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**WORK PAPERS OF SIL-AAB**

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**KRIOL OF NORTH AUSTRALIA  
A LANGUAGE COMING OF AGE**

**John Sandefur**

**Summer Institute of Linguistics  
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This book is written  
in memory of  
Barnabas, Mordecai, Isaac and Douglas,  
four great men  
who had great patience  
with an inquisitive munanga,  
and it is  
dedicated to  
Holt Thompson and Dorothy Meehan,  
the first two Anglo-Australians to recognize  
the significance of Kriol  
to such a degree that  
they stood against the tide of opposition  
and helped to establish  
the Bamyili School Kriol bilingual education program.



# Foreword

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# Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b>	v
<b>PREFACE</b>	xi
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xiii
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	xv
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY OF PIDGINS AND CREOLES</b>	1
THE ORIGIN AND LIFE-CYCLE OF PIDGINS AND CREOLES	2
VARIATION IN PIDGINS AND CREOLES	4
PIDGINIZATION AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PIDGINS	6
Characteristics of pidgins	7
CREOLIZATION AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CREOLES	8
Characteristics of creoles	9
PROCESSES OF CHANGE	10
DECREOLIZATION	12
INTERLANGUAGE	14
<b>CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS KRIOL?</b>	17
KRIOL AND TORRES STRAIT CREOLE	20
Historical roots	20
Sociological features	22
Lexical differences	22
Grammatical differences	23
Distinct languages	24
KRIOL AND ABORIGINAL ENGLISH	25
Varieties of AE and terminological confusion	25
Historical relationships	27
Grammatical distinctness	28
ONE GRAND ABORIGINAL ENGLISH SYSTEM?	30
THE KRIOL 'SPEECH COMMUNITY'	31
Aboriginal community	32
The problem of 'speech community'	33
Kriol communication area	34
Kriol language currency area	34
Kriol language area	35
Cattle stations	38
Missions and settlements	40
Outstation or homeland centres	41
Towns	41
KRIOL, ABORIGINAL ENGLISH, AND ENGLISH - ONE SYSTEM?	43
Interlanguage rather than decreolization	44
Decreolization: perimeter communities and 'townies'	46
Government policy strengthening Kriol	48
VARIATION WITHIN KRIOL	49
A folk-linguistic perspective	49
Development and modernization variation	52
Dialectal continua variation	55
VARIETIES OF KRIOL	56
Social attitudes to dialects	57
Sociolects	58
KRIOL AND TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES	59
Baby-talk and child language	61
MULTILINGUALISM IN KRIOL-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES	62
SUMMARY: WHAT THEN <u>IS</u> KRIOL?	64
<b>CHAPTER 3: IS KRIOL AN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE?</b>	67
KRIOL AS A REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL SOCIETY	67
World view of humanity	69

Contemporary kinship	71
Classification of food and animals	77
SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE USE OF KRIOL	81
Two sociolinguistic rules	82
Changing value judgements	83
KRIOL AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY	85
Boundary marking	87
Identifying with Kriol	89
<b>CHAPTER 4: A CASE HISTORY OF A KRIOL-SPEAKING COMMUNITY</b>	91
BACKGROUND	91
The stage of neglect	91
The stage of direct control	92
The stage of indirect control	93
Government policy and language use	94
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE AT NGUKURR	95
Early history	98
Old Mission	102
World War Two	106
CMS	108
Government control	109
FOUR MODERN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AT NGUKURR	113
The Ngukurr town council	116
The Ngukurr school	117
The Ngukurr clinic	120
The Ngukurr church	121
SUMMARY OF THE EFFECT OF ABORIGINALIZATION ON KRIOL	123
<b>CHAPTER 5: THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF KRIOL</b>	127
KRIOL AND LEGISLATION	127
KRIOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION	128
Typology of education alternatives	128
Monolingualism in the dominant language	131
Transitional bilingualism	132
Monoliterate bilingualism	133
Partial bilingualism	135
Full bilingualism	137
Monolingualism in the home language	137
Kriol bilingual programs	137
KRIOL AND INFORMATION	139
KRIOL LANGUAGE PLANNING	143
<b>SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</b>	151
<b>NOTES</b>	154
<b>APPENDIXES</b>	
APPENDIX 1. Kriol Glossary	182
APPENDIX 2. Resource Guide to Kriol	192
APPENDIX 3. Non-Aboriginal Involvement in Kriol	195
APPENDIX 4. Newspaper Items regarding Kriol	209
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	219



**CHARTS AND DIAGRAMS**

Creolization and the developmental continuum	9
Developmental and restructuring changes	11
Summary of features common to Kriol and Aboriginal English	30
The Kriol system relative to a post-creole continuum	50
Contemporary Kriol kinship system at Ngukurr	72
The <u>skin</u> system at Ngukurr	73
English and Kriol classification of lizards	80

**MAPS**

Map 1 Australia	18
Map 2 The Kriol Language Currency Area	36
Map 3 The Kriol Language Area	37
Map 4 North Australia and the Roper River District	96



## CHAPTER 4

### A CASE HISTORY OF A KRIOL-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

This chapter will take a detailed look at some of the social, political and historical factors which have been relevant to the development of Kriol in one particular Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory — Ngukurr. As was pointed out in chapter two, it was in the Ngukurr area that creolization first took place. As a result, the 'time-base' for Kriol is deeper at Ngukurr than at other Aboriginal communities. As a consequence, the language in the Ngukurr area shows signs of being more developed, and its speakers in general have a greater understanding of the nature and significance of the language. A close look at the Kriol situation at Ngukurr, therefore, may help to give us insights into the direction that development in other Kriol-speaking communities may take.

#### BACKGROUND

The history of relations between Europeans and Aborigines has been described by Thiele (1982:3)<sup>99</sup> as falling into three broad stages: neglect, direct control and indirect control. The first stage, that of neglect, was the long period of the conquest of the Aboriginal peoples and the gaining of control of their lands by Europeans. Much of this conquest was accomplished through gross brutality. In order to force the Aborigines into submission, the early pioneers freely used violence. Where Aboriginal groups resisted European authority and encroachment upon their lands, not only did the government<sup>100</sup> condone the use of punitive expeditions by settlers, but it also coerced obedience directly through violent acts committed by its police force (Reynolds 1972, Robinson and York 1977, Rowley 1972b:288, Stanner 1969:13).

The conquest of Aboriginal peoples was not, however, totally by force. In some of the remoter parts of Australia, such as Arnhem Land, there were vast tracts of land which were never settled by Europeans and some which were only occupied for a few years by pastoralists in the 1880s and 1890s (Duncan 1967). The conquest of the Aboriginal peoples living in those lands came through the establishment of missions and government settlements. Aborigines were not in general openly forced to live on the settlements, but many of them drifted more or less permanently to them for a variety of reasons. The more they became involved with settlements, the more they became dependent upon the goods and services they offered and were, in a sense, trapped into submission.

Although many people were involved in establishing missions and settlements for philanthropic purposes, they functioned for the most part as agents of social control, attempting to pacify and settle Aborigines and to promote the legitimization of the government and its instrumentalities.

#### The Stage of Neglect

The conquest of Aboriginal peoples led in many cases to the demoralization of those who survived the violence. The government was then faced with the problem of what to do with the demoralized remnants of Aboriginal civilization (Rowley 1972b, Evans et al 1975). It

'responded' by basically neglecting to even address itself to the problems that dispossession of lands and maltreatment had produced (Stanner 1969:18-29). This neglect of Aborigines is a significant feature of early Australian history (Hasluck 1970:121). The dispossessed were in general economically and politically insignificant to the capitalist development of Australia, although they did provide a cheap source of labour for the pastoral industry, and became dependent upon government handouts or the largesse of various missionary bodies. During the second half of the 1800s and early 1900s, the government instituted "protection" policies to "smooth the dying pillow" of these so-called "stone age people" who were "doomed to pass away" (Elkin 1974:366-367).

The beginning of the end of the stage of neglect came about in the late 1920s when Professor A.P. Elkin and others became convinced that the protectionist policies should be replaced with policies based on the realization that Aborigines may not die out. Largely in response to pressure from an informed public opinion, government policy was changed in 1936 with citizenship being the goal of an assimilation process (Elkin 1974:368-369). The new policy implied the development and welfare of Aborigines as citizens in contrast to the idea of the previous policy of protecting a dying race.

Under the new policy the people were materially 'cared' for, but their traditions, including languages, were neglected and even directly or indirectly suppressed. The implementation of this new policy, however, was interrupted by World War Two. After the war, details of the new welfare system through which the assimilation policy was to be implemented were finalized, with welfare procedures coming into operation in the early 1950s (Hartwig 1976). In conjunction with the disruptions and changes in Aboriginal society brought about by the war, the policy had a very detrimental effect on traditional Aboriginal languages throughout most of North Australia. As was pointed out in chapter two, with the exception of north and northeastern Arnhem Land and a few pockets elsewhere, relatively few Aborigines in North Australia younger than mid-thirty can fluently speak a traditional Aboriginal language. Most of these younger people speak Kriol or Torres Strait Creole as their mother tongue.

### The Stage of Direct Control

The implementation of the welfare system under the assimilation policy brought in the second stage of European-Aboriginal relations, that of direct control. During the 1950s the Commonwealth Government began to take an active interest in the running of remote Aboriginal settlements in the Northern Territory (Cole 1975:68-69). Settlements were developed into 'springboard' institutions for the purpose of preparing Aborigines for assimilation (DAA 1974:4, Coombs et al 1980:20). Most government-sponsored activities were directed towards this end, with the traditional Aboriginal economy being further broken down under the pressure from institutionalization, enforced English schooling, cultural domination and manipulation, and economic dependency. Control of Aboriginal activities was direct, with Europeans steering Aboriginal affairs for non-Aboriginal purposes according to the dominant Anglo-Australian legal system and administrative rules. There was little delegation of authority to traditional Aboriginal leaders, although the handing out of small and gradual doses of responsibility was seen as part of the educational process leading to assimilation.

During this period Aborigines became more vocal and politically involved, with many demanding equal rights and having the support of some non-Aboriginal groups (Elkin 1944, Berndt and Berndt 1965, Horner 1974). It was becoming increasingly difficult for the government to neglect Aborigines. In the Northern Territory a new social welfare ordinance in 1964 ended legal discrimination and resulted in the "withdrawal of the whole superstructure of quite rigid controls" (Rowley 1972c:406). The following year the government shifted the emphasis of its policy from one of active contempt for Aboriginal culture to one of toleration and respect, albeit grudging respect. This shift in emphasis was the beginning of a move away from assimilation, which had been directed at the eradication of all vestiges of Aboriginal culture and traits, towards an integration policy which would allow the maintenance of Aboriginal culture and identity in a pluralistic Australian society (Wentworth 1973:12-15). The Referendum of 1967 brought citizenship to Aborigines and they were now 'free' to integrate into the broader Australian society on supposedly equal terms with Europeans. In many respects, however, this 'equal opportunity' was a myth which masked past injustice and the class conscious and racist nature of the society into which Aborigines were supposed to move (Thiele 1982:4).

The planned assimilation of Aborigines into the Anglo-Australian society did not take place. Scholars have given a variety of reasons for this failure, from cultural incompatibility to the self-perpetuating nature of institutional arrangements and poverty. A factor often overlooked by scholars, according to Thiele (1982:4), is the nature of the wider Australian society, which prevents both mobility off settlements and assimilation. For the remote Aboriginal the alternative to settlement life, in most cases, is to become a worker in an urban area, often underemployed or unemployed. This is an unsatisfactory and traumatic experience even for those Aborigines who are 'well educated' in a European sense (Rowley 1972c, Gilbert 1973, Lippman 1973). In terms of social structure and social psychology, Aborigines are rejected by European society (Thiele 1982:7).

To a degree, remote Aboriginal settlements are situations of class and racial domination by 'remote control' and many Aborigines cannot be said to have personally chosen to live on them (Sandall 1973:3). Until the early 1970s, the only major alternative to living in settlements was to enter the dominant European economy. Partly as an attempt to escape from the institutionalized European control of their lives, many Aborigines in the last decade have established and moved to 'outstations' (Coombs et al 1980:16).

### The Stage of Indirect Control

The third and most recent stage of European-Aboriginal relations, that of indirect control, officially came into being with the announcement in December 1972 of the self-determination policy of the then newly elected Australian Labor Party (Cavanagh 1974:12). The ousted Liberal-Country Party had, in fact, been also slowly moving in that direction. In January 1972 the then Prime Minister had stated that the government recognized the rights of individual Aborigines "to effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which they come to identify themselves" with the wider Australian society, and that the role of the government should increasingly be to enable the Aborigines to achieve their goals by their own efforts (quoted in Coombs 1972:1).

These were important changes in the stated philosophy and objectives of policy and indicated that the Liberal-Country Party was abandoning its policy of integration in favour of allowing Aborigines to lead a life separate from other Australians, although this change was not openly acknowledged (Thiele 1982:5). When the Liberal and National parties were returned to power in 1975, they continued to support a policy somewhat similar to that of the Australian Labor Party, although the label was changed to 'self-management' to reflect new interests now influential in government. Neither political party has acknowledged separate development for Aborigines as a goal, but it is clearly a consequence of the policies of self-determination and self-management (Thiele 1982:5).

These policy changes of the early 1970s have, in essence, only brought policy into line with reality, for the notion of separate development was implied in the establishment of remote Aboriginal settlements (e.g. see Elkin 1944:45).

Implicit in these new policies is an acceptance on the part of the government that the integration of Aborigines, especially those in remote areas, into the wider European-dominated social and economic system is not possible or at least is likely to take a very long time. One of the effects of the new government approach is that the geographic isolation of remote Aborigines can be maintained. The government is reducing the likelihood of large-scale migration to towns and cities by raising physical living standards on settlements, promoting an ideology of self-determination and separate development, and influencing Aborigines to accept that separate development will bring benefits (Thiele 1982:6). Thus the settlements that were originally established to promote assimilation tended to have the opposite longterm effect.

#### Government Policy and Language Use

The changes in government policy during the last few decades have significantly affected the use of language. The pressure under the assimilation policies was for Aborigines to become, in essence, black-skinned Europeans. This meant that Aboriginal language skills were undesirable, English skills were a prerequisite, and multilingualism was in no way to be encouraged. Increasing involvement on the part of the government in settlements and the enforced schooling of children for the purposes of assimilation, which was often accompanied by dormitory or hostel living conditions, rapidly boosted the rate of traditional language decline and inadvertently encouraged creolization. Kriol was closer to English than traditional languages, and in that respect Kriol represented a move towards the goal of Anglicization. At the same time, however, Kriol was almost universally considered to be a pathological development of English which needed to be eradicated (e.g. see Wurm 1963:4,7). Many Kriol speakers themselves viewed Kriol in this way and saw it as a hindrance to achieving acceptance in the broader non-Aboriginal Australian society.

Under the new policies, however, where an Aboriginal is allowed to stress his Aboriginality if he so desires, it is almost imperative for him to have control of a means of linguistic Aboriginal identification. As was discussed in the previous chapter, for many Aborigines, primarily those who speak Kriol as their mother tongue, Kriol serves that function. Kriol is no longer being seen as a hindrance to becoming a European. Instead, it is being seen as a necessity for linguistically displaying and maintaining one's Aboriginality. As a result, a number of Aborigines are now actively seeking to raise the status and prestige of Kriol as a legitimate Aboriginal language.

Another significant effect the new policies have had on Kriol has been the legitimization of its use in modern sectors of life. In a study of three Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (Barunga [formerly Bamyili], Oenpelli and Bagot in Darwin) in the late 1960s, Jernudd (1971:19) observed that modern social functions, such as transactions of settlement councils, were more likely to be carried out in Kriol<sup>101</sup> than in English if the non-Aboriginal settlement administrators were not present. The same can be said today for most Kriol-speaking communities, but with one significant difference. The recent changes in government policy have resulted in the replacement of many non-Aboriginal administrators and officers with Aborigines. As a result, there are fewer occasions now than at the time Jernudd did his studies on which standard English or Aboriginal English is used in preference to Kriol in the presence of a non-Aboriginal administrator.

This effect is not restricted to council affairs. Prior to the policy of self-determination, Aboriginal people needed to speak some English in order to make headway at such places as the store, the bank or the hospital. Today, however, since Aborigines are nearly always employed in these jobs, people can get most of their "white man's domain" needs met through their own language (Harris 1982:41).

In order for decreolization to take place, among other conditions, there must be (a) sufficient social mobility to motivate large numbers of creole speakers to modify their speech in the direction of the standard language, (b) a sufficient program of education and other acculturative activities to exert effective pressures from the standard language on the creole, and (c) occupational opportunities which require the use of the standard language so that it exerts real influence on creole speakers (DeCamp 1971a:29, 1971b:351).

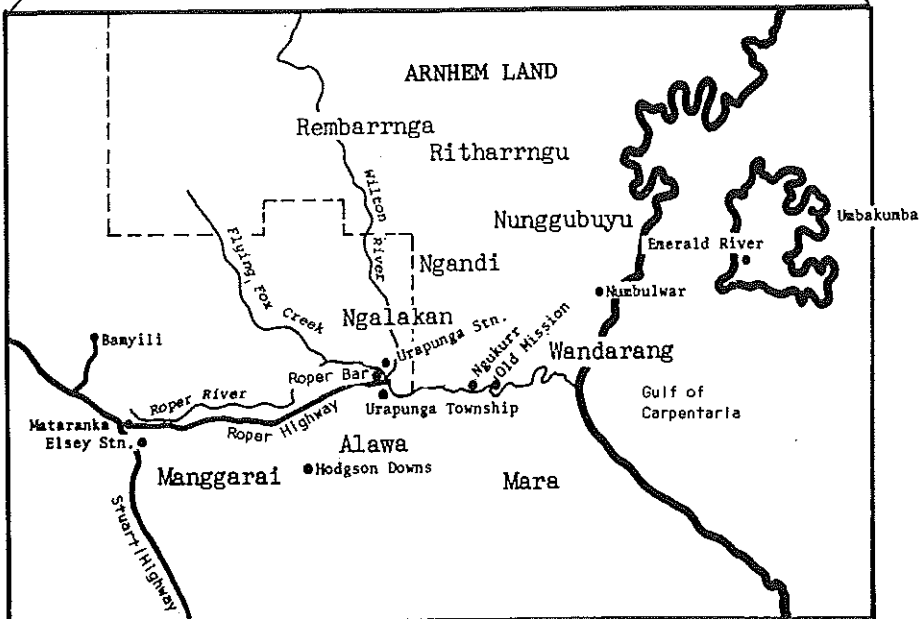
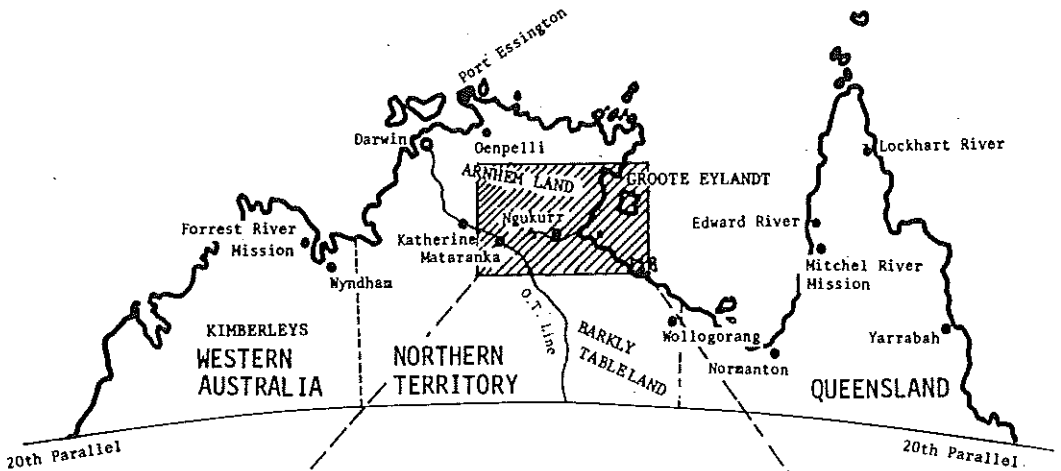
Under the assimilation policies, the pressure was towards developing monolingualism in English. The number of Kriol speakers directly affected, however, was relatively small. Occupational opportunities requiring English were limited, schooling until well into the 1960s for the majority of Kriol speakers was minimal, and it was extremely difficult for Aborigines to move into European-dominated towns with any degree of acceptance by Europeans. Education has improved immensely during the 1970s, but very few of the other acculturative activities are exerting any pressure, let alone 'effective' or 'real' pressure, on Kriol and Kriol speakers. There is a general desire among Aborigines to be able to control English, but under today's self-determination policies the emphasis is on developing bilingualism rather than the English monolingualism of the previous policies.

The move toward Aboriginal control or the 'Aboriginalization' of modern social institutions in Aboriginal communities under present government policies is reinforcing and expanding the use of Kriol and reducing the likelihood of decreolization (Sandefur 1982a, 1982b, 1982c). In the remainder of this chapter I will take a detailed look at the effect government policies, particularly in the last few decades, have had on Kriol in one particular settlement in the Northern Territory.

#### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE AT NGUKURR

Ngukurr is a settlement of Aborigines which developed from an Anglican mission, officially known as Roper River Mission, established in 1908 by the Church Missionary Society [colloquially and hereafter referred to as CMS]. The settlement is situated on Aboriginal-owned land<sup>102</sup> just inside

# MAP 4 - NORTH AUSTRALIA AND THE ROPER RIVER DISTRICT





the southeastern border of Arnhem Land. Ngukurr functions essentially as a private town, with access by non-Aboriginal people being restricted.

The Aboriginal population of the settlement has characteristically been variable, changing with the seasonal movements of people. In the past up to fifty percent of the peak, wet season population would move to cattle stations in the region during the dry season. Today the peak population is approximately five hundred, with movement being primarily directed towards a dozen outstations which have developed within a hundred kilometres of Ngukurr since 1977. Up to sixty percent of the peak population may be away from Ngukurr during the dry season. Half the population of Ngukurr is under sixteen years of age. Some twenty basically transient non-Aboriginal people live in the settlement.

Ngukurr is a fairly isolated community. It is located some three hundred kilometres by road, the last third of which is gravel, from its supply centre, Katherine. It is about two hours flying time from Darwin, the nearest major administrative centre. The nearest town, Mataranka, is just over two hundred kilometres away.

The settlement is located on the northern bank of the Roper River twenty-four kilometres downriver from Roper Bar where the highway crosses the river, and a hundred and sixteen kilometres from the mouth of the river. The only road access is impassable in the wet season because it crosses the Roper and Wilton rivers on low causeways. The area immediately around Ngukurr is open savannah of the kind often found in the dry tropics of North Australia. There are, however, large areas of lancewood scrub, salt pans, and ti-tree and paperbark swamps in the region. The area is only marginal country for improved pasture and agriculture, with an average annual rainfall of 725 mm. There are no mining activities in the area.

In physical terms, Ngukurr is somewhat like a small, isolated ordinary town. Although there is always some change taking place in the settlement, it currently [i.e. 1985] has a clinic, a school, a church, a police station, a municipal office block, a mechanics' workshop, a general store, a bank agency, an oval and basketball court, a defunct movie 'theatre', a defunct club house, a power station, an airstrip, a barge landing, a sewerage system, reticulated electricity and water, and some sixty to seventy dwellings on streets mostly laid out to a town development plan. There is a twice weekly air service from Katherine. Telephone service is limited to two semi-private radio-telephones and several outpost radios which connect with the Darwin telephone exchange. Spasmodic satellite television reception was introduced in 1983 and medium wave radio reception is marginal.

The language most commonly used by Aborigines at Ngukurr is Kriol. The second most common would be English. The only traditional Aboriginal language that is actively used by a significant segment of the community is Ritharrngu. Speakers of up to twenty traditional languages, however, can be found at Ngukurr.

The staple foods of most residents are mainly beef, flour, sugar, tea and soft drinks. The preferred clothing tends to be of the stockman style, although many of the younger people prefer more 'mod' styles. The most popular music is country and western, although here again many of the younger people prefer rock. Guitars, including electric guitars and large amplifiers, are by far the most common musical instruments around, and large cassette players are extremely popular. In some respects the Aborigines under thirty years of age, who represent about seventy

percent of the resident population, have a lifestyle which is not dissimilar to that of many young Europeans or Aborigines from lower-class areas in Australian towns.

About twenty percent of the residents at Ngukurr are employed to do many of the jobs that are normal for the running of small towns. For example, there are councillors, police, teachers, shop attendants, health workers, hygiene workers, builders, plumbers, mechanics, grader drivers and a minister. Only about thirty percent of the potential Aboriginal work force is employed as compared to almost one hundred percent of the European work force.

What distinguishes Ngukurr from most ordinary towns is the poverty of its inhabitants and the poor standard of many facilities.<sup>103</sup> Although some of the newer houses are of fibro and brick construction, a number of the dwellings are iron shacks. There are relatively few private cars, no roads are sealed or kerbed, and in general maintenance is minimal. Many houses are not equipped with functional stoves, refrigerators or washing machines. The areas inhabited by the twenty or so Europeans on the settlement, however, do not in general show signs of similar poverty.

Ngukurr is an 'artificial' town in the sense that there is virtually no economic activity based on the utilization of local natural resources. There are no mining, fishing or tourist ventures, no agriculture or horticulture and no manufacturing or processing industries, nor is Ngukurr a financial, shopping or administrative centre for the whole Roper River region. Virtually no money is generated locally. The Ngukurr cash economy is primarily dependent on Northern Territory Government finances through the Education, Health, Transport and Works, and Community Development departments, and on Commonwealth finances primarily through Social Security and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

### Early History

The history of Aboriginal contact with other peoples in the Ngukurr area has been divided by Bern (1974:69) into three periods. The first period, "intermittent interaction involving little if any disruption of the independent on-going organisation of Aboriginal society", extends from initial contact with the Macassans to the construction in 1872 of the Overland Telegraph Line [colloquially and hereafter referred to as the O.T. Line]. The second period, that of "increasing intensity and extent of contact in which relations between the intruders and indigines [sic] are conditioned by basic conflict over living space and the use of resources" (Bern 1974:69), extends from the construction of the O.T. Line to the establishment of Roper River Mission in 1908 and into the 1930s. During this period independent Aboriginal lifestyle on the Roper River was destroyed. The third period, "permanent establishment of Europeans, their domination and the development of dependent Aboriginal communities" (Bern 1974:69), extends from the early 1900s, with considerable overlap with the second period, to the present.

It is not known when and whence the Aborigines first arrived to take up residence in the Northern Territory. The oldest archaeological sites so far investigated are five rock shelters near Oenpelli, some of which have yielded stone tools that date from 20,000 B.C. The oldest archaeological site in Australia is only about 40,000 years old, but much earlier dates than this are being suggested by scholars for the

occupation by these first Australians (Powell 1982). Throughout those years there appears to have been several waves of migration and movement of languages. The evidence suggests that the linguistic mosaic pattern which existed when the Europeans first entered Australia would have spanned only a small fraction of the total time that the first Australians had spent in the land, and it is not known when nor how that pattern developed (Powell 1982:13-15).

Today there are nine major traditional languages represented at Ngukurr. These languages are represented by seven major social groups colloquially called "tribes". These seven tribes are referred to locally by seven of the language names. The nine major languages at Ngukurr are members of five Aboriginal language families.<sup>104</sup> The languages in this area tend to be highly divergent from each other (Heath 1981:4). As mentioned earlier, only one of these languages is still spoken by a significant number of residents at Ngukurr.

Ngukurr is located in Yukul country. Very little is known about Yukul, although it is thought by some to have been a language or dialect related to Mara, one of the three languages of the Maran Family. The language is now extinct, if indeed it was a language. Some Ngukurr Aborigines consider Yukul to have been an 'association' of the tribes in the lower Roper River district that was formed before the arrival of Europeans, rather than a specific language group.

The languages of the Maran Family, Mara, Alawa and Wandarang, are prefixing languages and are characterized by extensive use of auxiliary verbs. Only two tribes are normally represented by these languages, Alawa and Mara, with Wandarang people being considered to be part of the Mara tribe. None of these languages is now actively spoken. Heath (1981:7) says about Mara that "had research on this language been delayed for five years or longer it is very unlikely that grammatical or textual material" of high quality could have been obtained, for all of his informants were in their sixties. Wandarang is 'very close' to linguistic extinction, being now known by only two or three people (Merlan 1978:73, Sharpe 1972:1). The number of people who knew Alawa well in the late 1960s was only about thirty, most of whom were living on cattle stations south of the Roper River (Sharpe 1972:vii).

The area west of Ngukurr is Manggarai territory. Manggarai is the only member of the Mangaraian Family. It is a two-gender classifying language with only limited concord. To the northeast is Nunggubuyu, the only member of the Nunggubuyan Family. It is characterized by a highly developed system of noun classification (fifteen classes) and very complex verb structure (seven orders of prefixes and two of suffixes).

To the northwest of Ngukurr is the Gunwingguan Family of languages. Two of the languages from this family, Ngalakan and Ngandi, are represented by major tribes at Ngukurr. Both of these languages are multiple-classifying prefixing languages. There are only about six persons who can fluently speak Ngandi (Heath 1978:3). One other language from this family, Rembarrnga, is also significantly represented at Ngukurr but the Rembarrnga people are usually included with the Ngalakan tribe. Rembarrnga is a non-classifying prefixing language and is spoken by a maximum of two hundred adults (McKay 1975:1), only a few of whom reside at Ngukurr.

To the far north of Ngukurr is the Yolngu Subgroup of the Pama-Nyungan Family of languages. One of the languages of the Yolngu Subgroup, Ritharrngu, is represented as the seventh major tribe at Ngukurr today.

Ritharrngu is spoken by several hundred people, most of whom reside outside the Ngukurr area (Heath 1980a:3). The Pama-Nyungan languages are suffixing languages and are not related to the prefixing languages. Three dialects make up the 'Ritharrngu' language, Ritharrngu, Wagilak and Manggurra. The first two of these dialects are significantly represented at Ngukurr today. The Ritharrngu people are the latecomers to Ngukurr, having first arrived in the 1940s in contrast to the other groups who have been represented at Ngukurr virtually from the year of its establishment as a community.

Before the arrival of Europeans, contact with outsiders was virtually unknown by most of the Aborigines of the Ngukurr area. For two hundred years prior to the arrival of the first Europeans, however, Macassans from the southern Celebes had regularly visited the coast of Arnhem Land in search of Australian trepang (Flinders 1814:172,183, Powell 1982:34-37). Some of the ancestors of the Nunggubuyu, Wandarang and Mara people are likely to have had contact with the Macassans, while relatively few of the ancestors of the other Ngukurr Aborigines would have had direct contact with them, for the trepang industry was limited to the coastal areas and most of the Ngukurr Aborigines come from inland areas.

The period of Macassan contact appears to have had very little influence on the traditional life of the Aborigines in southern Arnhem Land even though a Macassan camping ground was located near the mouth of the Roper River (Searcy 1912:202, Tindale 1925:131). This phase of the history of the Ngukurr area had no direct effect on Kriol, although in one respect it did help set the stage for its arrival (Harris 1984).

Contact with the Macassans resulted in the development of a pidgin variety of the Macassans' language which functioned as a lingua franca between Aborigines of different linguistic groups (Macknight 1972, Urry and Walsh 1981). This 'Macassan' language was used not only among coastal Aboriginal communities, but also between them and some of the inland groups with whom they had contact. As a result, Macassan influences may have affected Aborigines who had never seen or met a real Macassar (Urry and Walsh 1981:98). Thus the mechanism of an Aboriginal lingua franca based on the language of an ethnically different people with whom the Aborigines were in contact was firmly established by the time Europeans arrived.

With the increasing European presence in the Northern Territory from the mid-1800s onwards, a knowledge of English became more important than a knowledge of the Macassan language. As a result, the Macassan language began to rapidly decline, being replaced by (pidgin) English.

The 'invasion'<sup>105</sup> of the Ngukurr area by whites began in 1845 when the exploration party of Ludwig Leichardt passed through the area, the Roper River itself being 'first discovered' by the party's advance scout, John Roper. Leichardt's party came from Queensland and was making for Port Essington on the northwest coast of Arnhem Land. The party crossed the Roper River at what is now called Roper Bar and continued up Flying Fox Creek. Two other exploration expeditions, that of Augustus Charles Gregory in 1856 and John McDouall Stuart in 1862, passed through the upper reaches of the Roper River. These two parties did not come through the immediate Ngukurr area, although they did pass through sections of Manggarai, Alawa and Mara country. The next recorded contact<sup>106</sup> was in 1867 when Frances Cadell made an examination of "the country around the Roper" in a paddle-steamer.

Intensive contact began with the construction of the O.T. Line between Adelaide and Darwin in the early 1870s. George MacLachlan was sent to Leichardt's Bar, as Roper Bar was then called, to survey a site for a supply depot for the O.T. Line in 1870, and late the next year the Gulnare arrived with the first load of supplies. The following year a sizeable township developed at the boat landing. The township was regularly serviced by three ships from Darwin, the Omeo, the Larrikeah and the Young Australian. Towards the end of the year as the O.T. Line neared completion, the population of the township was estimated to be three hundred. For a short period of time the township was the largest European population centre in the Northern Territory. The European population of Darwin in 1878 by comparison was less than two hundred and that of the whole of the Northern Territory just over five hundred.

By 1873 most of the O.T. Line construction workers had returned south, but the Ngukurr area never recovered from their presence. It has been amply documented that the pattern of relations between Aborigines and Europeans established by the O.T. Line construction crews was characterised by hostility (Bern 1974, Merlan 1978, and Morphy and Morphy 1981). The region had been opened up, and for the next three decades the government attempted to establish a permanent European presence in the area. When the O.T. Line party left Roper Bar, a small community of Europeans continued to live in the area. A store was built to service the 'overlanders' from Queensland, who were mostly drovers, prospectors and outlaws. Before the establishment of a police station<sup>107</sup> in the district in 1885, Roper Bar had become a 'sanctuary' for the lawless. The hostility between Europeans and Aborigines very quickly turned into savage violence and by the turn of the century had caused extensive and irreparable damage to Aboriginal life and social organization in the area.

Throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s the Roper River valley served as the stock route for the tens of thousands of Queensland cattle which were being driven to the developing north. In 1884 alone it was estimated that 20,000 cattle were in transit along the route. The pattern of relations set by the O.T. Line party continued throughout this period, with Aborigines harassing the drovers and killing the cattle, and with Europeans responding with punitive expeditions. During this time several cattle stations were established in the area, and the township of Urapunga gazetted, although never taken up.

By 1890 the situation was beginning to stabilize. Many Aborigines had been killed during the previous two decades and others had retreated into areas in Arnhem Land where Europeans had not penetrated. Some of the Aborigines, however, had been 'pacified' and remained in the area. They had come to recognize the superiority of European weapons and began to accommodate to the European presence, with the few permanent settlers in the district beginning to 'employ' them.

This relatively peaceful state of coexistence, however, was shattered by the large cattle syndicate, the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company. This company leased the entire eastern half of Arnhem Land comprising some 50,000 square kilometres, and purchased Elsey and Hodgson Downs stations as well as Wologorang Station further south, thus taking in virtually all of the country belonging to the seven major tribes of Ngukurr. In 1903 the company engaged in what has been described as "probably one of the few authenticated instances in which Aborigines were systematically hunted" (Bauer 1964:157) and without doubt "the most systematic extermination of Aborigines ever carried out on the Roper" (Merlan 1978:87). For a time the company employed two

gangs of ten to fourteen Aborigines headed by a European or a part-European to hunt and shoot 'wild blacks' on sight. The company went into liquidation in 1908, the year that CMS established its mission station on the Roper River.

It was in this environment that the process of creolization, which resulted in the development of Kriol, first appears to have taken place. The development and spread of Kriol appears to have been encouraged by the disruption of Aboriginal residence patterns and the reduction of the Aboriginal population consequent on European occupation and development of the region. Some of the language groups became too small to be viable, while the speakers of others became dispersed over a wide area. As a result, the communities which developed around the cattle stations consisted of speakers of several different languages, with Kriol developing as the lingua franca for daily interaction in this multilingual situation. Within a decade of the turn of the century, Kriol was the main language used by school children at Roper River Mission for talking among themselves (Harris 1984).

### Old Mission

The second period in the history of the Ngukurr area began with the establishment of the Roper River Mission in August 1908. The mission station was located about six kilometres down river from the present community of Ngukurr. It was destroyed by floods during the wet season of 1939/40 and a new mission station built on the site of the present community. The original mission station and the events associated with it are known as "Old Mission" by the residents of Ngukurr, and the older generation now living at Ngukurr who grew up at Old Mission are referred to as the "Old Mission Mob". This phase of the history of Ngukurr will thus be referred to as 'Old Mission'.

Old Mission was established in the midst of the stage of neglect when Anglo-Australians were supposedly trying to 'smooth the dying pillow' of the dispossessed original Australians. CMS decided to commence mission work among Arnhem Land Aborigines as a result of an appeal by the Bishop of North Queensland to the Australian Church Congress in Melbourne in 1906:

A previous speaker at this Congress has said that the "British were put by God into Australia to preach the Gospel to the heathen". I have never heard a more complete condemnation of the stewardship of the Australian people. We have developed the country, and we have civilised it, but we have certainly done very little to preach the Gospel to the people we have dispossessed. The blacks have been shot and poisoned while they were wild and dangerous. They are now left to kill themselves with white vices where they have been "tamed"... but very few have received at our hands either justice or consideration (quoted in Cole [1968]:5).

The prime motives for establishing Old Mission were humanitarian and evangelical. From the beginning the mission was to have industrial and agricultural as well as educational and spiritual concerns (Cole [1968]:5). Almost immediately a school and dispensary were started, followed a short time later by agricultural and stock work.

The original party<sup>108</sup> that arrived on the banks of the Roper River to start Old Mission consisted of three missionaries sent from Victoria and

three Aboriginal assistants picked up at Yarrabah Mission in Queensland. One of the Aborigines, James Noble, had previously helped start a mission at Mitchell River [Kowanyama] in Queensland and would later help start a mission at Forrest River [Oombulgurri] in Western Australia (Higgins 1981). The Old Mission Mob usually give James Noble the credit for having started Old Mission rather than the Rev. F.L.G. Huthnance, the missionary in charge of the party.

When the missionaries arrived on the Roper in 1908, Kriol, at least as a pidgin, was well established in the area (Harris 1984). The leader of the first Aborigines to come and take up residence at Old Mission was able to speak Kriol (Huthnance 1909a). He had worked as a deck hand on the boats which plied the Roper River, and it is possible that he had learnt Kriol, or at least improved his proficiency in speaking it, from doing so. Some of the Old Mission Mob, however, credit James Noble with having brought Kriol with him from Queensland and introducing it to Old Mission. Noble was born near Normanton in 1876. He moved to New South Wales in the late 1880s and from there to Yarrabah in 1896 (Higgins 1981). An Aboriginal English which possibly developed from a Queensland pidgin of the last century (Sharpe 1974a:20) is currently spoken at Yarrabah, so it is possible that Noble arrived on the Roper River with the ability to speak the pidgin of the outback at that time.

As soon as Old Mission was established, many Aborigines moved there from the area round about. Just over a year after its establishment, Huthnance (1909b:8) reported that at the time there were over two hundred Aborigines at the mission, with an average of seventy being there regularly. As a result, the mission staff was able to conduct a school for the children, hold a daily class for adults, and frequently gather the people together for services.

The Aboriginal population fluctuated as Aborigines moved to and from Old Mission unpredictably. The average population of Old Mission, however, remained fairly constant throughout its thirty year history, slowly rising from seventy to a hundred by the early 1940s.

A significant feature of the demography of Old Mission is that in spite of the marked fluctuation in population, there was a small number of Aborigines who lived more or less permanently at Old Mission almost from the time it was established. Some of these were important traditional men. All of them worked closely with the missionaries and were deeply influenced by them. The Old Mission Mob are the remnants of this group, and the descendants of this group form the core group that plays an important role in contemporary Ngukurr society (Bern 1974). The oldest positively identified mother tongue speakers of Kriol are the first generation of the Old Mission Mob children who grew up at the mission station.

Aborigines were attracted to Old Mission for a variety of reasons. By the time Old Mission was established, Aboriginal society in the Roper region was so disrupted that the Aborigines could be considered to have been detribalized. Such a state of social disorganization prompted them to move to Old Mission (Thiele 1982:9). Some of them evidently used Old Mission as a refuge from the violence of the settlers (Bern 1974:80), while others came because they had relatives there or because they sought European food and goods (Thiele 1982:9). In addition, CMS made efforts to attract and settle Aborigines through institutionalization (Cole 1977:182).

Old Mission had a history of staffing difficulties. There were never more than a handful of missionaries in residence at any one time, and most missionaries remained for only a few years, although there were some exceptions. By 1911, for example, the staff had increased to five, but there was only one member left of the original party, R.D. Joynt,<sup>109</sup> who remained for twenty years. Similarly, Rev. H.E. Warren, who arrived in 1913, remained for eighteen years, and Miss E.I.M. Dove remained for twenty-two years.

Old Mission work was extended in 1921 by the establishment of a mission station on Groote Eylandt, and in 1925 at Oenpelli. The mission on Groote Eylandt was established for Roper children of mixed descent in order to segregate them from "unprincipled whites on the mainland, who frequently tried to lure the girls away from the Mission" (Cole 1971:178). The Groote Eylandt mission operated as such until 1933 when the children were transferred back to Old Mission and the work then directed towards the Groote Eylandters themselves. The mission work at Oenpelli was started at the request by the Commonwealth Government that CMS take over an already established pastoral project.

Due in large part to staffing problems, consideration was given to closing down Old Mission in the late 1920s. It was finally decided to continue the mission, however, because the land would probably have been leased by the government to pastoralists "which would mean the beginning of the end of the blacks in that district" (Cole [1968]:12). Shortly afterwards Keith Langford-Smith,<sup>110</sup> the 'Sky Pilot' who was the first to use an aeroplane in the area, arrived to work at Old Mission.

The attitude of missionaries towards Aboriginal culture and the use of Aboriginal languages, and Kriol in particular, varied. CMS missionaries are reputed to have adopted a rigid policy from the start, with Aboriginal culture being negatively valued and the Aborigines encouraged to model their behaviour in all respects fundamentally on that of the missionaries: "they could not change their physical appearance, but they could, and should, change all the rest" (Berndt 1961:23). The degree to which this was true, however, depended on the particular missionaries in question. Langford-Smith, for example, one of the more advanced-thinking early CMS missionaries, wrote<sup>111</sup> in 1932 that he believed three things were absolutely essential to the mission: "(1) A knowledge of the native language (2) A knowledge of his [the Aboriginal's] laws and customs (3) A knowledge of his beliefs, myths, which forms the psychological background which is very real to him."

A new mission constitution and policy, which was accepted in 1944 and in effect until 1962, stated<sup>112</sup> that "all Missionaries shall, in general, study a suitable native language, and native social customs and laws, for it is an essential part of the policy of the Society that the natives shall not be cut off from their own tribal life... Great care must be taken not to adopt a merely negative attitude to things the missionary regards as evil."

This policy was re-emphasized in 1954 when a letter was circularized which stated in part that "the missionaries (should) be informed that the Federal Council expects them to spend time in language study".<sup>113</sup> In practice, however, the policy of studying language and culture was not always carried out, in part due to "busyness and a negative attitude".<sup>114</sup>

In the early 1930s when Langford-Smith first arrived, Kriol was used by some of the missionaries. He commented<sup>115</sup> that "most of the white men



spoke pidgin [Kriol], which we picked up from the natives". He also noted that "all instruction was done in English or pidgin [Kriol]", and that "many of [the Aborigines] were obviously unable to grasp the meaning of the English [church] service" (1935:59,57 respectively). In the late 1930s the General Secretary of CMS visited Old Mission, became aware of the communication problem, and advocated the introduction of simpler services and simpler versions of the Bible for both public and private use (Cole [1968]:18).

Some of the missionaries, however, did not look favourably upon Kriol and disciplined those who used it.<sup>116</sup> Others, while also disapproving of Kriol, found that it was necessary to use it if communication was to take place. The minister at the mission during the early 1940s, for example, admitted that while he was against the use of Kriol he found he had to use it in order to communicate.<sup>117</sup>

The official mission policy in 1944 stated<sup>118</sup> that "the use of pidgin English [Kriol] shall be discouraged, and in any region where it is impracticable to base educational work on the use of any one native dialect, English shall be used, and the native trained as far as possible to speak correct English."

It should be pointed out that this policy was in essence simply a reflection of the general milieu at the time. It was generally being advocated that "protectors and missionaries need to know Aboriginal languages... [but] Pidjin-English is quite unsatisfactory..." for it is simply "English perverted and mangled... ridiculous gibberish... childish babbling..." that "is useless for the conveying of any but the most concrete of directions..." (Elkin n.d.:2, Strehlow 1947:xviii, and Elkin 1974[1938]:65 respectively). The language policy of the mission as a whole was much more favorable towards Aboriginal languages than was that of the government, which at that time was one of outright hostility directed towards the complete suppression and eradication not only of pidgin, but even of traditional Aboriginal languages (Wurm 1971b:1034).

Traditional Aboriginal languages were still in active use at Old Mission.<sup>119</sup> In the 1940s there was such a significant number of Nunggubuyu speakers that the minister set about learning the language and translated several books of the Bible into it. These were published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. There was also an influx during the 1940s of Ritharrngu and Balamumu people from northeast Arnhem Land, although a few years later the Balamumu along with the Nunggubuyu people moved out to the newly established mission at Numbulwar.

Old Mission was operated on a pattern similar to that adopted by Europeans on many other remote Aboriginal settlements (Theile 1982:10). One of the main aspects of this was a focus on promoting change on the level of the individual, a strategy put forth in the Bleakley Report of 1929. In discussing this report, Rowley (1972b:330) notes that "the document provided that individual Aborigines would move from Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal society", learning and earning their civil rights in some manner not altogether clearly defined in the document.

Cole ([1968]:28) tries to excuse the lack of attention given by missionaries to the promotion of change at a level other than the individual, by pointing out that sociological development was not the primary aim of CMS. Many missionaries, unfortunately, were not even aware of the social changes which they were inadvertently promoting: "While it was obvious that acculturation was taking place at the material level, the deeper implications of settled life on the social

patterns of the Aborigines were not apparent to the Anglican missionaries working in Arnhem Land" (Cole 1977:192).

Prior to the 1950s the missionaries at Roper River Mission kept strict control over all 'modern' activities at the mission (Thiele 1982:11). The Aborigines had no official say in modern sector affairs and little unofficial influence. In the history of the so-called development of the north, Europeans have always been dominant and Aborigines made to feel inferior and not free to voice their opinions or take action on issues. Missionary domination at Old Mission was, however, tempered by benevolence, paternalism and the logistical, financial and staffing problems associated with managing a remote settlement. Old Mission was understaffed, underprovisioned and underequipped, with the staff arguing strongly and often amongst themselves. Nevertheless, they had a very strong impact on the Aborigines, especially the Old Mission Mob and their descendants.

### World War Two

The history of the Roper River Mission itself can be divided into two parts, one before the 1950s and one after (Thiele 1982:10). The break between the two, although not abrupt, is very clear. As was mentioned earlier, the original mission station was destroyed in the 1939/40 wet season and rebuilt at a new location. The move to a new location was followed by World War Two, during which mission staff was minimal and normal mission life interrupted. Unlike the interruption of World War One, that of World War Two completely changed CMS activity in Arnhem Land (Cole 1971:180). Life at Roper River Mission never settled back to what it had been.

The interruption of World War Two appears to have had several significant effects on social interaction which had an impact on Kriol.<sup>120</sup> To begin with, the war brought an influx of Europeans into the north greater than ever before, with some 100,000 military personnel coming to the Northern Territory during the war. It was thought that the Japanese would try to isolate the Top End of the Northern Territory by coming up the Roper River and cutting off the Stuart Highway around Mataranka. In anticipation of this, thousands of servicemen were stationed throughout the region, manning lookout points all along the river. Children of mixed descent were evacuated to New South Wales and the mission operated with a skeleton staff (Cole 1979:109). Hundreds of Aborigines were 'employed' around the service camps, many acting as guides for scouting parties and some serving on boats patrolling the waterways.

In addition, a number of special compounds were established by the Army along the Stuart Highway and Aborigines encouraged to 'settle' in them. The focus of these compounds "was overwhelmingly on Army employment, Army rations, Army control as such", with the Aborigines sharing in the routine work of the compound by taking their place in the roster of duties as ordinary members of it (Berndt (1961:19). Many of the Aborigines became trapped into such compounds because of the opportunities they offered for obtaining the European goods to which they had become accustomed. The compounds were established only 'for the duration', but when they were disbanded, most of the Aborigines did not return permanently to their traditional country (Berndt 1961:20).

One of the main effects of the sudden influx of thousands of Europeans was the massive increase in the closeness of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal

contact and the number of Aborigines personally involved in such contact. Before the war, older people were still actively using traditional languages. Traditional languages, however, were of no use for Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal communication, nor was English effective except for a minority of cases. Kriol, which existed throughout much of the region as a lingua franca, therefore functioned as a medium of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal communication.

Not only did Kriol, however, serve for Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal communication in the new situation, but also for Aboriginal-Aboriginal communication. The compounds were meeting grounds for Aborigines from a diversity of languages and localities. The population of the compounds "covered almost the whole gamut of contact experience, from old Darwin hands and jaded cattle station sophisticates to people associating with Europeans for the first time" (Berndt 1961:20). This situation encouraged the use of Kriol and provided a major impetus for creolization. As was mentioned in chapter two, creolization in the Barunga region appears to have begun with, and primarily as a result of, the establishment of the war compound out of which it developed. In some families at Barunga, the offspring born before the war were born in the bush and speak a traditional language as their mother tongue and Kriol as a second language. Their younger siblings who were born at the compound or settlement that developed from it speak Kriol as their mother tongue.

Another significant effect of the war was that it gave Aborigines a freedom of movement which had never before existed. Relatively few Aborigines moved outside their traditional country before the war. In many respects, the war forced them to travel through strange country and helped many overcome their fear of moving outside familiar regions. The compounds encouraged many Aborigines to make the social adjustments to a new set of relations with members of other tribes, whose languages and customs may have seemed entirely strange, as well as with non-Aboriginal people, on their first step in their journey away from their home area (Berndt 1961:20).

The new freedom of movement brought about by the war enabled many Aborigines to enter into cattle droving. After the war, for example, many Ngukurr Aborigines spent months away from their own country on droving trips, travelling east across the Barkly Tablelands deep into Queensland, or south to the railhead at Alice Springs, or west across the Northern Territory to the meatworks at Wyndham. Such droving continued throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s until roads were opened up and modern transport made droving uneconomical. Extensive droving may account for the knowledge of Kriol by some older Aborigines in communities well outside the Kriol language area, for several such Aborigines have said that they learnt Kriol when they had been 'up north' droving (Sharpe and Sandefur 1976, Sandefur et al 1982, Sharpe 1983 and Glasgow 1984).

It appears, then, that the influx of people during the war accelerated the use of Kriol, and the establishment of new compounds and collections of Aborigines from a variety of language backgrounds brought about additional creolization. The freedom of mobility and movement that the war brought stimulated the convergence of numerous varieties of pidgin and Kriol and increased the amount of inter-Aboriginal group communication that was dependent upon Kriol as a lingua franca. The effects of the war were not limited to the Roper River region but affected virtually the whole of North Australia as evidenced by the fact mentioned in chapter two that relatively few Aborigines born after the war can fluently speak a traditional language.

A number of factors combined to bring about extensive changes in Roper River Mission around the middle of the present century. In addition to the relocation in 1940 due to the destruction of Old Mission by floods and the interruption and changes brought about by World War Two, there was a complete changeover in staff. By the early 1950s the break with Old Mission was complete. The Aboriginal residents of Ngukurr today generally refer to the pre-war days as Old Mission time, and the 1950s and 1960s up until the mission was turned over to the government as the CMS time. This phase of the history of Ngukurr will thus be referred to as 'CMS'.

The new government assimilation policy and welfare system provided the major impetus for a change in mission policy during the CMS time. In 1947 Professor A.P. Elkin was instrumental in calling a conference of representatives of the various missions in the Northern Territory at which he urged them to help implement the new government plan for the assimilation of Aborigines into the Anglo-Australian way of life. The missions were encouraged to provide work for the Aborigines, pay wages and open shops so they could learn to run their own lives and their own communities within the framework of the missions. The government made promises of larger grants for capital buildings and approved personnel to help the missions carry out such programs.

CMS had few hesitations in backing the government's new approach (Cole [1968]:22-23). As a consequence of these initiatives, the staff at Ngukurr increased, a building program was instituted and CMS concentrated on educating and training Aborigines. By the mid-1950s a shop had been opened, electricity and water were reticulated to the homes of Aborigines and motion pictures were being regularly shown. In 1951 CMS began paying pocket money to Aboriginal workers and over the next few years Ngukurr began to operate on a cash economy, with Aboriginal workers being paid full wages by the end of the 1950s.

The change in government policy, however, had little effect on the overall management of the missions in that the staff continued to see their role as primarily regulatory and retained their paternal orientation (Bern 1974:213). They initiated and managed all modern institutional activities and rewarded or sanctioned Aboriginal behaviour in regard to them (Thiele 1982). CMS could not have easily withdrawn from its position of authority and domination in the community because the Aborigines had become dependent upon mission staff and could not readily have filled the managerial role themselves. Many Aborigines accepted this role of CMS as legitimate and turned to CMS to solve many of the mundane problems they faced in their day-to-day lives on the mission. The Aborigines could, it appears, do little to prevent their domination by CMS in the mission environment, for they not only came from a diversity of tribal backgrounds but their societies and authority structures, as discussed earlier, had been greatly disrupted by European settlement prior to their taking up residence at Ngukurr.

One of the effects the assimilation policy had was to influence Aborigines to stay permanently at Ngukurr. By the late 1950s most had become used to settlement life and had come to see many features of it as desirable, even necessary. About 1955, for the first time, the majority of the Aborigines decided to stay at Ngukurr even over the dry season, primarily as a direct result of having grown their own gardens. In the words of the CMS Superintendent<sup>121</sup> at that time, the Aborigines were "trapped": "When they became more and more involved, they found out

they had lost their freedom because there was responsibility they hadn't reckoned on." This 'entrapment' had not been overtly planned.

By the late 1950s the average resident population had risen to 250. The Aborigines had become permanent settlement dwellers unable to move easily back to a traditional way of life. This permanency resulted in a strengthening of the European-oriented activities and beliefs of the Aborigines that had been slowly developing at Ngukurr since 1908 (Theile 1982:12).

The 1960s brought a number of changes which affected the structure and administration of Ngukurr. In 1960 the government started paying social service benefits to Aborigines living on missions and government settlements. However, only a small part of such benefits was actually paid directly to the Aborigines, with the rest going to the mission or government settlement that had the Aborigines under their care. Around 1964 CMS took this a step further and pioneered a new 'experiment'. Some of the social service and welfare benefits and allowances were paid in toto directly to the Aborigines. This was undertaken to encourage the people to assume greater responsibility for their own well-being.

That same year CMS began planning to hand over control of the settlement to the government. CMS wanted to concentrate its resources on pastoral, evangelistic and educational work, with the government having the responsibilities of civil administration and "political and industrial assimilation".<sup>122</sup> The decision to hand over to the government was made primarily because of the increasing difficulty in financing the operational activities of the settlement,<sup>123</sup> brought about in part by having the social service payments going directly to the Aborigines instead of CMS. Such financial difficulties were not unique to the CMS mission at Ngukurr. About the same time as the Ngukurr handover took place, the CMS mission at Umbakumba and Anglican missions at Forrest River, Lockhart River, Edward River and Mitchell River were also handed over.

The sixty-year period of the Church Missionary Society's control had produced profound social changes. By the end of this period the Aborigines at Ngukurr were European-oriented in many ways, yet at the same time they also vigorously retained many traditional social practices and beliefs (Theile 1982:12).

### Government Control

Almost a decade before CMS pulled out of Ngukurr, an attempt to help the Aborigines take control of their own affairs was begun. This attempt was primarily through the establishment of a 'station' council.<sup>124</sup> The council was formally established by CMS in 1962, primarily at the request of the late Silas Roberts, one of the younger members of the Old Mission Mob and later to be a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal.

The station council, which later served as a model to the government when establishing councils at other communities, functioned as a consultative and administrative body for the running and development of the internal affairs of the settlement. It had sixteen members, consisting of the settlement superintendent as the chairman, seven people who were heads of departments, and an equal number of Aborigines elected by the Aboriginal population of the settlement. The agenda of meetings was made known so the Aboriginal members could talk to the other Aborigines about issues, and as a result when they came to the

council meeting they usually had their decisions already made according to what the elders in the village had said. Elders were never elected to the council, in part because to be elected implied calling into question the authority they already possessed. Initially the council was composed of eight Europeans and eight Aborigines, but as Aborigines became heads of departments their number increased against the Europeans. This resulted in an automatic phasing of control to Aborigines.

Bern (1977:109) claims that the superintendent, as chairman, determined the structure and course of council meetings, and that the council was not competent to make decisions affecting the organization of the settlement, being limited to making requests to the superintendent and through him to the government. This claim, however, is only partially correct. The council was involved in the total running of the community and was granted much responsibility by the superintendent.

There were three main factors which prevented the council from successfully achieving full autonomy and authority as envisaged by CMS:

Firstly, as the council was a new concept, it took some time for councillors to grasp their role and begin to function. Few Aborigines had a good grasp of the various operational aspects necessary for the running of modern social institutions. None of them, for example, had more than an elementary understanding of the principles of European economics, accounting procedures or business management practices (Thiele 1982:16).

Secondly, the Aborigines had developed no settlement-wide authority structures capable of running the modern activities of the community. This was not a situation that was unique to Ngukurr. Aborigines throughout North Australia have had difficulties in taking control of settlement affairs because of a lack of decision-making authority structures. Some writers argue that Aboriginal decision-making structures were destroyed, while others argue that these structures were not likely to have existed in the first place (Thiele 1982:18). Either way, it is clear that the formation of settlements meant trying to unify heterogeneous and accidental collections of people who usually felt no reciprocal obligations to each other (Stanner 1969:46). This was certainly the case at Ngukurr during the CMS time, for up to twenty-five different groups of Aborigines were represented among a population of only three hundred. There was little cooperation between many of those groups and the chairman had to impose a certain amount of authority on the council and community in order to keep the settlement functioning.

Thirdly, the community had no self-generated finances and was totally dependent upon government funds. The council was unable to administer the funds as they desired because of government restrictions and controls, and as was noted earlier, CMS ultimately had to turn over control of the community to the government because of the lack of funds.

The failure of the council to develop into a self-governing body, in many respects, was due to historical circumstances. Thiele (1982:16) argues that it failed in part because CMS established the council too late, having opposed or neglected similar moves in the past and having deeply entrenched its own dominating and dogmatic management role in Ngukurr affairs.

Leske,<sup>125</sup> on the other hand, maintains that the council could have become self-governing in a few years if CMS had not had to pull out due to lack of finances. When the handover took place, it was reported that

Peter Nixon, the then Minister for the Interior, recognized the freedom the Ngukurr people had developed under CMS direction and said that the Ngukurr people should govern themselves. Unfortunately, however, the government ordinance on settlement regulations made no provision for self-government. The government officers who took control of Ngukurr had to abide by the existing government regulations which did not allow the council to continue developing in the direction it had been heading.

Finally, in October 1968, control of the settlement was turned over to the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration. Unlike CMS, which had had some sixty years experience in running settlements, the government had only had twenty years experience. The government was impersonal and, unlike CMS, was unable to develop a framework built on personal relations. This was partly due to the high turnover in government staff that is typical on Aboriginal settlements. This high turnover also prevented the continuity and stability in government settlements that was relatively characteristic of the church institutions.

What the Aboriginal residents of Ngukurr thought about the settlement handover is not exactly clear. On the one hand, Thiele (1982:24-25) claims that the Aborigines looked forward to government control, for they believed that it would lead to a considerable improvement in their living conditions in terms of jobs, housing and general facilities. On the other hand, Downing (1971:78) claims that the people spoke out very strongly against government control and requested government financing to enable CMS to continue administering the settlement.

In either case, the government assumed control of the settlement and the Aboriginal residents found themselves dealing with an ill-prepared, and at times reluctant, remote government bureaucracy whose Ngukurr representatives tended to only stay for short periods of time. For a variety of reasons, the government did not begin organizing staff, finance and other resources until after it took control. As a result, Ngukurr remained in a state of disorganization for several years after the handover.

In addition, about the time of the settlement handover, government policy had begun to swing away from enforced assimilation. When the handover took place, the Aborigines were expecting the government to act positively and decisively in filling the role CMS had vacated. The government, however, was no longer prepared to take the responsibilities that such action demanded. Government policy was increasingly favouring the handing over of responsibility for settlement affairs to Aborigines, but, at the same time, details for the implementation of such policy had yet to be formulated. As a result, government action on Ngukurr was characterized by vacillation and procrastination.

In response to dissatisfaction with the situation, the Aborigines called a settlement-wide strike in March 1970. This strike is described in detail by Bern (1976).<sup>126</sup> One point Bern fails to mention, according to Thiele (1982:25), is that the Aborigines were officially offered full control of Ngukurr affairs after the strike was over. While most Aborigines at Ngukurr wanted to take full responsibility for settlement affairs, they had no leaders or organizations with the authority or power to respond on behalf of the Aboriginal community as a whole. As a result, they made no response to the offer of local control.

When the Australian Labor Party came to power in 1972, it adopted a policy of self-determination for Aborigines. This resulted in two major

changes at Ngukurr. Over the next few years there was a gradual withdrawal of European staff, both physically and from positions of control. At the same time, a town council, which was essentially a continuation of the CMS station council, began to accumulate both power and authority over the modern institutional affairs of the community. The council took responsibility for many of the positions vacated by Europeans and employed Aborigines to fill them. Europeans who remained worked either directly for the council, filled advisory positions, or worked in the government office at Ngukurr until it was closed. Full official control was not taken until the Commonwealth Government passed the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 which enabled councils to become legal entities which could act on behalf of the communities and receive government grants and loans.

The Labor Government also reorganized the Northern Territory Welfare Branch that had taken over control of Ngukurr from CMS, and control of Ngukurr then came under the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs [colloquially and hereafter referred to as DAA]. The administration of the Welfare Branch had been very stable, largely due to the fact that the Director, Harry C. Giese, had been in that post for almost twenty years. He regularly visited Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory and personally knew thousands of Aborigines from those communities. DAA was unable to duplicate that stability.

When the Commonwealth Government took over control of Ngukurr, a government administrator was placed in charge of running the community and the council virtually ceased to function. Shortly after the takeover, the new government policies were implemented and the DAA administrator changed roles to become the community advisor. It was to be several years, however, before the change of roles in relation to the council was worked out in practice. The process was hindered to a large degree by a very high turnover of DAA advisors at Ngukurr during the first few years of DAA control, with the new advisor coming in often having different views from those of his predecessor.

The DAA years were characterized, not only by a lack of continuity and stability, but also by a move towards 'departmentalization'. Under the Northern Territory Welfare Branch the Aboriginal community had to deal directly with only one government entity. Under the new Commonwealth rule, however, each department handled its own work. In some situations this resulted in lack of co-ordination and efficiency.

At Ngukurr this departmentalization resulted at one stage in the DAA officer in charge preventing equipment and personnel of one department from being used by another department. The lack of co-ordination reached its peak when a DAA-funded council groundsman was no longer allowed to work at the clinic, and the shop was no longer allowed to use the DAA boat to cart supplies in during the wet season. The shop, in turn, sold its boat motor, which resulted in the DAA boat being left to deteriorate as DAA had no motor with which to operate it. Departmentalization is still in effect, with the town council currently having to deal with more than a dozen separate government entities on behalf of the community.

When the Labor Government came to power, it began a substantial construction program at Ngukurr. Over the next few years an administration block, a sixteen bed clinic, four new school classrooms, a new shop, a new airstrip, sewerage works, a new water reticulation system, a new power house, and a number of houses and a block of flats



were constructed. This resulted, however, in an influx of Europeans, with much of the new housing being for them. At one stage the European population was over eighty, although many of these Europeans were temporary workers on construction contracts.

The town council gradually increased its control over settlement affairs and resources and by the second half of the 1970s had become the official ruling body of the settlement. The council by that time was all Aboriginal in composition, with the president functioning as both chairman of the council and superintendent of the settlement. Although all members, including the president, are elected by the Aboriginal residents of the community, the constitution requires that each of the seven major tribal groups have a representative on the council.

In some respects, the council is not a very strong organization because of sectional interests and alliances, but it has the basic support of the "Ngukurr Aboriginal society" (Thiele 1982:25). The Aborigines of Ngukurr have developed a strong sense of "Ngukurrness", a community consciousness which has arisen mainly from their shared experiences of life in the settlement and a sense of Aboriginal identity in opposition to European domination. In spite of the lack of a unified decision-making authority structure in the past, this growing feeling of Ngukurrness has resulted in many residents accepting the fact that the council is the only organization capable of controlling the modern institutional activities of Ngukurr on behalf of the community as a whole.

#### FOUR MODERN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AT NGUKURR

Virtually all modern social institutions in Aboriginal communities have their origins in European institutions which were initially 'imposed' upon them. Aborigines were not a settlement society which had to confront a new European social system. Rather, it was individuals who faced change as they became involved in modern settlement activities under the total control of Europeans. As the contribution of their traditional economic activities declined, they became more and more dependent on the modern activities, eventually becoming economically, as well as culturally and socially, locked into the modern settlement economy. To survive, Aborigines could not avoid prolonged and regular participation in that economy. As a result, new patterns of intra-Aboriginal and Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations were gradually institutionalized as they became a part of the Aborigines' daily routine and method of earning a living (Thiele 1982:13-14).

These new patterns of social interaction are often opposed to traditional patterns. In some cases the Aborigines have been forced or cajoled into participating in the modern activities which in time became an institutionalized part of their normal day-to-day existence; but in many instances they willingly entered into these non-traditional activities in order to obtain, maintain or develop a position of power in relation to other Aborigines. They began, in many cases, to relate to each other on the basis of their new roles in the modern activities, rather than in ways in accordance with traditional kinship structures.

These new patterns of relations, however, were generally only followed in the European-dominated modern activities. As long as a European was present and in direct control, the Aborigines could interact with each other in non-traditional ways. In the absence of such a European, the sharpness of the dichotomy between the two sets of relations was

characteristically blunted, with traditionally expected behaviour towards one's relations overriding and weakening the behaviour 'required' by Europeans of the Aborigines functioning in a modern role. In time, a number of the European social institutions have become legitimized, with many of the modern activities having become, at least partially, Aboriginal. In response to these modern Aboriginal activities, new patterns of Aboriginal relations, which are neither fully European nor traditional but which allow acceptable participation in Aboriginal-dominated modern activities, are becoming institutionalized.

The current generation is the fifth growing up at Ngukurr.<sup>127</sup> Its lifestyle is now structured in large part by the modern social institutions that were established, structured and administered by Europeans.

Originally, the Aboriginal population formed a community within the settlement, which was known colloquially as 'the village'. The settlement administration had little direct interference with the organization of the village. The village was relatively free to organize its internal activities as long as they did not conflict with Australian laws, government ameliorative efforts, or the economic organization of the settlement.

As in other settlements (Jernudd 1971:18), English was the exclusive European-interaction norm. In the early 1970s most modern social functions at Ngukurr demanded the use of English, although individual abilities in speaking English varied widely.

Rapid changes have taken place, however, during the last decade in the sociopolitical and administrative structure of most modern social institutions at Ngukurr. The local administration of some of the major institutions has been handed over to the Aborigines: the church by default in 1972 when the European minister went on leave and officially the following year when the Anglican Church ordained the Aboriginal lay leader; the town council in 1973 when the Ngukurr Township Association was incorporated, but in practice a few years later when the DAA 'administrator' was withdrawn and the president began fully functioning as chief administrator; and the school in 1978 when the Northern Territory Department of Education appointed an Aboriginal principal after protracted negotiations with the community.

These changes have resulted in a lessening of the distinction between village and settlement. Physically this is indicated by the movement of part of the Aboriginal community out of the village into housing in the previously European-only section of the settlement. Politically many residents of the village who previously had little influence upon the running of the settlement are now actively involved in setting and carrying out community policy.

These changes have had two significant effects on the use of language. Firstly, the language which used to be confined primarily to the village [i.e. Kriol] has now been taken into virtually all levels of settlement administration. Secondly, issues which were previously considered to be mainly of European interest and thus discussed in English, are now interpreted to be of Aboriginal interest and discussed in Kriol.

This does not mean, however, that Kriol has totally taken the place of English throughout Ngukurr. Some of the modern social institutions, such as the clinic, are still under ultimate control of a local European

administrator. Even though the administrator<sup>128</sup> may respect the fact that English is not an effective medium of communication with a large percentage of the Aboriginal population at Ngukurr and may encourage the use of Kriol by the Aboriginal staff, the mere presence of a non-Kriol-speaking European in an administrative position commands the use of English.

Even those institutions which have been handed over to local Aboriginal control are not independent of European interlocutors and the resultant pressure to use English. All of the major institutions have Europeans involved at various levels of local administration:<sup>129</sup> the town council normally employs several Europeans who function as supervisors in the mechanics' workshop, on housing projects, with bookkeeping and other special projects; the school has a European local education advisor to assist the Aboriginal principal as well as two European primary advisory teachers and a European adult educator; the church has been informally assisted with 'paper work' by a local European while CMS<sup>130</sup> tries to recruit a permanent assistant to the Aboriginal minister.<sup>131</sup>

The pressure to use English exerted by these semi-transient European residents varies, with the attitude of the individual European being the main determinant. On the one extreme are several Europeans who are actively learning Kriol. English is seldom used by Aborigines in communicating with them, even in formal situations. For example, at a formal tea given by the town council for the visiting Northern Territory Government Administrator, Commodore Johnston, comments to one such European<sup>132</sup> were made by Aborigines in Kriol, even within hearing of the Administrator. On the other extreme are Europeans who denigrate Kriol and ridicule those who speak it. In the presence of such Europeans, Kriol is very seldom used. Kriol speakers who cannot speak English refrain if at all possible from speaking to such Europeans.

Another source of potential pressure for the use of English comes from Europeans outside the community. Government control has become less direct, but it has not disappeared altogether, for the government maintains indirect control through its control of settlement finances. Virtually all funds which the town council itself receives for running Ngukurr come from the Northern Territory Department of Community Development. This department can exercise power over the town council by cutting off funds, although it needs ministerial approval to do so. The school remains under ultimate control of the Northern Territory Department of Education in Darwin. Although allowed the normal freedom of operation of all state schools, standards and procedures of the department have to be adhered to. Similarly, the church, although allowed much freedom in the development of Aboriginal means of expression, remains an Anglican church of the Diocese of the Northern Territory and the Aboriginal minister is bound by his ordination vows and required by the canons and constitution of the church to maintain certain structures.

Such outside control does not in itself exert pressure for the use of English within the community, except in the matter of paperwork and in contact with outside departmental officers who make frequent visits to Ngukurr. With relatively few exceptions, such visits demand the use of English. This is rarely stated overtly as it is understood by Kriol speakers as one of their unstated rules of speech usage. Most Europeans are unaware that their visit calls such a rule into operation.

It must be noted, however, that with the rise in the prestige of Kriol and the use of Kriol cassettes and posters by various government

departments in recent years, even this rule is not being as strictly adhered to as previously. In addition, there is an increasing number of Europeans who visit the community who are aware of Kriol, although their concepts of Kriol and the communication situation may be inaccurate.<sup>133</sup>

### The Ngukurr Town Council

The administrative structural organization of Ngukurr has undergone a number of revisions during the last decade.<sup>134</sup> All local institutions are theoretically under the ultimate control of the town council.<sup>135</sup> In practice, however, some are under town council control, some operate independently, and some are sublet by the council and operate fairly independently. Those in the first group include the outstations, housing association, mechanic workshop and women's club, although the council controls the finance for only the mechanic workshop. The women's club is financed directly from the Northern Territory Department of Community Development, while the outstations and housing association are financed from DAA through the Katherine-based Yulngu Association. The shop has been leased to an outside European entrepreneur, power and water are contracted to a European through the Northern Territory Department of Transport and Works, and a European is employed to run the bank and airlines agencies for the council. The church, the school (including adult education), the police and the clinic operate independently of the town council, although there is liaison between them.

The town council is the largest employer in the community, directly employing up to almost fifty percent of the employed Aboriginal workforce. The council has no means of generating money locally and finances its operations through government grants channelled directly to the council by the Northern Territory Department of Community Development, as mentioned earlier.

Although the council desires to maintain and carry out the modern affairs of the community themselves, there are a number of factors which undermine its ability to do so. One of these factors is an insufficient grasp or a misinterpretation of some of the operational aspects necessary for the running of the modern affairs. Another is the social and cultural dichotomy which exists within the Ngukurr Aboriginal society. Conflict and political power struggles between groups can have a very disruptive effect upon the composition and operation of the council, sometimes resulting in an inability to utilize skills which are available within the community. As a result, to keep the modern affairs of the settlement in operation, the council regularly employs several Europeans who are needed to supply skills, advice and managerial services and to carry out a variety of functions which are necessary but which the Aborigines are unable or unwilling to do themselves.

During the period of government control, the council functions were strongly under the domain of English. At the same time Kriol had very low prestige. The DAA administrator who became the first community advisor openly despised it. The government school is reputed as recently as 1972 to have abandoned a policy of punishing children who were caught speaking it in school.<sup>136</sup> At a community meeting in 1973, the president of the town council, who claimed to have received such punishment as a school boy, publicly decried Kriol and denied that he and his family spoke it.

At the beginning of the Aboriginalization of modern social institutions, English was the language predominantly used at the formal level of

carrying out their functions. Within the chambers of the council hall, Kriol was not to be used. This rule was not necessarily observed between Aboriginal workers, but between Aboriginal worker and European supervisor Kriol was normally not used.

As Aboriginalization has progressed and Aborigines have gained confidence in running their affairs, their feelings of subordination to Europeans has decreased. As Europeans have lost their dominant positions, Aborigines have begun to no longer 'accept' many of the negative social attitudes that have been communicated to them and used to 'keep them in their place'. A few years ago, for example, a comment by the district's Member for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly about "our Aborigines" would have elicited no overt response from Aborigines. In 1981 such a statement in a letter to a European Ngukurr town council employee brought much ridicule upon the M.L.A. and the employee.<sup>137</sup>

The president of the town council mentioned above who had publicly disclaimed anything to do with Kriol, three or four years later was not only beginning to advocate its use in school and saying that non-Aboriginal council employees should learn it, but he was also calling to task some of the Europeans who openly ridiculed the use of Kriol. Several years later he was observed proclaiming the virtues of Kriol and Kriol literacy to Europeans and talking about having the minutes of council meetings kept in Kriol. As far as can be ascertained there were no Europeans directly encouraging the president to do so.

#### The Ngukurr School

Unlike the Ngukurr town council which is a relatively recent innovation, the school at Ngukurr was established shortly after the community itself was established by CMS in 1908 and has functioned continuously since. Although little detail is known about the attitude of teachers toward Kriol in the mission school, it appears that reactions varied.

During the CMS time<sup>138</sup> the use of Kriol was allowed in school, for the only way to communicate with the preschool children was with Kriol. At the same time, however, Kriol was the cause of much confusion. New teachers would come to the superintendent and question why the "rubbish stuff" was being used. They would then ask how they could communicate with the children, and the superintendent would tell them to use the children's language!

The confusion Kriol caused stemmed primarily from a misunderstanding of the nature of the language, a misunderstanding that continues in many circles today. A proper understanding of the nature of the language was obscured in part by the lack of a distinctive name. Because it was referred to as "pidgin English", almost everyone classified it as poor English. Kriol speakers themselves tended to overlook the 'pidgin' and focus upon the 'English', thus generally thinking they were speaking standard English. Europeans, on the other hand, would focus upon the 'pidgin' aspect and generally considered it to be degenerate English. For the teachers, the unresolved problem was how to teach in school and at the same time obviate the problem of the two 'Englises'. This problem continues today in many Aboriginal communities in North Australia, although solutions to the problem have now been proposed as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Commonwealth Government policy during the CMS time was that Aborigines had to learn English and English had to be used in school. In the playground at Ngukurr, however, the children normally used Kriol. In the school, in spite of the government policy, instructions for 'transition' children were often in Kriol. Transition children were the children coming into the school for the first time, whether younger children at the preschool level or older children from the bush at higher levels. The only way of initially communicating with these children was by using Kriol. It was the only language all the children knew, although some of them also knew a traditional language. Because Kriol was not recognized as a separate language, however, most Europeans thought CMS was treating the Aborigines as inferiors and exposing them to ridicule. It was generally thought that all they could speak was a "bastardized" form of English and that they would therefore always be disadvantaged, which in turn would cause further cultural deprivation.

It was not the European teachers who mostly used Kriol with the children, but rather the Aboriginal 'monitors', as teaching assistants were then called. In 1951 the one European teacher in the school was assisted by up to eight monitors, depending on the number of students. The student population in the early 1950s fluctuated from a low of about thirty during the dry season to a hundred during the wet season, and up to 150 if a group of Nunggubuyu people were in residence. The monitors were Aborigines who had been through school and could supervise a class once the European teacher had outlined a particular exercise. Two of the monitors were skilled enough to devise their own curriculum to a degree. One of them, James Japanma, taught in the mission school for over thirty years. At least twice, once in 1941 and again in 1950, he functioned as head teacher when CMS was unable to provide a European teacher. All of the monitors used English in formal lessons but would use Kriol at other times. If the children did not understand the English, however, they would give an explanation in Kriol. They would often do this, not only when they were supervising the lesson, but also when the European teacher was taking the lesson. When the Nunggubuyu people were in residence at Ngukurr, a monitor would do the same for them, but use Nunggubuyu instead of Kriol.

The Commonwealth Government began to take over control and staffing of the school from CMS a few years before the official handover of the settlement. A government headmaster was sent to manage the school with the CMS teachers, who were then replaced with government teachers as they left. At the time of the transfer there were five European teachers and three Aboriginal teaching assistants (Boekel 1980:6). The teaching assistants, however, were apprehensive about the transfer and did not initially come to work.<sup>139</sup>

Prior to the announcement of the Commonwealth Government's bilingual education policy in late 1972, one of the main functions of the school was to teach English language and culture as an aid to assimilation. In such a climate there was no real place for Kriol. It was generally considered to be a pathological form of English which blocked the acquisition of standard English and therefore needed to be eradicated.

Although English was the only language officially approved of and taught at school, it made very few inroads on Kriol in the village. Most of the older generation who went through school at Old Mission are fluent speakers and readers of English. They persist, however, in using Kriol at home, reserving English for use in the European context. The only way in which English is significantly used in the home is through reading. Prior to 1976 there was no literature available in Kriol, and there is

only a very limited amount available today. The relatively few avid readers among the people have had no other recourse than to bring English literature into the village.

The changes in government policies in the early 1970s have resulted, not in more English being brought into the village, but in more Kriol being brought into the school. When the new policies came into effect, there were no qualified Aboriginal teachers in the Northern Territory (Harris 1982:41). Today, however, there are over two dozen and the number is increasing each year.

The new policies have not only resulted in Aborigines becoming teachers, but they have also resulted in Kriol being officially allowed in school. This latter has not been without opposition. At a community meeting at Ngukurr in early 1973 to consider the bilingual education issue, the use of Kriol was opposed by the vast majority of the Aborigines who expressed their opinions. Their desire was to have traditional languages taught to the children. The concept of bilingual education, however, was not clearly understood by most of the Europeans at the meeting, much less by the Aborigines.

Virtually all classroom teaching at Ngukurr in the government school before 1978 was done by Europeans. At that time there were ten European teachers and six Aboriginal teaching assistants, with the latter mostly assisting with menial tasks rather than teaching (Boekel 1980:12). During 1978 the school underwent extensive reorganization following protracted negotiations between the Ngukurr town council and the Northern Territory Department of Education (Boekel 1980). The 'state' school was closed and a 'community' school was established. The community school does not, however, have complete autonomy for it is financially dependent on the Northern Territory Department of Education, and the department has the ultimate power of veto over decisions regarding the school. The Ngukurr town council, speaking on behalf of the community, stipulated that all face-to-face teaching be done by Aboriginal teachers. It also insisted that non-Aboriginal staff be restricted to a maximum of six.

Today the Ngukurr school<sup>140</sup> is unique in the Northern Territory in that virtually all classroom teaching is done by Aborigines (Harris 1982:51). The principal, vice principal and all preschool and primary school teachers are Aborigines. The school has several external outstation 'schools', each with an Aboriginal teacher and no resident Europeans. The non-Aboriginal staff, as pointed out earlier, consists of three advisory teachers and an adult educator.

The changes during the last few years have resulted in Kriol being openly used in school by students and teachers alike, in both informal activities and formal classroom instruction. All curriculum materials are in English and yet most of the teaching is primarily through Kriol. The school does not have an official bilingual program, and this teaching pattern has developed spontaneously (Harris 1982:52).

The use of Kriol and English has not, on the whole, been compartmentalized. There is much switching and mixing of the two codes during lessons. English concepts and words are often explained in Kriol, with instructions and explanations during English reading lessons being in Kriol.

This code-mixing is not limited to schools in Kriol-speaking communities, but affects traditional language communities as well. What

should be done about such code-mixing in the classroom is not clear. Educationists are undecided as to what to think about such code-mixing. On the one hand, they would like to be able to recommend that particular subjects be taught in each language at each year level. On the other hand, they are not sure if that is the right approach, how such decisions should be made, nor if their suggestions would be carried out anyway (Harris 1982:41).

One thing is certain: while the theoretical basis for code-mixing in the classroom and resultant prescriptive measures are being contemplated by educationists, the search for Kriol ways of teaching concepts which have previously always been taught in English are being spontaneously pursued by Kriol-speaking Aboriginal teachers.

### The Ngukurr Clinic

As with the school, medical work was begun at Ngukurr shortly after Old Mission was established. The present medical service is a Northern Territory Department of Health clinic. Until December 1984 the staffing was under the control of CMS. The staff normally includes two European nursing sisters as well as four to six Aboriginal health workers<sup>141</sup> with various levels of training. There is no resident doctor, although the flying doctor pays a regular fortnightly visit. The Aboriginal health workers have the medical skills necessary for running the clinic themselves. Aboriginalization of local control of the clinic, however, has not yet taken place due in part to problems related to the volume of paperwork required and the maintenance of the physical facilities.<sup>142</sup>

The use of Kriol has long been encouraged in the clinic, due primarily to the vital need for effective communication. During the 1950s two Commonwealth Department of Health doctors, Drs. Raymond and Langsford, used Kriol while at Ngukurr.<sup>143</sup> Unlike doctors today who usually fly out for only a day visit, they often stayed for up to a fortnight, thus immersing themselves in the local language situation.

While there has been a fairly regular turnover of part of the staff, the CMS sister-in-charge until January 1982 had been serving at the clinic since 1968. Her close relationship with the people and appreciation for their language situation has been in large measure what set the tone of the clinic for the acceptance and use of Kriol. This local attitude has been supported by the Department of Health in that it has encouraged the use of Aboriginal languages in health education and has helped in the production of materials in Kriol.<sup>144</sup>

The attitudes of the European staff other than that particular sister-in-charge has varied. Some have been positive or neutral towards Kriol, while others have been negative towards it. Aborigines visiting the clinic read such attitudes and respond accordingly. While sitting in the waiting room or talking to an Aboriginal health worker, Kriol is normally used. When one of the European sisters attends a patient, however, English is usually called upon. The same is true with the doctor's visit. The Aboriginal health workers are also prone to switch to English in the presence of Europeans, especially unfamiliar Europeans.

The Aboriginal health workers are continually undergoing further training, some of which is on-site training by the resident sisters, adult educator or visiting doctor. Much of their training, however, consists of short courses in Darwin or Katherine. Either way, the vast



majority of their training is in English. Similar to workers with the council and school, however, the Aboriginal health workers are continually attempting spontaneously to communicate in Kriol the health concepts they learn as part of their training. There is little evidence of an attempt on their part to carry out their medical duties in English, except in the presence of most Europeans.

### The Ngukurr Church

For the first sixty years of its existence, the attitude of the church at Ngukurr towards Kriol was interwoven with that of the school and clinic. All three were under the control and direction of European missionaries until the late 1960s. The official CMS language policy, which was discussed in an earlier section, stated that missionaries were supposed to learn the language of the people.<sup>145</sup> With Kriol the policy was seldom followed through, largely because of the attitude of "What's the sense of learning a pidgin English, and it's only corrupting their English anyway". In spite of this, however, Kriol was often used in relation to the church during the CMS time, just as it had been at Old Mission.

During the 1950s Kriol was generally used in the daily services by different staff in the church. Those who took the time to prepare their lessons in Kriol received a good hearing, whereas everyone else generally did not. Even so, there was a general feeling among Europeans that to use Kriol was 'demeaning' to the Aborigines. Partly because of this, and partly because of the translation which had been done in the early 1940s, CMS initially tried to concentrate on the use of Nunggubuyu. As was noted earlier, however, most of the Nunggubuyu people shifted to the mission at Numbulwar when it was started in 1952. There were several other traditional languages at Ngukurr at that time. In 1954 Gospel Recordings made recordings in some twenty languages, including Kriol. Concerned with communication rather than assimilation, that organization had a high appreciation for all forms of Aboriginal language. That same year, Gerty Huddleston, a local Aboriginal Christian, on her own initiative, translated a passage from the Gospels into Kriol.

During the early 1950s several CMS staff used Kriol in their preaching and teaching in the daily services, having learnt Kriol with the aid of James Japanma. The minister, however, reasoned that the Ritharrngu group could only comprehend Ritharrngu while the others could understand English. As a result, he concentrated on using Ritharrngu instead of Kriol. In the late 1960s a new minister arrived from Sydney. It was openly recognized by then that virtually all of the Aborigines spoke Kriol among themselves, so the new minister, the Rev. D.C. Woodbridge, set about to make himself proficient in the language (Cole [1968]:26). According to Sharpe (1982:44), the people specifically requested Woodbridge to learn Kriol and to preach in it instead of English. With the help of an Aboriginal lay reader, he translated his sermons into Kriol. In the service he preached from the Kriol text, distributing the written English text to those who wanted it as an aid to fostering Bible study and for the benefit of the Europeans in the congregation. Leske,<sup>146</sup> however, who was at Ngukurr throughout most of the 1950s and 1960s, claims that the people had placed no extra demand on this particular minister: "It was generally always implied by the people that they would appreciate things being done in Kriol. It would be much better. It would be more helpful."

CMS had desired for many years to see an 'indigenous ministry' develop at Ngukurr but had not met with success in the early 1950s in persuading anyone to undertake the studies required for ordination (Cole 1971:181). In the mid-1960s one Aboriginal man completed three years of study towards that end, two years at the Aborigines Inland Mission Bible College at Singleton, New South Wales, and a year at Moore Theological College in Sydney (Cole [1968]:27). He became the catechist in charge at Ngukurr in 1966 but for various reasons did not complete his theological training. In 1972 when the European minister went on leave and was unable to return due to health problems, it was decided that Michael Gumbuli, the Aboriginal lay leader of the church, should be ordained. The following year he was ordained and continues to function as the church's minister. The same year the Summer Institute of Linguistics allocated a linguistic fieldworker<sup>147</sup> to Ngukurr to work with the church on translating the Bible into Kriol, and the first complete translated book was published by the Bible Society in 1981.

The church at Ngukurr is an Anglican church. Throughout its history and continuing still today, formal services follow the English prayer book. All hymns are in English, although a few choruses have been translated into Kriol and are often used in informal services. A few select Kriol choruses started occasionally being used in formal services, especially in funeral services, in 1981.

One of the unwritten rules of the church which is seldom broken is that a person who cannot read cannot preach. This possibly stems in part from the fact that all biblical training in the past has been in English. Leading a formal service has always required the use of the prayer book, which requires a knowledge of English and the ability to read. An illiterate person can, however, be in charge of the overall service.

Although evangelization and informal preaching by Aborigines in the past may have been in Kriol, reference to Scripture has always meant reference to English. The result is a constant switching back and forth between English and Kriol. In addition, concepts which have been learnt in English have not always been fully comprehended. The English phraseology learnt with these concepts is often mixed with Kriol in preaching.

When the Aboriginal minister was first ordained at Ngukurr, formal services tended to follow the prayer book very closely. Prayers and songs were all in English, with much of the sermon being in English. Since his ordination several changes have taken (and are still taking) place. Although the opening unwritten prayer twelve years ago was usually in English, the closing unwritten prayer was often in Kriol. Today most unwritten prayers are in Kriol, although it is not uncommon for the initial prayer in a formal service to be started in English and end in Kriol. Prayers at informal prayer meetings used to be mostly English. Today most of the Aboriginal Christians pray predominantly in Kriol.

The preaching of the Aboriginal minister still exhibits much code-switching and code-mixing.<sup>148</sup> This is typical of other Kriol-speaking Aborigines when preaching.<sup>149</sup> Three major trends have, however, been noticed over the last twelve years at Ngukurr. Firstly, there has been a shift away from a predominance of English to a predominance of Kriol. Secondly, the pressure to use English caused by the presence of Europeans in the congregation has steadily been diminishing to such an extent that their presence today often results in no noticeable code-shift. Thirdly, as the Aboriginal minister's

knowledge and understanding of Scripture and biblical concepts have increased, the use of English phraseology to teach these concepts has decreased, being replaced by Kriol expressions.

The Aboriginalization of the church by turning over local control to Aborigines and the resultant spontaneous modernization of Kriol in church-related activities by the Aboriginal minister have influenced speech behaviour of people involved with the church as a whole. Sermons and evangelism by the laity as a whole now tend to be in Kriol. With the assistance of several non-Aboriginal entities<sup>150</sup> and in conjunction with churches in other Kriol-speaking communities, the Ngukurr church is undertaking the translation of Scripture, the creation of songs, the development of Sunday school material and the production of cassettes and video tapes in Kriol.<sup>151</sup> There is also some talk by the Aboriginal Christians at Ngukurr about translating the prayer book so that all services can be in Kriol.

#### SUMMARY OF THE EFFECT OF ABORIGINALIZATION ON KRIOL

It is generally assumed by creolists that there is a unidimensional flow of variation and change in 'creole communities' around the world towards the standard language of the country in which a particular community happens to be located (Rickford 1980:176). The general assumption in North Australia is that Kriol is rapidly and irreversibly moving in the direction of English, with merger being predicted as early as within one and a half generations (Steffensen 1975:4). There are definite pressures on the Kriol continuum system which encourage movement in the direction of English, but as this and the previous chapter have attempted to show, there are also counter-pressures which favour Kriol and encourage its longevity.

The pressures which favour movement in the direction of English are essentially the same pressures which have long favoured movement away from traditional languages. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Anglo-Australians have a long tradition of an English monolingual mentality which they have consistently tried to impose on Aboriginal-Australians. The imposition of this monolingual tradition became institutionalized in the assimilation policies of the post-war period. The resultant Europeanization has meant a decline in language facility for most Aborigines rather than an extension or development of it (Berndt 1961:25). The multilingualism characteristic of older Aborigines is noticeably lacking in younger Aborigines, for the pressure to assimilate encouraged the development of an English-only linguistic competence. Generally speaking, this pressure, when institutionally applied to speakers of traditional languages in much of North Australia, as was discussed in chapter two, resulted in the acquisition of Kriol by those speakers. The pressure was also applied, however, to speakers of this 'bad English' (i.e. Kriol) in an effort to move them closer to 'proper English'.

Many Kriol speakers have responded to that pressure by 'moving up' to speaking so-called 'proper' English, but as was pointed out in chapter two, with relatively few exceptions they have continued to speak Kriol. The European educational establishment at Ngukurr has been teaching English and in English for over seventy years, or in Aboriginal generational terms, for four generations. Many of the Ngukurr people who have been through that educational system can speak and read English, but all of them also continue to speak Kriol in their home environment. The assimilation policies of the 1950s and 1960s have also failed to 'eradicate' Kriol.

Aboriginal-European relations in Australia have always been characterized by separation and European domination. At Ngukurr there was a dichotomy between the village and the settlement, between traditional and modern activities. The village was an Aboriginal domain, while the settlement was a European domain. The same basic division and domination applied to Kriol and English, both of which have been present at Ngukurr since its establishment in 1908, Kriol in the Aboriginal domain, and English in the European domain. Use of the two languages followed much the same general pattern as the social interaction of Aborigines and Europeans. When Aborigines moved out of the village and into the settlement, they moved from an Aboriginal domain into a European domain. For example, as discussed earlier in this chapter, activities in the European domain often required them to act according to non-traditional patterns of social interaction. It also required them to switch from Kriol to English, at least as regards speaker intent for those who lacked English competence.

The result of assimilation at Ngukurr, following on the heels of forty years of missionizing, was a community of Aborigines who were European-oriented in many of their activities and beliefs, but who had just as obviously maintained many of their traditions. By the early 1970s they had developed a consciousness of community, a feeling of 'Ngukurrness', and in response to European domination, a non-traditional sense of Aboriginality. Kriol, a language which was neither traditional nor European, functioned as an identity marker, being used to indicate the non-traditional group consciousness and the Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal dichotomy.

As was discussed in chapter three, language is a critical element of group identity even in speakers of low prestige language varieties. By the end of the 1960s, in spite of strenuous efforts on the part of the government, as well as linguists, anthropologists and the general public, the Kriol speakers at Ngukurr were still persistently holding on to their Kriol. With the implementation in the 1970s of new government policies which emphasized Aboriginal identity, the strength of Kriol appears to have been made even more secure. As was shown in the previous chapter, publicly expressed negative attitudes towards Kriol are decreasing and the 'no Kriol to Europeans' rule is showing signs of weakening since Kriol speakers are no longer ashamed of their language.

There is some threat to the continued existence of Kriol from the Aboriginalization of modern social institutions in Aboriginal communities. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the linguistic result of Aborigines taking over administrative and operational control of modern institutions at Ngukurr is the spontaneous modernization of Kriol. Modernization, among other things, involves spontaneous lexical expansion. As was pointed out earlier, when the station council was first organized at Ngukurr in the early 1960s, one of the major difficulties was the lack of understanding on the part of the Aboriginal council members of aspects of modern activities such as economics and business management practices. It was not simply a matter of Kriol not having terminology for such aspects, but of the concepts themselves being totally outside the range of Aboriginal experience. In virtually every case, the development of an understanding of such concepts by Aborigines has come through the use of English. As the 'elite' Aborigines who now understand these concepts try to teach them to other Aborigines, the danger to Kriol is the possible wholesale introduction of 'pure' English terminology and phraseology. A massive quantity of such wholesale introduction of English phraseology may result in enough significant restructuring so as to force the weakening of the linguistic norms of Kriol and lead eventually to its breakdown.

However, this is only a potential danger, for the spontaneous modernization of Kriol thus far shows few signs of developing in that direction. It appears, at least on the basis of observations at Ngukurr, that a re-analysis of English-learned concepts takes place over a period of time as they are communicated to the 'non-elite' members of the community. This is possibly due to the fact that the English competence of Ngukurr residents as a whole is not as thorough as it appears to be on the surface. Kriol speakers are very good 'listeners' who characteristically give the impression to English speakers that they understand everything being said, but this is not the case. Except for the everyday, mundane aspects of life, miscommunication through the use of English is very high. The 'elite' members of the community who possess a high degree of English competence find it necessary to express themselves in Kriol for the sake of being understood by 'non-elite' members of the community whose English competence is very sketchy. It is this awareness by 'elite' Aboriginal speakers which contrasts sharply with the practice of European speakers who do not fully realize that they are not being understood and who insist on using English.

Present government policies are reducing the likelihood of large-scale migration of Aborigines to towns and cities. This in turn is reducing the pressure for Europeanization and Anglicization on Aborigines as a whole, although in a sense, by taking over modern administrative and operational responsibilities, a more sophisticated form of Europeanization is being thrust by circumstances on the ruling elite in Aboriginal communities. For the vast majority of Aborigines, however, the Aboriginalization policies are strengthening the social dichotomy between Aboriginal and European. One of the main effects of 'Aboriginalization' on Kriol speakers is the strengthening of the sociolinguistic dichotomy between Kriol and English. For an increasing number of Kriol speakers, their language is no longer bastardized English, nor is it simply creolized English. For many it has become a language in its own right, a language related to English, but a language which is at the same time distinct from English.

