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MEN AS WOMEN:
FEMALE DANCE SYMBOLISM IN
WALBIRI MEN'S RITUALS*

Introduction

Dance in a particular cultural tradition may be analyzed from any of several different perspectives, which may be classified in two categories. In the first, analysis may be structural or stylistic. By structure I mean the set of relationships among discrete movements characteristic of a dance tradition; it is similar to grammar in language (cf. Woodard, 1976). Style refers to the general qualities of a dance tradition or classes of the tradition: tempo, energy level, parts of the body used, characteristic number of dancers, smoothness or abruptness of movements, body decorations and objects manipulated in the dance (cf. Lomax, 1968:222-273). Although this category is concerned with analysis of dance *qua* dance, it may justifiably be argued that a kind of meaning inheres in pure structure and style, and therefore that their analysis is an explication of meaning.

Other ways of analyzing dance in a cultural tradition approach meaning in a different way. Meaning is sought in the relationship between structure and style on one hand and other aspects of the culture on the other. For example, particular classes of structure and style may be associated characteristically with and thereby identify particular classes (in the general sense) of people. Or, the structure of dances may be isomorphic with other cultural structures (the structures of myths, rites, graphic designs, houses), suggesting a cultural preference in structural design. Or, style may be found to be expressive of general cultural values (cf. Ager, 1975-76). This category of analyses may be termed symbolic (one thing representing another), although the direction of the symbolism may not be determinable (does the structure of dances symbolize the structure of graphic designs, or vice versa?), and symbolic associations not univocal. Symbolic analysis may also be structural, but the structure is sought at a more inclusive level of culture than in the first category.

This paper falls into the second category. It is about relationships between style and other aspects of Walbiri culture. In particular, it explores the relationship between two Walbiri dance styles on the one hand and sex roles on the other hand. The emphasis is on contrast between each member of the pair on each side of the relationship. Hence, analyses of the two dance styles, as also of the sex roles, are not exhaustive.

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Ethnographic details which accompanied photographic illustrations in the original are included in the text and enclosed in square brackets. (Eds.)

The problem to be solved is why men dance in women's style in certain contexts of men's rites, but never the reverse. The thesis of the paper is that men dance in women's style in part as a symbolic celebration of the complementarity of sex roles, and partly as a symbolic appropriation of women's procreative and nurturing role. Men assume this role in the spheres of ritually inducting novices and spiritually maintaining the fertility and general well-being of the Walbiri universe. General characteristics of rites and their relationships to Walbiri social organization and religious beliefs and the female symbolism inherent in men's rites are discussed before dance styles and their ritual contexts are analyzed.

The Walbiri

Traditionally the Walbiri Aborigines, as hunters and gatherers, occupied some 50,000 square miles of semi-arid country in central Australia. Today, numbering about 2,500, they live on government reserves or work on cattle stations.

Aside from the family, the main social groups are weakly corporate patrilineal descent groups with shallow genealogies and with primarily ritual functions. The society is divided into patrilineal moieties. Patrilineal moieties are not named, but each person refers to his own moiety and the opposite moiety by different terms (kira, kurungulu),² which are extended to refer to the relationships obtaining between a ritual and its owning moiety (kira moiety) and the opposite moiety (kurungulu moiety). The Walbiri also recognize the principle of matriliney, though it is more weakly evident than patriliney and functions mainly in secular affairs (Peterson, 1969). Finally, there are two unnamed alternate generation levels, one consisting of first and third generations, the other of second and fourth; adjacent generations are in opposite levels.

In common with other Australian Aborigines, the Walbiri believe in a supernatural and timeless sphere of existence whose name (tjukurpa) may be translated as "the Dreamtime." It is spoken of as existing in the distant past but also as having a continuing existence in the present. The phenomenal universe of the Walbiri is believed to be a material manifestation of the events of the Dreamtime and is sustained by its supernatural power. In the Dreamtime, conceptual categories of the Walbiri universe are represented by supernatural beings which are the prototypes of classes of natural phenomena and which are responsible for the characteristics of these classes. Every member of Walbiri society is believed to have been vivified, at the moment of conception, by the spiritual substance of one of these supernatural beings. The identity of the supernatural being is established by clues provided by natural events occurring around the presumed time of conception and by the proximity of the mother to a sacred site believed to have been visited by it. Thus each individual has a

spiritual (totemistic) relationship with a class of natural phenomena and is animated by the same spirit which animates or sustains that class. In addition, the members of a patrilineal descent group, as a group, have totemistic relationships with several Dreamtime beings. Determinations of conception totemism and descent group totemism are independent of each other. In a sense the totemic beings of the Dreamtime may be considered ancestors, because the Walbiri look on them as the ultimate source of their own existence.

Walbiri rituals are re-enactments of the believed events of the Dreamtime, in particular of the activities of the Dreamtime beings. In the Dreamtime the totemic ancestors roamed the countryside establishing the patterns of the natural and cultural world, creating the topographical features of the country, and depositing their supernatural power to sustain their creation. At hundreds of sites they paused to commemorate their activities in song, dance, and dramatic performances, and subsequent generations of Walbiri have continued to recreate these ritual dramas. Ritual is the context of Walbiri art -- graphic, plastic, dramatic, poetic, musical and choreographic -- and each form expresses an aspect of the founding dramas of the culture.

From the Walbiri point of view ritual performances have three purposes: commemorative, revelatory, and instrumental. All rituals are commemorative. They remind the participants of the believed sources and sustaining power of the physical, biological and cultural aspects of their universe. Rituals also reveal knowledge of the Dreamtime, embodied in ritual art forms, to novices at various stages of ritual progress. The primary means of imparting the knowledge is ritual performance. Finally, ritual performance has an instrumental purpose: man's participation in the Dreamtime through ritual performance is believed to be necessary to ensure the propagation of species, the continuity of life-sustaining natural phenomena, and the continuity and well-being of Walbiri society itself. By virtue of man's spiritual link with the Dreamtime, his participation in its creative activity is required to sustain its life-maintaining role in the temporal sphere.

With the exception of most of the circumcision ceremony, the participants in men's rituals are divided into performers/owners (kira) and managers (kurungulu). The division excludes singing, which is performed by all participants, and primarily affects dancing. The performers are initiated members of the patrilineal descent group whose totemic ancestor's Dreamtime activity is being re-enacted. The right to perform a ritual is sometimes extended to other members of the same patrimoiety, but never to members of the opposite patrimoiety. The managers are members of the opposite patrimoiety, and without their cooperation a ritual cannot be performed. Their role is to prepare the ritual paraphernalia, decorate the bodies of the dancers, and direct the dance performance. By decorating the dancer, the managers re-create the totemic ancestor on the body of the dancer who then re-enacts the Dreamtime activity of the ancestor. A mutual dependence thus exists between managers and performers, both roles being necessary to ensure the continuation of the Walbiri universe and society.

The Female Symbolism of Men's Rituals

The theme of men as ritual procreators is most clearly apparent in the katjiri ritual. The focus of the ritual is upon two women who are sisters and who are referred to by the kin term meaning "mother's sister" (ngati). The word katjiri itself means "woman," although the Walbiri recognize it as belonging to languages spoken north of them. At Hooker Creek, the ritual is often referred to as ngatilkatjara, two women who are in the kinship category of ngati.³

The main symbols of the katjiri are two different-sized bullroarers. The small bullroarer produces a high-pitched and piercing whistle-sound, while the large one produces a low-pitched rumble. The small bullroarer is said to be the elder sister of the large bullroarer, and it is thus more "dangerous" and "more important" than the latter. These two types of bullroarers figure prominently in men's rituals in general, both as sound-producing instruments and as ritual objects.

Every katjiri ceremony begins with a ritual action which expresses the conceptual identity of the ritual and the Two Sisters. Each junior novice,⁴ eyes covered by his ritual guardian, is made to dip his index finger into a small cylindrical hole in the ground, into which arm blood has been bled, and then to taste the blood. He is told that the blood is the urine of the Two Sisters, who must have passed by recently. The junior novices and their guardians sit in a compact group during this procedure. After each novice has tasted, an elder walks around the perimeter of the group, hitting the ground at intervals with the sharp point of the large bullroarer. The junior novices -- still with eyes covered -- are told that the Two Sisters are walking close by, using their digging sticks as walking sticks. The bullroarer is then passed under the arms and in front of the bodies of those junior novices who are attending their first katjiri ceremony. It is then swung for their benefit. Finally, the junior novices are permitted to watch the bullroarer being swung. They are told that it is the Two Sisters themselves.

The introductory revelation of the Two Sisters is completed when each novice is required to touch with the tongue the tip of a spear, which represents the clitoris. This act symbolically binds the junior novices to absolute silence while on the ceremonial ground, and to silence concerning what they are about to witness. By tasting this symbol of the Two Sisters, the tongues of the novices (i.e., their ability to communicate through speech) are included in the covenant between the novices and initiated men and between men and the Two Sisters. They are thus bound to uphold its secrecy and sanctity.

The ritual culminates in a symbolic rebirth of the junior and senior novices from a symbolic womb of the Two Sisters. The womb is represented by a pit (nangkuru) dug in the center of the ground. Prior to the rebirth, a huge bullroarer in the form of a tall flattened pole about twelve feet in length is displayed to the junior novices seated in the pit. The pole (kumaku) is decorated in red and white fluff with two Dreamtime designs which are mythologically related to the katjiri. The pole is then held horizontally over the heads of the junior novices and shaken vigorously to dislodge some of the particles which fall on them. The actual rebirth scene occurs when

the novices crawl out of the pit and along the length of the pole, scraping their chests and stomachs along it.

The katjiri ceremony occupies a central position in Walbiri men's rituals at Hooker Creek. The word ngatilkatjara, which is frequently applied to the katjiri ceremony, is also used to refer to other men's rituals. Thus, the Walbiri conceptualize men's rituals in general as a symbolic fertile mother. The two bullroarers are used in all men's secret and semi-secret rituals (though they are not swung in the presence of women and children) with the same symbolism. Novices are taken to the first katjiri ceremony after their circumcision. They are required to attend all subsequent katjiri ceremonies, and to pass through all ritual stages in the context of this ceremony.

In fact, the katjiri integrates all men's ritual life at Hooker Creek. Its representation as a fertile mother is a pervasive symbol. Katjiri initiation represents the incorporation of the novices into the fertile mother figure. They partake of her identity and become active participants in her regenerative activity.

Dance Styles

The Walbiri have two styles of dancing: mimetic (walaparini) and non-mimetic (mili-mili wintimi), characteristically performed by men and women respectively. A mimetic dancer mimes the specific behavior of a specific Dreamtime ancestor. A mimetic dance has only as many dancers as there are characters in the Dreamtime incident being re-created. A non-mimetic dancer represents the generalized traveling behavior of a generalized ancestor. Non-mimetic dances are generally undifferentiated from one occasion to another, and the number of performers is irrelevant. Although both women and men perform non-mimetic dances, only men are permitted to perform mimetic dances. Women always dance non-mimetically.

Named types of mimetic dances include: kiRipikanji -- dancing on all fours; pangkatja-kura -- a running dance; wapantja-kura -- a walking dance; njinantja-kura -- a sitting dance.⁵ Sitting dances are always accompanied by singing, while other dances are usually, though not always, musically unaccompanied except for the beating of a shield by any hard object which happens to be at hand, or by clapping paired boomerangs together. Dances unaccompanied by singing are referred to as kuwari.

Mimetic dances accompanied by singing are the choreographic expressions of the verbal symbolism contained in one song. Only very few songs are so choreographed. A song text may have a rather restricted range of symbolic reference; others, however, contain more elaborate symbolism. Following is a description of such a dance I observed:

Two brothers were decorated with vertical stripes for a dance from the Initiation dreaming. The Dreamtime incident concerned a fire which occurred at a place called kulungalinpa. A Dreamtime initiate lit a fire which got out of control, and he had to let it go. The dance is given the title of Fire or Foreskin (or Boy with Foreskin Intact). The text of the song which accompanied the dance is as follows:

walunkunjanu yari-yari-manu ngitjinkinalu

fire picked up firesticks

A cylindrical stick, red-ochered with a white ring around it about two thirds along its length, was protruding out of the ground about three feet high. It looked like a penis. The two performers lay down each with his head resting on a shield, because when the Dreamtime initiate first saw the fire he was lying down resting as the fire swept through and burnt his country. After some singing (by those standing around the dancers), the two men were raised by managers to a sitting position.

Then, still in a sitting position and periodically quivering their bodies, they gradually approached the stick from their opposite directions, fondling it as they approached. Periodically, the dancers pointed unspecifically among the spectators, indicating that the fire had got out of control and they had to let it go. When the two men met, one put his legs over the other's legs, until the stick was in an unmistakably phallic position. (Field Notes)

Although this dance is not performed at a circumcision ceremony, some parts of that ceremony are derived from the Initiation dreaming.⁶ The symbolic reference to circumcision in the dance is as follows: fire is a metaphor of circumcision; the symbol vehicle (the stick) has the dual meaning of a penis and of the burning sticks left over after the fire had passed through the country. The red ochre represents glowing coals and the white ring, ashes.

Another sub-class of mimetic dancing -- Rurupungu, tjuRutjuRu -- was observed in several ceremonies. The dancer achieves forward locomotion by alternately extending his right and left feet widely sideways and forward, followed by bringing the other foot up to it. The trunk is bent forward from the hips, and the hands are clasped behind the back. Following is a description of this style of dancing on a particular occasion:

The two dancers began in front of the singing group by kneeling, leaning forward with hands behind the back so that their torsos were parallel with the ground, and quivering their torsos and shoulders. The two dancers faced each other. They then proceeded northward along the ceremonial ground, stopping on the way to repeat the kneeling action. They proceeded in Rurupungu style. At the far end of the ground the managers attached a representation

of a bird's head to the head of each dancer. The seated group continued to sing. The dancers then returned southward in Rurupungu style, pausing periodically to perform the kneeling action. As they proceeded southward they wove about each other in figures of eight. The managers at the southern end removed their headgear at the end of the dance. (Field Notes)

Women's dancing style consists of a small, regular, up and down jump. Both legs are synchronized and slightly bent at the knees; arms are bent while elbows point toward the ground and hands and forearms point upward. During the dancing the body may remain stationary or move forward. A soft, high-pitched "whoop" is emitted on alternate jumps, or a low-pitched hum, pulsating with the jumping movement, is sounded. Jumping is synchronized with the meter of the singing which accompanies it. During ceremonies in which both men and women participate, men provide the singing for the women's dancing. On these joint ritual occasions, the men act the role of a generalized ancestor, owners seated in a tightly packed group representing the body of the ancestor, and managers standing around them. In purely women's ceremonies, some women remain seated and provide the singing accompaniment while others dance.

On some occasions men dance in the non-mimetic style of women's dancing, for example in Fire ceremonies, so-called because participants are burned with fire (Spencer and Gillen, 1904, Peterson, 1970, Wild, 1975:133-134). Every day for several weeks prior to the main part of the ceremony (lasting only two days), the songs of the ritual are sung for a few hours in the early evening by the male owners, who are seated in a tight circle formation, and the male managers, who stand around the circle. The men face in the direction the ancestor is believed to have traveled. The women behind them dance in non-mimetic style. These several preliminary weeks provide an opportunity for the male managers to dance, not as specific ancestors, which is reserved for male owners of the ceremony, but in the generalized traveling style also performed by women:

The singing was accompanied by clapped boomerangs. Periodically a few male managers would skip around the back of the group and out to a position in front. There they danced for half a minute or so. The dancing, mostly singly or in twos, consisted of up and down jumps in the meter of the singing and with legs apart and slightly bent. On every second jump a high-pitched 'whoop' was emitted by the dancer. During the performance the dancer held each end of a boomerang behind his neck. The few women at the back also danced occasionally, using a dance movement similar to that of the men but emitting a lower-pitched, continuous but pulsating vocal hum. (Field Notes)

The action of jumping or skipping sideways to the position where the non-mimetic dance was to be performed, and the holding of the boomerang behind the neck, further classify the dance style as wangkita (katinikala, Tjulpinjika), a sub-class of non-mimetic dancing.

The distinction between mimetic and non-mimetic dance is reinforced by the kinds of body decorations applied to dancers. The Walbiri use directly applied paint (waRu) and colored fluff glued to the body (marukuRu). Fluff is used only on occasions when the dancer is representing a specific ancestor's specific behavior. It is derived from two sources: the soft white down of the underbody of certain bird species, and the fluffy efflorescence of a local plant species. Because of its glistening whiteness and the greater difficulty of obtaining it, bird-down is always used for the white sections of the body decorations. Plant-down is mixed with powdered red ocher for red fluff or powdered charcoal for black. The effect achieved when the colored fluff is glued to the dancer's body in the patterns associated with different Dreamtime ancestors is often striking. [A manager will decorate the owner's body in ritual fluff prior to performance. Designs may cover the back and front of the face and body down to the waist.]

Women are not permitted to wear ritual fluff, but they may be painted with the ritual design applied directly to the body. [Women decorated for dancing, for example, may have the front of their bodies painted with designs representing ancestors.] Men, as well as children, may also wear paint, and paint is sometimes worn on the body for ritual occasions other than dancing. Ritual paint is made of two bases, water and grease, mixed with four non-organic pigments -- two shades of red, yellow, white -- and charcoal. Grease-based paint (nguntju-nguntju) is used only on the body.

Because of the differentiation of ritual roles, only male owners of the ceremony being performed wear the Dreamtime design in grease paint on their backs, painted on by male non-owners. Women and male non-owners may wear graphic designs in grease paint on the front of the body; women, however, are permitted to wear the Dreamtime design, whereas male non-owners wear a standardized design, though with many variations, which is general to all totems. Since his design is on the front of the body, the male non-owner is able to apply it on himself.

We may summarize the differences between mimetic and non-mimetic dance thus:

Mimetic Dance

- men only
- specific ancestors
- specific number of dancers
- specific Dreamtime incident
- each dance associated with one song
- specific symbolism
- male owners
- ritual down or painted body
- ritual paint on back
- paint applied by manager

Non-mimetic Dance

men and women, but especially women
 generalized ancestor
 number of dancers irrelevant
 generalized Dreamtime traveling
 no association with particular songs
 general symbolism
 male managers
 only painted body
 ritual paint on front
 paint applied by self

The Significance of Men's Dancing in Women's Style

During childhood, before circumcision, a boy is classified ritually with women, and women's designs are applied to his body, accompanied by the performance of associated women's songs and dances. Women's ritual activities are associated explicitly, in part, with nurture and physical maturation, for which women's songs, dances, and graphic designs painted on a child's body are believed to be efficacious. The focus of women's rites is the family camp and the marital relationship. Their functions "cluster around personal sexual and procreative aims and interests, personal health (curing) and the growth of children, especially girls" (Munn, 1973:41). Men sometimes dream rites for their wives, and actual and potential sisters-in-law ideally should paint each other in ceremonies (ibid:36).

After circumcision and further ritual induction, a man's childhood association with women's rites and their affinal focus is continued and expressed in his manager's role, since a man is a true manager for his mother's brothers. The generalization of the manager and owner roles to include all of the men of each patrimoiety respectively expresses the opposition and yet complementarity of men's and women's roles. Women are associated with procreation and physical nurture; they are said to be "of the campfire" (walupanta), a term which is also used to refer to men's rituals performed in the vicinity of the women and the camp. Similarly, the managers provide the (procreative) services which enable the owners to perform their ritual role of acting out the part of the ancestors. They are also spiritual nurturers in that they direct the performances of the male owners. In men's rituals the managers are substitute women; on occasions when they dance they perform in women's non-mimetic dance style.

Walbiri men's performance in two distinct dance styles, one mimetic representing the cosmogenic activity of the Dreamtime ancestors and reserved exclusively for men, the other non-mimetic representing indirectly the fertile and nurturing role of women and shared as a style with women, can be explained in Durkheimian terms of the society celebrating itself in religious ritual. Out of women's bodies children

are born and the nurture of children is in their hands. Similarly, the non-owning managers of men's rituals re-create the Dreamtime ancestors on the bodies of the owners and through their nurture they facilitate the re-enactment of the activities of the ancestors. The ritual re-creation of ancestors is analogous to the physical creation of children because it is believed that the former, like the latter, is necessary for the transgenerational continuity of Walbiri society. Thus all men's rituals symbolize the fertile and nurturing Mother who re-creates the Dreamtime ancestors and assures the re-creation of Walbiri society and the phenomenal world on whose continuance Walbiri society depends.

Uses and Contexts of Women's Dance Style in Men's Rituals

1. Circumcision Ceremony.

In the secret core of the circumcision ceremony, the Kangaroo ritual, the division of participants emphasizes generation differences rather than partimoieties. This is expressed in two ways: the active participation of young men and the relatively passive participation of older men; and the division of participants into alternate generation levels. It is primarily senior novices who perform the Kangaroo dances for the initiate to observe.

An important dance which is performed during the ritual is the Blood Dance (*yalju*). It is said to have been performed by the Two Kangaroos of the supporting myth all the way along their journey. The subincised young men prick or stab their subincision scars and massage their penes to induce a free flow of blood prior to the dance.⁷ The dance itself consists of the sounds and movements characteristic of women's dancing: up and down jumps with knees slightly bent and feet apart, high-pitched whoops in the meter of the dance, and humming which pulsates because of the jumping movements of the dancers. The penis of the dancer bobs up and down sympathetically, causing blood to splash on the insides of the thighs and flow down the legs of the dancer. The bleeding appears to be a simulation of menstruation.

Initially, the dancers are grouped in alternate generation levels around two fires. From time to time the members of each group hop clockwise around the fire, one leg held off the ground, emitting soft whoops as women dancers do, and then hop toward the other fire, the two groups thus changing fires. At a signal from the singers, who sing throughout the performance, the dancers hop as one body toward the initiate and perform the Blood Dance in front of him.

The meaning of the Blood Dance appears to be twofold. Firstly, the dancers symbolize the spiritually regenerative role of men's ritual into which the initiate is being inducted by the use of women's dance style and simulation of menstruation. Secondly, the manner in which the members of the two generation levels interact is suggestive of blurring and identification of levels: the members of the initiate's father's generation are symbolically offering ritual equality in return for his abandonment of his identification with women and children.

The last dance of the circumcision ceremony, the witi dance, is performed by classificatory affines and particularly the circumciser ('wife's father,' 'wife's mother's brother', or 'wife's mother's mother's brother'). Tall poles tied to the legs of the dancers symbolize their representation of the male ancestor. When the circumciser is laid down on the initiate, the poles lying along the length of the latter's body, the initiate is symbolically incorporated at the same time into the ritual life of initiated men and into his future family of procreation. Each dancer, save the circumciser, may paint on the front of his body any totemic design he has received in the katjiri or other ritual; a circumciser wears a painted representation of a design associated with the Initiation dreaming. No ritual fluff is worn, and this together with the painting of the design on the front of the body suggests that the dancers also represent women. The dance itself is performed in women's dance style, the dancers emitting the high-pitched yelps in the meter of the dance that women make when dancing.

The female symbolism inherent in men's rituals is thus expressed immediately prior to the actual circumcision operation. It is combined with male symbolism in the tying of the poles to the dancer's legs to represent the male Dreamtime ancestors of the Initiation dreaming.

2. Katjiri Ceremony.

In addition to mimetic dances performed by the men of the owning patrimoiety, dances performed by senior novices acting as clowns constitute a significant category of performances at the katjiri ceremony. At first the clowns appear to be peripheral to the theme of the ritual, but I believe they are not.

Although the elders ultimately control the ritual, they do not directly control junior novices. That discipline is exercised by the senior novices, who represent the authority of the elders. The senior novices occupy an ambiguous status. Many are bachelors without legitimate sexual access to women, and hence at odds with the elders who are responsible for their deprivation. At the same time they represent to the junior novices that same authority which demands their bachelor status in the prime of virility. The ambiguity of their status is expressed in their role as clowns during the ceremony.

Although the main butt of their merciless joking and teasing are the junior novices, a veneer of impartiality is maintained by the elders, who suffer in good part the same teasing and joking. However, their recourse is their ultimate authority over the senior novices who, on occasion, are sent packing back to the novices' camp when the elders have had enough.

At the time a junior novice is inducted into senior novice status, a special dance is performed by all the senior novices, and the new senior novice participates in it. The dancing is grotesque and very

much like distorted women's dancing, and a lampoon of it is perhaps intended. This grotesque clown dance may be a symbolic urging of the junior novices to abandon their identification with women and children. A description of a performance I observed follows:

After the new senior novices have been inducted, they performed their special dance. A fire was lit and the senior novices gathered in a group on one side of it. About twelve elders sang the clown song. The senior novices danced in ones, twos and threes around the fire, knees bent, buttocks sticking out into the flames, and hands pulling buttocks apart to expose their anuses to the flames. The more grotesque the performance, and the longer a performer could endure the flames, the more it was appreciated by the audience. The new senior novices particularly were applauded for a good performance. Finally, all the senior novices danced around the flames together. (Field Notes)

The final occasion on which the senior novices perform is the last night of the ceremony when a pit is dug in the ceremonial ground.

After the singing ended, a long period of clown performances followed. The central activity was the hitting of the clowns with heavy sticks by the junior novices, helped by their fathers and brothers, in retaliation for their having been hit by clowns throughout the ceremony. The clowns emerged from the pit in a stylized clown step between two lines of junior novices, their fathers and their brothers. As they passed through the two lines they were soundly thumped several times on the back. Prior to this, the clowns danced out of, into and inside the pit in the arrogant stylized clown steps. After the hitting of the clowns a series of performances occurred. The clowns first assembled on each side of the pit next to two fires, and as they 'danced like women' -- emitting shrill cries -- each took a firestick and waved it about, striking the ground and sending sparks flying. They continued to hold the firesticks, now above their heads, as they entered the pit and continued to dance in the same manner for a short period. The next performance used a similar jumping movement, in single file, toward and finally into the pit. The last performance consisted of the clowns approaching the pit in single file, walking on their knees, bodies bent forward and hands held behind their backs -- a difficult feat as I discovered when I was invited to perform it. As we performed the last item we emitted cries as women do. Each time the clowns performed, the junior novices and everyone else emerged from the pit, the junior novices standing in a line in front of it. The actions of the clowns after they had been hit seemed designed to make the clowns suffer and look ridiculous, whereas before they were hit, the actions were more in the nature of clowning, as if, not having received their punishment, they had not yet been put down. (Field Notes)

Several comments are germane to our discussion of clown performances. First, the movements of the clowns in and out of the pit is an expression of the Walbiri concept that the Two Sisters, whose body and womb is represented by the pit, carry inside them senior novices (clowns) as well as elders and junior novices; all participants are symbolically inside the Two Sisters. The role of clowns is, as the elders frequently

said to me, "really katjiri", that is, central to the ceremony. Second, the hitting of the clowns by the junior novice, his father and his brothers, is in retaliation for what he has suffered at their hands. Not only do the senior novices carry out the intentions of the elders in ritually killing the junior novices, but they also suffer the retaliation actually due the elders. Third, and most germane to our interest in dances, is the explicit association of clown dances with women's dances.

It could be said that the clowns are neither novices nor elders; it could equally be said that they are both novices and elders. They are between two clear ritual stages, their ritual status is ambiguous. They represent the authority of the elders, but they are also subject to that same authority. In representing the authority of the elders, they represent the authority of the Two Sisters: they dance like women. In addition to being both elders and novices, they are both men and women. Like the Blood Dancers in the circumcision ceremonies, the clown dancers symbolize the self-sufficiency of men's rituals.

At the same time, like senior novices who perform the Blood Dance, the clowns at katjiri perform the role of ritual mid-wives, 'killing' the junior novices as an accompaniment of their incorporation into men's ritual life and their re-embodiment of the ancestors. If lampooning of women's dancing is intended, it expresses an incongruity in their role. By simulating women's dancing the clowns express the themes of incorporation of novices into men's rituals and the symbolic parallel between the role of women as physical creators and nurturers and the role of men as spiritual creators and nurturers. By lampooning the same simulation they express the theme of separation of novices from their former identification with women and the necessity to disavow the security of childhood.

Lampooning aside, a symbolic thread connects Blood Dancers, witi dancers, clown dancers, and managers who dance in other contexts of men's rituals. Their simulation of women's dancing expresses the theme of spiritual nurturing and creativity which is believed to be vital to the continuity of the Walbiri universe.⁸

Summary and Conclusion

The regeneration of Walbiri society is most evidently the physical function of women, both in parturition and in childhood nurturance and sustenance, as distinct from men whose regenerative role is spiritual. Men's rituals are believed to be necessary for the spiritual, and thus less directly physical regeneration of Walbiri society and the country which supports it. Thus men's rituals are collectively and metaphorically conceptualized as female. At the same time, in the internal organization of men's rituals, women's physical roles and men's spiritual roles in regeneration are expressed by the division of the

participants into managers, whose role is to physically prepare the dancers and nurture and sustain their performance, and owners, whose role is to spiritually re-create the symbols of creative endeavors of the ancestors. Thus there is a homologous relationship between the two levels of symbolism, viz., women's physical regenerative role: men's spiritual regenerative role:: managers' physically recreative role: owners' spiritually recreative role. Both the more general metaphor of men's rituals as a regenerative female and the homology between the complementarity of women's and men's roles and ritual managers' and owners' roles are given choreographic expression which pervades circumcision ceremonies, the katjiri, and men's entire ritual life.

The symbolism of men dancing as women is not well articulated by the Walbiri; in fact the ritual clowns 'dancing like women' is the only occasion on which I heard it explicitly stated. The meaning attributed in the analysis was arrived at by examining ritual contexts, ritual roles, and social structure and processes. Male informants were quite explicit about the female identity of the mythical heroes of the katjiri ceremony as well as about their ritual representations. However, even here there was ambiguity, since at times the heroes were spoken of as male (cf. Meggitt, 1966). Munn's analysis of Walbiri iconography supports the interpretation of men's rites as symbolic procreation and of the ritual roles of owner and manager as symbolic of male and female sex roles (Munn, 1973). In the case of non-mimetic dancing in the circumcision rites I have taken greater liberty with the data, although the symbol of menstruation is clear to an observer. Symbolic meaning is not always explicated by participants in ritual and the arts, and if it is, the exegesis itself may require ethnographic interpretation, as Sperber (1975) has argued. Some degree of intuitive interpretation of symbols by the ethnographer, who is familiar with the cultural nexus, may often be necessary for ethnographic analysis.

An assumption underlying this paper is that there is a strain toward consistency of symbolic association in any culture. Historical borrowings of symbol vehicles tend to be integrated with already existing symbols within a culture to form a consistent symbolic repertoire. At the time of Meggitt's field work with the Walbiri in the mid-nineteen-fifties, the Walbiri asserted that the mythical heroes of the katjiri ceremony were male, despite the fact that a substantial part of it was evidently borrowed from northern tribes where the heroes are female (Meggitt, 1966). Nor did Meggitt (1965: 313) observe the Blood Dance in the circumcision rites. Today the Walbiri explicitly assign the katjiri heroes to the female sex, although, as I have stated, there still exists some male/female ambiguity. The Blood Dance appears to have been borrowed from the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines to the south, where Roheim (1945:166-177) adduced substantial ethnographic and linguistic evidence to the effect that the dance is a symbol of menstruation. These two historical facts, the shift in sex symbolism of the katjiri and the borrowing of the Blood Dance, occurring over a period of about fifteen years (c. 1955-1970), suggest that the Walbiri have moved quite rapidly toward

a new configuration of symbols, and that men dancing in women's style has now a common symbolic association across the boundaries of ritual categories.

The interpretation given so far follows Durkheim's concept of collective representations and Lévi-Strauss' symbolic contrasts. An alternative, but not contradictory interpretation is psychological: men dancing in women's style satisfied men's need to symbolically appropriate women's procreative powers (cf. Roheim, 1945, Bettelheim, 1954).⁹ The former focuses on society's need to enhance solidarity by creating collective symbols of itself, while the latter emphasizes the individual's need to compensate for the lack of a power held by others by creating a symbol of that power. The latter has the advantage of explaining the excessive secrecy of men's rites which enhances the psychical advantage of the symbol by protecting men against the doubts of skeptical women (Bettelheim, 1954:228). The former considers dance as a social rather than an individual phenomenon, and hence as part of a more inclusive system. However, since social systems have psychological foundations, the two interpretations are complementary.

Another example of a society in choreographic action in which men and women are portrayed in a cult dance by men only occurs among the western Yoruba. In the gelede dance men are portrayed as explosive, unrestrained, hot and powerful; and women are portrayed (by men) as controlled, cool and restrained (Drewal and Drewal, 1975). The authors of the account of the gelede dance suggest that men's portrayal of women as the emotional and social opposite of men really expresses men's perception and fear of women as having covert power that is secret and mysterious. In all societies the relationship between men and women, in both psychological and social terms, must be established. The Walbiri, as well as the Western Yoruba, symbolize that relationship in dance.

Stephen A. Wild

NOTES

1. This paper is based on data collected in field work carried out at Hooker Creek, a Walbiri Aboriginal settlement and reserve in the Northern Territory of Australia, in the period from October, 1969, through August, 1972, in four field trips totalling ten months. The research was funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra. Further data were provided by two Walbiri assistants, Jerry Patrick and Fred Rider, who between them spent five weeks working at my office at Monash University, Melbourne. I wish to express my thanks to them and my other main Walbiri assistant in the field, Dick Raymond.

2. The orthography is derived from Hale (n.d.: 100-101) and Jagst (n.d.), though the final form is mine (Wild, 1975:152-3).
3. In Meggitt's account, the heroes (mamantapari) were male, although the men used another myth of two female heroes to deceive the women about the true nature of the katjiri (Meggitt, 1966). I was told the mamantapari heroes in the myth were female, although in general conversation they were sometimes referred to as if they were male. There is at least ambiguity on the subject. Secondly, although the mamantapari myth appears to be primus inter pares, the focus of two katjiri ceremonies I observed were the ritual expressions of two other myths, both sexually neutral. My contention is that the primary symbolism of the ritual, rather than the myth, is female.
4. A junior novice (punjunju) is a boy who has been initiated into the men's ritual life through circumcision (at about 12 years of age) but is not yet permitted to take any active part in men's rituals. After being subincised about four years later he is inducted into senior novice status (tjilwiri) from which he finally passes into the status of a fully initiated man (ngarka).
5. Photographs in the original version of this article illustrate two of these types of mimetic dances. The first shows a KiPipikanji and depicts an owner's performance of an incidence relating to a kangaroo ancestor and its direction by a manager. The second is of a Njinantja-kuru or sitting dance in which the dancer performs sitting on a ground painting which represents the Rain ancestor. The mimetic dance is of a lightning incident of the Rain ancestor. One manager provides accompaniment with make-shift "clap-sticks", while the other gives encouragement and direction - Editor.
6. The Initiation dreaming concerns the dreamtime activities of ritual novices who undergo the process of initiation which is today re-enacted in initiation ceremonies.
7. Males are subincised toward the end of their junior novitiate. They are inducted into senior novitiate at the next katjiri ceremony.
8. The role of the clowns may also be explained in part by Leach's argument that revelry and role reversal on ritual occasions mark off normal secular time periods between rituals (Leach, 1966: 132-136). Aside from semantic reversal in clown speech (Hale, 1971), two other reversals occur: men acting as women, and adults acting as children. Near the beginning of a katjiri ceremony, two clowns humorously act out a childish fight over access to girls. The clear implication is that such behavior is inappropriate for initiated men (although it is, in fact, highly characteristic!). The fight is the signal for the beginning of clowning activities, the clowns acting as irresponsible children do throughout the ceremony.

9. Roheim explained implicit female symbolism in Aboriginal men's rites as satisfying men's psychological need to restore initiates to new life after symbolically castrating them through circumcision, and in increase rites to restore to life species they kill in order to live. Bettelheim rejects Roheim's castration hypothesis, interpreting circumcision rites as meeting the need of male adolescents to symbolically compensate for their lack of female procreative power, and increase rites as meeting the same need in adult men.

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