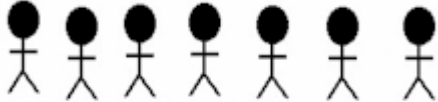
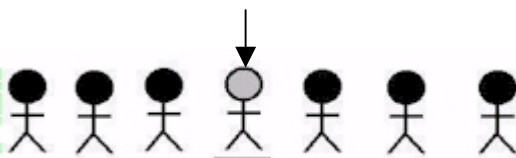
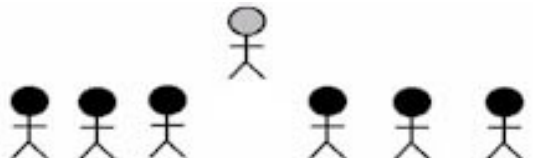
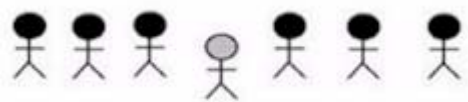
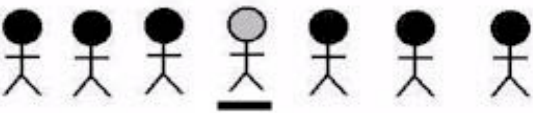
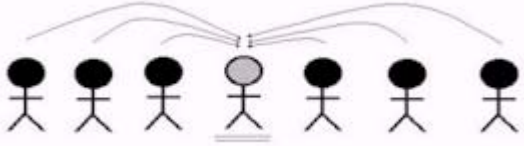


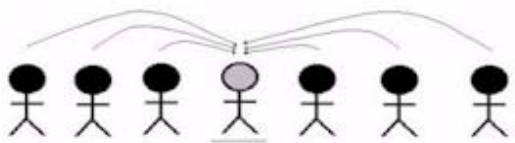
**ABORIGINAL RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES INC.
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POLITICAL STRUCTURES OF GOVERNMENT

The following diagrams and dialogue arose consistently on a number of occasions when a particular educational workshop was run with **Yolŋu** (Aboriginal people of Central to North East Arnhem Land) on political literacy, to explore the respective **Yolŋu** and **Balanda** (non-Aboriginal) structures of government. The dialogue has been very much summarised into a question/ response form here in English for reasons of brevity and clarity, the questions written here being raised by the educators and the responses are that of **Yolŋu**. (Of course in reality there was much more dialogue, which took place in the people's vernacular, where there were questions given by both groups leading to mutual learning.)

 <p>1.Q: If this was a typical 'bäpurru' (clan), where would the 'ŋurru-dawalaŋu' (selected leader) stand (in a wider sense)?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Leader</p>  <p>2. <u>Resp</u>: The ŋurru-dawalaŋu would stand here with the people.</p>
 <p>3.<u>Resp</u>: Not over and above the people</p>	 <p>4. <u>Resp</u>: And not below the people</p>
 <p>5.<u>Resp</u>: The leader must be 'one' with the people. They must be 'liya-rrambaŋi' (same in mind/thinking</p>	 <p>6.Q: Who gives this authority to the leader? <u>Resp</u>: The people do.</p>

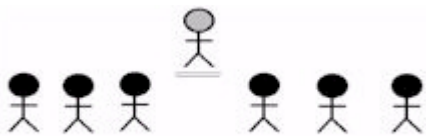
with the people).



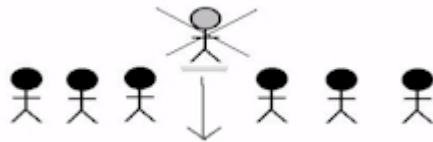
7. Q: Who gives the symbols of authority to the leader?
Resp: The people.



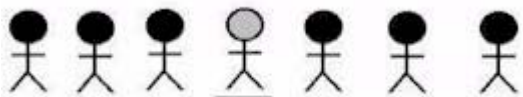
8. Q: What are some of these symbols of authority that the people give to the leader?
Resp: Clapsticks to call the people together and the clan 'crest' in the form of a sacred dilly bag.



9. Q: What happens if the leader puts themselves over and above the people?



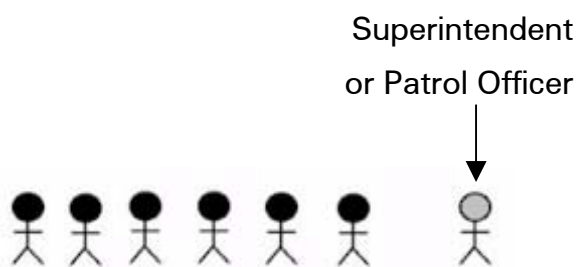
10. Resp: The people will pull them down because the authority for the leader to rule comes from the people.



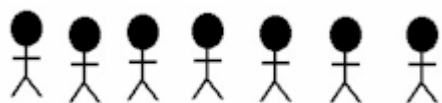
11. Resp: Because we the people know where their authority comes from, we are therefore able to take action to deal with a leader that has overstepped their authority. A leader should be at one mind with the people, never over, above or apart from the people.

12. The people name this system as 'mägayamirr'. It is a structure of law that is peaceful and tranquil, with the right people making decisions. It is a Government for the people by the people.

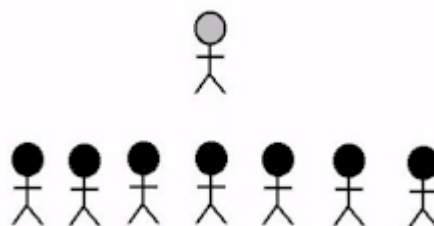
13. We then raised with the people why their local government at the community council level was not working. In their search for an answer, we asked the people to draw pictures of the situation that existed in the old mission or government settlement day. Who had the authority and power then?



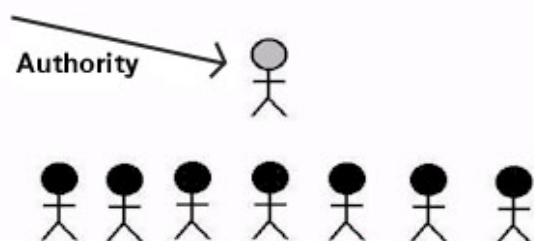
14. Resp: The superintendent or patrol officer was the '**bungawa**' (boss).



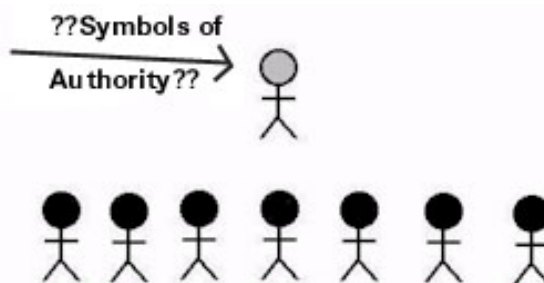
15. Q. Was he level with the people or above or below the people?



16. Resp: No, he was over and above the people.



17. Q: Who gave the authority to the superintendent or patrol officer?
Resp: '**Mulkuru**' (strangers/foreigners/outside). We don't know who gave it.



18. Q: Who gave the symbols of authority to the superintendent?
Resp: '**Mulkuru**' (strangers/foreigners/outside)

Symbols of



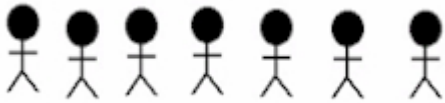
Authority?



19. Q: What were some of the symbols of authority that were given to the superintendent or patrol officer?



20. Resp: A gun, whip, bunch of keys and/or a Bible (the response depending on the experience of the people).



21. Q. What do you call this type of leadership or authority?

Resp: '**Liya-gānamirr**' (literally, 'mind by itself'. That is, the person's mind/thinking is not with the peoples. Rather, they act in a dictatorial way, as they have no **Yolŋu** constitutional authority or backing (as with dictators).)

22. After much reflection and telling of stories by the people about the two different types of leadership, we asked the people which type of government operates in Australia today. (a) A system of government that has **māgayamirr** qualities, that is, government for the people by the people, or (b) A **liya-gānamirr** system?

Resp: Almost all responses were that every form of Balanda government, from the federal level down to the local government councils, were of the second type, **liya-gānamirr** (dictatorships). Only one or two people in each workshop commented that it may be somewhere between the first and second types.

CONFUSION ABOUT THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Soon after commencing these workshops, it became clearly evident that many of the **Yolngu** living on Aboriginal communities are extremely confused about their rights as citizens of this country, as citizens of the municipality in which they reside, as members of their local incorporated community and as councillors of local incorporated groups. It was initially very difficult for those of us facilitating these workshops to understand how the **Yolngu** could have come to this way of thinking. This only became clear after reflecting on the historical contact between **Yolngu** and **Balanda** and after the **Yolngu** participants depicted this in diagrams as we talked. What we then became aware of was as follows:-

Before the 1967 referendum which resulted in Aboriginal people being given full citizenship under the Federal Constitution, Aboriginal people had lived as wards of the state under various state and Commonwealth welfare or similar acts. The structure of these acts was autocratic in nature, however as **Yolngu** were not aware of the underlying constitutional power given to those individuals and bodies that delivered services under these acts, they therefore saw the whole system and it's deliverers as dictatorial in nature. That is, their absolute authority had no constitutional basis. For this reason, **Yolngu** have for many decades lived under what they have perceived to be dictatorships and as a result, have come to the intellectual conclusion that all Balanda political structures are dictatorial in structure and nature.

Referring again to the workshops, on asking the people who holds the power and has the authority in the Federal Government, the response received was that the Prime Minister was the '**bungawa**' (boss), who they said can "do what they like". At the Northern Territory Government level, the answer was the Chief Minister, who can also 'do what they like'. As regards their response to the local **Yolngu** town council level, there was no certainty in their opinion, because they recognised a few people who could be the **bungawa** (boss). Was it the chairman, or the vice-chairman, or the town clerk? Or was it the **Balanda** bookkeeper or secretary? The people were not sure and commented that there was frequently argument between the people in these roles as to whom held the supreme authority.

On the people expressing their uncertainty about who held the supreme authority within their local town councils, we questioned as to whether there was now a full council instead of just one boss like in the superintendent or patrol officer days. "Oh, but we also had a council in the old days" was their response. That was called the village council. The people told us that under that system, the superintendent or patrol officer would make the decisions and then come and tell the village council what he had decided. The village council would then in turn tell the people. So they saw the role of the current day town councils, as one of listening to the Chairperson, the vice-chairperson, the town clerk and the bookkeeper/secretary, then reporting that to the community.

We then discussed further with the workshop participants the two types of government structure, namely the **māgayamirr** system - a government for the people and by the people - and the **liya-gānamirr** system - a government structure that is dictatorial in nature. We then needed to start discussing the wider Australian system as it now exists, so as to enable the people to discover what was the truth about the two systems and what was the true political structure now operating in Australia. In some workshops we got to this point, whilst in others that discussion would have to go on later.

The area of work which we refer to here is very significant and in itself is large in content; As a result, in no community that we have worked has this dialogue been carried to anywhere near completion. However although this specific educational process is too lengthy to document here, we stress that this discussion is a vital link to people starting their own investigation of what are the actual political structures in place and discovering through this process what are their individual and corporate rights and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The object of this paper has been to show an example of the political confusion that is in the minds of the people. In light of this confusion, it is not difficult to understand why certain things are just 'not working'. At the same time however, we have tried to give the reader a glimpse of the fact that there is a complete political system already existent within **Yolŋu** culture that can be used together with the people's vernacular, as a vehicle for education and clarification of the wider Australian political system.

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