up insensible (the day was a very hot one, and in probability the case was one of sunstroke), and brought into camp in a dazed condition. Under the treatment of a able medicine man, whose services were fortunately available, he recovered, after the extraction from his body of a number of pieces of wooden Churinga.

“When being prepared, the Illapurinja is rubbed all over with grease and red ochre and decorated with white down, which is fixed on to her body with blood drawn from her husband, this being the only occasion known to us on which a woman is thus decorated. Her head is ornamented with head rings and tufts of tail tips. In one hand she carries a long fighting-club, the ends of which are decorated with down, and in the other a large wooden stick, which has been specially made for the occasion by her husband and ‘sung’ by him. It is spoken of as ‘Churinga’.

“When the decoration, which is done in perfect secrecy, is complete, no one but just the man and woman know anything whatever about it, the husband takes one of her digging sticks, fixes it upright in the ground, and ties on to the upper end a small tuft of *Alpita* or rat tails. This he carefully watches while she is away. Should she be killed, then the *Alpita* at once falls to the ground of its own accord; and the husband, understanding what this means, will immediately destroy his camp and everything in it which belonged to the Illapurinja, and move to a new spot, leaving, however, the digging-stick and the *Alpita* untouched.

“It is always night-time when the woman sets out, and after having been decorated, she first al all lies down in the camp as if nothing unusual were about to happen; but when her husband is asleep she steals quietly away, and goes to the place where she hopes to find the man or woman whom she is in search of. If it be a man, then she lies down concealed and waits her opportunity, which comes when his attention is

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73 probably *albetja*
occupied in stalking a kangaroo or emu.\textsuperscript{74} If a woman be her quarry, then she hides close to some favourite ‘yam’ ground, and when the former is busy digging up the tubers she creeps up. In either case the Churinga is thrown from behind, so as to hit the victim’s neck, when it enters the body, becoming, as it does so, broken up into a number of small pieces.

“The victim at once becomes insensible, and remains so for some time, and, when consciousness is once more recovered, suffers great pain. In the case of an old woman, death is sure to follow, but in that of an young man or woman, recovery is possible with the aid of a clever medicine man, who after much trouble and by dint of long-continued rubbing and sucking, may succeed in extract the broken bits of Churinga from the patient’s body.

‘If successful, the Illapurinja returns at once to her husband’s camp, always waiting, however, till it be dark before she comes close up to it. During her absence he has made, and kept burning, a small fire at some little distance. By the side of this she lies down quietly until her husband discovers her presence, when he goes and takes her by the arm and leads her into his camp, where both of them sit down without speaking a word while he removes all traces of the decorations and rubs her with fat and red ochre. The woman then takes up the stick to which the \textit{Alpita} is tied, and sits down, while the man asks questions, to which she replies, but she must not volunteer any information.

“The special breach of custom with the punishment of which the Illapurinja is associated, is the omission of a \textit{mia}\textsuperscript{75} to cut herself as a mark of sorrow on the death of an \textit{umba} – that is, a daughter, blood or ritual. Such an omission is a grave offence against a dead \textit{umba}, and the dread punishment at the hands of an Illapurinja must act as a strong inducement to serve the proper carrying out of the ceremony. If one omits to cut herself, then some other one will go in search of

\textsuperscript{74} Cf. Mr. Stuart’s account and Letlj of Kotitja Myth

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{meia} = mother
her, and, failing the chance of killing her, will strike one of the offending woman’s brothers. There is now living at Alice Springs a man who was thus saved, so the natives believe, by the exertions of a medicine man. When his death does occur it will undoubtedly be attributed to this attack, certain parts of the Chruringa – so it will be said – not having been extracted.

“...This is the only case which has come to our knowledge in which a woman is decorated with down fixed with blood, and in which, at the present day, she actually handles a Churinga. The latter, of course, is not one of the ancestral Churinga, but it is regarded as being a sacred stick, and is spoken of as a Churinga just as are certain other similarly shaped sticks which are used in various ceremonies, for which they may be specially made. All that the woman is told is that the stick has been ‘sung’ over, and is what is called *arungquita* – that is, charged with magic and evil influence.

“The whole affair is a superstition kept alive to make some women believe that they, or their brothers, will suffer if certain ceremonies are not duly attended to, and it is worthy of notice that in this instance the victim belongs to the same group as the avenger.”

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76 = _arunquita_ death-dealing poison that kills from afar.
ON PAGE THIRTY, above, is cited the massacre of Irbmaŋkara in which a whole camp of people had been virtually wiped out by a large party of blood avengers. An account of this incident follows:

“For centuries, or perhaps for thousands of years, before the white man’s coming Irbmangkara had been an important Aranda ceremonial centre. Its sacred cave was located only about a mile away the upper pools, and no women and children had ever been allowed to enter its forbidden precincts. Even the fully initiated men could only do so on ceremonial occasions; and at such times no weapons were allowed to be carried. No game or wild fowl could be killed by hunters within a radius of about two miles from the hill containing the sacred cave. Irbmangkara had hence been, according to the ancient traditions, a game and wildfowl sanctuary “since the beginning of time”. Its ti-tree and bulrush thickets afforded magnificent breeding grounds for several varieties of ducks, for cormorants, pelicans, and spoonbills, and for other waterfowl found in Central Australia; and these birds found ample food in the shallow parts of the pools, since they were richly stocked with several varieties of fish, ranging from the flat and bony *ntapitnja* (know among the whites as ‘bony brim’), which attained a maximum length of about eleven inches, to the shorter and rather fatter *ntamintana* and *longulbura*, whose rich white flesh was much freer of small bones.

Irbmangkara looked a place of peace and undisturbed serene beauty; but, like many other seeming Edens on earth, it had known its full share of man’s cruelty and viciousness,77

But sacrilege could be committed by a ceremonial chief even at his own local group’s major totemic centre, if he departed from the correct ritual in any way. In such a case, the men who had the right to kill the ceremonial chief, and,

77 *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, pages 34-35.
In case of equal guilt, other members of the council of elders, could, of course, not come from the local group area; for that would have amounted to an act of sedition against the supernaturally established authority. But each major totemic centre (*pmara kutata*) was linked by myths with major totemic centres located in other local group areas, and some of these centres were situated in different tribal areas. It was from these outside areas that punishment had to be meted out. The grimmest case illustrating this point in Aranda history is the massacre of Irbmanḵara, which took place somewhere about 1875. Irbmanḵara, a very important Aranda site located on the Finke River at the border of the Western and Upper Southern Aranda areas, was associated with the duck and mulga-seed totems; but its name featured in many other myths as well. Consequently a number of other totemic centres, situated in the Northern, Western and Upper Southern Aranda areas, were linked with Irbmanḵara by myths: and common myths also bound up Irbmanḵara with ceremonial centres in the Matuntara area. Because of its miles of lagoons that were fed by springs in the river bed, and its wealth of wild fowl, ducks and game animals, Irbmanḵara was often used as a convenient centre for full-scale festivals, and its ceremonial chief in the 1870s, Ltjabakuka, was a well-known figure of authority far beyond the limits of his own group area. Somewhere about 1875, however, Ltjabakuka and his elders were falsely accused by a man called Kalejika, after the latter’s return from a visit to Irbmanḵara, of having committed a grave act of sacrilege. Since the nature of the act of sacrilege that was said to have been committed had been handed on after the massacre merely in whispers among the older men, my informants were not completely certain of Kalejika’s allegations; but they believed that Ltjabakuka and his elders had been accused of having given uninitiated boys blood drawn from the veins of initiated men to drink, in mockery of a particularly sacred initiatory rite. The Western and Northern Aranda men refused to believe this scandalous story, but the Matuntara men and some of the Southern Aranda men gave credence to it. To punish Ltjabakuka and his men meant the wiping out of the whole camp of people normally resident at Irbmanḵara, so that no witnesses should be left alive who could have revealed the names of the attackers. A large part of avengers drawn from
The Matuntara area along the Palmer River, and from some Southern Aranda local groups, was accordingly assembled and led to Irbmanakara by Tjinawariti, who was described to me as having been a Matuntara ‘ceremonial chief’ (iŋkata) from the Palmer River whose prowess as a warrior had given him a great reputation among the Southern Aranda as well. Tjinawariti had the backing of another Matuntara man of importance called Kapaluru, allegedly ‘ceremonial chief’ of Akaua, an important native cat site on the Palmer River; and Kapaluru had detailed a considerable number of young men from Akaua to join Tjinawariti’s party. Tjinawariti and his men fell upon Irbmanakara one evening, after all the local folk, as they believed, had returned to their camps from their day’s quests for food. Men women and children were massacred indiscriminately, and the party turned back in the belief that they had left behind no witnesses. However, their confidence was undermined when they came upon two more Aranda hunters soon after leaving Irbmanakara. They succeeded in killing one of them; but the other hunter, a man called Nameia, managed to escape. In addition, a woman called Laparintja and her infant son Kaltjirbuka had survived the slaughter at Irbmanakara. Laparintja, who had hurled herself over her child to protect him with her body, had merely been injured; and she had successfully shammed death when being prodded by spears of the attackers while they were making their final check of the slain before leaving Irbmanakara. After their departure, Laparintja made her way to safety by crawling into the banks of reeds and rushes along the Irbmanakara lagoons; and she took her son with her.

With Nameia – who had Matuntara family connections with the Akaua region – and Laparintja to identify the main attackers, it was possible for friendly Western Aranda groups to take revenge for the massacre of Irbmanakara. A small band of experienced warriors, led by Nameia, went deep into the areas whence the killers had come. This party had to live off their enemies’ lands and lie low, sometimes for weeks, between each kill; for they had to pick off their victims in singles or twos and threes whenever suitable occasions arose. But by patience and superb bushcraft they achieved their errands; and finally they managed
to kill Tjinawariti as well. When they returned into Western Aranda area after an absence of about three years (perhaps 1878), they found that their own world had been changed by the coming of the Europeans; for the first structures erected at Hermannsburg greeted their eyes. (Hermannsburg was founded in 1877.)

Conflicts with European settlers and police officers put an end to any attempts at concerted reprisals upon the Aranda party by their Matuntara victims. Tjinawariti’s death, however, rankled in the memories of his Matuntara friends and relatives. It was avenged, in 1890, by the slaying of Nameia at the newly established police camp of Boggy Waterhole (Alitera) by a band of Matuntara avengers.

It must be stressed that the Western Aranda counter-raid into Southern Aranda and Matuntara territories was organized only because the men in the Western Aranda local groups involved in this counter-raid firmly believed in the innocence of Ltjabakuka and his elders. For there was general agreement among all parties concerned that Tjinawariti and his band would have acted in accordance with ‘tribal law’ in punishing the Irbmanŋkara men, had the charge of sacrilege been true; for men from all totemic centres linked by myths had the obligation to guard the ‘sanctity’ of the various centres linked in this manner.78

On 2nd September 1982 the writer camped at this spot in the company of the hosts and guides Gordon and Joylene Abbott and Jean Armstrong and wrote of the trip down the Finke to Irbmanŋkara:

(We followed) the tracks of the buggy on its fateful ride to Horseshoe Bend with the dying elder Strehlow sixty years ago. The route and event were remembered as though yesterday and a copy of Journey to Horseshoe Bend was frequently consulted during the difficult ride made almost impossible by the February Finke floods that had changed the whole route to Irbmanŋkara by lifting up huge shoals of sand elsewhere and dumping them where the track had once led, sand

78 Totemic Geography, pages 124-126.
So fine as to provide no grip even for a four-wheel drive vehicle. Hours were spent digging the Toyota out of the worst patches and in putting branches and stones under the wheels to make them grip. The peace and beauty of Irbmanŋkara itself came like the welcome soft whisper of a breeze. Henbury Station no longer uses these waters for cattle; the Hugh yard is a monument to the futility of human endeavour (in this case aboriginal labour, poorly paid), and the cattle have all run wild. Only the huge menacing scrub bulls remain, the cows having all been killed by the bulls. Camping at Irbmanŋkara hours were spent reading from Journey to Horseshoe Bend and from Strehlow’s journal account of his last visit to Irbmanŋkara over 22 years previously. Although Irbmanŋkara is right on the path of the Pitja-pitja (or “red-ochre man”) intruding up to Alitera (= Boggy Hole) from their own country in the Petermann Ranges the peace remained and no one seemed worried about the dangerous menace that has terrorized the Aranda-speaking people ever since the Pitja-pitja moved out of their territory (contrary to Premier Tonkin’s actual assertions) in the late 1920s because of the big drought. Only the superintendent of Jay Creek since Strehlow’s time had the guts to stand up to them: “You think you are pretty big men don’t you, you red-ochre men”, he was alleged to have said when they were terrorizing the local population – “We’ll see how long a big man survives without tucker”. Even a red-ochre man has to eat and within a week they were on their way home. Mrs. Strehlow was taken over the actual sites of the massacre of the Irbmanŋkara as she was given the account, and then taken to Ilamata police station, long since abandoned, and Henbury meteorite craters now over-run by “tourist kona-kona” – “the know-nothing mob.” Henbury and Doctor’s Stones Stations were visited on the way home to Wallis Rockhole. At the latter was old Jack Bristow (or Briscoe), Victoria Stoneham’s son (vide Journey to Horseshoe Bend), page 188, pages 200ff), now an old man living permanently in Alice Springs. He chatted about old times and the old people, dark and white, long gone, whose stories form the real history of Central Australia.79

THE SITE OF NTJIPITNJA AND PUNISHMENT FOR SEXUAL TRANSGRESSIONS

NTJIPITNJA is a major totemic centre associated with ancestors of the following totems: *leltja*, *arintja*, *gura*, *iliar*, and a *rara* that came from Ajali. Ntjipitnja is situated inside a gorge through which runs Ntjipitnja, a gum creek rising from Kotitja. Just north of Ntjipitnja the creek divides and one part runs north to Inbumala. The site lies just inside the south western side of the Waterhouse Range.

A huge boulder lying in the middle of the gorge represented the *atua arintja* himself and close by there are three caves, one where the *arintja* sat on the western side, the other sacred cave or *arkηanaua* in which once large amounts of *tjurunga* or sacred objects had been stored also on the western side, and the other on the eastern side where the emu came to its last rest (see below).

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80 also spelt “Ntjipintja”, “Ntjipinja”, and “Intjipitnja”, (Book XXIX, page 140).
82 or *pmara Kutata* = “everlasting home”
83 = blood avenger; see Family Tree of Artjila II, I. 24, pages 2,3.
84 = man-eating monster; see *Songs of Central Australia* index: also Book XXIX (=1962 Field Diary, Part 1), pages 21-28 and 79-80.
86 = emus (Book XVII), 1953 Field Diary (19th September); also Book XXIX, page 21.
87 = kangaroo (Boox XXIX, page 24 and page 80).
88 see sketch maps, Book XXIX, pages 21a, 24a and 80a.
89 *atua* = sire; *arintja* = man-eating monster.
90 This showed the *atua arintja*, the great sire himself, blocking the gorge against all-comers when he was still in the pride of his strength: “*era etata tjala paralelama*” : literally : “be alive
91 years ago this sacred cave had been plundered by an aboriginal called Joel who apparently later perished from thirst down Oodnadatta way, an object lesson that would not have been lost on the aboriginal population. These *tjurunga* were sold to white people whose identity remains unknown.
Besides the arintja, various other objects and markings of significance at this site included a very straight gum tree which had allegedly represented the tnatantja kutatarinja\(^{92}\) of Ntjipitnja. At the foot was a small rock sunk into the creek bed which bore a single large emu footprint pointing towards the Ntjipitnja cave. This represented the footprint of the emu which had come from Mbananaŋa which had been killed by the atua arintja and its body had fallen against the eastern side of the gorge and its atn altjura\(^{93}\) now formed the entrance to a very large roomy cave. To the east of this gum there was another rock with some very clearly engraved kangaroo footprints (from the rara Ajali) and faint emu footprints. On the western side of the boulder representing atua arintja, long parallel vertical marks had been rubbed with smaller stones so that it looked as though it was bearing stripes.\(^{94}\) These stripes were the stripes that the Central Aranda from the Waterhouse Range area had painted on themselves when they went out as blood avengers. According to one informant\(^{95}\) the arintja cave bore bandicoot and kangaroo footprints on its floor\(^{96}\)

(a) The Myth of the Atua Arintja af Ntjipintja

THIS ARINTJA SIRE had sat in a large cave on the western side of the Ntjipintja gorge. His eyes – glowing like suns – had seen men and women everywhere. He had killed them with his tjurunga. These instruments of destruction – there were two of

\(^{92}\) a ceremonial pole that had always stood there, or which had originated there (at the beginning of time)

\(^{93}\) literally “rectum open” or, translated “open rectum”

\(^{94}\) Book XXIX, page 24

\(^{95}\) (Willy) Araŋa

\(^{96}\) Book XXIX, page 80
them – went on for miles, hitting his victims across the bridge of the nose. This arintja however did not go out himself to collect the bodies of his dead victims. He sent out instead all sorts of birds – ulbatja, ljirtjina, ilultara, rutiwalja and so on, to carry back the bodies. Many of the bodies putrefied, and their “green” juices of decay flowed over the bodies of their carriers; That is how the ringneck parrots, and shell parrots, and the other parrots mentioned above had received their green plumage. On the other hand, the arintja was afraid to press the palkara, the ndorota, the tjutalpa and other crested birds into his horrible service for their crests were really sacred objects which they were wearing on their heads. Eventually two brothers had come from some distant place to the James Range south of Ntjipitnja. Wherever they went, they found empty camps, often with the campfires still burning, but no living camp dwellers. Nor could they find any tracks leading away from these deserted camps. Full of amazement, they climbed to the mountain crest above Rubitjera. And they saw something that terrified them. On the mountain

97 Here is what Strehlow recorded of these two magical killing weapons: “finally he (=Anton Abbott) took out a small un-engraved black wooden tjuruŋga, with some tjalaŋka (= porcupine resin) stopping up a longish hollow on one side, also a boomerang-shaped black wooden object. These two objects – which were always rubbed with charcoal, never with red ochre – had been the instruments of destruction (alaŋara tunatuna = “they constant fighters”) used by the atua arintja. These had, in later human times, been used in magical rites by some kyaribata (council of elders) of these parts. They had sung charms after setting them up in the ground; these weapons had then gone out unseen and “hit the intended victims across the bridge of the nose”. This weakened them so that they would be unable either to evade or resist the parties of human avengers who came in order to do the actual killing.

98 = the ring-necked parrot (Barnardius zonarius)
99 = shell parrot (budgerigar)
100 = ?
101 = parrot, a special head, green breast and back, green wings, tips blue and black, yellow-red on the forehead and on the wing-joints, underside of tail yellow, green tail-feathers with blue tips (paephotus multicolour)
102 = the blue crested pigeon
103 = crested rock pigeon, probably Lophophaps plumifera
104 = a song bird, probably the Wedgebill (Sphenostoma cristatum)
105 = the fact that they were birds explains why no tracks could be found
north of them, at Ntjipitinja, they could see someone sitting, whose eyes lit up the countryside like sun beams. They froze into immobility, afraid of being discovered. Fortunately for them, the sun-eyed evil creature had not seen them: he was at the time looking eastward. The younger brother, keeping his body stiff to the shoulders and swinging around merely his head towards the left, watched the arintja intently. The older brother put down a tnatantja (or ceremonial pole) now represented by a straight gum tree while his younger brother began to walk in a wide circle north westward, and finally came up behind the arintja. When he was in spearing distance, he hurled his spear, which hit the arintja in the middle of the spine. He dropped to the bed of the creek onto his elbow, with the spear still sticking in his back. To this day the imprint of his elbow can be seen on a small rockplate. When he had recovered a little, he tried to regain his cave home: but he could not make the distance. His last sleep came upon him, at the site of which now became a sacred cave. The old gum tree with two main branches near the arintja rock shows the place where the stricken arintja had borkeraka.

(b) The Secrets of Ntjipitinja

EXCEPT FOR THE few fragments recounted here, the secrets of Ntjipitinja almost certainly passed Strehlow.

He had been taken over this site on two occasions in 1962. The first had been by Anton Abbott on 11th and 12th July and on the second visit by Willy Araña, Ekunjamarinja and Dr. George Jiramba on Wednesday 8th August.

106 = the thatantja kutatarinja
107 this had been removed to safely long ago – to where no one knows
108 Book XXIX, pages 80 and 80a, 24a
109 borka = weary, tired; borkerama (jina) = to grow weary or tired, the invariable term in sacred myths describing a totemic being passing to his or her last rest: borkeraka = had passed to his last rest.
Anton Abbott had “deplored” (on page 22, Book XXIX) that Strehlow had not come there with Udepatarinja (in the 1030s) for he, Anton, a three quarter caste, could only give him bits of the Ntjipitnja traditions that he had earned from Alex Alkŋenteria (and Moses), who had vainly attempted to interest closer relatives in this site. Finally Alkŋenteria had prevailed on Anton to come to this great ilia centre where he had shown him everything and then told him that everything was his once he (Alkŋenteria) had died. But Strehlow records his deep feelings of personal guilt about the tragedy on page 27a of Book XXIX:

I can’t get the reproachful face of Udepatarinja out of my mind as I am writing about Ntjipitnja. U. Knew all about the traditions of Rubitjera, Ntjipitnja, and the rest. He was particularly happy when the Jay Creek Reserve was established by my coming to live there in 1936, and he often begged me to come with him to Ntjipitnja, so that he could show and tell me everything. But 1936-42 were my fruitless official years – trips, reports, and departmental fights. I delayed my intended visit to Ntjipitnja just as I delayed my visits to Makarinja’s ceremonial sites. And then suddenly Udepatarinja’s last illness came upon him at Jay Creek, and I could do nothing to avert his end. I could see the reproachful look in his eyes when I visited his camp fire for the last time.

The last few remaining tjurunga were handed over to Strehlow in 1962 after being viewed on 12th July at Hermannsburg by Sydney, the son of Billy McNamara, Manasse Ilatjia, Anton Abbott, his brother Arthur Abbott, and the son of Erota. Esron (or Tjatjina), whose conception site had been nearby Indilkŋama, had had a cold and could not be present; but he had agreed to the proposal and “was equally ignorant” (I.E. of the traditions). The tjurunga had remained the property “of their present owners” until Strehlow “had written down the traditions associated with them”. The proper handing over ceremony was held at Amoonguna on 17th October 1962.
(c) **Fear Still Present in Modern Times**

STREHLOW WRITES (on 12th July 1962): “As we descended {from the sacred cave after removing the few remaining tjurunga} Anton stumbles against a stone, and called out the traditional exclamation of fear and dismay that had been uttered by the old men whenever they came away from the cave:

‘*Pmarra kutaηa, pmarra imalilkujana jiŋana iŋkarpataka tjalbulelama* {= ‘out of this evil place, this death-dealing place something evil (has come which) is striking against my toes’}, *kala ilkitjikantama, atnabaka ilkutjika tjimala* {= ‘so that I will cry out or eat faeces after falling down’} : thus the *kŋaribata* assured themselves of safety.’

(d) **The Ultimate Price for Sexual Transgression**

APART FROM INSTANCES given in the Spencer and Gillen account of capital punishment and ritual revenge cited above, one more grim and fearful rite is recorded concerning Ntjipitnja:

“I was ready to leave Ntjipitnja (writes Strehlow) after taking this shot with my (with his camera), thinking I had shot everything. But Willy Araηa stopped me, saying ‘*njinta wota*’ (=‘one more’). He then took me to the eastern side of the *arintja* rock, where a separate piece of rock stood against it, with pointed top: ‘*Nana pmaraka njemba*’ said Araŋa, ‘*nana para ultakanakana era*’ (= ‘this is a symbolical small pitchi, - it severs the penis completely’). He explained that it was charmed in the old days when a man was to be punished for a particularly grave marital offence\(^\text{110}\) (Cf. Wm the Conqueror). This *pmaraka njemba* then went out and cut off his penis completely . . . .

\(^{110}\text{Cf, a law introduced by William the Conqueror into England where rapists had their penises severed completely; this made it safe for women to walk without fear the length and breadth of England.} \)
It had allegedly been used for this purpose against a man who had come from the Lake Nash area to Alice Springs as a tracker. This man had taken away Iltjamama, who was the wife of İŋkáticojarinja. But the pmaraka njemba had gone out and cut off his para (= penis) completely somewhere in the Lake Nash area. He had died some time later.

... . . . .

“My companions recalled that another man, who came from Putulu near Coniston had also died in Alice Springs. They had heard him referred to only as Tinwhistle. He had allegedly had not only his member, but also part of his mons veneris also cut off, and had died still screaming with pain. (This had nothing to do with Ntjipitinja, but was among the Ilpara (or Wailbiri), - they thought by means of charms. Finally, Willy Araņa told me that there had been a magic rite of cutting off the penis completely also at Tnorula (= Gosse’s Range). The par ulta'kanakana rite there was just as evil and dangerous as the one associated with Ntjipitinja. At Tnorula this grim rite was known as arun'kulta walija.”

“None of my informants knew any details of the actual rite – the kŋaribata urugalinja had not passed these on to the younger generation.”

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111 Some of these grim rites compare with the “Blood Eagle” rite in old Norway: “A method of execution (riste blodön paa ryggen) practised in the Viking age. The ribs were hewn from the backbone, and lungs and heart torn out through the wound. Sometimes a man would ask to be put to death in this manner, to show his defiant spirit, and prove his courage, So, at least, the sagas tell us” (Kristin Lavransdatter, Note 26 to page 247, by Singrid Undset)
SITE AVOIDANCE

FROM EARLIEST CHILDHOOD – as witnessed by the iliaka njemba\textsuperscript{112} and the sacred cave site of Manaŋanaŋa – as Strehlow himself experienced in his young days at Hermannsburg, even adult males were not immune from experiencing fear instilled by the traditions associated with certain (sacred) sites.

On 6\textsuperscript{th} August 1962 Strehlow and his three guides (Edunjambarinja, Dr. George Jiramba and Willy Araŋa) visited Serpentine Gorge in the Western MacDonnell Ranges:

We turned into the Serpentine Tourist Lodge, and proceeded up to what they called their dam. A concrete wall had been built to dam up the water in the Bakara Rockhole and a pipeline ran down from here to the lodge. Bakara Rockhole had been seen once – fearfully – by Jiramba; the other two remembered its vicious reputation. In this intaia remakula (= deep, circular rockpool in a gorge) had dwelt an apma (= a serpent) which had once swallowed up many inintja (= blood avengers) who had come into this area from the north. It was therefore an unapproachable place . . . Jiramba had heard of only two men being killed by this snake; but Araŋa maintained that there had been a host of them (= tneŋka) . . . At the beginning of time an apma ilumbalitnana (= a highly poisonous snake) . . . had lived in it; it had then gone to Japalpa (or the Finke Gorge) (BookXXIX, page 73).

On the same day the four men visited Ellery Creek Gorge, called by the Western Aranda “Udepata”:

We pulled up for the night at Udepata – right on its south-eastern edge: . . . the hour was near sundown. My companions remarked that the mighty and dreaded pool (= intjaŋa makalaria) of Udepata had now shrunk to a harmless size: when they were young men people dreaded camping near it; the banks went down steeply into the water and the latter was steep right up to the banks. You could slip into a great depth of water if you stepped into it from the bank. Its centre was completely ‘dark because of its depth’. But with the death of the original inhabitants, the waters of their country were also drying. (Book XXIX, page 74)

\textsuperscript{112} = iliaka njemba” = emu-footed apparition
The following day (7th August 1962) Strehlow wrote:

After breakfast we loaded up, and then, all of us sat around my campfire for a couple of hours, waiting for the sun to shine through the dark gaps. My companions talked about various things – about the great snakes that had been reputed to live in the following large waterholes in the Western MacDonnells – Udepata, Bakara, Japalpa, Irkŋalaŋka, and Pmukuna. The Udepata serpent had been seen (when Jiramba was a young man) rising like a huge desert oak trunk out of the water; but the old men had charmed it with magic verses, and it had fallen back into the water, with one eye gouged out. Similarly, old Loatjira had laid to rest the water serpent of Japalpa, after it had swallowed many bullocks and many men. Even an old bullock waggon allegedly rested in the Japalpa intjanja, after the water serpent had dragged the bullocks down into it.

Then they mentioned how Wurumbrand and other whites had shot many men in the Western MacDonnells. They could recall only one of the names of his victims, however, that of Makitilbila (that’s what they thought the name was). Ltaba (Andy’s father) had been shot in the arm, and Eroparinja (Jiramba’s father) had been fired at; but the latter had saved himself by single magic charms, and the bullets had sped by harmlessly. (Book XXIX, page 76)

I have given these instances of ritual and site avoidance, and the aboriginal reasons for this avoidance, not only to illustrate the point, but because they have not been previously published. Instances also occur however in Strehlow’s published writings. There was a sound ecological result:

“One last feature of the Aranda land-based religious institutions must be mentioned – the decisive economic influence of pmara kutata in functioning as game reserves within each njinaŋa section area. A pmara kutata had a sacred cave or tree storehouse for which local sacred objects; and consequently its immediate environs constituted a prohibited area, whose edge was generally about a mile (even more)

113 Wurmbrand = Mounted Constable Erwin Warmbrand, chief mate and principle off-sider of Mounted Constable Willshire, who had been despatched by the South Australian Government to Central Australia in 1881 in order to pacify the Aranda territory and made it safe for cattle-raising. See Journey to Horseshoe Bend by T.G.H. Strehlow, pages 7-8.
from the sacred cave. Within those sacred precincts all hunting and food gathering was forbidden. Even wounded animals could not be pursued into this forbidden zone, which he could entered only for ceremonial purposes. On such occasions the members of the local totemic clan, led by the ceremonial chief of the pmara kutata, would leave their camp early in the morning. They would kill some game (often the totemic animal of the pmara kutata), and place it untouched on the branches of a tree, leaving all their spears and weapons at its foot. They would then approach the sacred site by a rigidly prescribed track, and carry out the appropriate rites. (T.G.H. Strehlow, 1947: 1-5, 114-17.) On their return journey they would eat their first meal for the day, close to where they left behind the killed game earlier; and if this included the totem animal of the pmara kutata, then even men belonging personally to this totem partook of the meat, which was normally forbidden to them.

“"The prohibitions guarding their pmara kutata prevented the Aranda even in drought times from using many of their best permanent waters in their territory. This fact alone will indicate how ample the supplies of surface water were in the Aranda area. The main waterhole of Japalpa remained a game reserve for fish, ducks and all kinds of water birds, and so did the banks of the Finke along the first two miles of ponds at Irbaŋkara. Again many of the finest waterholes in the MacDonnell Ranges provided inviolable sanctuaries for kangaroos, emus, and native animals of every kind. In drought times the animals and birds from thousands of square miles of drought stricken country found refuge at these pmara kutata; and when the drought broke, the surrounding countryside was restocked with game as quickly as it became covered with food plants."114

114 “Culture, Social Structure and Environment in Aboriginal Central Australia” in Aboriginal Man in Australia, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965.
(a) **Women and the Sacred Sites**

“. . . IT IS IMPOSSIBLE not to be impressed by the air of deep reverence devotion and fearful silence in which sacred sites are invariably approached by the initiated men.

“Each large *pmara kutata* has its appropriate set of directions for safe approach. At most of them are either sacred caves or tree store houses, where the stone or wooden *tjurunga* are kept. These are taken out and inspected, and their sacred “names” are sung over them. The totemites believe that they are handling either the actual bodies of the ancestors (generally the lesser ancestors), or the implements and weapons left behind by them, or else replicas of the *tjurunga*, “hidden” or “lost” by the totemic ancestors, that became reincarnated within living memory. The emotions of the totemites are deeply stirred. Each object has its name sung, and is pressed in turn against the body of every man present. Spencer writes of such scenes as follows (*The Arunta*, II, page 585):

How profoundly intimate this connection (that between the *tjurunga* and a ‘spirit’) is in the mind of the native can only be realised by one who has had the opportunity of sitting quietly amongst the older men whilst, for hours on end, they have reverently handled and, in many cases, literally wept over the Churinga. They told us that the spirits of their ancestors … were there watching them, and they sincerely believed this.

“At all important ceremonial centres the boulders or stones that represent the bodies of their major totemic ancestors must also be rubbed and have their “names” sung over them. All grasses and bushes that have grown up around them are carefully cleared away so that the ancestors can take pleasure in a “clean”, well-tended home. Occasionally ceremonial sites are met with where one or the other of these rocks or stones has to be painted with human blood. I have quoted above\(^{115}\) Spencer’s account of his visit to the Southern Aranda kangaroo

\(^{115}\) Note 174, *Songs of Central Australia*, cites pages 279-280.
of Inteera, where he mentions how blood was allowed to spurt over the edge of the ceremonial stone. At Rar’ Ilba in the Hale River district the stone which represents the local rain ancestor used to be rubbed on such occasions with fat, then painted with stripes of red ochre and pipeclay; next bands of eagle’s down were fastened to it with human blood. By means of this ritual ‘rain was called down’ (ulamba ekŋuma), to use the actual native words. The same rite was enacted at the other Hale River district rain site of Inintara. (Songs of Central Australia, pages 338-339).

... 

The reverence shown to the totemic ancestors on these visits (to sacred sites) is so great that spears, weapons, chattels, and game must all be left at special trees before the sacred sites may be approached. No living creatures may be killed anywhere in the vicinity of the pmara kutata. Women and children are set definite limits around sacred centres and they must keep without those limits on pain of death. Adult, fully-initiated men never forgot the fear of the pmara kutata which had been instilled into them when they were young children.

Even waters open to women and children, if they were at all near a sacred site, had to be approached carefully; generally, too, they had to be vacated before their rocky bottoms could be seen. Thus in the Krantji area, where a dearth of other safe waters in the district made it necessary that women should be allowed to drink from the soak itself, they were permitted merely to skim the water off close to the surface; only men could plunge their vessels down to any depth. When the soak some months after good rains began to get low, and

116 Note 179, Songs of Central Australia, page 140: Spencer and Gillen give an instance of a breach of such a prohibition by a thirsty woman (The Arunta, Vol. I, page 168). Here the woman was not killed. She had not, however actually seen the slabs nor the sacred kangaroo tail rock. Had she done so, she could scarcely have escaped death.
when the rock plate at its bottom was in danger of becoming visible, the Krantji group moved away lest their women should catch a glimpse of this rockplate.\textsuperscript{117} Similarly, the Northern Aranda Ilbalintja men and women were permitted to approach their storied soak only if they bore bunches of green \textit{tnuruŋa} branches which then had to be laid down near its edge. This was done to please the totemic ancestor Karora.\textsuperscript{118} When the level of the water in the Ilbalintja soak began to recede and to turn reddish in colour, the natives would depart in fear and make their way back to the mountain border of their country.\textsuperscript{119}

(b) \textbf{The Death Penalty for Violation of the Sacred Sites (and Ceremonies)}

At the full performance of the eagle cycle of Akar Intjota at Uralawuraka, east of Charlotte Waters, in the 1850s or 1860s,\textsuperscript{120} men were gathered together for most of the eagle commemorative ceremonies – known as \textit{wariera} acts – were performed at the foot of a large pole – ‘as thick as a tree’ – set up on the ceremonial ground (\textit{kerinbinŋa}). This pole stood on the \textit{kerinbinŋa} for the duration of the festival – a matter of some weeks. Since there was only one waterhole available for all the festival guests, the women and children were permitted to camp near it. They could, however, come to their camping ground only at night; and then they were able to catch a glimpse of the pole some distance away, lit up by the glow of the fires around which their menfolk were singing the eagle ceremonial verses. Each morning the women and children had to

\textsuperscript{117} Note 180, \textit{Songs of Central Australia}, cites Book IV, page 13.

\textsuperscript{118} Note 181, \textit{Songs of Central Australia}, cites \textit{Aranda Tradition}, page 10.

\textsuperscript{119} Note 182, \textit{Songs of Central Australia}, cites \textit{Aranda Tradition}, page 50.

\textsuperscript{120} Note 13, Totemic Geography, cites that this festival took place when his informant Kŋeitnam’s father was still a boy, some time before the construction of the overland telegraph.
leave while it was still dark, and spend the rest of the day gathering food some miles away till well after sunset. The signal for their departure in the mornings was given out by a young man who climbed up on the pole in order to rattle the sea-shells suspended near its top, while the ceremonial chief below intoned one of the special wariera verses. All went well at this festival till an unfortunate accident one morning. This accident was deemed to constitute a grave act of sacrilege against the grim eagle ancestors. There were cries of alarm from the watching men and shouts of murderous anger from the ceremonial chief and his elders. The young men involved in the accident — there were either two or three of them — were immediately seized. Their necks were twisted around till the vertebrae had been dislocated, and they were probably choked to death as well. Holes were dug at the foot of the eagle totem pole, as a token that it was this symbol itself which had executed the offenders against its sacred dignity. After that the shocked spectators and all other male visitors rushed away from the desecrated ground taking their wailing women and children with them without further delay. No one dared lift his voice against the authority exercised by the ceremonial chief or his elders. For an objector to do so would have meant that he would be risking his own execution as well; for the men wielding authority on a ceremonial ground at such times were believed to be acting with the full power of the offended supernatural beings. However, the shock that ran through the assembled festival gathering which had witnessed the murderous grimness of religious power exercised so ruthlessly was so severe that no eagle wariera festivals were ever held again.

Note 14, Totemic Geography, states: Because of tabus against the free discussion of serious acts of sacrilege, my informants had never been given by their fathers the exact details of what had actually happened at Uralawuraka. The young man who had to give the signal — and who had probably been assisted by one or two of his friends to climb the pole — had either slipped and fallen off, or had broken the string from which one of the se-shell clusters had been suspended and dashed the shells to the ground below. Again, my informants had not been told exactly whether two or three young men had been killed for this accident; but Kneitnama, who as a young man had still seen the bleached skulls and skeletons lying at Uralawuraka (where they had been exposed by the action of wind and weather), thought that there had been three skulls.
either at Uralawuraka or at Akar Intjota. Men belonging to the eagle totem in this area had to be content with performing merely those eagle acts that belonged to them personally. Had no European settlers come into the Centre, it might have been possible for the local group leaders to revive wariera festivals after a lapse of many decades. But after 1870 the building the Overland Telegraph Line and the setting up of the Charlotte Waters Telegraph Station affected revolutionary changes in the Lower Southern Aranda way of life; and the ‘murderous eagle pole’ was never again set up.

While tragedies such as which happened at Uralawuraka did not happen frequently – otherwise most of the Aranda sacred cycle would in the course of time slipped into oblivion – all men invited to the Aranda ceremonial festivals in the old days were keenly aware that they were camping on holy ground, where their ritual actions were being watch by the human reincarnations of supernatural beings; and they knew that these reincarnations had the power of life and death over all people resident for the time being at that particular totemic centre. No man who did not belong to the local totemic clan, or who had not been invited by the leaders of the local totemic clan, had any right to be present; and the careful grading of all acts in the totemic cycle ensured that the ceremonial chief, in consultation with his assisting elders, determined what men were to constitute the audience for each act. There were acts that could be witnessed by all men present; and there were other that were reserved for the sights of a few elders only. Chanting, raiṅkintja calls, and the whistling and booming of bullroarers, gave warning to all persons in listening distance that there were men gathered in assembly on a sacred ground who were performing sacred acts that no unauthorised or uninvited persons would be allowed to witness. Any attempt at ‘gate crashing’ or ‘spying’ would have
been punished by death.\textsuperscript{122} It was a capital offence for unauthorised persons to approach the storage places of sacred *tjurunga*. Only the ceremonial chief and local group elders had the right to do so. Other local males could go to such sites only if sent there on special errands by the ceremonial chief and his elder. Women and children were excluded at all times. Within living memory, a thirsty Eastern Aranda woman, when walking to the Ujitja spring to fill her kangaroo-skin waterbag, cut a corner in the mile-long mountain gully on her way, and passed within sight of the trees on which the Ujitja rain *tjurunga* were stored. Her tracks were discovered soon afterward, and she was killed by a spear thrust through the side of her chest.

The thirsty Southern Aranda woman, who ventured in to the sacred waterhole of Inteera (Spencer’s ‘Undiara’), and saw ‘the ceremonial stone’, must have been very lucky to have escaped death after discovery, if Spencer and Gillen were given a true version of the incident 1927: Vol. I, page 168). She was punished by being made ‘for a time being common property to all the men’. Perhaps she was young and attractive, and knew it. (*Totemic Geography*, pages 112-114)

\textsuperscript{122} Note 15, *Totemic geography*, states: Actual instances of such punishments have been given to me by several informants. H, Basedow (1925:282; see also the picture of the *Etominja*, plate XXXVII) similarly refers to the power of the Aranda ceremonial Chief to execute unauthorised persons:

Once constructed, this drawing, which is known as ‘Epominja’ is zealously guarded by one of the old men. If, peradventure, an unauthorised person happens upon the sanctified place, he is killed and buried immediately beneath the spot occupied by the design; thereupon the ground is smoothed again and the *Etominja* re-constructed. Nobody in camp ever hears what became of the person, and should any relative track him in the direction of the area known to be tabooed, he is horror-stricken and runs away.

The ceremonial verses quoted by Basedow confirm that his *Etominja* is the *Etamintja* ground-painting associated with the *latjia* yam totem of Iwupataka (Jay Creek).
RITUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

IN A COUNTRY the rainfall of which is often highly erratic (see Totemic Geography, page ), the responsibility of ensuring adequate food and water supplies (and general spiritual wellbeing as well) in traditional times must have been heavy. For the failure of rains meant fear that the tribes would surely perish. This fear was alleviated by ritual and its apparent efficacy in time gone by.  

“Each Aranda local group had the duty of staging, at irregular intervals, the complete ceremonial cycle associated with its own major totemic centre (pmara kutata). This could be put on only during an excellent season, and its staging could be carried out only on the presence of visitors from other local Aranda groups, and from any non-Aranda local groups whose major totemic centres were linked by myths with the (pmara kutata) of their hosts. The complete performance of any given cycle was thus always a rare event; for the members of the host-group had to attend the performances of the full cycles of their major visitor-groups in subsequent good years. Thus, it is doubtful whether, even in pre-European days, the full Ljaba honey-ant cycle would have been put on more frequently than once in fifteen or even twenty years; for the members of the Ljaba totemic clan (or, as it would be termed, the Baŋata-Panaŋka local group of the Ljaba) had to attend subsequently, as visitors, the honey-ant cycles of Roublmaulbma (Western Aranda), Popanji (Kukatja), and Korbula (Unmatjera), all of which places were major honey-ant centres (pmara kutata) linked by myths with Ljaba.

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123 While there is no scientifically valid causal connections between ritual and continued food supplies to our “western minds” it is what an aboriginal believes that is the reality to him and he cannot be shifted from this belief by any “bogus” scientific explanations; he will listen carefully, and say “Yes, I know all that”, then firmly reject such explanations and theories. A case in point is the geological explanation of the universe as opposed to explanations handed down to him by his ancestors.
It has been made clear in my earlier accounts that each Aranda local group was believed to perform an indispensable economic service not only for itself but for the population around its borders as well. Thus, the Eastern Aranda Purula-Kamara local group of Ujitja was believed to have the responsibility of creating rain for the whole of the surrounding countryside by the performance of the Ujitja rain ceremonies. Other Aranda rain totemic clans – such as the Purula-Kamara local groups of Kaporilja (Western Aranda) Inuŋamala (Eastern Aranda), Mborawatna (Upper Southern Aranda), and Erea (Lower Southern Aranda) – were credited with performing identical services for the populations in their local areas. In the same way, the members of the kangaroo, euro, emu, carpet snake, grass seed, and other totemic clans were regarded as having the power of bringing about the increase of their totemic plants or animals not only within their local group areas, but throughout the adjoining regions as well. Consequently, the economic well-being, in fact the very existence, of the whole Aboriginal population of the Aranda-speaking area, was believed to depend on the continued existence of all the local groups found in it. Similarly, the religious acts performed by the totemic clan members of all the inland tribes at their respective totemic centres were regarded as being indispensable for the continuation of all the human, animal and plant life in Central Australia.

This attitude was expressed clearly in a remark made by my Northern Aranda informant Makarinja at the Njonta Festival in 1933. Nettled by the whispers of the Ilbalintja bandicoot clansmen, who claimed that he did not know how to perform the euro increase acts of Kaput Urbula in their correct fullness, he remarked:

The Ilbalintja men are always talking and boasting about their bandicoot (gura) ceremonies. But their ceremonies are utterly useless. Euros are to be found everywhere, and it is we who create them. The bandicoots have vanished long ago. Even we old men can remember eating bandicoot meat only when we were still mere boys. Where they have gone to since, I do not know. (T.G.H. Strehlow, 1971 : pages 304-305)
Rain, game animals and food plants were, however, not the only objects of totemic rites in Central Australia. Many local groups had as their main centres places which were associated with the deeds and travels of supernatural beings of the culture-heroic type. The lakabara hawks, who were credited with having introduced the rite of circumcision, the tjilpa (native cat) men, to whom the rite of subincision was attributed, and the bat men (who first sang the songs once used by Upper Southern and Eastern Aranda warriors who were about to set out as blood avengers), were all held in honour by powerful local groups who preserved their songs and their commemorative acts. The Lower Southern Aranda centres of Akara and Pmar Ulbura celebrated in their great cycles ancestral heroes and heroines who had always appeared in human shape only: in all their actions they had revealed themselves as ordinary men and women, both on their travels and while resting: they had been personages impelled by powerful human emotions, in particular, by love, jealousy and frustrated passion. It was surely no accident that Akara and Pmar Ulbura once boasted of possessing the longest and most elaborate sets of love charms that existed in Central Australia.

“Through our knowledge of the religious acts of the non-Aranda groups of the Centre is still pitifully defective, it is clear that in the other Central Australian tribes, too, local groups or units associated in some way with definite geographic areas were responsible for performing either the increase rites which ensured the magic propagation of animals and plants or the commemorative ceremonies which celebrated the supernatural personages figuring in their mythologies. The Waŋkaŋuru, for instance, did not only have sacred traditions concerned with rain, carpet snake, acacia seed, and similar ‘useful’ totems: fascinating ‘semi-historical’ traditions also inspired some of the finest items in their treasury of myth, song and dramatic action. Among these are the wanderings of the Seven Sisters (Uljalakarikumana) from Mauwrani northward through the heart of the Simpson Desert, and a vivid account of the tortures of thirst inflicted between Kantiwata on the Kallakoopa and Paŋaluna in the Simpson Desert upon the hapless
crane followers by their treacherous leader (whose song verses had the power to increase the heat of the sun to a dangerously high degree). 124

“During the performance of such rites there is no longer real connection between the official religion of the community and the ancient magic rite. Happenings of this kind, however, prove that magical practices exert such a strong hold upon the human mind that it is very difficult for religion, philosophy, science, or scepticism to eradicate entirely the last traces of the general popular belief in their efficacy.

“I have stated earlier that the implicit faith placed in the efficacy of magic spells among the Central Australian natives is based upon the belief that these verses are the actual creative charms first uttered by their totemic ancestors. To change them or to vary them would not merely make them magically inoperative; it would also be an act of sacrilege as well. All songs, including spells, are therefore carefully graded; and moral fitness in the native sense as well as age are necessary attributes in the men who are permitted to advance more and more deeply into the sacred mysteries. The spells are normally uttered at the exact site where they first proved their power. Thus, the Kaput Urbula spells used to be chanted only at Kaput Urbula and the Krantji spells only at Krantji, though, of course, Ulamba and Kitjitjira have songs virtually identical with the Krantji Song, since they are totemic centres closely linked with the Krantji pmara kutata.

“These original creative charms were intoned during the performance of ancient creative rites which, like the spells themselves, were firmly believed to have been instituted by the totemic ancestors. In the old days these rites used to be practiced by the totemites only at the original sites where they had first been carried out by their totemic ancestors. Undoubtedly, the early forefathers of the present-day Central Australian tribes who first thought out this magic ritual were

124 * Totemic Geography*, pages 102-104.
influenced in the invention of their formal features by what Frazer calls ‘mistaken applications of one or other of two great fundamental laws of thought, namely, the association of ideas by similarity and the association of ideas by continuity in space or time’. But their descendents had long since ceased to ponder about these associations; in fact, they would have strongly opposed any attempts to discuss or to argue about the origins of the ritual. The idea of fertilization by ceremonial intercourse, for instance, seems clearly expressed in the symbolism of the Krantji kangaroo increase ceremonies; but the only explanation that the Northern Aranda totemites were allowed to advance was that they were bringing the phallus to the soak ‘because that was what the ancestors themselves had originally done at Krantji’.

“Rites such as the various increase ceremonies used to be performed at regular intervals, if possible once a year, whether or not the magic result was needed immediately by the totemites. The Krantji utnitjia ceremonies, for instance, could be staged at Krantji only in good or fair seasons, when there were already hordes of kangaroos grazing in the mulga thickets; but their result was not expected until the rains of the following season. They could not be enacted at the pmara kutata in a drought season, since the Krantji soak ceased to yield water in a prolonged dry spell, and there were no other permanent waters close at hand from which the totemites could have drawn their supplies. Each totemic clan believed, moreover, that that as long as they regularly visited the great totemic centres and faithfully performed both the commemorative and increase ceremonies attached to them, their district would yield to them all the necessary means of sustenance – both water and daily food – and not merely an abundance of the particular plants and animals that had constituted the central objects of their sacred rites. If a drought intervened, then additional rites might have to be performed. If no large body of men could be assembled at the pmara kutata because of lack of water, then the clan leader, accompanied by one or two other men, could visit the ceremonial site, carrying sufficient water for one or two days in deep wooden vessels or in a euro skin
bag. Upon arrival they could then rub some rock dust off the boulders representing the changed bodies of the totemic ancestors and sing the appropriate charms, in the firm expectation that this extra ritual act would speed up the return of normal conditions.  

“Normally, then, the Central Australian increase ceremonies are acts of worship as well as magical rites; the totemic ancestors had instituted creative ritual and bequeathed their creative words to their human worshipers, or, in the native phrase, they had ‘left all their tjurunja at the bottom.’ Of the sacred soak or the sacred spring or the sacred waterhole near which the ceremonies were to be performed. Just as the tjurunja slabs of stone and wood left behind by the ancestors must be greased and red-ochred regularly, so too the ceremonies and the ritual of every pmara kutata must be performed at not too widely spaced intervals. Neglect to do so will bring about not merely calamitous decrease in the number of particular animals or a poor supply of particular plants, but will draw down also the displeasure of the totemic ancestors themselves. Though they have become rocks, trees, and tjurunja, they have not lost their supernatural powers; they may be slumbering, but they are not dead. They are still aware of everything that goes on around them.”

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125 Even in Christian countries, where general prayers are offered up at the conclusion of every service for health, peace, good government, freedom from famine, and good weather, it is customary to hold Days of National Prayer when disastrous wars or vast catastrophes have disrupted the normal way of life. Prayer Sundays have sometimes been arranged by Australian churches in times of ruinous droughts.

126 *Songs of Central Australia*, Pages 336-338
RESTITUTION FOR BREACHES OF MORAL AND SOCIAL CONDUCT

“ONE LAST FEATURE of these inter-clan relations must be mentioned” write Strehlow\textsuperscript{127} - the frequent use made of fear of possible sanctions to be applied by a neighbouring clan to enforce acquiescence to the rules of moral and social conduct laid down by the council of elders in its own district. An instance may be seen in Rauwiraka's explanation that the eagerness of relatives to inflict wounds upon themselves in token of sorrow for a dead man was always reinforced by the fear that if they flouted the accepted rules of mourning in their own community, men from other districts would come and punish them:

When a man died, then his older and younger sisters and his mother used to strike their heads with stones and stab their heads with sharp sticks till the blood gushed over their bodies, as a sign of great sorrow. They dared not appear unconcerned, - they too had to suffer grievous pain. Just as the dead man had suffered grievous pain, so they too had to suffer pain, and their eyes had to swell up with blood from their heads. Again, the following men used to cut their shoulders and inflict mourning incisions upon themselves with a stone knife or hafted flint: a mother's brother used to cut mourning incisions when his sister's son had died, a brother-in-law similarly used to cut mourning incisions in his shoulders, and also cut his legs, or if he had no stone knife, he would take a spear and thrust it into his leg: he was not allowed to possess the sister of the dead man without suffering pain. If the father-in-law died, the son-in-law had to cut himself in the same way. He cut himself lest a rumour should reach men at another place, “Have you heard yet? Over yonder is a man who is quite satisfied to keep his wife without suffering pain (i.e. on account of her dead father)!”

\textsuperscript{127} Agencies of social Control in Central Australian Aboriginal Societies, pages 64 - 65.
[86]

[He therefore used to cut himself] cut lest these men should for a certain come as avengers and kill him, - the man who refused to suffer pain.” 128

I have also frequently heard the remark made that if any tjurunga secrets were revealed to women and children, men from outside clans would intervene and kill the offenders unless their own council of elders had first taken action. Thus, in 1949 Rauwiraka told me the story of the alleged slaughter of a whole camp of natives somewhere near Mt. Eba many years ago. In this camp the men had been in the habit of changing sacred songs and performing ritual acts in the presence of women contrary to their own laws. One night two Loritja visitors came from the far west, and they were startled to see a such desecration of the sacred ritual. However they said nothing, and even joined in the singing for a while. 129 Finally, they excused themselves and went home to the west. The news of this sacrilege spread in the western areas from place to place, and intense fury was aroused everywhere. At last a large band of men from all sides headed for the offending district. They were led by the two messengers who had witnessed the sacrilege. When the party was close to the camp, they went into hiding, and the two messengers approached the unsuspecting victims, with whom they mixed as friends until night came, when they excused themselves on a plea of going to relieve themselves. They then called the waiting avengers. Soon the flames of the camp fires revealed the spears of the approaching enemies to the unfortunate inmates of the surrounded camp. Man. woman,

128 Spencer and Gillen (The Arunta, Vol. II, page 507) record how on one occasion, when a group of Southern Aranda people came to visit the Alice Springs group in 1901, three local natives went to the visiting group and started taunting one of the visitors whom they accused of not having cut himself properly when his father-in-law, a local man, had died. They threw boomerangs at him, which he avoided. He rushed forward, embraced on of his challengers and expressed his determination of cutting his shoulder through to the bone. The challenger, having been appeased by the Southern Aranda man’s offer to cut himself so deeply, graciously tried to prevent his visitor from inflicting a very serious injury upon himself. In the end the Southern Aranda man cut himself slightly, and all four men became reconciled. According to Spencer and Gillen, the same performance was repeated in the case of two other men belonging to the visiting party.

129 This would have been a typically native action so as not to arouse suspicion as being spies or potential enemies.
and children were slaughtered, and their bodies flung into their own fires and left to burn. Thus was sacrilege punished by others, since the whole clan had shared in it.

The truth of this story cannot be now checked, but there is little doubt that if any clan had dared to reveal ceremonial secrets to their women, other clans would have intervened in this way. In the old days young men were always assured that for serious breaches of the moral code and religious ritual punishment would be meted out to them without hope of escape: either by their own elders, or by men from surrounding clans, should their own council be too weak or too timid. But in the latter case the council members too might suffer punishment. The idea was thus firmly imprinted in the minds of all, that outsiders had a legal and moral right to interfere in the inner affairs of a totemic clan in which grave breaches of the moral or religious standards of behaviour had occurred. This seems to be quite an advanced concept, since among ourselves few people would concede other nations any right to interfere in our home affairs on any excuse whatever. It may sound a concept too high for the Australian natives, whose low material culture has caused them to be accused of low morality, low mentality, a low form of speech, a poor vocabulary, and so on. But no very convincing case has yet been made out for a close correlation between technical skills and high standards of public morality. It is, for instance, still doubtful whether we, with all our wonderful technical progress within the last half-century have really evolved better political machinery for regulating and adjusting the problems and the conflicting claims of the various great world powers than the old-time-dishonoured tribal method of nations ganging up against each other in armed conflict and letting victory in war decide the justice of the cause. It may be urged that the desperate need for collaboration between the various discordant nations of the globe has led in our own times to the creation first of the League of Nations and more recently of the United Nations. It may be admitted that the machinery seems to be there; we still need, however, the spirit of mutual goodwill that alone can set it to work; and that spirit seems to be difficult
to arouse as was Baal when his priests slashed themselves before the mocking Elijah.

The Australian native in his unsophistication was merely lapsed quickly into acts of anger and violence, but often also allowed himself to be dissuaded from a set course of action by sparing some of his intended victims. A good illustration of this may be found in Spencer and Gillen’s account of the behaviour of an Aranda avenging party in Iliaura territory just before the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{130}
A SUMMARY AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

IN SUMMARIZING the operation of fear in traditional aboriginal society in Central Australia I have decided to draw together some quotations on fear from T.G.H. Strehlow’s “Agencies of Social Control in Central Australian Aboriginal Societies”:

“Fathers and paternal relatives were for the young man largely persons of authority whom after initiation he was taught to respect and even fear.: (typescript, page 4)

“At the entrance to the cave . . . they struck me across the stomach with an arenana\textsuperscript{131} tjurunga and sang these verses:

1. Let the head of the rock burn red, -
   Let the crest of the rock glow

2. Among the sandhills they smoothed out their curving paths, -
   Among the undulating sandhills they smoothed them out.

In this way they first inflicted pain upon me . . . they (finally) came together face to face, and then (ceremonially) slit open one another’s stomachs:

3. In the red sand-waste let them slit open one another’s stomachs.” (\textit{ibid.}, page 7)

“Every native man in Central Australia . . . had certain rights and duties . . . If we . . . examine the mechanisms which governed his religious duties, his moral code, and his social behaviour, we shall find it convenient to divide them similarly according to the level at which they functioned, and according to the authorities that were responsible for policing departures from traditional norms and for punishing the transgressors.” (\textit{ibid.}, page 20)

“No attempt was made at instilling positive religious beliefs into the young, if we except tales about sky-beings and the homes of the departed spirits, or such traditional false accounts as, say the Western Aranda legend concerning a

\textsuperscript{131} = carpet snake
supernatural one-legged being called Tuanjiraka, who initiated the boys into manhood by cutting off their heads and then restoring them to life, - his voice being audible in the sound of the bullroarers swung on the circumcision ground by the initiated men. However the boys were encouraged not to revere Tuanjiraka but to revile him so as to increase their courage against the time of pain and terror that preceded their attainment of manhood status. Here is the Tuanjiraka version that was current in Rauwiraka’s Ellery Creek district:

The old men used to state falsely to boys and to women that there were Tuajiraka at all the centres where there were rukuta novices . . . There was one Tuanjiraka having only one leg, his other leg being a stump; and that leg he used to give, stinking as it was, to the rukuta to carry about . . . To a boy the old men would keep on repeating – ‘Boy, Tuanjiraka is going to cut off your head and toss it away so that it flies into the distance’ . . As boys we were really afraid lest our heads should be cut off. They also added that Tuanjiraka would pick the head up again and put it back on the body, sealing (the cut) with porcupine resin, - in this way once more raising up alive the boy who had been dead . . . And then when the bullroarers could be heard, the old men were screaming, and abusing the boys, having grown angry with the boys: ‘Boys, Tuanjiraka is abusing you, - he, the man with the maggot-crawling leg!’ Then the boys would in turn fling abuse back at him: ‘You there, with the one leg! You there, with the stinking leg! You there, with the maggot-crawling leg!’

One religious attitude only was firmly inculcated into the young – the fear of magic and the supernatural.” (pages 26-27, ibid.)

“Circumcision, subincision, head-biting, the stabbing of the initiate’s scalp and cheeks with sharp sticks, and in many parts of the Aranda area, the pulling off of one or more finger nails, instilled into the mind of the newly-initiated youths a deep terror and wholesome respect for the collective powers wielded by the ceremonial chief and the council of elders who directed activities on the initiation grounds. The young men had the power to inflict any amount of pain upon
Them; also that their own male relatives, instead of helping them to escape from these ordeals, actually assisted the old men to carry out their painful decisions. To the fear of magic and the supernatural was now added the fear of the old men assembled in council.” (ibid., page 28)

“Every man had, in his youth, learned deep respect for the concerted power of the old men sitting in council, partly because of their individual knowledge of the evil magic charms whose in escapable power to kill was deeply and universally dreaded; and partly because of the terrifying physical ordeals suffered on the initiation grounds.” (ibid., page 36)

“One last feature of these inter-clan relationships must be mentioned – the frequent use made of fear of possible sanctions to be applied by a neighbouring clan to enforce acquiescence to rule of moral and social conduct laid down by the council of elders in its own district.” (ibid., page 64)

(a) **Positive Effects of Tribal Law**

FROM WHAT HAS been set down above, it is clear that fear in traditional aboriginal societies in Central Australia plays a prominent role. However, Strehlow writes also about the strong positive elements that come in spite of the fear and its associated ritual or, perhaps more correctly, because of it:

“Here one may speak with assurance about one aspect of primitive law: primitive law in Central Australia was the function of a properly-constituted corporate groups with universally acknowledged coercive powers. The decisions of the highest authority were backed by fear of supernatural sanctions and by the use of physical force. No ‘police officers’ existed; but and man who had been ordered to punish a criminal

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132 Agencies of Social Control in Central Australian Aboriginal Societies, pages 67-68.
and who refused to carry out such a command would have been made himself liable to severe punishment or even the death penalty. Rebels and resisters to established authority were very rare; and in the old days such individuals would not have been permitted a long life. If they had been too powerful to be tackled by their fellow clansmen, they could have been accused of revealing sacred ritual to uninitiated persons or of having practiced sorcery against members of some other clan; and then outside clansmen would have helped in the killing of such a dangerous man.

“Religion as a means of attaining to a sense of security in an undependable and often treacherous environment was then the answer to one of the main psychological needs of the natives. By carrying out the sacred ritual a man could be certain that his totemic ancestors at least would not send illness or death upon him, and through obeying the social and moral codes of behaviour, he insured himself against the evil magic and violence of his fellow-men. There were other re-assuring beliefs as well. In Rauwiraka’s area, for instance, it was believed that each man had a spirit double which dwelt in the tjurunga that was regarded as his other body. This spirit double used to accompany him on his lone hunts and warn him against approaching danger by whistling.

“But native religion did not have merely the somewhat negative function of keeping away fear of accidents and sickness. An initiated man, as a member of a totemic clan practicing its increase ceremonies, looked upon himself and was regarded by his fellows as an important producer of food for the other members of his community. To us the increase ceremonies may appear utterly worthless, superstitious acts. But in Central Australia men belonging to the kangaroo totem, for instance, would proudly claim credit for each sudden influx of hundreds of kangaroos into an area where drought had just been broken by copious seasonal rains. Similarly, when emu eggs were plentiful and the birds themselves grew sleek and fat, the population sang the praises of the emu totemic clansmen; and so it went on. The belief in the efficacy of magic meant that men did not
regard themselves as merely “living off the land” like unthinking animals. They tried to increase the food resources by ritual, and thus felt a strong sense of pride in acting as food producers and benefactors of other men. The natives have often been attacked by their critics for being entirely improvident and, unlike other human races, completely lacking in any forethought for the future and in planning to ensure adequate supplies of food. That criticism is less than fair. Anyone who has seen members of a totemic clan performing their increase rites which – as in the case of the Northern Aranda kangaroo ceremonies – may take weeks to perform, during which time the totemites have to draw pints of blood from their veins, and sing and “work” till failing food supplies have taken inches off their waist lines and put hollows in their cheeks, will realize the great amount of labour and physical pain, also the great amount of devotion to a duty undertaken for other, that is necessary for the staging of these increase rites. In each case, the totemic clan “produces” food not only for itself but for others, since the totemites do not normally eat their own totem animal or plant. This again means that each clan regards itself as depending for its food supplies not so much on its own efforts but on those of others. This feeling engendered a spirit of willing co-operation that made possible the staging of the great ceremonial festivals, where even men who had already become inkata in their own totems, still agreed to assist in a subordinate capacity men of other totems”, in a genuine democracy.

“No one would pretend that the social or moral code of the Australian natives was anywhere near perfect; nor should it be imagined that before the coming of whites serious miscarriages of justice were entirely unknown among them, or that might did not sometimes worst right, or that councils of elders were always innocent of favouritism. The principle of retaliation in “private” cases did meant that a weak man with few friends sometimes had to put up with many wrongs. But few would claim that our courts of law give universal satisfaction, or that a man with a good conscience need have
no lawyer to defend his case before one of our own learned judges, or that it is always advisable to take all one’s disputes before a court competent to deal with them without trying to effect settlement privately. Whether mankind will ever reach that ultimate perfection in legal procedure that will enable courts to deal out absolute justice promptly in all cases, remains highly doubtful, if only for the reason that in most cases there is a measure of right and a measure of wrong to be found in both sides. The Central Australian tribesmen has at least evolved a system of law that enabled them to settle most of their disputes with considerable effectiveness. It also satisfied one of the basic requirements of a system of law that aspires to command the respect of its own community: it inspired a general sense of fairness – the feeling that in theory always and in practice on most occasions there was only one law for all who lived in one social and political body. And so respect for primitive law became in Central Australia one of the three stays of ordered society; the other two being religion and social organization.

(b) The Insecurity of Modern Times

SO MUCH IDLE SPECULATION – much of it from academic circles where in Australia it has been a sound economic investment to indulge in it – has been written about the “golden” times in aboriginal society before the white man came, that it has become the obligation of those of us who realize what the fear was really like to set down some of the facts, necessary to give a rounded picture. Indeed many of those lawyers and academics who tell us about the “golden” days would scorn any religion at all, let alone one that whilst inculcating fear from the earliest days, yet provided the security for effective operation of life in all other spheres: intellectual, social and moral.

The chill feeling some of us get comes from the complete breakdown of aboriginal society where there is no religion at all and where a different type of fear has taken over.
To quote Strehlow 133

It should not be imagined from what has been said so far that Aboriginal people in the pre-white days lived in an atmosphere of [complete and unmitigated] terror caused by the grimness of Aboriginal Law.

On the contrary, the heavy punishments meted out to law-breakers and easy elimination of insubordinate and vicious men (a charge of sacrilege readily removed from the community anyone who continually defied the warnings of the local group elders) meant members of a local group enjoyed a great sense of security.

In addition, Aboriginal law ensured that in droughts as in good seasons all hunted game and gathered food had to be shared equitably among all members of a local kinship group according to rules resting on classificatory kinship.

It must be emphasised that ready laughter was once a most notable feature in pre-white Aboriginal communities. They were essentially a happy people. I realized that particularly during my own travels through the areas of the then still nomadic Pintubis, hundreds of miles west of Alice Springs, in 1932. Their territory was poor in game and water; but whatever the food gatherers had returned to camp, cheerful laughter filled the air.

Their descendents, now gathered mainly in Government-controlled settlements like Papunya and Yuendumu, rarely laugh; and under the added influence of white man’s grog, drunken orgies, according to reports, have replaced the old entertainments.

Despite the white man’s welfare handouts, the old sense of security and intra-group human dignity appears to have been almost lost. The young people have become, it seems, virtually a lawless community, with all the horrors which that term implies.

The old “law” has largely lost its force, its remaining guardians can no longer control the younger generations; and the new “whiteman’s law” has not taken any real root among the young people either.

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The remedy is, of course, a return to respect for the law. But how is this to be achieved? The old law rested on the old religious beliefs, and the younger generation will no longer accept these. But here are problems well beyond the scope of this article. Perhaps white Australians, too, are finding themselves in a not very dissimilar ‘transitionary stage.’

(c) Aboriginal Philosophy in the Face of Adversity

IT IS FITTING to close however, on a note of hope that a time could come when men everywhere could understand at least some of that philosophy that once sustained traditional aboriginal societies in Central Australia, an idealism that did something to transcend the terror of physical pain, and the fear of capital punishment and black magic:

“According to native beliefs, the earth was the eternal mother from whose fertile womb the totemic ancestors and first animals and plants had sprung. Each ancestor was associated with one animal or one plant, whose life essence was the same as its own. The later human beings, who were believed to have become reincarnated from these immortal ancestors, were therefore linked intimately with the animals and the natural features of their birthplaces or, more correctly, of their conception sites. To a man of the kangaroos totem, the kangaroos were his own ‘elder brothers’; and the rocks and tress of the kangaroo totemic site were sacred objects that shared with him some of the mysterious life essence that had once emanated from the original kangaroo totemic ancestor. A common bond of life united a man with the animals of his totem, with the supernatural personage that he honoured in his ritual, and with the land in which he had been born. An Australian native consequently had an affection for, and a feeling of oneness with, Nature that few of the present-day generation of white Australians can even comprehend, let alone feel in their own hearts. It is this personal legendary link with the animals, trees, and rocks of his environment that had the power once to turn even an arid and sun-scorched tract of
desert into a spiritual home for our natives; and the emotions stirred up by the sight of the animals, trees, and rocks of their home gave to the aboriginals in past times spiritual strength during cruel droughts and disastrous epidemics. As long as the mountains stood, the springs flowed, the animals survived, and the ancestral rocks escaped damage, the tribe and no fear for the future. Nature and men shared the same life; and Nature could not die.”

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