

The Last Step?

Movement did not stop with the outstations. In mid-1981, the Pintupi moved back to a site near the Kintore Range, known to them as Warlungurru. This area was, for the first time in twenty years, their own country—located 150 miles west of Papunya. The older Pintupi saw the creation of this settlement as a step toward autonomy and a reassertion of control over destructive outside influences. Nonetheless, the actual move to Kintore depended on the grudging willingness of the government to support the new community and the provision of a white administrator to handle the business with Alice Springs. As the Pintupi had hoped, however, the distance has made alcohol difficult to obtain, and they have prohibited its use in Kintore.

Those who moved from Papunya have been joined at Kintore by relatives who had once left the desert for Balgo, Warburton Range, or Jigalong. And the thrust of recent developments is an increasing ritual and pragmatic communication among Western Desert communities that had previously been individually isolated on the fringes of the Gibson Desert. Even so, access to the more remote parts of the desert remains difficult. The limited water and transportation resources in the Western Desert initially restricted the population of 300–350 Pintupi to living in one settlement at Kintore. But their plan, since the move, has always been to create a number of small outstations in the Gibson Desert. The drilling of new bores is now making this last movement possible, with fifty Pintupi living still further west at Kiwirrkura and other outstations. This development promises, one hopes, an eventual end to their odyssey.

CHAPTER 2

The Dreaming: Time and Space

*It's not our idea, it's a big law.
We have to sit down alongside of that Law like all
the dead people who went before us.*

Throughout Australia, the Aboriginal outlook on human life and the universe is shaped by a distinctive and subtle conception that they refer to in English as *The Dreaming*. A series of celebrated anthropologists from Spencer and Gillen (1899), Roheim (1945), and Strehlow (1947), to Stanner (1956, 1966), Meggitt (1972), and Munro (1970) have grappled with the significance of *The Dreaming*, each arriving at fruitful interpretations. Taken together with the theoretical extrapolations of scholars such as Durkheim (1912) and Lévi-Strauss (1966), these accounts provide illuminating analyses of this distinctly Aboriginal cultural construction. Pointedly, they all agree on the importance of *The Dreaming* in Aboriginal social life and its central place in constituting their lived world.

Yet for all that has been written, the relationship between this cultural construction of time, space, and personhood and the particular varieties of social life remains problematic. It is with this in view that I address again the problem of *The Dreaming* among the Pintupi.

Initially, the constitution of the world by *The Dreaming* must be treated phenomenologically as a given condition of "what there is," an endowment of being and potential that defines for Pintupi the framework of human action. Like all symbolic constructions, however, its meaning requires further interpretation (Geertz 1973, Ricoeur 1970, Rosaldo 1980). Because it touches so many dimensions of Pintupi life, *The Dreaming* (*tiyankurpa*) possesses no single or finite significance. It represents, instead, a projection into symbolic space of various social processes. We understand the social meaning of such a construct only when we are able to relate it to the particular circumstances of those who use it.

For the Pintupi, at least, particular attention should be paid to the precarious achievement of Society within the constraints of life in dispersed local groups as a construction that transcends the present and immediate. Essentially, the form taken by The Dreaming among the Pintupi represents this dilemma. Its structure is a product of the way Pintupi society reproduces itself in space and time. Indeed, the distinction that the concept of The Dreaming establishes between two levels of being reflects the structuring of Pintupi space. Such a view sustains the intuition that two other constructs of major importance in Pintupi social life—*ngurra*, meaning "camp," "country," or "place," and *walytja*, referring to "family," "relatives," or "kin"—are fundamentally linked to the concept of The Dreaming. It is in relation to this practical logic that space and time, defined by The Dreaming, acquire their value.

The Dreaming: Tjukurrpa as Ontology

Far more than a set of just-so stories, the concept of The Dreaming is basic to the Pintupi view of reality. The distinction between The Dreaming and all else underlies every feature of their universe. Both the country (the landscape and its form) and the people are thought to be "from The Dreaming" (*tjukurrpangu*), the ground of being. Pintupi describe a large hill in the Kintore Range, for example, as the body of a monitor lizard, *Ngintaka*, who traveled from the west. At Kintore, the monitor lizard came upon a group of women and children dancing. He killed them with his tail and, raising his head up in a position that is represented in the shape of the landform, turned to stone (*purritingu*). The hill that arose is known as *Yunytjinyu*, in reference to the exposure of the lizard's throat (*yunytju*).

As Pintupi use the term, "Dreaming" may refer both to the specific stories and to the whole creative epoch of which the stories are part. A narrative of the traveling ancestor who killed the dancing women becomes, then, Monitor Lizard Dreaming.

An important semantic opposition reveals the consistent ontology underlying the Pintupi conceptualization of The Dreaming. When they describe events, Pintupi contrast The Dreaming (*tjukurrpa*) with those events or stories that are said to be *yuti*. The word *yuti* signifies visibility or some other form of sensory presentation to a subject. A person might be directed to an ax he wants to borrow by the phrase, "There it is over there, visible" (*yuti*). A kangaroo emerging from behind a bush has, to the Pintupi, "become visible" (*yutirringu*). But other senses equally convey the information that makes an object *yuti*. For example, a native curer once

told me he was certain that a car was on the way to our camp. After waiting and listening for several minutes, he turned to me triumphantly and said, "Listen, the motor sound has become *yuti*." Whether or not something is *yuti* is very important to Pintupi, who place great emphasis on personal experience and distinguish between what is witnessed and what is reported at secondhand. The contrast between *yuti* and *tjukurrpa*, however, does not depend on a person's actually having seen an event. As long as somebody *could* see an event, it may be described as *yuti*. What is critical ontologically is not whether a particular person witnessed the event, but whether it is in principle witnessable.

A late arrival to a conversation often asks a storyteller about the status of the narrative: "Are you talking about The Dreaming?" "No," he may answer, "not Dreaming; I'm talking about the visible" (*yuti*), or "not Dreaming; I'm talking about what really happened" (*mularrpa*). Since the word *mularrpa* usually means "real," "true," or "actual" as opposed to "untrue," "fictitious," or "lie," its contrast with the concept of The Dreaming may seem puzzling. However, The Dreaming is not viewed either as a fiction or a lie. In fact, there is no category of fictional narrative in Pintupi. A story either happened or it did not; if it did not occur, the story is a "lie."

The relationship between these two realms of the universe (*tjukurrpa* and *mularrpa*) is not, therefore, one of simple logical opposition. Rather, The Dreaming constitutes the ground or foundation of the visible, present-day world. What speakers define by choosing between these words is whether an occurrence is in the phenomenal (*mularrpa*) realm or in the noumenal, whether it is witnessable. For the Pintupi, the veracity of The Dreaming is assured, no matter how imperfectly it may be known by humans who did not witness it. These stories, they insist, are not "made up just for fun" (*ngunytji*); they really happened. The existence of the lizard's hill is proof enough that the event occurred as postulated.¹ Thus, informants assured me of a Dreaming story's truth by insisting they had seen the place where it happened.

Pintupi apply this theory of existence to everything in their world. Persons, customs, geographical features, all are said to have originated in The Dreaming. The phrase they use—"from The Dreaming, it becomes real" (*tjukurrpangu*, *mularrparringu*)—represents a passage between two planes of being.

If The Dreaming can be said to transcend the present in this fashion, the fact that the landscape is a series of stories allows it, also, to transcend the immediate. Frequently known as totemic ancestors in anthropological literature, the mythological personages of The Dreaming traveled from place to place, hunted, performed

ceremonies, fought, and finally turned to stone or "went into the ground," where they remain. The actions of these powerful beings—animal, human, and monster?—created the world as it now exists. They gave it outward form, identity (a name), and internal structure. The desert is crisscrossed with their lines of travel and, just as an animal's tracks leave a record of what happened, the geography and special features of the land—hills, creeks, salt lakes, trees—are marks of the ancestors' activities. Places where exceptionally significant events took place, where power was left behind, or where the ancestors went into the ground and still remain are special sacred sites (*yaria yaria*) because ancestral potency is near. For almost all the landscape (hills, water holes, and so on), the country (*igurrat*) takes its name from The Dreaming, either from the event or from the associated rituals and songs. Finally, while Dreamtime action gives name and identity to each location, the connections a story may make between places also links them into a larger country whose parts share identity.

Other aspects of Pintupi life derive from this epoch as well. One hears repeatedly about customs and of human beings that "from The Dreaming, [they] became real." Nothing is created by human beings; it was all there "from the start." Pintupi believe that The Dreaming left behind at various places the creative potency—or spiritual essence—of all the natural species and of human beings. They speak of conception and birth as the emergence of an individual from the plane of The Dreaming onto the physical, phenomenal plane of existence. Logically, then, conception in the Pintupi sense refers to the quickening of the fetus, when the mother first notices physically that she is pregnant. An individual is said to have been "sitting as a Dreamtime being" (*iyinama tiikurrpa*) and then to have become visible (*yaitirringu*). Alternately, the transformation may be characterized as "becoming body" or "becoming a human being" (*yarnangurrngu*). Individuals are thought of as being "left behind" (*wantingul*) by The Dreaming and subsequently to emerge into the present-day world. Birth thus represents a movement from the significant, invisible, temporally prior situation to the present, visible one; and quite unambiguously, the spirit of an individual preexists, autonomously, apart from parental contribution.

The Dreaming also links people and place. The place from which a person's spirit comes is his or her Dreaming-place, and the person is an incarnation of the ancestor who made the place. A person's Dreaming provides the basic source of his or her identity, an identity that preexists. It is not unusual, therefore, to hear people describe actions of The Dreaming in the first person. For the Pintupi,

individuals come from the country, and this relationship provides a primary basis for owning a sacred site and for living in the area. In such ways, present-day arrangements are prefigured by The Dreaming, although the Pintupi see themselves as following The Dreaming. As the invisible framework of this world, The Dreaming is its cosmic prototype.³

Dreams

Although Pintupi make a sharp conceptual distinction between "dreams" and "The Dreaming," certain cultural understandings underlie both. Therefore, the word *tiikurrpa* is also used to signify actual dreams. Sometimes, Pintupi will describe the act of dreaming as "seeing Dreaming" (*tiikurrpa nyangiripa*) or just as "dreaming" by adding a suffix to the root to create a verb (*tiikurmaniripa*). In this way, the experience of dreams is contrasted with the visible, but The Dreaming remains a different order of reality. Conventional dreams are usually considered matters of "little import" (*inguyiti*). To sustain the distinction when necessary, the word *kapukuri* unambiguously refers to actual dreams and is never equivalent with the concept of The Dreaming as the mythological past. The relationship between the two derives, presumably, from their joint reference to situations of nonordinary reality, but the connection between them is culturally problematic.

The common Pintupi view of what happens in dreams is that one's "spirit" (*kurruiripa*) travels apart from the body and observes things not ordinarily within the field of sensory presentation. These observed events may be distant in time or space but, significantly, others cannot witness them. Sometimes individuals are believed to come into contact with the ancestral figures of The Dreaming, who may give them special knowledge, usually of songs and ceremonies. These experiences are considered to be revelations of matters people did not know of before. What one sees is believed to have always existed. As other observers have pointed out (cf. Stanner 1956), the experience of dreams—as a dimension of existence that is parallel to everyday life but invisible to it—makes them a good metaphor for The Dreaming. Like the latter, dreams also are said to be "not real" (*imulirpa wiyul*). The relationship is more than metaphorical and, consequently, more complex.

The major question of all such experiences is whether or not they are "true." Though usually considered insignificant, their value is negotiable, as the tentative ambiguity of the commonly used phrase "I saw something" suggests. When people wake up in the morning, it is not uncommon for them to mention a dream. They

may wonder about what they saw, what it means, and whether it is an omen, but a dream's potential portent seems prominent only in situations of uncertainty and danger. Although a dream of violence that a man interprets as a killing at a distant settlement may arouse anxiety if relations are strained between groups, it will be forgotten if nothing transpires. Or such a dream may gain importance in retrospect, if the appearance of an event confirms an interpretation of it.

The significance of dreams, then, becomes a product of negotiation and not a given. Even if one believes one has come into contact with ancestral beings, to validate this publicly one must be able to persuade others to accept the claim. Most often, people express a puzzled curiosity rather than an insistence on any value as omen. In this way, the mystery of dreams parallels that of *The Dreaming*. While they offer a certain amount of information, one cannot be sure about their meaning and no one else will have witnessed them. That they lie outside of human control—unwitnessable—gives dreams much potency. They remain open to enormous interpretive possibilities, while individuals need not commit themselves to a particular meaning. Social construction can take place around them without attributing creativity to individuals.

Time as Continuity

What is critical about the concept of *The Dreaming* is that it denies creative significance to history and human action, just as it denies the crossings of time. It represents all that exists as deriving from a single, unchanging, timeless source. All things have always been the same, forever deriving from the same basic pattern. The Dreaming, which cannot be altered by human action, is the very image of self-direction and the source of a given autonomy in human life.

In the Pintupi view, things as they are—the familiar customs of male initiation, death, cross-cousin marriage, sorcery, and burial, for example—were instituted once-and-for-all in *The Dreaming*. Human beings neither made it so nor invented these practices. Like everything else of the cosmos, people and their practices are simply part of a single, monistic order of existents established long ago. The vital essence of men and women appeared as spirits (*kurrumpai*) from *The Dreaming*. The Pintupi ontology thus emphasizes the relatedness of the cosmos, rather than the opposition of spirit and matter, natural and supernatural, or good and evil.

It is also a world view that implies continuity and permanence. The historicity of hills unchanged through time proclaims that the cosmos has always been as it is and that, indeed, it cannot be

different. The Pintupi, like other Western Desert Aborigines, sometimes mark this quality of "life as a one-possibility thing" (Stanner 1966) when they describe *The Dreaming* as "the Law." In doing so, they emphasize not only the norms or precedents established in *The Dreaming*, but also the sense of moral imperative it embodies. People must continue *The Dreaming* and preserve it, making first things continuous with last, by "holding the Law" for coming generations. Thus, human beings play a role in the maintenance of the instituted order. Pintupi explain about *The Dreaming* that it is not a product of human subjectivity or will. It is, rather, an order to which all are subordinated: "It's not our idea," men told me. "It's a big Law. We have to sit down alongside of that Law like all the dead people who went before us." Indeed, not only do the Dreaming narratives tell how the world came to be, but the raw material of the stories, the symbols themselves in the form of the landscape, signify the same concern on another level. Human life and being, they imply, are as permanent, enduring, and unchanging as the land itself.

These concepts are subtle and complex. In Western historical terms, changes have always taken place. The evidence of new customs and new cults is unassailable; life is not static. The Pintupi understandings of the historical process are not totally static either, but the concept of the *The Dreaming* organizes experience so that it appears to be continuous and permanent. For the Pintupi, the dynamic, processual aspect of history seems to exist as one of discovering, uncovering, or even reenacting elements of *The Dreaming*.⁴

The basis for the present-day association of people, in the Pintupi view, is that they come from one Dreaming, that is, a single geographical track of a story. Since the forties, Western Desert Aborigines have been moving out of the deepest desert areas and congregating around government settlements and mission stations. This process has brought together people who previously had had little contact with each other. Some Pintupi wound up hundreds of miles to the north, at Balgo Mission. Until 1975 I had been told that one of the main Pintupi Dreaming tracks ended at a place called Pinari near Lake Mackay. However, after Pintupi from my community visited their long-separated relatives at Balgo, they returned to tell me that "we thought that story ended, went into the ground, at Pinari. But we found that it goes underground all the way to Balgo." Apparently, this revelation was discovered in a vision by a man from Balgo. The example shows that historical change can be integrated, but that it is assimilated to the preexisting forms: The foundation had always been there, but people had not known it before.

What appear to be changes do not challenge the fundamental ontology of all things ordained once-and-for-all. New rituals, songs, or designs—for Westerners the products of human creation—are for the Pintupi clearer sights of what was always there. This construction denies the impact of human actions by asserting that the events and extents of the visible world remain reflections of an ontologically prior set of events. Though we might see in *The Dreaming* merely the "moving shadow of the present" (as Stanner once described it), its participants see sustained correspondence. Time—in this sense as an abstract dimension detached from subjectivity—is captive to the cultural constructions of continuity. A similar structure underlies the Pintupi ordering of space.

Ngurra: Extension in Space

Orientation in space is a prime concern for the Pintupi. Even their dreams are cast in a framework of spatial coordinates. It is impossible to listen to any narrative, whether it be historical, mythological, or contemporary, without constant reference to where events happened. In this sense, place provides the framework around which events coalesce, and places serve as mnemonics for significant events. Travel through the country evokes memories about a fight that occurred at a nearby water hole or a death in the hills beyond. Not temporal relation but geography is the great punctuator of Pintupi storytelling. Upon close examination, it is activity that creates places, giving significance to impervious matter.

Thus the world is socialized by the Pintupi, although they do not build a spatially centered cosmos of domesticated culture and wild nature as many more settled people have done. A social life with so much movement seems to preclude such a construction. Instead, they seem truly at home as they walk through the bush, full of confidence. A camp can be made almost anywhere within a few minutes—a windbreak set up, fires built, and perhaps a hillscan of tea prepared. Unmarked and wild country becomes a "camp" (*ngurra*) with the comfort of home. The way of thinking that enables a people to make a camp almost anywhere they happen to be, with little sense of dislocation, is a way of thinking that creates a universe of meanings around the mythologized country. These people who move and shift so regularly from place to place have truly culturalized space and made out of impersonal geography a home, a *ngurra*. The threat to this construction is not the overgrowth of wild nature but the ravages of time.

As the Pintupi portray it, this universe of meaning is not restricted to their own creations or those of their forebears. The

world as it now exists, in their conception, is the product of powerful mythological beings and the formative events in which they took part. Evidence of this enduring reality is all about them, in every formation of the landscape. To travel across the land with them is to learn that at this hill or in that creek something happened "in *The Dreaming*."

There is a consistency in these structurings, embodied in the dual meaning of *ngurra*. This word has two distinct references to socialized space, in referring both to a temporary camp in which people live and also to an enduring "country" or named place. *Ngurra* is not only the human creation of "camp" but also the Dreaming creation of "country." Thus, as the concept by which the Pintupi most frequently appropriate space, *ngurra* always relates demarcated places to activity that gives them meaning. As with the Nuer use of *cieng* (Evans-Pritchard 1940), it is through this concept of spatial order that the Pintupi articulate their own social organization. The idea of a camp combines people who live together with a site at which they are localized; it is the fact of people living there that makes a space a camp.

Although the identification it formulates is more complex, the usage of *ngurra* as country or place similarly does not refer to an objective, physical space. Because named places acquire their identity through the activities of mythological personages in *The Dreaming*, *ngurra* continues to be based on a social reference. Neither "camp" nor "country" exist apart from the significance created by action or event, but "country" retains an identity enduring through time as something beyond human choice. Human and Dreaming action each contribute to the definition of landscape, although their constructions have differing properties. In relation to human action, one is historical while the other might be termed transhistorical.

The realm of human action is surely primary in its meaning, and at its simplest, *ngurra* is the place where one belongs or where one sleeps. It is common for Pintupi to classify a water hole and its environs as a *ngurra*. But when describing a particular site, they clearly distinguish between the place where one camps, sleeps, and prepares food (the camp), and the water hole nearby (*ikupi*). In this sense, a *ngurra* may be anywhere that people decide to sleep.

Just as a bird's nest is its *ngurra* and a kangaroo's home is the plain, one's *ngurra* is the place where one belongs. Within the daily routine of leaving a camp in the morning and returning, perhaps after a day's hunt, in the afternoon, the *ngurra* is the place to which one returns. Here, food is likely to be shared and resources pooled. Through this association, the concept of *ngurra* involves the idea

of "relatives" (*waityia*) or "family group," in the sense of people whose daily lives are tied together. In Pintupi thinking, therefore, *ngura* is the embodiment and image of sociality, the physical expression of a basic social unit, the conjugal family. Just as proximity implies cooperation, so does social distance lead to spatial separation. When the social ties between people weaken, they move apart. Because it embodies sociality at a primary level, the concept of *ngura* is used by the Pintupi as an idiom of social classification.

It is characteristic of folk terms like *ngura* that, unlike analytic concepts, they may be used at quite distinctive levels of organization. Conflating these has often led observers to treat the organization of small-scale societies as less complex and more rigid than it is. What Pintupi mean when they talk of *ngura* can be sorted into several distinct contexts.

When speakers refer to the camp of an individual man and his spouse, as opposed to the nearby camps of coresidents in a local group, the term *ngura* delineates social boundaries of privacy that, ordinarily, people should respect. Further, a married man who lives with his wife and young children is said to be "with camp" (*nguraitjara*) and differentiated thereby from unmarried men and boys who are described as "from the single men's camp" (*lawar-rangkatala*).

At a broader level, the word *ngura* may be used to distinguish a set of camps (individual units), whose members consider themselves to be a group—that is, spatially separated from the camps of others who may be living nearby. Those of the same *ngura*, in this sense, cooperate more closely within the designated cluster than between them, and people will speak of "our camp" as opposed to "their camp." Such classification is quite noticeable in settlement life, especially in the continuing separation of the "old Pintupi" and the "new Pintupi."

The difference between *ngura* as "country" and as "camp" is especially significant. Among people who move so frequently, camps are physically impermanent, and their membership changes through time. The idea of *ngura* as "country," on the other hand, is enduring. In this sense, the two forms of appropriating space (*ngura* as camp and as country) imply different temporal dimensions. A camp, as a human creation, never loses its identification with those who made it or lived there. Not only do the Pintupi move away from camps associated with someone who has died, but they avoid the places for years, as they avoid all other extensions of the deceased such as name or property. Places, they say, remind them of the dead person and make them sad. People also avoid setting up camp in the precise spots where others have camped. But despite these identifications

with people who lived there, camps are impermanent. Eventually they are overgrown and their associations forgotten, while significant new spaces are constantly being established.

Ngura as "country" represents a more inclusive level of the social system. These named places are the camps of The Dreaming. In this way, as several theorists have suggested (cf. Leach 1958, Turner 1979a), the higher level of organization is constructed through a recursive transformation of the lower-level unit. *Ngura* as country employs a relation of people to each other through place modeled on the camp, but it becomes a different sort of social object. Whereas camps come into and pass out of existence, country endures as a reality which people cannot, in theory, alter. Country is collectivized or turned into a socially enduring object because its creators are outside the immediate social world. Though it is modeled on the camp, it exists through time, providing a social framework that appears to have objective status to humans. Further, if *ngura* as camp represents social ties that exist at the moment—relatives organized around a camp—those sharing a country are identified as a fundamental, enduring corporation. That The Dreaming is invisible and, in a sense, not knowable with finality makes it possible to turn the lower-level realities into social ties of more permanent status.

Place and Place-Names

To the Pintupi, then, the landscape in which they move is a life-world of constituted meanings. Though it is not possible to ignore the social concomitant of places, the rest of this chapter will outline the significant features of "country" as a frame for action. We will consider country as if it were simply culturalized space, noting as others have before (Gould 1969a, Tonkinson 1978) that the Western Desert is dotted with places named and known by its Aboriginal inhabitants.

Almost invariably, Pintupi discussions of country are punctuated by descriptions of what happened in The Dreaming. Every significant feature is held to result from Dreaming events. Yumarinya, for example, means "wife's mother-place." The *yumari* of this case is the mother-in-law of a mythological man, who copulated with her at this place. Rock outcroppings, a rock hole, and various markings within a few hundred yards are interpreted as the result of the abhorrent actions of the mythological beings. The name signifies a specific feature of the event.

Two places have the name Kuritji-nya, "shield-place." In one case the name refers to a shield made in The Dreaming. The other

refers to a ritual performed in a boy's initiation in which men beat a shield with a boomerang and sing while the women dance. In the second case, the site was said to have been a result of the ritual being performed there in The Dreaming.

Not all names are Dreaming-derived. Wanariarra-nya, "mulga tree-having-place," refers to the physical attributes of the area around a water hole surrounded by mulga trees. Names such as this seem to resemble descriptive labels rather than proper names. If the word *wanari* became taboo, owing to the death of someone with a similar name, the place would be referred to as Kunnamutjaranya, meaning "with name avoided."

An increase center for wild black currants, whose essence was left there by a group of men in The Dreaming, is known as Yawalyuru-nya, "black currant-place," or as Tjartupirnga, a synonym. It is also known, and preferably so, as Tjukulanya, describing its feature of a large sinkhole in the ground. This last name is used as a matter of etiquette and respect by those who feel a close identification with the site. Some substitutions of this sort are meant to deceive or to focus on nonritual or nonsacred associations in the presence of uninitiated persons.

At the level of "country," the world *ngurra* may apply to any named place. Pintupi refer to Yumariya as a *ngurra*. All its features hold mythological significance. When people say they went to Yumariya, they refer to the whole clustering, a single name referring to several features. Although included in the one name, particular aspects of a site may be designated by context or by further linguistic additions.⁵ For example, a speaker might distinguish between Yumariya the water hole (*tijwiri*) and Yumariya the sacred part (*yarta yarta*).

Likewise, a single name may be used to refer to a number of individually named places that are geographically clustered. Thus, a trip to the Pollock Hills in Western Australia was described as a trip to Yunarlanya. We camped on a creek with that name, taken from the tuber plant growing beside the water. Pointing to the hill beside us, men named three distinctive places on it: Tijkarnga, Panukurunya, and Yunarlanya. In ordinary conversation, particularly when the place is remote, speakers would refer to the whole area as Yunarlanya, knowledgeable listeners understand that the other features are nearby. As other cases could further illustrate, Yunarlanya is not a more general and logically inclusive term for the whole area or hill, as Pennsylvania is for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. It is merely one of the several named places in the cluster. Another site name could be similarly used to refer to them all.

The names of *ngurra*, in other words, refer to specific features rather than to an area enclosed within spatial boundaries. In addition, the names are not organized in an ascending series of mutually exclusive units, as with cities and states. One name may be used to designate collectively a series of place that are considered to be unified or defined by some set of activities as a single living area.⁶

The Pintupi names of places should not be understood as proper names. Alternative names or references are frequently employed, such as words from a song or some other referential system. A large salt lake in the west is variously known as Ngunarmanya, Pinarunya, or Nyaru. The last term refers to the fact that the Dreaming event there was a fire that left a huge burned-out area (or *nyaru*). The second name and probably the first derive from the words of associated songs, although they have a meaning in themselves. To the Pintupi, then, a place itself with its multiple features is logically prior or central; its names are simply standardized forms of reference or description. This view of naming parallels a Pintupi tendency to circumlocution in talking about individual persons and a zest for oblique but descriptive reference.

The Country as Story

One cannot speak of places, as the Pintupi view them, without considering their mythological associations. For two reasons, at least, the metaphor of country as story is particularly appropriate.

First, in discussing an individual's ownership of a place, Pintupi men frequently use the English equivalent, "That's his story." This phrase focuses on what is significant about a place for ownership—the ritual or sacred associations that Stanner (1965) called the country as an "estate." The usual word for sacred object, *turku*, means variously "song," "sacred board," "ritual object," "ceremony," or "story." It is significant that all these referents are classified by the single term, as Strehlow (1947) noted for the Aranda concept of *tjurunga*. Within the category delineated by *turku* there are, of course, more precise words for different kinds of objects, but Pintupi usage emphasizes the underlying commonality of the referents as manifestations of a story, The Dreaming. This view expresses a fundamental feature of Western Desert thought, as Munn (1970) observed: Sacred objects, country, or songs become the embodiment of events, of activity that has, in a sense, turned into these objects.

Second, Pintupi mythology consists mainly of narratives of beings traveling from place to place. Consequently, all the places visited may be part of one larger story or myth. Each place is discrete and separate, but also is part of a continuous series of places linked

by the one story. As a way of classifying places into potentially larger systems, this tradition of geographically based narrative is extremely important both here and elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia.⁷ Principally it establishes a framework for the theory and politics of "ownership," in which claims about rights may be based on the geographical continuity of a single Dreaming. The system is not, despite appearances, a closed one. Reworked and recreated even now, systems of stories constitute a changing political charter of who and what are identified at various levels. With the "discovery" that the *Tingari* Dreaming traveled underground northward to Balgo Hills Mission, for example, the Pintupi found themselves able, in certain contexts, to describe the people of Balgo as "from one country, from one Dreaming."

Country as a Continuous Entity

It is as a manifestation of an underlying story that the Pintupi perceive of country as, essentially, a continuous entity. This structure accounts for some initially puzzling features of Pintupi attitudes toward their homeland. Sociocentric boundaries are difficult to draw; one cannot say that an area X, made up of such-and-such places, constitutes a "country." When individuals describe their "own country," their lists of places are likely to overlap without being identical. Indeed, no separate technical term exists for a larger unit of space composed of a number of named places. What Pintupi emphasized, instead, was that there was one country for everybody, that they were all one family. As one patient older man said, Pintupi country was not like a paddock that is fenced off; if he saw smoke from a fire, he would be happy to go to see who was there.

Pintupi frequently claim that theirs is "one country," nonsegmentary and belonging to everybody. Like so many sweeping ideological assertions, this is both true in one way and not true at another level. Such claims represent, certainly, an assertion of the unity and identity of the people who had come to live together in settlements to the east, using their traditional country as an ideological basis for current relations. Far from being an exception, this assertion represents a major consideration in the cultural organization of space. Thus, one reason given for considering the Pintupi as one group, one "family," is that they are all from the *Tingari*, one long and interconnected Dreaming story.

They do not mean, of course, that all Pintupi are incarnations of the same Dreaming, *Tingari*. As everyone knows, there are people of all different mythological origins. A clue to the meaning of the claim is a contrast related to me. The Pitsantjatjara ceremony

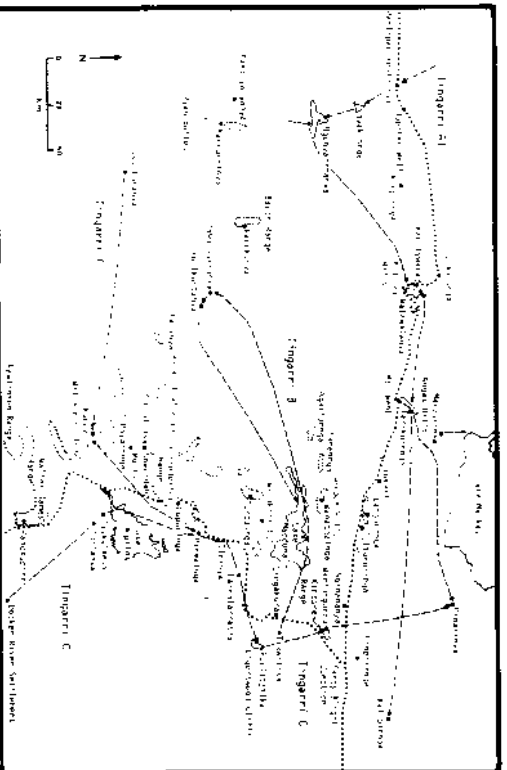
was the Kangaroo Dreaming, according to a thoughtful informant. The Warlpiri was Shield (*Kuritji*) Dreaming, and the Pintupi had *Tingari*.

While considerable complexities surround the meaning of *Tingari*,⁸ in the context of Pintupi claims about their country the word refers to mythological traveling groups of men and ceremonial novices. Pintupi glossed it regularly as "all the men" or "many novices." Three major geographical lines of named places are described as *Tingari*, visited and created in The Dreaming by three groups of traveling people. These groups were made up of novices who had already undergone circumcision (*punyunyu*) and who traveled under the guidance and discipline of powerful, authoritative "bosses." Secluded from women and the uninitiated, such groups performed and witnessed ceremonies of revelation, as well as hunted, argued, and fought, just as present-day Aboriginal people do. Action in the myths themselves interrelates the three groups, and consequently some basis exists in Pintupi thought for considering *Tingari* to be a proper name for the interrelated complex. It is worth examining a small portion of this myth system to illustrate how places are linked in The Dreaming and how country operates as a continuous entity.

Tingari and Pintupi Country: The Native Cat Story

Though most of Pintupi country (and even territory beyond that) is linked by the *Tingari* complex, a portion suffices to show how Dreaming and country relate. Referring to the northern, middle, and southern routes of *Tingari* groups as A, B, C respectively (see Map 2A), I take up the story of *Tingari* group B.⁹ This particular segment of the larger complex links people from the Tjkaritka region in the east with Lake Macdonald and Yawalyurru in the west. The story is punctuated by place—emphasizing localities (named places), relations in space, and evocation of specific kinds of place (sandhills, water holes, and so on).

This particular narrative will provide background for many additional issues discussed in later chapters. (The extended case of claims to the sacred site of Yawalyurru, for example, is an important part of the discussion of the politics of landownership in chapter 5.) As a product of the mythological imagination, this narrative emphasizes the motivations and appropriate relations among people "from one country" (sharing), the geographical expanse of such relations, and the violent consequences of failing to respect the rights of others.



Map 2A. Tingari Routes

The underlying motif of this story is the Native Cat's (*Kuninka*, marsupial cat) desire for revenge against the *Tingari* men from Yawalyurrunya.

Native Cat's home country, men say, is Lake Macdonald (Karkuruntjinyal). While walking near here one day, he came upon a piece of emu fat and saw the tracks of men who had dropped it. He realized that the *Tingari* men had speared an emu east of the lake and cooked it at Tikarikanya. Native Cat became angry (*imirrampa*, "no compassion") because the men had sneaked into his country unannounced and not shared the meat with him. He told his two sons at the lake to prepare themselves, for he was going to bring back these people. He started westward then, following the *Tingari* men's tracks. These latter had transformed themselves into wild dogs for their return. Heading west at night, he passed the Possum people among the claypans of Yintjirunya, the most eastward of a north-south line of fairly permanent waters in the sandhill country south of the Pollock Hills.

The possums were a revenge party chasing a man who had eloped with his mother-in-law and fled south from Warlpiri country. Gathered for a ceremony when Native Cat burst into view, they were frightened by his demeanor as he ran up a sandhill and ululated (*namatjanganaku*, a signal from elder men that indicates a ceremony is about to begin). Native Cat ran down the other side of the sandhill, racing across the claypans in the high-stepping action which men use in ceremonial performances and in displaying anger.

He did not speak to the possums as he decorated himself with vegetable fluff¹⁰ in the design used now in ritual to represent him. At this place, a large bloodwood tree arose, marking the spot. Then, Native Cat raced up another sandhill and ululated, holding a large ritual object in his hand. To this terrifying and dangerous sight, the possum men sang a verse which is included in the *Tingari* song cycles now performed.

Then he headed further westward, finally sleeping near Muntjunga. In the morning he approached Yintjintjinyal, where the women of the *Tingari* men were camped. He climbed a sandhill and sent up a smoke. The women saw it and tossed dirt into the air, as people do to ward off a dangerous spirit (*mamul*). Frightened, the women did not speak to him as he turned south for the men at Yawalyurrunya. He approached from the north as he saw smoke rising from a small hole in the ground. The *Tingari* men were underground, "inside." From the desert oak on the north side of the site, he called to them. He "questioned" them in the ritual manner used by older men toward secluded novices. There was no answer, so he hurled a throwing stick at them, but it bounced away. He stepped back then and circled to the south side of the site. He drew on his hairstring belt, grasped another throwing stick and thrust it vertically down into the ground, twisting it back and forth, opening up a huge hole (which is now Yawalyurrunya) "like dynamite."

The first men to see him as they climbed up were those on the north side. They looked around expecting, because of the power displayed, to see many men, but there was only Native Cat. He was sitting on the edge of the sandhill to the south of the hole, crying because he was "sorry" (*yaltirpa*) for these novices whom he had blasted. Where he sat with an arm covering his face, a startled tree now represents him. The *Tingari* men climbed up his throwing stick, just as contemporary men who care for the north side of the site climb a ladder (*itjkalpa*) to prepare the increase center. From the black currants (*yawalyurrul*) the *Tingari* men had with them inside the ground, it is said, come the black droppings on the walls of the sinkhole. When all the men had climbed out of the hole, they decorated themselves with ceremonial down, the process leaving loose reddish stones on the southern edge. Native Cat told them to leave the black currants behind and go to Kurikuranya, to wait for him in the sandstone hills to the east. He sent them away "just like children." Because they left the black currants behind, their essence from *The Dreaming* is still at the place which men visit to make the fruit grow throughout the country.¹¹

After he sent them away, Native Cat flew westward to Puyulkuranya to direct another *Tingari* group [C] eastward toward Docker River (Wintalkanya) and then to Tjukulanya, Mitukagintjinyal, and Pinanaya [see Map 2A]. Native Cat returned from Puyulkuranya

to Kurlkurtanya and took the *Tingari* men and women to Lake Macdonald, hunting and performing ceremonies along the way. Their actions gave rise to the features of this landscape. At Lake Macdonald, finally, the *Tingari* people were killed with hail and lightning by Native Cat's two sons. Exhausted by this exercise of their powers, however, the sons died and turned into snakes at the salt lake. Stricken with grief (*yalturpa*) at the sight of his dead sons, Native Cat bashed himself in the forehead with a stone axe. Where he died, his body became a stone formation still visible out in the lake.

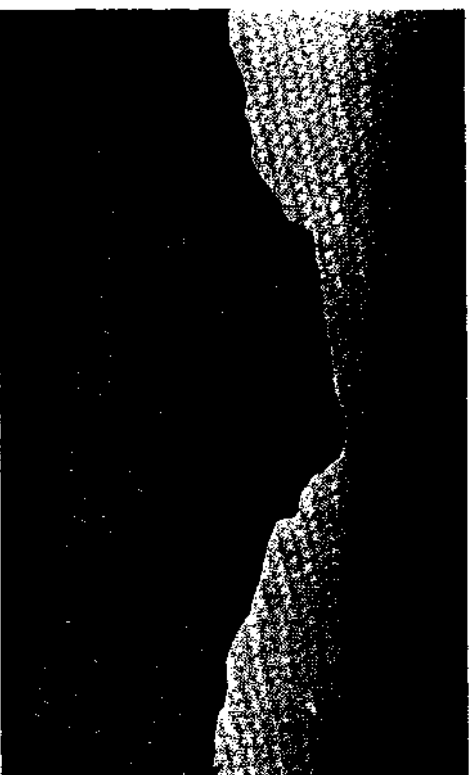
As this brief narrative shows, Dreaming stories may be both extensive, in linking up many geographically distant places, and intensive, in organizing myriad details of a single place. The stories account for far more precise and intricate detail than I have given here, but in most cases the information is considered to be secret and sacred. Because such detail is intimately related to men's and women's ritual, access to the information is restricted. Thus, frequently, only initiated men are permitted to visit sacred sites, and women and children are excluded.¹²

Transforming Landscape into Narrative

The process through which landscape is assimilated to narrative structure is still active. I had the opportunity to see it take place on one occasion at Yayayi in 1974.

One morning a group of men gathered near a white gum tree on the creek bank where they waited for two older men. A younger man had, as they put it ambiguously, "found something." But they did not know what it was. Because they had close relationships with the traditional owners of this area, the two elders were presumed to have special knowledge of local myth. On the one hand, the men were fearful about the consequences of the discovery, lest the owners of the country attack them with sorcery for disturbing a secret site. On the other hand, they wondered if the discovery were "gold" or "opal," value for which the owners might pay them.

When the older men arrived, the group went down to the creek and examined the discovery, an outcrop of some sedimentary crusty rock that had been exposed by erosion. The men chipped off a bit and examined the colors, then dug around the area to expose more of the rock. Although one man expressed his fear of sorcery for having desecrated a sacred site belonging to others, the enterprise continued. One of the two elders speculated confidently that this rock must be from the Kangaroo Dreaming with which the creek is associated. Knowing that two men in The Dreaming had speared a kangaroo at a point five miles east, he deduced that they must



This view of Yuyiyunya, in the Kintore Range, from the southeast shows the outstretched neck (at the right) of the Dreamtime Ngintaka, the Monitor Lizard, as it turned to stone. (1974)



Yanyatjari Tikamara's unusual figurative painting (lacrylix on canvas) of Yuyiyunya represents the hill as the Dreamtime Ngintaka who turned into stone there. (Yayayi, 1974)

have gutted it here on the way back. No one had ever told him this, however. The Papunya people were ignorant of this fact, he said.

This Kangaroo Dreaming, the men maintained, is important because it is associated with ceremonies in which men "show special designs (*wamulu*) and make women and children go under a blanket." As the men continued digging, three of them looked to see if there was gold in the composite; for others, "gold" was simply a metaphorical equivalent to the traditional value of sacred sites. Throughout the inquiry, the participants oscillated between assuring themselves that the owners of the country had told them not to be afraid if they found anything hereabouts and a hopefulness that they would be paid for "finding" this thing.

Finally, examining the uneven distribution of colors in the composite, they decided it was the sloppy stomach contents of the gutted Dreaming kangaroo. The red elements in it, one man suggested, must be the vegetable fluff that had been colored with red ochre and stuck to the two men's bodies, since traveling with body decoration was common for many mythological figures.

All in all, the men's behavior showed cautious concern, meant to avoid punishment for desecration. They justified their digging up of the composite and chipping of it by saying it was necessary so that the owners would not think they were lying when they went to tell them they had found "gold." Eventually the spot was covered with leaves and the old men told the women camped nearby that no one was to go near the area. Subsequently, little was made of the event, at least to my knowledge, but one man continued to talk of the find. He was concerned, he said, because his son was "from this Dreaming," that is, conceived nearby. By now, everyone was satisfied that the rock was the stomach contents of the gutted kangaroo who had been speared and must have been crawling along the creek trying to return to his *ngurra* near Yayayi soakage.

Geography as Code

We can see in this episode not only how previously unknown local detail can be incorporated into an already known myth by a deductive process, but also the concern that the Pintupi have for "explaining" the existence of strange geological formations and shapes—or more generally why there is something at a place at all. People who go out hunting sometimes return with a pocketful of strangely shaped or colored rocks, pointing out that they are, unexpectedly, "different." They seem to ponder these occurrences as possible new information, but they do not produce theoretical explanations easily.

The unusual is valuable in itself. Within the contemporary cash economy, the finder may suspect that the unusual is "gold" and hope to exchange it for money. For most, the worth of gold is a metaphorical equivalent for the value they already attribute to things that are "different." Most sacred sites are said, therefore, to be "gold."

The process by which space becomes "country," by which a story gets attached to an object, is part of the Pintupi habit of mind that looks behind objects to events and sees in objects a sign of something else. To the hunter's mind, anything other than the ordinary on the ground can be a sign that something has happened. The landscape itself offers clues about what may have happened. Not only does it reveal something about the invisible, but it offers a link to the invisible forces that created it and whose essence is embodied in it. As with a code, "country" signifies the whole event of which it was a part, carrying "a meaning which refers to the missing parts and is information about those parts" (Bateson 1972: 414).

The concern of the Pintupi is to gain knowledge about that which is invisible, which is important and powerful. Conversely, they are uncomfortable about that which is hidden (*yarrka*). Dreams may be seen as signs, as potential sources of information about what will happen, or as revelations of The Dreaming, but it is hard to be certain about such information. What the Pintupi must rely on is the knowledge that is handed down socially. The designs and stories they paint on novices, Pintupi emphasize, are not made up. One's predecessors, "those who are dead," had known these stories before; they are from The Dreaming. The value of ceremonies, designs, and objects, as the Pintupi formulate explicitly, is that they are true, their veracity guaranteed indexically by their actual connection to "first things."¹³ These properties enter into the social processes of Pintupi life in several ways.

The Pintupi use the visible evidence of the world as a sign to interpret that which happened and is invisible. Country is valuable both for its iconic relationship to The Dreaming (telling a story) and also for the indexical relationship between places and the ancestral power left behind in them. However, the information visible in the landscape is not sufficient in itself to illuminate the underlying reality. Nor is knowledge of "what happened" in detail freely available. The necessary keys are the highly valued ("dear") ceremonies, which reenact The Dreaming's events at particular places. Custodianship of these rituals and the associated sites is a zealously guarded prerogative. Indeed, knowledge of this sort is

controlled by older people, and each site is identified with a group of "owners."

Those who "own" a ritual and a place, the joint entity called an "estate" by Scanner (1965), assume responsibility for their care and preservation. They must "hold on to The Dreaming." They must also pass it on to the future. Through initiation and a long process of epiphany in revelatory ceremonies, younger men and women gradually are taught how to interpret and act toward the invisible world that underlies their immediate physical and social world. Pintupi describe the process as giving (*yunginpa*) knowledge to young people, as revealing (*yutimipa*) it, or as teaching it (*imimipa*). In this regard, the visibility/invisibility contrast reproduces the temporal process of generational succession in Pintupi social life.

However, given the nature of The Dreaming, this knowledge remains particulate and localized. If the imprint of Dreaming events on the country embodies a temporal process, the fact that Pintupi country is continuous—a set of interconnected Dreaming tracks—is equally significant. This property of the country is a concomitant of the continuity of social networks, ultimately deriving from the sharing of knowledge of places among people who are geographically disparate.

From one point of view, named places are signs from which Pintupi can interpret events in The Dreaming. From another perspective, it is also true that places can code or punctuate events in the phenomenal world. For Maantja tungurrayi, the place Walukirritjinya is where his father was killed and buried; Tiulyurunya is the place he himself was conceived; at another place he was initiated; his mother died at Tjicurrunga; and so on. For each individual, the landscape becomes a history of significant social events. Geography serves, it would seem, as a signifier of experiences; previous events become attached to places and are recited as one moves across the country.

History, then, is incorporated into the unchanging, ever-present features of the physical landscape. The question is really to what extent this incorporation of history occurs: What endures and what is erased? The concept of *ngirra* offers considerable flexibility for expressing different kinds of relationships between persons and between persons and space, but it also elides their differences. The Pintupi inclusion of two levels of organization, "camp" and "country," in a single term reflects this possibility of reification, of action being converted to a structure that becomes the foundation for further action.

Cosmos and Social Life

What leads a people to emphasize a changeless, timeless permanence? I am not, of course, describing a "philosophy" in any formal sense, but rather a construction of reality to which people subscribe in less self-conscious ways. The principle embodied in The Dreaming is nothing less than the principle by which parts of Pintupi social structure are ranked in relation to each other, the relation of part to whole that Dumont (1980) calls "hierarchy." Ultimately (and I explore this in detail in succeeding chapters), the structure of Pintupi society defines the meaning of "the world."

To be sure, the erasure of the historical is not confined to The Dreaming. Tahos on mentioning the names of the dead, shallow genealogies, and the lack of a written record also serve in this regard (cf. Sansom 1980). The Dreaming—"the Law"—provides a moral authority lying outside the individual and outside human creation. It is not his idea or his will. Thus, although The Dreaming as an ordering of the cosmos is presumably a product of historical events, such an origin is denied. These human creations are objectified—thrust out—into principles or precedents for the immediate world. As in Plato's Cave, the ideal comes first. The principles to which the Pintupi look for guidance and which they manipulate in daily life are not seen as the creations of contemporary men and women. Consequently, current action is not understood as the result of human alliances, creations, and choices, but is seen as imposed by an embracing, cosmic order. This construction of temporality is intricately tied to Pintupi politics, Pintupi ideas of what a person is, and theories of action.

The Dreaming, then, can be reduced to its significant features, which constitute it as transcending the immediate and present. The concept dichotomizes the world into that which is *yuti* ("visible") and that which is *tjukurrpa*, where the latter lies outside human affairs and constitutes an enduring, primary reality. This construction occurs in space, on the landscape, where it creates places with enduring identity and relationship to other sites. Finally, The Dreaming provides the source of both humanity and the landscape. As we shall see, this construction reflects the reproduction of Pintupi social life through time, organizing a basic and given autonomy into a larger system.

While the two critical qualities of The Dreaming, timelessness and segmented extension in space, correspond to Lévi-Strauss's theory of "totemic structures" as synthesizing constructs (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1966), their meaning for the Pintupi should be sought

written a particular form of social life rather than in ahistorical philosophical concerns. Through their inclusion in *The Dreaming*, the principles employed by people in the negotiations of daily life have a claim to being outside the creation of the manipulators; they are instead timeless truths. Erasing the specific past, *The Dreaming* pursues continuities between current human action and a realm of order transcending human affairs.

The Pintupi appropriation of temporality is guided, I will show, by the two basic problems of Pintupi social life, the tension between relatedness and differentiation and that between hierarchy and equality. As an order outside of human subjectivity which is morally imperative, *The Dreaming* can also be understood in relationship to the problem of hierarchy in a small-scale society where egalitarian relations are valued, and to the organization of a regional system of sociality. It is not accidental that the sources of what Westerners would think of as autonomy and authority are considered by the Pintupi to exist "outside" the self, projected outward into *The Dreaming* and onto the landscape where they are available as social artifacts. This projection of a domain "outside" society answers two constraints that impede certain kinds of coordinated social action: (1) the web of mutual obligation and relatedness between people in this society of former hunter-gatherers, based on their need for help from each other, and (2) the value placed on equality or personal autonomy, such that no one is prepared to be told by others what to do.

CHAPTER 3

Individuals and Bands

My country is the place where I can cut a spear or make a spear-thrower without asking anyone.
(Western Desert man, quoted in Tindale 1974: 18)

This chapter takes up one dimension of Pintupi organization in space: the problem of "bands." The variability of these formations is of central importance. Pintupi people did not always live with the same coresidential group or even within a single territory. I do not treat this variability, however, as just one more example of the "flexibility" of hunting-and-gathering social systems (Lee and DeVore 1968). In the Pintupi case, the mobility of individuals is a primary feature of the social structure. As such, it encourages a significant revision of our thinking about bands.

To do so suggests that we should recognize the spatial component of production in hunting-and-gathering societies, rather than envisioning the organization of productive roles as reflecting only the division of labor by sex. Among the Pintupi, the relationships of individuals to land enter into their social identities in a direct and immediate fashion. Pintupi insist, for example, that individuals who can marry must be from different localities. Locality is not something merely added on, so that productive units can be situated in space. Marriage establishes not only the immediate relations of production but also, by creating ties between distant people, establishes relations of production and access to land within a larger ecological region.

Bands, Land, and People

The prolonged debate about the kind of groups in which Aborigines live (Radcliffe-Brown 1930, Hiatt 1962, Meggitt 1962, Stanner 1965, Birdsall 1970, Tindale 1974, Peterson 1975, Myers 1982) has focused largely on the relationship between residential groups and ownership