

‘You are ... my anthropological children’: AP Elkin, Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, 1940–1956

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Anthropology in the past was so very different, in terms of both numbers and regional spread, to what it is today, and the opportunities for concentration on a few specific persons, rather than the diffusion among many, were correspondingly greater.¹

Summary

Ronald and Catherine Berndt were Australian anthropology's most well-known and prolific practitioners in the period after AP Elkin — a period from about 1950 until their respective deaths in 1990 and 1994. The two met in Elkin's rooms in April 1940 and married the following year. Their intellectual and personal debt to Elkin was enormous, which they recognised. But it was also a burden, one which they attempted to shake off for the rest of their professional lives. This paper, by focusing on Ronald and Catherine Berndt, examines the role of patronage in the academy as a way of elucidating the formation and shaping of the discipline of anthropology in Australian universities in the period 1940 to 1956, the year when Ronald Berndt obtained a position as senior lecturer in anthropology in the University of Western Australia. During this period Elkin, Professor of Anthropology, managed to obtain research funding for the Berndts, occasional employment in the Sydney Department of Anthropology as well as sending them to the London School of Economics to do their PhDs, and finally obtaining a position for Ronald as lecturer in the University of Sydney. Catherine had been promoted by HD Skinner at Otago (New Zealand) and it was he who encouraged her to attend Sydney. Due to University regulations she was unable to obtain a tenured position. Professional anthropology in Australia had such a small base that a patron like Elkin was critical to success. The Berndts were not the brightest and best of Elkin's students — a fact acknowledged by Elkin — yet they went on to accept his mantle as the authorities on all matters to do with Aboriginal Australia and Aboriginal Studies. Academic brilliance does not necessarily secure a position and/or success in the academy, a fact Elkin had observed earlier: 'anthropological field work in Australia does not demand brilliance in examinations'.

1. Berndt and Berndt 1965: 1.

Introduction

In their obituary for Adolphus Peter (AP) Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney between 1934 and 1956, Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt declared that the debt 'we ourselves owe him, personally' was immeasurable. 'It was', they had declared earlier, 'a debt beyond our repayment'. They informed the reader that it was in Elkin's study that they first met in 1940. 'Over the years, his support for us both never wavered — even though at times, inevitably, we saw things differently from the way he did. He wrote to us on 18 May 1978 [near the end of his life], "you are, if I may say so, my anthropological children — of whom I am proud". It was ... reciprocated ... since we looked upon him as our close classificatory father'.²

Elkin was not Ronald's only patron but Ronald (RMB) was not indebted to the others in the way he was to Elkin.³ CP Mountford and Norman Tindale of the Museum of South Australia, Harvey Johnston and JB Cleland, both members of the University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research, also encouraged him to pursue a career in ethnology. Ronald did acknowledge a special debt to Johnston and Cleland. On hearing of Johnston's death he told Cleland that 'I personally owe a great debt to him, for during my early years in Adelaide he constantly encouraged me to pursue anthropology, and it was indeed his recommendation as well as your own, which introduced me to Professor Elkin and thus enabled me to receive [my] initial training'.⁴

Johnston and Cleland may have pointed RMB towards Sydney but it is unlikely that Ronald and Catherine would have been able to develop their careers in social anthropology without the personal patronage of Elkin. The circumstances of Elkin's patronage of a couple, the Berndts, were most likely unique internationally and were certainly unique in Australia. As the British anthropologist Lucy Mair recalled, when she was at the London School of Economics in the 1920s and 1930s 'in those days ... it was all personal patronage'.⁵ Raymond Firth in a more subtle way told me that he was 'sympathetic to [Ralph Piddington] both in his Australian work and later, in his job applications in Aberdeen etc'.⁶ He arranged Piddington's appointment to the Chair of Anthropology at Auckland University in 1950. However, Catherine and Ronald were marital as well as anthropological partners and it was the qualities of a husband and wife team that were attractive to Elkin: he had often lamented the lack of anthropological knowledge about women and the Berndts offered an opportunity of studying both men and women concurrently.⁷ It was the career of Ronald which Elkin assisted and promoted. Although he was supportive of Catherine he was also constrained by the

2. Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8; Berndt and Berndt 1964: xi. In the 1985 edition of the book they state 'our debt to him remains', 1985: xviii.

3. I refer to Ronald Berndt sometimes as Ronald and at other times as RMB; Catherine Berndt as Catherine or CHB.

4. RM Berndt to JB Cleland, 26 September 1951, Cleland Papers, Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide.

5. Lucy Mair, in 'Interview of Lucy Mair' by Jean La Fontaine, 1983. <http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/ancestors/mair.html>, accessed 3/1/06.

6. Firth to author, 20 February 1993 (personal possession of author).

7. Such husband-and-wife teams were not uncommon in British anthropology of the period — Monica and Godfrey Wilson, Scarlett and Bill Epstein, Shirley and Edwin Ardener, Rosemary and Raymond Firth, for example.

mores of the time: unless they were unmarried, women in academia were often seen as having a career that was supportive of their husband.

We know academic patronage exists but we do not know the extent and dimensions and the multiple agenda being played out. This paper discusses how personal patronage and disciplinary territoriality worked in making the career of Ronald Berndt and to a lesser extent of Catherine Berndt. I argue that through a combination of good luck, hard work, determination, opportunity and, importantly, the patronage of Elkin, Ronald Berndt was able to develop and consolidate a career as a professional anthropologist. Elkin maintained both intellectual and financial control by directing where anthropological research could be undertaken as well as by promoting those whom he favoured.⁸ CD Rowley has referred to Elkin's 'benign paternalism' whereas DJ Mulvaney describes it as evidence of Elkin's intellectual narrowness and 'cultural imperialism'. In fact Mulvaney goes further: he argues that Elkin acted against his anthropological opponents, for example Donald F Thomson.⁹ Patronage therefore was not a neutral process in the hands of Elkin. In this case the patron wants to either mould the person in their image or ensure the continuation of their way of doing things. The patron protects and promotes their client at every available opportunity as well as regulating the flow of resources between him/herself and the client which assists in the maintenance of various institutions and beliefs. By carefully tracing the characters, exploring their rationales and relationships, an examination of such patronage enables a more nuanced reading of the forces that helped shape the formation of Australian anthropology in the immediate post-war period.

Positions for anthropologists were scarce at the time. The growth of the Department of Anthropology in the University of Sydney was slow. Until H Ian Hogbin was appointed permanent lecturer in 1936, the professor was assisted by a combination of short-term lecturers including Camilla Wedgwood, Raymond Firth and WEH Stanner, and researchers sponsored by the Australian National Research Council (ANRC) who were at the department writing up their fieldwork.¹⁰ Mona T Ravenscroft, who lectured in 1938, was also appointed tutor in the department. No further appointments, except for the linguist Arthur Capell's appointment as a lecturer in 1944, were made until 1948 when he and Hogbin were appointed Readers.

The establishment of the Australian Army's School of Civil Affairs, later the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA), the Australian National University (ANU) in 1946, and a department of anthropology at Auckland University (New Zealand) in 1950 all created positions for anthropologists. The appointments for the ANU and Auckland were within the domain of Raymond Firth. ASOPA, although independent of the University of Sydney and outside the gift of Elkin, was nonetheless dependent on graduates from that university — KE Read, Marie Reay and Ruth Fink.¹¹

8. A referee of this paper surprisingly suggested that this was the natural order of things in the academy: 'all academics are juniors, depend on their teachers/supervisors to help them grow, including gaining grants and jobs and eventually move away and succeed to positions where they have students and the process begins again ... this is how academic life works'.

9. Mulvaney 1990; 1988: 211.

10. Notes and News 1932: 226.

11. For further discussion see Gray 2000, 2001a: 1–29.

Elkin, nevertheless, was particularly well positioned to provide financial support through his position as chairman of the Anthropology Committee of the ANRC, as well professor in the only teaching department of anthropology in an Australian university. In effect, from 1933 onwards he controlled the limited funds available for anthropological research in Australia. In the period from 1926 (the date of the founding of the chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney) to 1938, the Rockefeller Foundation provided the bulk of the funding for anthropological research. These funds were administered through the ANRC and awarded on the recommendation of the Committee for Anthropological Research chaired by the professor.¹² When these funds were exhausted, no funding was available other than funds from the University and the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, and a small amount put aside by Elkin which covered the ongoing expenses for publication of the journal *Oceania*, and funded the research of Phyllis Kaberry in Abelam (New Guinea) and the linguistic work of Arthur Capell. Both were clients of Elkin's largesse and Capell was promoted within the department by Elkin. Kaberry left for Yale in 1941 never to return to Australia.¹³ In 1940 Elkin received £3000 from the Carnegie Corporation which he placed at the disposal of the ANRC, but in reality he recommended the research workers and the research program. The Carnegie money was used on the Berndts' research, as well as by Marie Reay, Arthur Capell, and the Sydney based sociologists Jean Craig, Caroline Kelly, Mona Ravenscroft, Vera Hole and Florence Harding.¹⁴ Research projects were fitted in with the general schema of anthropological research first articulated by AR Radcliffe-Brown and adopted by Elkin. The plan was to fill in all the gaps of ethnographic knowledge and each researcher was sent to such places where ethnographic knowledge was either limited or nonexistent.

I

Catherine Helen Webb had graduated Bachelor of Arts from Victoria University (Wellington, New Zealand) and completed a Certificate of Proficiency in Anthropology at Otago University. The style of anthropology taught at the University of Sydney was unavailable in New Zealand. Ronald Murray Berndt, on the other hand, had no academic qualifications but came highly recommended by JB Cleland and T Harvey Johnston as we know.¹⁵ He was employed as an honorary ethnologist in the South Australian Museum. Both he and Catherine enrolled for a Diploma in Anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1940. This required coursework and a short thesis.

Once they had completed their coursework Elkin was eager to get them into the field. The fact that the Berndts had not completed the requirements for the diploma were of little importance; Elkin had observed earlier that 'anthropological field work in Australia does not demand brilliance in examinations'¹⁶ and this was so in the case of the Berndts.¹⁷ He had consulted Cleland as to a suitable site in South Australia for them.¹⁸ He arranged for Catherine to obtain an ANRC grant for six months' fieldwork

12. Peterson 1990.

13. See Gray 2002: 23–50.

14. Gray 2001a.

15. RMB to Cleland, 26 September 1951, Cleland Papers, Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide.

16. Elkin to Vice-Chancellor University of Sydney, 16 November 1937, EP 249/659.

in Ooldea. Ronald, although not eligible as he had no academic qualifications, applied for a grant.¹⁹ Elkin informed the ANRC Executive Committee that Ronald was familiar with 'Ooldea and the opportunities for work there' and that he 'has ... shown himself to be possessed of the necessary qualities which are required in the field worker and as a result of his study and training with me this year he should be a very good [field] worker'.²⁰

The Berndts needed official permission to go to Ooldea and this was provided by Ronald's old patron JB Cleland, who was also Chairman of the South Australia Aborigines' Protection Board (APB). The APB provided a permit to Catherine's husband although she was the recipient of the research funds – as his wife, she did not need a permit. (Ronald had been at Ooldea in July–August 1939 as part of an expedition by the Museum of South Australia and the University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research.)²¹ He pointed out in his application to the ANRC that he had undertaken previous fieldwork, besides Ooldea, 'in Adelaide and at Murray Bridge on the Lower River Murray between November 1939 and February 1940, and intermittent periods with informants of the Jaralde tribe; Data collected from a Ngadjuri informant ('middle' South Australia), 1939-40; Work carried out at intermittent periods with T. Vogelsang who is intimately familiar with the Dieri tribe (Lake Eyre Region). Inquiry into the Dieri language and the collection of native texts had been the result'.²²

After Ooldea, Ronald and Catherine Berndt continued to work on two distinct but related projects; firstly, in the Lower Murray, among people who did not live a traditional life but where a few of the eldest remembered their traditional past ('memory cultures'). This was a continuation of work started by Ronald in the late 1930s. Catherine notes that this trip 'constituted RMB's first anthropological field experience with living people, and that at a time when he had no anthropological training'.²³ Secondly, Ronald and Catherine were engaged in a study of acculturation in urban and rural South Australia, which was linked to Ronald's work on the Lower Murray.²⁴

In the early months of 1942, the Berndts wrote up their Ooldea fieldwork, which was submitted for the Diploma in Anthropology, although it was Ronald's initial intention to submit a thesis on his Lower Murray research.²⁵ They were eager to have it completed because Ronald was increasingly anxious he would have to leave the research to undertake some war work.²⁶ The Berndts, especially Ronald, also sought to

17. The coursework results were as follows: Miss C Webb – Essays A; A. Exam: 71%. Result P[ass]. Mr R Berndt – Essays B+; B+. Exam 36%. Result F[ail]. Post Paper 56%. Result P[ass]. Elkin to Registrar, 21 May 1941, University of Sydney Archives (Student Records), 13/4/4.

18. Elkin to Secretary (ANRC), 14 July 1940, Elkin Papers (hereafter EP) 156/4/1/14, University of Sydney Archives.

19. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 2 May 1941, EP 156/4/1/14.

20. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 July 1940, EP 156/4/1/14; RMB to ANRC, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78. Also RM Berndt 1982: 49–50.

21. RM Berndt 1939; also RM Berndt 1989: 59–62.

22. RMB to ANRC, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78.

23. Catherine Berndt 1993: 3.

24. Berndt and Berndt 1951 was a result of this research.

25. RMB to Elkin, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78. They spent the first months of 1942 with Catherine's family in Dunedin (New Zealand), returning to Sydney in March.

26. RMB to Elkin, 11 January 1942, RMB to Elkin, 28 January 1942, EP 246/613.

obtain 'some post in a semi-military capacity ... dealing with the natives directly or indirectly', in Papua and New Guinea or the Native Affairs Branch in the Northern Territory. At the instigation of Elkin, Ronald Berndt wrote to the Prime Minister offering his (and Catherine's) services. Elkin had also written to the Prime Minister outlining a position of Liaison Officers who would supervise depots where Aboriginal people could be assessed for their suitability for war work.²⁷ In May 1943 they were each awarded a Diploma in Anthropology for their Ooldea research which they had presented as a joint thesis — *A preliminary report of field work in the Ooldea region, western South Australia*.²⁸ Elkin considered it the 'best complete monograph' of an Aboriginal tribe and told Raymond Firth: 'Personally I think they have real understanding of Aboriginal life, and are the best field workers in Australia to date'.²⁹

Soon after their return to Adelaide, Ronald presented a paper (jointly written with Catherine) to the Anthropological Society of South Australia on their Ooldea work, culture contact and native policy. It was received with some hostility by the audience — mostly members of the Museum, the Board for Anthropology Research, missionaries and government officials, and interested members of the public. Catherine told Elkin they had not anticipated 'that any controversy could possibly arise from the paper among people who had the interests of the natives at heart ... who [nevertheless] feel that the paper was a veiled personal attack on their knowledge of aborigines and a certain amount of unexpected emotion seems to have developed'.³⁰ In their presentation the Berndts expressed concern that there was indiscriminate and unsympathetic moving of Aboriginal people 'from the northern coast to further inland and towards Adelaide. Half castes are taken away from their homes, while missionized full-bloods and those who have been in long contact with the white man, are told to go bush'.³¹ The Berndts also opposed the proposed move of 'natives from the Ooldea Reserve' to a 'suitable property in the north-western pastoral country'. Their conclusion was 'supported by the knowledge that the natives themselves emphatically did not desire this move. It seems to us only fair that in the question that is bound to have such an important bearing on their whole future, their point of view should in justice be taken into account. It seemed to us that the movement of these natives to such an area will serve to hasten the process of disintegration, considerably more even than would be the result of contact along the [Transnational Railway] Line'.³²

They continued their research around the Lower Murray and other parts of rural and urban South Australia which they considered as an 'excellent opportunity for stud-

27. RMB to Elkin, 4 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 11 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 28 January 1942; RMB to Elkin, 16 February 1942, EP 246/613. Elkin to Curtin, 2 April 1942, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) MP508/1, 240/701/217.

28. Berndt and Berndt 1942–43.

29. Elkin to Firth, 13 November 1948, EP 178/4/2/178; RMB to Elkin, 15 February 1945, EP 246/613.

30. CHB to Elkin, 24 June 1942, EP 246/613.

31. RMB to Elkin, 17 April 1942, EP 246/613.

32. RMB to University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research, 4 November 1942, EP 246/613. Copies were sent to Cleland, Johnston, Elkin, Erskine and Penhall; see also RMB to Elkin, 2 November 1942, EP 246/613. RMB did not address the Society again until 1989; CHB never did after their joint address.

ying culture contact in an advanced form'.³³ They were interested in 'matters concerning Culture Contact and points of Native Policy – also their [Aborigines'] attitude toward the war'.³⁴ The Adelaide research was unfunded (although supported by Elkin)³⁵ and demonstrated their enthusiasm and determination to work as anthropologists. They had no formal position with the University of Sydney or with the Museum. Living in Adelaide was cheap, yet living at RMB's father's house was not easy. They told Elkin that 'the circumstances under which we work are not always pleasant'. He explained that because of his mother's death the previous year, under the 'Adelaide billeting system' two rooms were vacant in 'our house'. It was a choice of taking a number of soldiers or sub-letting the rooms. RMB's father chose the latter. The couple living at the house had two children and as a consequence 'most of our work has to be done at night'. Added to this was concern over obtaining his military exemption.³⁶

In the following year Elkin succeeded in obtaining funding for the Berndts' Adelaide research (which included two months at Menindee in south-west New South Wales funded by the New South Wales Aborigines' Welfare Board).³⁷ He explained to JA Gibson, honorary secretary of the ANRC, that the Berndts had

at their *own expense* ... spent several months of 1942 on the Lower Murray doing very careful research amongst the remaining Aborigines – checking and adding to work done there 20 years and more ago of Radcliffe-Brown. They have months of writing up of material before them, and should do this before tackling any other job. I know they cannot afford to do this on their own funds, and *I recommend* that the ANRC make a grant to their writing up material at the rate of £6 per week, as from February 1, 1943, for six months or until such time, if earlier, they enter the Commonwealth Service.³⁸

Elkin's hope that this would be completed before they began any new work was not fulfilled. Although they worked at this material and prepared a draft it was not until 1993 that it was finally published as *The world that was*.³⁹ (By this time Ronald was dead.) In August 1943 Elkin presented a further application on their behalf for a grant for 12 months' fieldwork in South Australia 'especially in (1) the Adelaide, (2) the Quorn-Maree, (3) Lower Murray and possibly (4) Koonibba-Port Augusta districts, for (a) research on acculturation of aborigines and (b) recording of tribal knowledge provided by remaining members of former tribes in these districts.' Both projects were 'important scientifically, and the former also practically'. Moreover, Elkin declared, 'these two workers have specialized in this type of work and [are] particularly efficient in it'. The Executive recommended that payment start from 1 September 1943.⁴⁰ (Elkin had the grant start 'as from 1st August, following on after the termination of the grant

³³. RMB to Elkin, 11 August 1942; Elkin to RMB, 4 September 1942, RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942; RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁴. RMB to Elkin, 17 April 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁵. Elkin to RMB, 4 September 1942, RMB to Elkin, 4 October 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁶. RMB to Elkin, 10 May 1942, EP 246/613.

³⁷. Berndt and Berndt 1943.

³⁸. Elkin's emphasis. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 February 1943, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA) Australian National Research Council papers MS 482, folder 840.

³⁹. Berndt and Berndt with Stanton 1993.

⁴⁰. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 19 August 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

for the first part of this year'.⁴¹ It was only in the months from December 1943 to February 1944 that they were not recipients of ANRC funding. A commonwealth position for the Berndts — 'to take charge of a Feeding Station for Aborigines at the Granites, Northn (sic) Territory' — optimistically hoped for by Elkin and the Berndts did not eventuate.⁴²

II

The Berndts' South Australian research was unexpectedly hindered in late 1943 by the refusal of the South Australian APB to grant them permission to enter the Port Augusta, Point Pearce, Point McLeay and Swan Reach Aboriginal Reserves. RMB had written to the APB requesting permission for him and Catherine to conduct research at these reserves. He stated that the work was for Elkin and funded by the ANRC.⁴³ Elkin made strong representations on their behalf; he told the Board that the Berndts were 'proficient and skilled', 'earnest and sincere' and 'got on very well with the Aborigines'.⁴⁴ He stressed that comparative work such as the Berndts were doing on the 'scientific study of acculturation and assimilation is an essential basis for [future Native] administration'.⁴⁵ JB Cleland, chairman of the APB, however, advised Elkin that 'there are likely to be difficulties ... in granting permission for the Berndt's [sic] to enter the reserves'.⁴⁶ He did not specify what these difficulties might be. At the end of 1943, the APB deferred, yet again, consideration of the Berndts' application, 'as many of the natives are not accessible, being engaged in work related to the prosecution of the war, and also on the grounds that the applicants have a disturbing influence on the tranquillity of the natives on the Reserves'.⁴⁷ Ronald provided further information on the purpose and significance of their research, their methods and aims, but was again refused a permit.⁴⁸ He wrote again to the Board and requested the reasons for the application's non-approval. The chairman noted that the APB was not required to give reasons for its decisions.⁴⁹ The Berndts nonetheless were 'astonished' that they continued to meet with such opposition 'before our investigation had been carried out'. They assumed there was some 'apprehension that our work would reveal certain conditions and activities which the authorities wish to remain unrecorded'.⁵⁰ The Berndts underestimated the depth of opposition to their work, and to them personally, despite the indication of this in the hostility shown to their paper at the Anthropological Society of South Australia in June 1942. But what was the cause of the hostility and how deep was it?

The Berndts were unaware that the United Aborigines' Mission superintendent at Ooldea had made a complaint to the APB while they were at Ooldea. After initially wel-

41. Isabel Houison to RMB and CHB, 13 September 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

42. Elkin to Hon Sec, ANRC, 16 February 1943, NLA MS 482, 840.

43. RMB to Penhall, 15 November, 1943, State Archives of South Australia (hereafter SASA), GRG 52/1/1940/97; RMB to Elkin, 8 November 1943, EP 246/613.

44. Elkin to Chief Secretary (Aborigines' Protection Board), 10 November 1943, Cleland Papers, South Australian Museum (hereafter SAM).

45. Elkin to Cleland, 13 December 1943, EP 157/4/1/23.

46. Cleland to Elkin, 30 November 1943, SAM Cleland Papers.

47. APB Minutes, November 1943, SASA GRG 52/16.

48. APB Minutes, 19 January 1944, SASA GRG 52/16.

49. APB Minutes, 2 December 1943, SASA GRG 52/16.

50. RMB to Elkin, 12 November 1943; RMB to Elkin, 16 November 1943, EP 246/613.

coming Ronald and Catherine Berndt,⁵¹ the superintendent of the Mission, Harrie E Green, wrote to the Aborigines' Protection Board that he did not want them at Ooldea as they were 'having a very unsettling effect upon the Natives'. Green reported that Aboriginal people 'deeply resent[ed] [Berndts'] persistent questionings into matters which concern their tribal life and Secret Customs. Also taking photos of them with no covering at all, representing them to be wild bush Natives in Central Australia and they do not get around like that here at Ooldea'.⁵² (As a result of Green's representations, the Berndts' permit was terminated as of 22 November 1941, the date they left Ooldea.)

Soon after Green made his initial complaint to the APB he was contacted by the Commonwealth Investigation Bureau (a precursor of the Australian Security Intelligence Office) seeking information on Berndt: 'Dr Charles Duguid has requested that you may favour me with some information, in strict confidence, regarding Ronald Murray Berndt, an alleged anthropologist, who has a Permit to stay on the Native Compound at Ooldea ... It has been reported that Berndt is upsetting the Natives: — that he is suspected of anti-British feelings ... Any information you may be pleased to supply will be greatly appreciated'.⁵³ This only served to reinforce Green's views on Ronald. In mid-1943 Ronald informed Green that he and Catherine planned to return to Ooldea as part of the South Australian survey and 'stay for two years or more'. Green was dismayed and he advised AB Erskine, secretary of the United Aborigines' Mission, that Ronald Berndt 'does not like the mission work at heart, I am sure, and I have no sympathy with his idea of the Germans being justified in invading Poland and in trying to exterminate that nation and what they did to the Jews there. Whatever he says or writes or does he is pro-German and I don't trust him. You can communicate this to Mr Penhall [secretary of the APB] or anyone you please whom it may concern'.⁵⁴

Erskine, aware of the CIB interest, however, kept to the point that Berndt was a disruptive presence; he informed the APB that

as a Mission we are opposed to this man [RMB] spending time on one of our Stations. He is not in sympathy with our work, and his presence so upsets the natives that our work is not only more difficult but is definitely hindered. If we could see that he was doing any good for the native we would tolerate his presence, but, as far as we can see, there is absolutely nothing done to lift the native on to a higher platform. We trust that, if this man sends in a request, asking permission to go on this, or any other reserve, on which we are working, that the Board will refuse to grant it ... [Their work] is of no practical value to the Aborigines.⁵⁵

51. Harrie Green to Cleland, 17 July 1941, SAM Cleland Papers. RMB to Cleland, 19 July 1941, SAM Cleland Papers; Catherine Berndt 1994: 154.

52. HE Green to Aborigines' Protection Board, 20 September 1941 SASA GRG 52/1/1941/25.

53. R Williams, Inspector CIB, to HE Green, 3 October 1941, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

54. Green's comments reported by AB Erskine (Secretary, United Aborigines' Mission) to Aborigines' Protection Board, 28 July 1943, copy in NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248. As scurrilous as Green's comment seems, anti-Semitism among Germans and people of German descent in South Australia is well documented. With regard to Ronald Berndt, it is highly likely that he uttered anti-Semitic statements. Green had his own agenda and most likely exaggerated the strength of RMB's views. Colin Tatz, who spoke with RMB about anti-Semitism, assures me that RMB was deeply disturbed by his (Berndt's) father's anti-Semitism and how it lingered with him (RMB) (pers comm Colin Tatz, 25 May 2004, Canberra).

Green's complaint about the disruptive effect of the Berndts on Aboriginal people at Ooldea, supported by Erskine, was used by the APB to restrict the Berndts' movement and entry to government and mission stations in South Australia.⁵⁶

The Berndts, naively as we now know, were sure Green was 'not the instigator of the opposition to their entering reserves'. They felt it had to be other, more influential people, who opposed them and their research. They told Elkin that they had received a short but cordial note from Green which confirmed their 'conviction that the opposition is not the result of his instigation'. They held this view some months later, perhaps not knowing Green's role until much later, if at all. They were confident, however, that Cleland, Penhall and Erskine 'may be at least partly responsible'. CP Mountford, who had befriended Ronald when he joined the Museum, also reported to the CIB on his conversations with Ronald.⁵⁷

Cleland informed the Berndts that the Board decided they should be 'doing direct war work' as anthropology and sociology were 'no value whatsoever to any one in war time, although perhaps of some use in time of peace'. Cleland added that if the Berndts continued their 'present work' they would be 'barred from any employment either in any Government concern or any Body even partially controlled from public funds: and he advised that if we had regard for own welfare we would consider his remarks carefully and look for other occupations'. He nonetheless conceded that if the Berndts found work in 'regard to acculturation' in another area such as the Northern Territory or New Guinea 'but particularly not in South Australia' he would be satisfied.⁵⁸ Another contributing factor was opposition to the Sydney Department by members of the Board for Anthropological Research and the Museum of South Australia who were, Ronald told Elkin, 'bitterly antagonistic to the ... "Sydney School of Anthropologists"'.⁵⁹ Elkin was bemused: 'I thought that would not exist in your case, seeing you are a South Australian, but apparently you have been contaminated by residence in Sydney'.⁶⁰ This antagonism was primarily over funding and a different research agenda, in what was considered by the Adelaide people as Sydney's intellectual imperialism. Towards the end of his life Ronald made the observation, forgetting the intensity of the rivalry in the 1930s and 1940s, that it was about 'the issue of amateur versus professional'.⁶¹ Cleland and the Board had a limited understanding of the Sydney anthropological enterprise which made it harder for them to appreciate the value of social anthropological research.

A further irritation to most of the members of the Universities Board, besides Ronald's German ancestry, was his military exemption.⁶² Cleland raised the possibility

55. AB Erskine (Secretary, United Aborigines' Mission) to Aborigines' Protection Board, 28 July 1943, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

56. See various in NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

57. RMB to Elkin, 18 January 1944; RMB to Elkin, 8 October 1944, EP 246/613.

58. RMB to Elkin, 8 November 1943; RMB to Elkin, 12 November 1943, EP 246/613.

59. RMB to Elkin, 6 December 1943, EP 246/613.

60. Elkin to RMB, 10 December 1943, EP 246/613.

61. RMB 1989: 59; also Jones 1987: 71-92; Mulvaney 1988: 207-12.

62. Many Germans and Australians of German descent had been interned. In the circumstances RMB was fortunate that no further action other than surveillance was taken. See, for example, Bevege 1993.

with Ronald that anthropological research was simply a device for avoiding military service or war-related work. Cleland reported his conversations with Ronald Berndt to the Commonwealth Investigation Branch and provided no support for the Berndts in APB meetings. On one occasion, Ronald's remarks about the war and his bragging about avoiding military training so upset Cleland's wife and daughters that they left the room.⁶³

In his letter of support for the Berndts, Elkin addressed the matter of Ronald's military exemption and the importance of their research. He informed Cleland that – despite his views about the inappropriateness of the Berndts research – the ANRC was satisfied, as was Scientific Manpower,

that in doing the present work [Menindee and the larger survey of South Australia], they are contributing towards a solution of a very important present and post-war reconstruction problem. I am sure you can understand why their work should be done in South Australia, as well as in New South Wales and Queensland and, of course, the obvious persons to do it in South Australia are the Berndts. They have already done work there and Mr Berndt is a native. I would like to emphasize the fact too that this work should be done under the special conditions which arise during wartime, for this will affect their [Berndts] future. ... The problem with the more or less civilized aborigines is a very difficult one sociologically and psychologically, and the more detailed and deep analysis of all aspects of the problem, the more hope we have of finding a solution. ... [A]s Mr Berndt had worked to some extent under your guidance and with your blessing, I thought he should continue the research in South Australia.⁶⁴

Cleland was not persuaded. It should have been obvious by then that the Board was opposed to the Berndts' anthropological research and unhappy about Ronald's military exemption, and that this antagonism and deprecation flowed across to the decisions of the APB.

Despite strong opposition from the APB and its refusal to issue permits, the Berndts – almost as an act of defiance – visited Aboriginal people on the boundaries of the mission stations. Catherine, who looked after the bookwork and other administrative matters to do with their ANRC grants, developed a chatty and (for present-day readers) a revealing and informative correspondence, with Isabel Houison, assistant secretary of the ANRC. They had an extensive and wide ranging correspondence which covered everyday events and gossip as well as anthropological reflections and general political comments. Catherine told Houison that they had a 'very profitable visit to Yorke Peninsula'; she observed that

it is very conservative area and in some of the towns color (sic) prejudice is extremely noticeable. In Port Victoria, for instance, near Point Pearce Mission Station, there are special regulations which are rigidly enforced. For instance, the natives are not permitted in that town after 6pm, under threat of prosecution – although the town receives much profit from their custom during the day. The feeling against them is strong too.⁶⁵

⁶³. AC Palmer, Inquiry Officer, to The Inspector (CIB), 10 July 1941, NAA D1915/0, Item SA 19248.

⁶⁴. Elkin to Cleland, 10 November 1943, EP 157/4/1/23.

⁶⁵. CHB to Isabel Houison, 16 January 1944, NLA MS 482, 840.

From the coast they set out for Ernabella Mission and spent some time at Macumba and Oodnadatta, 'where some ceremonies were being held; it was very cold camping out in the open but it was well worth while'. The founder of the mission, Charles Duguid, was angered and reported their unauthorised presence to the APB. They had also accompanied EWP Chinnery, the Commonwealth Advisor on Native Affairs and Director of the Northern Territory Branch of Native Affairs, to Balaklava, 'where there is a war-time settlement of half-castes from the Northern Territory'. They found the people 'very pleasant' and they hoped 'to return there for brief period'.⁶⁶ Until this visit the Berndts had not met people from the North, and this is reflected in their description: 'they are a mixture of aboriginal with various asiatic strains, such as Chinese, Japanese, Philippino and Malayan, and do not look at all like aborigines'.⁶⁷ Despite the tenacity and determination of Catherine and Ronald, it became clear to them and Elkin that continued opposition by the Board and key figures such as Cleland, CP Mountford and Duguid meant that there was little hope for continued research in South Australia. In addition, despite their (and Elkin's) representations, the Commonwealth and the Army were not interested in employing them. Elkin began casting around for other possibilities.

III

At the end of May 1944, following discussions with Chinnery and AS Bingle, General Manager of the Australian Investment Agency ('Vesteys'), Elkin arranged a position for the Berndts. He was confident it would provide 'great opportunities for research, and also should help in a very practical way. It is, in short, to be Aboriginal Welfare Officer and Liaison Officer on the Vestey's Stations in the North'.⁶⁸ The Berndts were 'very pleased to accept the position ... and extremely grateful for your kindness in arranging it. We are looking forward to the opportunities for practical research and applied anthropology which this will provide'.⁶⁹

The Berndts conducted a survey 'to investigate labour and allied problems connected with natives, on stations under the control of Northern Agency Ltd [Vesteys], Alice Springs; [they] were to look into such aspects as the declining birth-rate and labour shortage on these stations, and where possible to suggest measures for their alleviation. In this capacity they were to act as welfare officers, in the study of native social and living conditions, and to serve as liaison between the officials of the firm and the Department of Native Affairs'.⁷⁰ This survey was a difficult and often traumatic time for them. They found themselves in conflict with the General Manager of Vesteys over his reluctance to act on their recommendations to improve the working conditions and treatment of Aboriginal station workers and their dependants, as well as his demand that the Berndts recruit Aboriginal labour.⁷¹ They stayed employed by Vesteys from August 1944 to April 1946. During this time they were also increasingly concerned by what this work for Vesteys might mean for their career as anthropologists. They told

⁶⁶. CHB to Isabel Houison, 16 January 1944, NLA MS 482, 840. JRB Love (Superintendent of Ernabella) to Duguid, July 1944; Penhall to Love, 3 August 1944, SASA GRG 52/1, 1944/24.

⁶⁷. CH Berndt to Isabel Houison, 17 November 1943, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁶⁸. Elkin to RMB, 30 May 1944, EP 246/613.

⁶⁹. RMB to Elkin, 9 June 1944, EP 246/613.

⁷⁰. Berndt and Berndt 1945.

Chinnery, for example, that they were unhappy to think their 'association with this firm can prejudice our status as anthropologists, and so severely limit the natural course of our work'.⁷² Later they described their position as 'anthropologists to Vestey's' as 'far-cical ... In other words we are definitely prostituting our work for no adequate reason'.⁷³ In June 1946 they completed their report.⁷⁴

The survey and its writing up was a complex and contested event involving Elkin, Chinnery, officers of the Northern Territory Native Affairs Branch, particularly the deputy director VC Carrington and Bill Harney, Bingle and the station managers of Vestey's stations, the Northern Territory Administrator, CLA Abbott, the Commonwealth government, the State governments of South Australia and Western Australia, the Army, and both Army and Commonwealth intelligence agencies. The politics and views were manifold and conflicting. The Berndts were most likely unaware at the time — they give no indication to the contrary — of these machinations. We can, however, be reasonably certain that Elkin and Chinnery in particular were seeking to implement a 'new deal' through extensive government intervention, pursuing the aims of the Commonwealth government as set out by John McEwen, Minister for the Interior, in February 1939. Both men had been critical in the formulation of this policy.⁷⁵ They were motivated by humanitarian ideals premised on ideas of welfare and social justice which would bring about an alteration in the relationship between the state and Aboriginal people, as well as ameliorating and rehabilitating Aborigines from their tragic despondency. At the time, these goals seemed to be within the grasp of humane Europeans.⁷⁶

Elkin, while recognising the value of the report, did not think it should be published in the form presented in 1946. He wanted the Berndts to write a book on Aboriginal labour using the information they had obtained during their research on Vestey's stations and Army compounds. He thought this would be a more useful result of their research. The Berndts were caught in this complex web and failed, most likely due to their wish to see the Vestey's work behind them, to produce a report which could assist Elkin and Chinnery in their pursuit of better working conditions and treatment for Aboriginal pastoral workers. It is little wonder, in the light of the circumstances now known, that it took until 1987 for a version of the report — *End of an era* — to be published.

^{71.} This research personally affected the Berndts for a long time after they left the employ of Vestey's. An example of how difficult it was personally is provided in C Berndt 1994: 155–6. Their commentary on some of these relationships is provided in Berndt and Berndt 1987: x–xx; 14–54; 252–84. See also C Berndt 1950: 9; 16–17. The relationship between Elkin, the Berndts and Bingle is discussed in Gray 2001b.

^{72.} RMB to Chinnery, 5 August 1945, Chinnery Papers (hereafter CP), NLA MS766.

^{73.} RMB to Chinnery, 21 August 1945, CP, NLA MS766.

^{74.} Berndt and Berndt 1946. It is difficult to ascertain how many copies of this ms were made; it does appear, however, that a copy was not presented to Vestey's. See Gray 2001b: 38.

^{75.} McEwen 1939; also Gray 2004: 21–33.

^{76.} See Gray 2005: 37–54; Rowse 1988: 57–73.

IV

With the war ending, Elkin focused on the general plan for anthropological research, initiated and developed by AR Radcliffe-Brown in 1926. Once the Berndts' work for Vestey's was completed, Elkin encouraged them to make an application to the ANRC to 'carry out social anthropological work' in the northern part of the Northern Territory, particularly Yirrkala. Lloyd Warner and Donald Thomson had worked in Arnhem Land before the war. Elkin, supporting the application, declared to the committee of which he was chairman, 'that this would be a valuable place for research to be carried out by these two most experienced and thorough workers.' Elkin arranged for a salary and expenses to be paid to the Berndts from the end of May 1946, when their work for Vestey's officially ended. The projected research, typical of the sort conducted in the 1940s, was 'concerned mainly with such important aspects of acculturation as the taking of a census, the collection of genealogies and case histories, the study of population and tribal distribution, education and occupational training, native labour, diet and nutrition'. The Berndts noted that it would be 'most unwise to neglect the indigenous and traditional culture, such as the sacred and non-sacred corroborees (ie of both men and women), and the collection of phonetic texts and other linguistic data'.⁷⁷ Co-operation was 'expected from all ... mission bodies and personnel; travelling expenses would be reduced to the minimum by the use of mission [and Northern Territory administration] luggers'.⁷⁸ Research could not occur without the support of either.

The research proposed may have fitted into the general research plan but it also had another purpose. There is little doubt that this project was developed as a way of thwarting the photographer and amateur ethnologist Charles P Mountford's proposed expedition to Arnhem Land. Mountford had arranged to undertake a major expedition to Arnhem Land in 1947 funded by the American National Geographic Society, the Commonwealth government with backing from the Navy and Air Force, and the American Smithsonian Institute. When Elkin heard of Mountford's proposed expedition to Arnhem Land, he wrote to the National Geographic Society: 'I should like to suggest that ... your expedition ... should include a trained social anthropologist. Mr Mountford, who is a good photographer, especially of still subjects, and who has done valuable work in the recording and copying of native art, is not a trained anthropologist, much to his own regret'.⁷⁹ Mountford was an amateur. In case there was any doubt, Elkin presented himself as the authority on Aboriginal culture and people.

Mountford, aware of Elkin's opposition, was concerned that the Berndts research would seriously undermine his relationship with the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian. Mountford, the Berndts told Elkin with an air of innocence, 'seemed to think that both you and the Research Council were deliberately "sending" us to that area to thwart his expedition'.⁸⁰ Catherine described to Isabel Houston Mountford's attempt to dissuade them from going to Arnhem Land:

77. Elkin, Report of the Anthropology Committee, July 1945–July 1946; Elkin, Report of Anthropology Committee, 7 August 1947, EP 161/4/1/81. RMB and CHB to ANRC (Anthropology Committee), 11 May 1946, NLA MS 482, 840.

78. Berndt and Berndt to ANRC, 11 May 1946, NLA MS 482, 840.

79. Elkin to National Geographic Society, 1945, quoted in Wise 1985: 204.

80. RMB to Elkin, 1 July 1946, EP 246/612.

First of all he tried hard to persuade us to give up the idea of going to Arnhem Land, saying that it would make him look rather silly if the news got into the papers. Then he promised us lots of concessions, including occasional trips on his lugger, or his launch, or his small motor-boat (he's expecting to have all three), if we would leave certain areas to his party, and not publish any data from them. He was especially anxious that I [Catherine] should 'lay off' women's ceremonial life at either Oenpelli or Millingimbi, and in return his party would do the same for me! I told him that I had lots of material already regarding that, and he was most upset — apparently they are going to make a big thing of it ... [H]e intended to have a scientist from Washington coming out to study the effects of the war on the natives: and he wasn't at all pleased to hear that (apart from actual army personnel) we hold most of the data relating to the now-abandoned army compounds, which included natives from Arnhem Land (Oenpelli, Millingimbi etc) ... I am afraid that he thinks it is all a plot on the part of Professor Elkin and the Research Council, to forestall his much-publicized expedition! ... [H]e was anxious that we shouldn't tell Professor Elkin even that he called, but of course we are doing so.⁸¹

It 'amused' them to think that Mountford, with a budget of nearly £10,000, 'expects competition from us, with our small grant'. Mountford paid the Berndts further visits until, finally, he seemed 'quite resigned to the idea' of their going to Arnhem Land.⁸² Elkin, not content with the Berndts working in Arnhem Land, arranged for an expedition of his own, which included Bill Harney, the cartoonist Eric Joliffe and a photographer from *Pix*, as well as two Methodist missionaries, to make a quick visit through Arnhem Land in August-September 1946.⁸³ While Elkin considered Mountford's expedition as 'just something else to delay the Aborigines finding their balance after the war'⁸⁴ he did not see his work or that of the Berndts in the same way. Their work was serious and in the interests of advancing scientific knowledge about Aboriginal life.

Elkin continued to undermine and deprecate Mountford and promote the Berndts. Clem Christensen, editor and founder of the journal *Meanjin*, was approached by Elkin to accept a piece by the Berndts on art in Arnhem Land. Elkin pointed out to him that the Berndts had obtained 'Aboriginal carvings in the round' from north-east Arnhem Land in 1947 — 'completely unknown previously — not even seen by Mr Mountford in his 1948 (American Expedition). Also bark paintings: those done for ceremonies (not for sale). Mountford, of course, got plenty of bark paintings — natives will make a trade of it. But the ones collected by the Berndts are mythologically correct and done with local ochres (Mountford took ochres up with him).'⁸⁵ Christensen, however, wanted them to write about some other region. After some discussion the Berndts decided to write on the 'Central Western area of the Northern Territory, a region where

⁸¹. CHB to Houison, 30 June 1946; CHB to Isabel Houison, 30 July 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁸². RMB to Chinnery, 11 July 1946, CP, NLA MS766.

⁸³. CHB to Chinnery, 16 September 1946, CP, NLA MS766.

⁸⁴. Elkin to Harney, 12 January 1948, EP 30/8/1/8/3.

⁸⁵. Elkin to Christensen, 22 May 1950, *Meanjin Papers*, University of Melbourne. In 1957 the Berndts organised 'Australian Aboriginal Art: Arnhem Land paintings on bark and carved human figures' at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Caruana (2000: 455) noted that this exhibition was highly significant: 'it was the first to situate identified and named artists within regionally-based styles'.

no other social anthropological work has been done ... we shall deal with some crayon drawings made by the Aborigines with the minimum of contact; these show some very interesting features, [and] represent a selection of several hundreds we have in our possession'.⁸⁶ They wanted, they told him, to 'give the anthropologist's attitude toward Aboriginal art, and incidentally explain something of our reasons for writing *Art in Arnhem Land*'.⁸⁷

Supporting Elkin against Mountford was not the only reason the Berndts objected to Mountford's expeditions. They, like Elkin, saw him as an amateur who had the potential, by virtue of his lack of scientific method and training, to disrupt their work. Catherine observed, somewhat sarcastically, that Mountford 'knows just enough really to prevent him from realising his ignorance'; in contrast, they were 'as thorough with our own work as we can [be]: and the more we learn, the more we realise how many years it would take to understand native life really well in all its aspects. There are so many details that can't be discovered by casual expeditions such as his, obliged always to use an interpreter and never becoming intimate with the people'.⁸⁸ Being there first also meant the field was 'uncontaminated'. Catherine commented that she was pleased they had been in Arnhem Land first (that is, before Mountford), 'because it will be a hundred times more difficult to do thorough work on that coast after all that rabble [Mountford's expedition] has been through; they will really do a lot of harm, and shouldn't be allowed to go'.⁸⁹ This echoed Elkin's assessment of the situation.⁹⁰

V

Mountford, of course, failed to dissuade the Berndts. They arrived in Darwin in mid-August 1946, where they briefly met Elkin,⁹¹ and quickly moved on to Yirrkala. The only handicap with Yirrkala was that very few 'people speak much English. Still, we'd find that at most places where there were any number of bush people, and we should not have too much difficulty [with the language]'. They usually liked to set up camp but when they arrived the construction of a Borden hut had started. It had a cement floor and 'may even have electric light later on, so we don't object to combining field work with a certain amount of comfort — particularly in wet weather. It will be quite a change after our camp on the Daly.' The building was to be used as a dispensary.⁹²

Yirrkala was a dramatic contrast to Vestey's stations and the position of Aboriginal people. At Yirrkala people were assertive, confident and independent; not always to the Berndts' liking. The Air Force had used Melville Bay as a base during the war and this had had a 'considerable effect on the natives: they have, for instance, quite sophisticated tastes in the matter of food'. The Berndts judged that Mission control had been

⁸⁶. RMB to Christensen, 21 July 1950, Meanjin Papers, University of Melbourne. See also Stanton 2000: 222–3.

⁸⁷. RMB & CHB to Christensen, 31 July 1950, Meanjin Papers, University of Melbourne.

⁸⁸. CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁸⁹. CHB to Houison, 2 January 1948, NLA MS 482, 857a. CHB to Chinnery, 7 February 1948, CP, NLA MS766.

⁹⁰. Elkin to Harney, 12 January 1948, EP 30/8/1/8/3.

⁹¹. CHB to Isabel Houison, 20 August 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

⁹². CHB to Chinnery, 16 September 1946, CP, NLA MS766. They spent December 1945 to March 1946 at the Daly River when they were employed by Vestey's. It had been a severe wet season.

'very lax; and the standard of work has not been sufficiently high'.⁹³ They described the Yirrkala 'natives [as] a very grasping people, with a great idea of their own importance'.⁹⁴ ... greedy and lazy, and so badly disciplined: they are by far the worst we have met'⁹⁵ ... [and] are very tiring to work with, continually demanding ... preferring to lie in the shade rather than work'.⁹⁶ It was also the most expensive place for fieldwork they'd encountered: 'the demand for tobacco and food grows at times almost overwhelming. ... We had expected a rather easier time of it ... we are actually having more difficulty with informant's food here than in the desert [Vesteys]'.⁹⁷ The situation with informants, they anticipated, would get worse as the Northern Territory Administration planned to start an 'industrial training scheme' and the Berndts felt they would not be able to compete in the matter of handing out rations.⁹⁸

At this time we get a glimpse of the Berndts' domestic relationship in the field. Ronald spoke with informants while Catherine, who also undertook her own fieldwork, attended to the correspondence, housekeeping and other domestic matters; she explained to Isabel Houison that 'Ron is so anxious to spend every minute in working (trying to do as many of the song-series as possible) that I'm doing his letters as well'.⁹⁹ They were excited by the song-series discovery and explained to Chinnery that

[T]here is no doubt that the songs ... reveal some aspects of aboriginal life which would otherwise take a long time to obtain. At Bathurst Island ... we concentrated on songs: and by working at full pressure every day we obtained quite a good sample — we'd like to spend about a year there doing nothing else. ... Actually the Yirrkalla (sic) people have the most picturesque songs we've met so far ... There are long song-series there, all very interesting. For example, there are hundreds of songs ... dealing with early pre-Macassan and Macassan contact, and the trepang camps that were established along the coast ... Another series of songs deals with the Island of the Dead away to the east, from which the spirits send the Morning Star each day to remind the natives that it's time to wake up, so that they go hunting to find food to keep themselves alive (not that they bother much about that these days, after the Air Force invasion).¹⁰⁰

93. CHB to Houison, 31 October 1946, NLA MS 482, 857a.

94. CHB to Chinnery, 24 March 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

95. CHB to Houison, 6 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

96. CHB to Houison, 26 May 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

97. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 21 January 1947, CP, NLA MS766. When Bill Harney left Yirrkala he gave his food supplies to the Berndts. The Berndts lived sparsely: 'we had only ordered plain bulk stores ourselves — flour, rice etc, since we had been promised garden produce: and in the last five months that has been negligible. So imagine our feelings at receiving a large piece of bacon, tinned fruits and Frankfurts, an entire bag of good flour — and some potatoes and onions (the first we've had for months)! That should help us to fatten up before we leave here, and you can guess how grateful we are' (CHB to Chinnery, 24 March 1947, CP, NLA MS766).

98. CHB to Houison, 31 October 1946; CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. Harney told Elkin that 'the Berndts are here plodding on surrounded by fires and dust, but not missing a beat. Great people these the right type for this work'. Harney to Elkin, nd (EP 30/8/1/8/3).

99. CHB to Houison, 23 April 1947; CHB to Houison, 7 January 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

100. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

In March, they visited Groote Eylandt, together with the newly appointed director of Native Affairs, FJ Moy: 'We had a very interesting and pleasant trip, being able to see both the Mission there (CMS) and the old Air Force base: [Catherine] spent [her] time at the Mission going through some records and journals relating to the days when it was half-caste settlement, and Ron was able to do quite a lot of kinship, genealogies etc.'¹⁰¹ Chinnery had resigned at the end of 1946, and the Berndts found his replacement, Moy, less interested in their anthropological research.¹⁰² This most likely reflected a significant difference between the two men: Chinnery saw himself as an anthropologist administrator whereas Moy was an administrator with some anthropological training. The Berndts told Chinnery that they were, for example, unable to 'discuss songs' and their significance with Moy, although he politely humoured them by pretending to take an interest. This disappointed them after Chinnery's interest in their work.¹⁰³

Their Yirrkala fieldwork had been 'trying' and Catherine went so far as to 'rejoice' that they were 'away from Yirrkala at last, and very thankful for it'.¹⁰⁴ In Darwin there was plenty to do: 'many of the natives and half-castes expect us to spend a certain amount of time with them.' They went to Oenpelli for twelve days and spent a few days at Port Keats, twelve days at Bathurst Island, and hoped to be back in Darwin plenty of time to meet up with Elkin, who was making another quick visit to the Northern Territory. From there they planned a trip to Goulbourn Island to finish off some genealogies and songs. They were in no hurry to return to Sydney.¹⁰⁵

VI

In Sydney, on their return in August 1947, Elkin arranged for the Berndts to lecture for the final term 'helping with cadets and so on'. They recognised that, despite the support they received from Elkin, opportunities to develop a career in Australia were limited. Ronald's lack of academic qualifications was also a hindrance. They hoped for work in the USA although Elkin discouraged them 'with talk of all the difficulties to be met with even before setting out, and it does seem that with the present inflation we would spend most of our time starving in a slum instead of working. Maybe the position will be a little easier soon'.¹⁰⁶ While they waited, Elkin obtained a Commonwealth Research Grant so they could write up their Arnhem Land material, and he arranged for the ANRC to reimburse their extra expenses as a result of their prolonged research trip in eastern Arnhem Land.¹⁰⁷ Their academic writing was also beginning to interest local and international publishers. They were enthusiastic about receiving a reply to a manu-

¹⁰¹. CHB to Houison, 26 May 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a.

¹⁰². RMB had expressed an interest in applying for the position (he sent an application to Elkin) but Elkin considered Berndt was not of the right temperament for the job. Elkin to Chinnery, 16 April 1946, EP 20/1/5/61. Chinnery to Elkin, 14 May 1946, EP 174/4/2/173.

¹⁰³. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

¹⁰⁴. CHB to Houison, 6 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 856a.

¹⁰⁵. In fact they took 'a lease of seven acres at West Point (next door to Bill Harney, and sharing the same billabong and sea frontage), only six miles from Delissaville — so one day we'll take our notebooks and rusticate there', RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766. CHB to Houison, 29 July 1947, NLA MS 482, 857a. See also Elkin to Moy, 6 August 1947, NAA CRS F1, 52/570.

¹⁰⁶. RMB and CHB to Chinnery, 15 September 1947, CP, NLA MS766.

¹⁰⁷. CHB to Houison, 2 January 1948, NLA MS 482, 857a.

script dealing with acculturation in South Australia, which they had sent to Chicago University Press.¹⁰⁸

The Berndts spent 1948 and part of 1949 at the University of Sydney teaching and writing up their research. Elkin then arranged for them to travel north again, and they spent the latter part of 1949 and early 1950 at Oenpelli in western Arnhem Land; they had long wanted to work at Oenpelli, attempting a visit while they were working for Vestey's. During 1950, Ronald was employed as a temporary lecturer and Catherine as an assistant. The previous year, 1949, Ronald had been awarded a BA (Research) while Catherine received her MA which was published as *Women's Changing Ceremonies* (1950). Ronald was awarded his MA in 1951. On obtaining formal qualifications it was necessary, if they wanted to advance their careers, especially overseas, to undertake study for a Doctor of Philosophy.

Elkin encouraged the Berndts to widen their anthropological interests and proposed that they work in the Highlands of New Guinea. Elkin was motivated in part by the interest shown by Frederick Nadel, foundation Professor of Anthropology at the Australian National University (ANU) in New Guinea and partly by his own desire to mark out an anthropological territory in the New Guinea Highlands.¹⁰⁹ The ANU, like the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) and the Australian Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, represented a threat to Elkin's hegemony over matters anthropological. It was understood that there was an agreement, albeit informal, that the ANU would not impinge on Aboriginal Australia.¹¹⁰ The Highlands, an area of international interest, was, so Elkin believed, divided between Sydney and the ANU. Elkin told Nadel he 'had gained the impression that you were concentrating on the region from Goroka to Mt Hagen, in a quite intensive coverage. I was therefore, directing my own workers, and any person for whom I had responsibility, either to the eastern end, or the western end of the Highlands.'¹¹¹ Elkin, for example, had sent Kenneth E (Mick) Read to Kainantu (Upper Markham Valley) at the end of the war.¹¹²

In 1951 Catherine was awarded an Ohio State Fellowship from the International Federation of University Women and Ronald obtained research funds from the Department of Anthropology in the University of Sydney. Ronald and Catherine did two periods of fieldwork — 1951 and 1952–3 — in an area south of Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea,¹¹³ an area where there was minimal European contact. In choosing such an area this was not because they desired the 'pristine primitive' but rather, because Ronald's 'expectation was that it should be possible to explore the processes of externally sponsored change almost from their beginnings; to discover the relative strengths and weaknesses of some of their institutions as contrasted with others; and, hopefully, to make some suggestions that might direct those changes, in order to modify the trauma of radical disruption ... [because] many of the people were experiencing substantial alien impact for the first time, it should be possible to influence the

¹⁰⁸. This was published as Berndt and Berndt 1951.

¹⁰⁹. Elkin to Hercus, 1 February 1950, EP 156/4/1/14.

¹¹⁰. Firth 1974: 16.

¹¹¹. Elkin to Nadel, 11 June 1954, EP 41/4/2/414. See also Wilson and Young 1996.

¹¹². Pers comm, KE Read, May 1993.

¹¹³. See RM Berndt 1992; CH Berndt 1992; Reay 1992.

course of change through local awareness of the problems and through administrative goodwill.¹¹⁴ Catherine, on the other hand, was more modest in her aims as she wanted to 'learn more about women's "world views"'.¹¹⁵ These themes were evident in their Australian Aboriginal work. Unlike other researchers in the Highlands they had considerable experience in the field, and their interests were developed through their previous work.

When the American anthropologist James B Watson indicated he was interested in working in the eastern Highlands, the Berndts commented to Elkin: 'we hope ... he will not choose our eastern Highlands! May we be so bold as to define our area as south from Kainantu, as far as the Papuan border; east to across the Lamari to Azana; west to Mt Michael. This is not selfishness — but we should very much like to have a further period there later, after writing up and going through our material here'.¹¹⁶ They argued that it would 'from both our points of view, as well as from an anthropological one, ... be a pity for [Watson] to work directly in Kainantu — especially since our material is yet unpublished. ... We would not recommend that he go to Kainantu ... anymore than we ourselves would go to Goroka, where [KE] Read has been working ... please don't think we desire to monopolise the Kainantu district — that is furthest from our minds'.¹¹⁷ They did not return to the Highlands and Watson worked at Kainantu.¹¹⁸ The Berndts' work in New Guinea formed the basis for their doctoral studies.

When casting around for a suitable university in which to undertake these doctoral studies they considered several universities in the United States, the ANU and the London School of Economics (LSE). It was Elkin who encouraged them to attend LSE, not only to obtain their doctorates but also to gain experience and develop an international network: the 'main thing [at LSE] is to make contacts and get everything you can out of the seminars'.¹¹⁹ This they did. They were pleased that they did not go to the ANU: 'England has been (and is) an experience which we needed, and from our point of view we are glad to be having this period'.¹²⁰ They maintained a regular correspondence with Elkin, informing him about who they met, their conversations and observations.

VII

In 1952, under the auspices of the Carnegie Corporation, Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn made a survey of the social sciences in Australia in which they recommended that Western Australia should be the site of a new anthropology department. While the Berndts were in England, the University of Western Australia had obtained funding from the Carnegie Corporation to establish a senior lectureship in anthropology. The position would be based in the Department of Psychology, headed by Ken F Walker, foundation professor of Psychology. Walker had completed a Diploma in Anthropol-

¹¹⁴. RM Berndt 1992: 77.

¹¹⁵. CH Berndt 1992: 99.

¹¹⁶. RMB to Elkin, 19 October 1953, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹¹⁷. RMB to Elkin, 28 October 1953, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹¹⁸. Watson 1992: 167–98.

¹¹⁹. Elkin to RMB and CHB, 3 August 1954; also RMB to Elkin, 2 May 1954, EP 41/4/2/375. Cf Berndt 1992: 68–72.

¹²⁰. RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

ogy at the University of Sydney under Elkin. In early 1954, he asked Elkin for information about the structure of the anthropology courses at the University of Sydney — 'I have been thinking of modelling the courses on the general Sydney plan, requiring Psychology I as a prerequisite for a second and third year unit.'¹²¹ Elkin considered the creation of the position in Perth as an opportunity to influence the appointment of the person chosen, as well as affecting the structure and content of the courses offered, and enabling the continuance of research and teaching about Aboriginal Australia along the lines he deemed desirable.¹²² He was adamant that the person appointed be Australian in outlook and show an interest in Aboriginal problems and that a future Department of Anthropology 'play a very important part in both University and State' affairs.¹²³ So Elkin was particularly pleased with Walker's emphasis on 'the need for research problems relating to Aborigines'.¹²⁴

Elkin continued to work hard to ensure the Berndts' future. At the 1954 ANZAAS Conference in Canberra, he took the opportunity to further discuss with Walker the University of Western Australia's plans for the establishment of a senior lectureship in anthropology. He told the Berndts that he had no doubt whatever that at the end of five years, 'or soon after, it will become a separate Department and a Chair'. And there was no doubt that, should Ronald apply, he would get the position and that 'Perth would wait' for him to complete his PhD. There was a position waiting for Ronald at Sydney as well, Elkin could assure Ronald. At the University of Sydney, Ronald and Catherine would be close to their chosen fields — Australia and Papua New Guinea; Perth offered other newer possibilities such as Timor. Nonetheless, it was, he told Ronald, his choice.¹²⁵

Despite his confidence about the Perth position Elkin nonetheless had to consider other potential candidates, particularly British candidates. Raymond Firth, Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, had been responsible for Nadel and Stanner's appointments to the ANU, as well as Ralph Piddington's to the foundation Chair in Auckland. Elkin was keen to limit Firth's influence in this appointment. He wrote to Walker: 'I understand that Professor Firth considers that the applicant ought to be rather an expert on studying our own society and somewhat of a psychologist. However, I think that should be secondary — you want somebody who really knows his social anthropology, and who will take especial interest in spreading and advancing knowledge about the Aborigines and all the problems related to them.' The emphasis had to be on Aborigines. It was 'quite likely that some quite bright folk from England will apply, but unless they really give assurances that they would attack the problems which are so important in Western Australia, I would regard it rather unsatisfactory to appoint any of them'.¹²⁶ He further advanced the cause of Ronald by ranking, both for Walker and the Registrar of the University of Western Australia, the three candidates that he proposed: Ronald Berndt, Mervyn Meggitt and KE Read, in that order. Read

¹²¹. Walker to Elkin, 22 April 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

¹²². Notes and News, *Oceania* 1954: 126.

¹²³. Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁴. Elkin to Walker, 26 October 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

¹²⁵. Elkin to RMB, 2 September 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁶. Elkin to Walker, 26 October 1954, EP 41/4/2/433.

was, he said, inexperienced in the Aboriginal field and Meggitt, who had still to complete his MA, wanted to undertake comparative studies in New Guinea. There was no one with Ronald's 'qualifications or experience in the Australian field who could better fill the position in the sub-Department of Anthropology in Perth, or in a later separate Department'.¹²⁷ This was a *de facto* job application on behalf of RMB! It is unknown whether Firth had someone in mind for the position, or who he encouraged to apply.

While Elkin was shoring up RMB's position in the University of Western Australia, the University of Sydney Senate confirmed Ronald's appointment as lecturer in the Department. Subsequently, Elkin advised Ronald to withdraw his application for the Perth position, at the same time informing the Registrar of the University of Western Australia on behalf of Ronald: 'Your offer is a very kind and considerate one, which Mr Berndt appreciates very much, and so do I'. Elkin noted it was still possible that by the end of the year, 'one or other of the candidates ... would be able accept the position' if it was still available.¹²⁸ During the latter part of 1955 the Berndts travelled through the United States, visiting anthropology and sociology departments.¹²⁹ In the interim Walker appointed Ruth Fink, a student of Elkin's, as 'someone with training in psychology and anthropology to make a survey of the Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal population in Western Australia in the white community'.¹³⁰ Having decided on Sydney, the Berndts were pleased to be returning to Sydney and to the Department: 'our friends and interests there, but there are, as you mention better opportunities for Catherine's research. Also, if you remain in Sydney after your retirement, we shall be able to keep in closer touch with you.'¹³¹

Aware that Elkin would retire at the end of 1956 Ronald was reasonably confident of being awarded the chair. Ronald knew it would be competitive and had previously observed that 'Hogbin, I am sure will try ... and Stanner too'.¹³² Stanner had informed Elkin that he 'shall be a contender for the Sydney chair when you feel that the time has come for you to retire'.¹³³ RMB told Elkin '[i]t would be an honour of inestimable value to hold your chair — I can only say that when the time comes I shall apply as you have suggested. Apart from anything else, Sydney is the natural centre of my interests and my research — for both Aboriginal Australia and the Pacific. It is with this intention too that I wish to be "strong" academically (both in degrees and theoretically — and with practical experience in organisational matters). I hope it will not be necessary to apply until we return.'¹³⁴

The Berndts' relationship with Hogbin, when in London, had been courteous but aloof; he was closely associated with Firth, with whom (they informed Elkin) he

¹²⁷ Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁸ RMB to Elkin, 20 December 1954; Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹²⁹ Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 31–3.

¹³⁰ Elkin to RMB, 7 December 1954, EP 41/4/2/375; Latukefu 2001: 53–68.

¹³¹ Elkin to RMB, 7 December 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³² RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³³ Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP 197/4/2/573. The Berndts shared Elkin's opinion of Stanner and his work, and noted in agreement that it 'is, however, unfortunate that he is so lax as far as writing goes' (EP 41/4/2/375, RMB to Elkin, 15 March 1954).

¹³⁴ RMB to Elkin, 21 August 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

seemed to spend most of his time and was, the Berndts claimed, under Firth's influence.¹³⁵ He was also nearly 15 years their senior and an established and reputable scholar on Melanesia. His relationship with Firth dated almost from the beginning of Hogbin's first anthropological research in 1927. Moreover, his relationship with Elkin was strained and it was hardly likely that he would embrace two of Elkin's proteges. In 1948 Elkin attempted to block Hogbin's appointment as Reader while supporting that of the linguist and (fellow Anglican) priest, Arthur Capell. He failed but only partly. Both were appointed to readerships. Elkin assured the Berndts that Hogbin's relationship with Firth was based 'on friendship. I don't think [Firth] has a very high opinion of Hogbin's ability, certainly not theoretically. He will help him get medals and such like, but I don't think he would have him on his staff.'¹³⁶ (He might well have been referring to himself and his own view of Hogbin!)

VIII

Positions and alliances were being formed in the context of the impending retirement of Elkin. It was possible that on his retirement, the replacement would be neither an Australian nor an Aboriginalist. Of the Australian candidates, only Stanner and Berndt had the requisite qualifications and experience. This caused Elkin some concern but he was certain he could surmount these difficulties when the time came. Les Hiatt, at that time a student at Sydney, recalled that 'what may have passed as modern theory in the dying days of Elkin's regime was no longer regarded as the state of the art north of the Equator'.¹³⁷ There was certainly a sense that change was in the air.

In an attempt to thwart the possibility of a non-Australianist being awarded the position, Elkin set out the criteria for the new 'occupant of the Chair', someone 'especially interested in, and also well experienced in, the anthropology of the Australian Aborigines and the people of New Guinea and Melanesia'.¹³⁸ If it was accepted, then the position was tailor-made for Ronald Berndt. Hogbin applied, but withdrew after Elkin threatened to disclose aspects of his personal life. Elkin did not think Stanner was up to the task as well as frequently expressing disappointment in his anthropological performance.¹³⁹ Hogbin, however, ensured that Elkin's preferred candidate, Ronald Berndt, did not succeed: he supported John A Barnes and received support from many in the university who wanted a professor with solid academic standing internationally, and a change from Elkin and his acolytes.¹⁴⁰

Barnes' appointment was considered a victory for Hogbin and anthropological modernity.¹⁴¹ As a consequence, it was evident that Ronald Berndt had no future in a department in which Hogbin could exercise his influence. It would be an intolerable situation. Furthermore, Ronald Berndt was not favourably disposed to Barnes. The Australian anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry explained to her friend Mary Durack that

¹³⁵. RMB to Elkin, 29 May 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁶. Elkin to RMB and CHB, 26 February 1954, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁷. Hiatt and Beckett 2001: 17.

¹³⁸. Elkin to Registrar (University of Sydney), 12 April 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹³⁹. Marie Reay to author, February 1991. There is also considerable correspondence in the Elkin Papers to support Reay's view. Pers comm Kenneth Smith, February 1991.

¹⁴⁰. Wise 1985: 220; Hiatt 2001: 109-14; Barnes 2001: 139-46.

¹⁴¹. Wise 1985: 219-20; cf Barnes 2001: 142.

'the Berndts are not friends of the Barnes and, between you and me, Berndt said he would not work under Barnes. No reflection on J Barnes — merely that Barnes is the same age and Berndt is jealous.'¹⁴² The University of Western Australia had delayed making an appointment.¹⁴³ This, serendipitously, was to Berndt's advantage. Ronald was still considered a candidate for the University of Western Australia position, and, when it became available, he accepted: Elkin assured him he 'could do nothing else'.¹⁴⁴

In mid-1956 Ronald wrote to Elkin from Perth. He hoped Elkin found Barnes 'agreeable: he is really quite a pleasant chap'. He recognised that the Sydney department as made by Elkin was under threat from Hogbin and hoped Barnes was 'not drawn too much towards Hogbin. But having yourself within observational distance of the Department should mean a great deal. It's a pity Stanner is not there, in spite of his strange ways!'¹⁴⁵ Six weeks later he commented on the appointments at the University of Sydney and the Australian National University. He was correct about Meggitt's appointment to a lectureship at Sydney but the appointment of Edmund Leach to the ANU Chair was a rumour. He considered Leach's appointment would 'undoubtedly mean a narrowing of Anthropology in Australia. All I can say is thank goodness we got out of Sydney and are establishing Anthropology here in a way which will counteract the kind of emphasis it is likely to have now in Sydney and Canberra'.¹⁴⁶

In fact, JA Barnes was appointed to the ANU in 1958 and a New Zealander, William Geddes, succeeded Barnes in Sydney. But Ronald was correct about the state of Aboriginal anthropology. Elkin had expressed concern about the state of Aboriginal anthropology towards the end of 1955, writing that 'neither at this Department nor at Mosman [ASOPA] will there be any member of staff personally conversant with the aboriginal problems of Northern Australia. All that can be said for Sydney is that there will be here a couple of staff who have had experience amongst mixed-bloods'.¹⁴⁷

IX

The paucity of positions — both teaching and research — meant that a career in anthropology in Australia was dependent upon the goodwill and patronage of the Professor of Anthropology in the University of Sydney. Without such patronage, funding for research and developing a career was virtually impossible. When the Berndts embarked on their anthropological careers there were few anthropologists of an earlier generation interested in the Australian field, and those who were, such as Ralph Pidington, CWM Hart, Stanner and Kaberry, had by force of circumstance established careers overseas. (Only Stanner returned to an academic position in Australia). As a consequence there were few candidates eligible for the position at the University of Western Australia. The Berndts were favoured also by both the exigencies of war and RMB's exemption from service: this created a space which enabled them to conduct

¹⁴² Kaberry to Durack, 25 April 1956, Durack Papers, Berndt Museum, University of Western Australia. Also RMB to Elkin, 24 July 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴³ Registrar (UWA) to Elkin, 17 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁴ Elkin to RMB, 12 December 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁵ RMB to Elkin, 6 June 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁶ RMB to Elkin, 24 July 1956, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁴⁷ Elkin to Giese, 11 November 1955, EP 189/4/42/455.

intensive research at Ooldea, Adelaide and Central western Northern Territory when they could otherwise have been engaged in war work.

The Berndts were the second generation of Sydney anthropologists. Besides them, the other students promoted by Elkin for careers in anthropology were KE Read and Marie Reay. Read attended the LSE where he was awarded his PhD; he then lectured at the ANU and ASOPA before taking a position in the University of Washington, Seattle, USA; Marie Reay also taught briefly at the ASOPA and then at the ANU where she was awarded her PhD. She remained at the ANU until her retirement in 1993.

Wise, in her biography of Elkin, described Ronald as being 'tailor-made for Elkin'; he 'had a natural air of deference, an attitude of extreme politeness, a deep interest in Aborigines and an extraordinary capacity for slogging doggedly at a task'.¹⁴⁸ From an early stage in his relationship with Elkin, Ronald Berndt frequently sought his mentor's approval and support in regard to decisions about his academic future. Ronald's deference and an implicit acknowledgment that he was dependent on the good will of Elkin made it difficult for him to act independently. He was dependent on Elkin for his and Catherine's future and, like a father, Elkin could be impatient and irritated by his 'child's' diffidence. Elkin was, as Wise put it, their 'paterfamilias'.¹⁴⁹

When Elkin described them, in May 1978, as 'if I may say so, my anthropological children — of whom I am proud' he was saying that they were the inheritors of *his* anthropology and in this they had made him proud that they continued in his tradition. The Berndts read the statement, thinking he was talking about them as his 'classificatory' children, thus making Elkin their 'close classificatory father'.¹⁵⁰ He may have been a father to them as well and he was proud that they had continued to walk in his footsteps and had succeeded in finding their place. In the short biographical introduction to *Going it Alone? Essays in Honour of Ronald and Catherine Berndt*, Robert Tonkinson and Michael Howard tell how Elkin 'disclosed [to the Berndts] that he had always considered them to be his "spiritual children"'.¹⁵¹ This makes reference to Elkin the spiritual father, both in a Christian and Aboriginal sense, as well as the mythic father — as the Berndts wrote: 'like the mythic beings of his beloved Aboriginal Australia, his spirit will surely live eternally, as an inspiration to generations of anthropologists to come'.¹⁵²

This did not mean that their relationship was without tension, as is evidenced by the trouble over Vestey's and the supposed suppression of the Berndts' report by Elkin and the Australian government. The Berndts needed, in a sense, to free themselves from Elkin but continued to acknowledge their indebtedness if not gratitude: they therefore needed to create a separate space in which they could work and develop. In this they were lucky that Elkin retired in the year they moved to Western Australia,

¹⁴⁸. Wise 1985: 166. RMB is remembered more often for his aggressive arrogance, always determined to prevail in whatever he felt strongly about (pers comm, Robert Tonkinson, 24 May 2004). Others variously describe him as rude, tactless, gauche, boorish, humourless and absurd. Catherine is largely the put-upon partner in these narratives.

¹⁴⁹. Wise 1985: 219–20.

¹⁵⁰. Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8.

¹⁵¹. Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 36.

¹⁵². Berndt and Berndt 1979: 8.

although this did not diminish their social and intellectual relationship.¹⁵³ It is significant that with Elkin's death the Berndts were able, finally, to publish a version of their 1946 Vestey's report. They had produced a revised version which Elkin rejected in the year before his death.¹⁵⁴

Catherine's career after Ronald's appointment to UWA appeared to be an adjunct to his. Catherine, who was variously described by Elkin as a 'very brilliant anthropological field worker' and a 'brilliant linguist',¹⁵⁵ was sidelined by the university's attitude to the employment of married women as Ronald's career developed. Throughout Ronald's tenure at the University, Catherine was employed in either a part-time or honorary capacity. They were aware of this restriction on Catherine's career before Ronald took up the position; I suspect they hoped it would change in time, which it did in the late 1960s but at 'some cost to the generation of women who fought to secure these changes'.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, she and Ronald continued to do fieldwork together and publish their results either singly or together. She, like Ronald, was committed to the anthropological enterprise. Ronald had told Elkin in March 1941 that his intention to study anthropology was 'to better fit myself for a life time of work in ethnological fields'.¹⁵⁷ He never wavered from this ambition which he achieved with the help of Catherine.

The Berndts established, developed and maintained Aboriginal anthropology at the University of Western Australia. There is little doubt that Elkin anticipated that Ronald, with the assistance of Catherine, would keep true to an Aboriginal anthropology sympathetic to his style and interests. Tonkinson and Howard suggest that this was so. Berndt sought, like Elkin in the 1940s, to combine anthropology and sociology, an 'interest which stemmed from ... Elkin's efforts in the same direction', and reinforced by their American experience.¹⁵⁸ They were not successful at the time. Nevertheless, Elkin, no doubt, was pleased and proud of their success in developing and promoting Aboriginal anthropology in Western Australia. They were indeed his 'anthropological children'.

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¹⁵³ Wise 1985: 227.

¹⁵⁴ VS Greaves (General Manager, University of Western Australia Press) to Elkin, 16 November 1977; Elkin to Greaves, 23 November 1977; AP Elkin to RMB and CHB, 10 January 1978, EP 76/1/12/272.

¹⁵⁵ Elkin to Registrar (UWA), 9 February 1955, EP 41/4/2/375.

¹⁵⁶ deGaris 1988: 103, 105, 245; also Crawford and Tonkinson 1988, and Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 32-3.

¹⁵⁷ RMB to Elkin, 3 March 1941, EP 160/4/1/78.

¹⁵⁸ Tonkinson and Howard 1990: 35-6. Such a combination occurred at the ANU under Nadel and was continued by JA Barnes.

sion to quote from the papers of her father, EWP Chinnery; the librarians at Mortlock Library, University of Adelaide; and Tom Gara for directing me to material in the State Archives of South Australia. Bob Tonkinson, Nic Peterson, Jeremy Beckett, Bruce Rigsby, Fiona Paisley, Diane Bell, Deane Fergie, Patrick Sullivan and Christine Winter read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper.

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