DREAMINGS AND CONNECTIONS TO COUNTRY
AMONG THE NGAANYATJARRA AND PINTUPI OF THE
AUSTRALIAN WESTERN DESERT.

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Abstract

In broad terms, this thesis has a two-fold aim. Firstly, it is a study of Aboriginal connectedness to country over a large area of the Australian Western Desert, sufficiently large that it embraces the main country of two recognised desert peoples, the Ngaanyatjarra and the Pintupi. This breadth of coverage enables me to undertake a comparison in respect to certain aspects of culture, social organisation and the relationship to land. There have previously been few detailed studies of these matters in the desert, and none in which two large scale groupings have been able to be compared in this way.

Secondly, the thesis sets out to fill a ‘gap’ in the anthropological record, inasmuch as it provides the first detailed ethnography of the Ngaanyatjarra. Of the two peoples, these are the ones with whom I have predominantly worked, and about whom I have by far the greater amount of material. The aims of the thesis in regard to the Pintupi, who have already been the subject of a major ethnographic work by another author, are more modest.

Their connectedness to country is something that is of vital importance in the life world of the desert people, but it is a complex and elusive matter that has proven baffling to many scholars. The thesis reviews this earlier work, and also shows that while in recent decades there have been major improvements in the level of understanding, many questions still remain. This thesis grapples with some of these questions, in the process also problematising some areas that had previously been unexamined.

A major focus of the thesis is on the *tjukurrpa* (Dreaming). While every account of the Aboriginal relationship to the land has necessarily addressed this subject, the coverage provided here is more broad-ranging and more detailed than most. I saw it as essential to address this phenomenon in all its aspects that I could think of. The Dreaming permeates desert life so thoroughly that it is hard to gain a clear analytical perspective on it without this exhaustive approach. For the same reason, there is also a tendency to assume that the Dreaming provides reasons, prescriptions or justifications for virtually every aspect of life, which I am able to show is not the case. This makes it possible to tackle the subject of the
Dreaming on another level, considering questions not only about its achievements as a system of thought and practice, but also about its limitations. In other words, a more critical perspective becomes possible.

The other major focus is on the forms of social organisation that are related to country. After the abandonment of earlier, inappropriate models of patrilineal descent organisation, the desert has come to be seen as an essentially ‘structureless’ place. I consider this proposition at length, and on the basis of my ethnographic evidence and analysis of the Dreaming, suggest that in fact two ‘modes’ of social organisation and relationship to country are to be found here, one having much more ‘structure’ than the other.
Except where cited in the text,
this work is the result of research carried out by the author.

David W. Brooks
Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time coming. It was in 1988 that I began work for the Ngaanyatjarra Council (at the time under the Pitjantjatjara umbrella) as ‘male anthropologist’, first meeting the desert people, and eleven years later, in 1999, that I enrolled in the ANU Ph.D. program to write about their interconnectedness with country and with one another, a subject that absorbed me endlessly. Admittedly this enrolment has been on a part-time basis, but that is still a lot of years. If one adds in the six years of my enrolment at Adelaide University for an uncompleted Ph.D. (also in anthropology, but not involving Australian Aboriginal people), back in the late 1970s and early ’80s, it can be imagined that a lot of ‘putting up’ with me has gone on.

This time around, and in a workplace sense, it has chiefly been the Ngaanyatjarra Council that has done the putting up. In 1992 I switched from an employee to a contract basis, and moved my base from Alice Springs to Canberra, so that I could do some ‘outside’ things as well. Given the tiny anthropological workforce that the Council was able to employ, this meant they have often had to wait for me to be available, to get some of their work done. I thank the staff and the members of the Council, and the Ngaanyatjarra people, for their forbearance over all these years. I have never quite been able to give them all that they deserved.

This does not mean, though, that I have not spent a lot of time ‘on the job’. During the overall 23-year period of my association with the Council, the people, and the area, I have spent a good 10 years or more actually on the Lands. But since much of my time between my fieldwork ‘blocks’ has also been spent on Ngaanyatjarra issues, this counts for more than if I had simply worked there for 10 years straight. (Actually, to be fair, there are probably pluses and minuses to the two situations.) Anyway, I have had the good fortune to get to know a great many Ngaanyatjarra people over the whole period, but by the same token have experienced the sadness of many, many deaths of close friends. Among those from whom I learned and received kindness and care, who contributed directly or indirectly to this thesis, and who have passed away, have been Fred Forbes, Andrew Lawson, Tommy Simms, Stewart Davies, Brian Woods, Thomas Newberry, Gerald Porter, Paul Porter, Ivan Shepherd, Bob Shepherd, Jacky Giles, Billy Ward, Frank Ward, Ian Ward, Brian Jennings, Charlie

I have been lucky enough to have had a good deal of mixing of my ‘personal life’ and my ‘work life’ over these years – indeed I could hardly have survived without this. My three children, Grace, Anna and Owen are all well known to the people of the Lands, as is Anna and Owen’s mother, Gillian Shaw. They have all supported me hugely. Gillian has also long worked on projects for the benefit of the area, sometimes in collaboration with me.

Damian McLean, who has been living and working in the Lands for much longer than I have, has been like a rock for me over the years. The stability he creates at Warburton has been of immeasurable value to the Lands and its people, including me. He also has some of the most acute insights into culture and social life of anyone I have ever known.

Other people who I want to acknowledge are Cheryl Mooner, who has always given me help ‘above and beyond the call of duty’, including in the preparation of this thesis; Sally Hodson,
Jan Turner, Albie Viegas and Helen O’Malley for being there in an earlier time; Inge Kral, Alex Knight, Bryony Nicholson and Edwina Circuitt for being there now; and Vikki Plant for her great help and support.

At ANU, Nic Peterson has guided me through this project since day one; in fact it was he, on a social occasion many years ago, who convinced me to try again on the Ph.D. treadmill, with the argument that no one else in the future would be able to replicate the work I was doing and had done with the Ngaanyatjarra, and that it must be written up. Like so many others, he too has had a lot to put up with, but has done so with grace and humour. When I have had my doubts, he has encouraged me with the reminder that the ethnographic material I am working with is priceless. If I have been able to do any kind of justice here to that material, I will be happy.

The following points should be noted in relation to the issue of permissions. Firstly, I formally sought and was given permission to prepare and submit this thesis, by the traditional owners of the country, through the governing body of the Ngaanyatjarra Council. Secondly, some of the material used in this thesis having been obtained by me in the course of research I undertook for the Kiwirrkura and Ngaanyatjarra Lands native title claims (claims that resulted in the recognition of exclusive possession over the Lands) permission has been given by Central Desert Native Title Services for the use of the material.

Some of the material relating to Dreamings that is documented in this thesis is subject to gender and age restrictions within Desert Aboriginal society. Thus I have placed the descriptions of some Dreamings into a special part of the appendices, Appendix 2A. Access to this material will require prior consultation with the author.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis examines the nature of Aboriginal connectedness to land as it exists across a broad tract of the Australian Western Desert. The study area embraces the country of two contiguous desert groups, known as the ‘Ngaanyatjarra’ and the ‘Pintupi’ respectively. Except for a short hiatus in the 1960s and ’70s in the case of the Pintupi, the people concerned have a history of occupation of the desert that on the archaeological evidence appears to extend back for around 12,000 years and possibly as long as 35,000 years.¹ The thesis gives the greater amount of attention to the southern (and larger) group, the Ngaanyatjarra, with whom I have spent the greater amount of time; but covering two groups allows me to develop a comparative perspective, something that has rarely been able to be undertaken in the Western Desert.

The general subject of what might be called relationship to land, including land tenure, among Aboriginal peoples was not one that caught the attention of the first European observers of Aboriginal society in the early days of colonial settlement, but it started to come into focus around the turn of the twentieth century, with the work of Spencer and Gillen in particular. It has remained an important research concern ever since, fanned by the unmistakable evidence of attachment to their own particular country that Aboriginal people display, and by their evident general affinity with country. The 1930s saw a bout of field-based research (that I will call the ‘first wave’ as far as the desert is concerned) into a range of subjects to do with Aboriginal social organization and culture, including relationship to country, which has had a lasting influence. The wellknown names involved here include Radcliffe-Brown, Elkin, the Berndts and Tindale. That part of the work that occurred in the Western Desert served to bring this region firmly on to the anthropological map.

¹ R. Gould 1977; M. Smith 2005; M. Smith 2006. The figure of 12,000 years is based on Gould’s analysis of an archaeological excavation he undertook at a rock shelter just outside the community of Warburton, the main contemporary settlement in the study area. Gould’s work indicated that occupation had been continuous over this period. The figure of 35,000 years arises from other work that has been undertaken in the Western Desert and on its margins. Some doubt has been shed on the question of continuity by linguistic evidence that points to an expansion of the Western Desert language into the desert as recently as 1,000 years ago. The unresolved question is whether this movement involved the migration also of people into the desert, presumably replacing or displacing an earlier set of inhabitants. However Smith considers this unlikely (Smith 2005).
Research interest in the topic of land tenure received a strong fillip in the late 1960s and through the 70s and 80s with the advent of the ‘land rights era’, which itself began as a political response to the lack of power over their own land and ‘sacred sites’ that even very ‘traditional’ Aboriginal people were revealed to have in the face of the powerful interests of mining companies. In the process of the development and implementation of the Aboriginal (Northern Territory) 1976, which sought to achieve some kind of restitution of Aboriginal rights in land, considerable anthropological investigation took place into the nature of the forms of relationship that Aboriginal people had with the land, and particularly into how their ‘ownership’ of it could be translated into terms that Europeans could recognize and validate. Essentially these same questions – and the consequent need for continuing anthropological research – have carried through into the subsequent ‘native title era’ of the 1990s and 2000s. Whereas land rights has remained largely associated with certain remote parts of Australia, the broad geographical scope of native title has seen an expansion of the research into Aboriginal land tenure to settings across much of the continent. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that there has been a strong and continuing strand of anthropological preoccupation with this topic as it applies specifically to that ‘remote’ (and very large) sector within which Aboriginal occupation of the country has been less disturbed by settler society and where practices rooted in Aboriginal ‘tradition’ continue to be more clearly evident. The Western Desert forms a substantial part of this sector, which is usually considered to comprise most of central and northern Australia.

Indeed, in terms of the understanding of ‘classical’ Aboriginal land tenure, the Western Desert has emerged as the exemplar of a particular possibility within a spectrum of forms this

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2 There has also been land returned to Aboriginal control in New South Wales under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW).
3 In this thesis I follow Sutton (1999) in using the term ‘classical’ to refer to the period of ‘self-sustaining, bush-dwelling life’ (Peterson 2008: 193) before substantial European contact. It is important to be able to distinguish such a time from the more recent past in which relatively rapid change has occurred, though it should be noted that the concept is not entirely unproblematical if it implies the false idea of a rigid, unchanging state prior to European contact. On a related issue, I will often refer to ‘the encounter’ between desert or other Aboriginal people and the settler society and its representatives. Of course every actual encounter would have been different, but in some respects there are common – and important – themes in the different instances. In any case, the coming together of the two societies has been such a critical occurrence that it seems to need a particular term to mark it. As regards the terms ‘contact’, ‘pre-contact’, ‘early contact’ ‘post-contact’ and the like, I prefer to avoid them as much as possible, but given the frequency with which I am discussing these kinds of matters I sometimes do use them to avoid too much clumsiness of expression. I also often use the local colloquial term ‘whitefellas’ in place of ‘Europeans’, ‘non-indigenous persons’, or ‘members or agents of the settler society’.
land tenure has been observed to take across the continent. In essence, at one end of this spectrum the connectedness of persons to particular areas of country was relatively well specified and systematic, and involved the principle of genealogical descent. This kind of scenario was associated with more fertile parts of the continent, and co-existed with a relatively high population density, low levels of population mobility over the medium and long term, and a stability of association of people with country in both a narrow and a broad geographical perspective. The desert represented the other end of the spectrum, where infertile conditions dictated low population densities while obliging a high level of mobility among those who did dwell here. Norms of connectedness were flexible, with a relatively weak emphasis on the cross-generational transmission of rights and interests in country through lines of genealogical descent. The question has frequently arisen (see e.g. I. Keen 1997) as to whether or not a distinct difference should be conceptualized as existing between the desert forms and the other classical forms, or whether it is simply a matter of variation along a continuum. This thesis provides the opportunity to shed some further light on this still unresolved question. Also relevant here is the fact the number of Western Desert ethnographies dealing in depth with the subject of connectedness to land is quite small. The major work that is relied upon is Myers’ ‘Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self’ (1986). In fact, it is probably fair to say that it is largely due to the impact of this book, and to the coherence and persuasiveness of the model that it presents, that the desert has come to occupy its position as an ‘exemplar’ of a particular form of land tenure in the way that I have alluded to. To put the matter slightly differently, we now have a situation where Myers’s model has, deservedly, come to dominate the anthropological landscape in regard to the whole topic of land tenure. This aside, other relevant work includes material produced in the ‘first wave’ alluded to above by Tindale, Elkin and the Berndts; subsequently in a ‘second wave’, from the 1960s through to the early 80s, that included Bob Tonkinson (1974, 1991), Lee Sackett (1976), Annette Hamilton (1979), Aram Yengoyan (1970), Scott Cane (1987) and Kingsley Palmer (1984); and then again in the ‘native title era’ by Peter Sutton (1990, 1995) and Dan Vachon (2006) among others. Some of those who were part of the ‘second wave’ returned later to work on native title, including Tonkinson and Sackett. On the whole though, and with the exception of Myers’s work on the Pintupi and Tonkinson’s on the Martu, there is nothing within all this

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4 Ronald Berndt also wrote later (e.g. 1972, 1976) on land issues in the Balgo area, in the north of the desert.
5 There is also another category of anthropological (or in some cases partly anthropological) research that has been undertaken in the desert by persons not looking directly or specifically at land tenure issues, but that in some cases is of a substantial nature. Poirier (2005); and the Ph.D. theses of Laurent Dousset, Inge Kral and, very recently, Pam McGrath are cases in point.

Chapter 1
body of work that gives us, for the desert, anything like a full ethnographically-based study of
issues around the subject of connectedness with country. Moreover, apart from Vachon’s
thesis and Sutton’s articles, most of the published material that deals at all with this topic is
now at least twenty years old.6

This issue of timing and ‘time lags’ needs some specific consideration. For instance, the
question might be asked why a work focussing on aspects of classical Aboriginal life is being
produced in 2010. As is explained in Chapter 5, I suggest that for the Ngaanyatjarra, 1940 is a
fair date to posit for the ‘transition’ from classical to post-classical conditions. My own
fieldwork began in 1988 and continues to the present, but I have settled on 2005 as the date of
my ‘ethnographic present’ (insofar as such a concept is required). Thus, by my own
calculations, the thesis is investigating a time and ‘way of life’ that essentially ended around
65 years beforehand.

My reasons for undertaking such a task, despite the obvious pitfalls of focussing on a time
before my own, are mainly straightforward enough. They do not involve me seeing the past as
an era more interesting than the present. Post-classical (including contemporary)
connectedness to country is as fascinating a subject to study as classical connectedness; and in
fact this study does extend its scope into more recent times, without trying to be
comprehensive in this regard. One can only do so much in a single piece of work. The
primary reason why my main focus is on the classical is because, as I have implied, no study
of Ngaanyatjarra land tenure (whether referring to the classical or to the more recent)
currently exists. Indeed, there is nothing to be found that could be really said to be an
ethnography of the Ngaanyatjarra.7 Thus there is no literature on the Ngaanyatjarra for me to
either draw upon or ‘bounce off’. I acknowledge that in recent times three major pieces of
work have been produced for the Ngaanyatjarra that are either anthropological or include a
significant anthropological component (the Ph.D. theses of Dousset, Kral and McGrath), but
each of these deals with special interests and does not set out to document such core subject

6 In more recent times, since the mid 1980s, many others have undertaken anthropological work in the desert,
especially in the capacity of working for Aboriginal ‘land councils’. Unfortunately, for various reasons mostly of
a political and legal nature, little of this work has found, or indeed is likely to find its way into the public domain
or to contribute much to the development of anthropological models – which is a pity, since the work doubtless
contains much invaluable substantive material that in many cases will never be able to be collected again.
7 de Graaf (1968) and Gould (1968), while ethnographic in nature, are of insufficient depth in relation to
sociological issues to be considered ethnographies as such.
areas as social organisation and culture as such. My own research interests, on the other hand, focus directly on issues of culture and society in the desert setting. I am interested in connectedness to country because it is a core preoccupation of desert people, and indeed I am interested in it not primarily for its own sake but precisely because, through it, I can get close to the core of the things that mattered (and continue to matter) in the desert life world.

As a matter of fact, beyond happenstance and the general effects of the 'tyranny of distance', it needs to be recognised that the investigation of the desert people's land tenure and relationship to country was subject to considerable obstacles until being made easier by certain developments that began only in the 1970s. For a researcher to gain a real grasp of a subject like connectedness to country, it is necessary to spend time with the desert people in the midst of that country, and especially to spend time with them as they travel from place to place across the landscape. This is particularly the case given the cultural predilection of the desert people not to talk much about a given place unless and until they are in that place. Doing 'armchair anthropology' with informants in a settlement context may be adequate for the collection of a range of data but it cannot deliver a deeper appreciation of matters that constitute some of the core realities and dimensions of desert life. Yet, because of a combination of factors to do with the physical harshness of the desert conditions and the incompatibility of the mobile desert lifestyle with the project of undertaking research as such, it was this type of fieldwork that the early researchers were largely restricted to. In the 1960s, Richard Gould sometimes spent a day or two accompanying band members on foot out from the area where he had established a base camp in the Clutterbuck Hills, but this was about as far as the idea of 'living with the people' ever got, under classical conditions. Others, like Tindale and the Berndts in earlier times, largely confined themselves to working from a fixed base, which they usually reached by car, though on occasion camels were used. In 1935, Tindale's team from the Board for Anthropological Research at the University of Adelaide set up a base camp at Warupuyu, only three or four kilometres from where Will Wade and his fellow missionaries had tentatively established the Warburton mission, though they themselves were not present during Tindale's visit. Through the efforts of his guides, and helped by the fact that the Warburton locality had already played host to the missionaries and to previous whitefella visitors, Tindale gained access to a large party of desert people who would not normally have been found in one place. Thus among many other things Tindale
was able to witness and document the performance of an initiation cycle over several days. But even Tindale could never get far off the vehicular tracks, which were themselves few and far between. This was mainly because of the limitations of the vehicles and the roughness of the country. Moreover because of space and practical considerations the likes of Tindale were severely restricted during their expeditions in their ability to take desert people as passengers in their vehicles, which might have greatly facilitated them in the acquisition of information and understandings about places and the role of country. One of the factors then, that has made so much difference to the modern research effort and particularly to the capacity to accompany the desert people to the remotest places and in all sorts of terrain had been, mundanely, the improvement in the robustness and reliability of the 4WD vehicles that are available. Paralleling this, and arising from the great ‘winds of change’ in Aboriginal affairs that began in the early 1970s with the election of the Whitlam government, there has been an enormous increase in the financial resources that have become available for the conduct of a whole range of Aboriginal-related activities in the desert, including the achievement of greater access to country. Thus not only are the vehicles better, but there are many more of them; meaning, for one thing, that trips to the remotest locations can be mounted relatively easily, and participated in by a much larger number and range of people (including women) than in the past, exponentially increasing the trip outcomes, including research outcomes. The extent and quality of the road network in the desert has improved greatly too, though the vast majority of places can still only be reached through off-road travel.

It is interesting to consider against this background the situation of Fred Myers, whose representation of the land tenure of his informants has, as mentioned, come to in effect ‘stand for’ the land tenure system not only of the Pintupi but of the Western Desert – with a strong relevance to understandings of Australian Aboriginal land tenure as a whole. Myers conducted his seminal fieldwork at a time, the mid 1970s, when the ‘winds of change’ were certainly in the air, but were only just starting to filter through on the ground to places like Papunya and Yaiyai where the Pintupi were living. Essentially, Myers would have stepped into the same world of meagre resources that had thus far characterised what might be termed ‘Aboriginal affairs’ since the beginnings of settler occupation of the continent. From what I understand of this 1970s period in the Pintupi part of the desert (and the same broad picture

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8 More accurately, the occurrence of the ceremonies was actually stimulated by the whitefella party by means of the resources that they brought with them and the consequent reasons that their presence provided for the local people to ‘perform’.

Chapter 1
applied to the Ngaanyatjarra region too), there was a mixture of the new and the old ‘breed’ of ‘whitefellas’ on the scene. The newcomers were often caught up in, and certainly sympathetic to, what had recently emerged as ‘the Aboriginal cause’, the chief symbols of which were land rights and self-determination. The framework within which the conduct of desert administration was undertaken was itself rapidly changing, and the range and quantity of services to be provided to the Aboriginal people dramatically expanding, but as yet there were few staff on the ground in remote areas who were willing and able to implement this vastly changed regime. Meanwhile, the expectations of Aboriginal people themselves were mushrooming, placing further pressure on the staff, especially since there were as yet only modest resources arriving to match the rhetoric. The flow of Toyota 4WDs and the emergence of local Aboriginal power structures still lay in the future. These were ‘heady days’, but burnout among the vanguard whitefellas was frequent and the on-the-ground situation often chaotic.

At the time Myers encountered them the Pintupi had effectively been ‘in exile’ from their homelands for a decade or more, having headed some 500 km east, motivated largely by the idea of rejoining kin who had gone in the same direction earlier than they.9 The tragic story of what in fact was to be their fate in the ‘Papunya years’ has been documented by Geoffrey Bardon in a series of publications (1979, 1991, 2004). They became seriously disempowered and subject to almost ‘total institution’ conditions at the Papunya settlement. At the same time, and simply because of the sedentary context in which they now lived, they soon lost their ability to wholly survive in the desert as they had previously done, and as their forebears had done for millennia.10 In the early 1970s, by which time they were desperate for some freedom and for a sight of their homelands, they began to hear tell of the national ‘winds of change’. When Myers arrived, he was perhaps regarded by them as one of those vanguard whitefellas come to help them, but in the event neither he nor anyone else at this time were able to get them relocated back in their homelands west of the WA border. This was not to happen until 1980. Hence Myers’s fieldwork with them largely unfolded while they were

9 See Long (1989a and 1989b) for a consideration of issues to do with this Pintupi ‘exodus’.
10 While the Western Desert people were the last in the continent to experience this huge transformation, even they (apart from a few tiny groups) had, by the mid to late 1960s, become ‘sedentary’, a complex and progressive process involving firstly becoming attached to a settlement and then losing the ability to ‘footwalk’ the desert and live in the old way. No matter what type or standard of settlement that a particular desert group headed to (some were run by a church, some by the state, and they varied considerably in quality), it was a transformation that happened to all.
living in country that was not their own, and the amount of time he was able to spend with them on trips out to this country was limited, due to the factors already noted.

I am not making these observations as a prelude to any kind of major critique of Myers. On the contrary, I add my endorsement to the original and enlightening nature of his work. I also accept that he largely captures the spirit of the Pintupi; all of which is the more remarkable when we consider the stresses that the group was under at the time and the expatriate circumstances they were in. As I will explain later in this thesis, I disagree with some of his emphases and I think he has left out one important dimension of the desert habitus, but in general his evocation of the Pintupi remains as applicable today as it was at the time of writing. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the conditions prevailing during the era of his fieldwork meant that he could not gather a great deal of material about particular places in the Pintupi landscape, nor about the orientations of the people towards these places when they were present within them. Working in a later era, it has been my good fortune to have been exposed to a huge amount of this direct experience of country, in the company (at different times) of both the Pintupi and the Ngaanyatjarra. As a result, my interpretations of the desert people, and particularly of the role that their country plays in their lives, are naturally somewhat different from those of Myers.

To summarize, it is not merely the passage of time that should be considered when assessing the likely yields, and pitfalls, of a given piece of field research. While it clearly does become more difficult with each passing year to write an accurate ethnography of the classical way of life of a group of people who no longer live this life (or who no longer live it fully, for there are many continuities) other considerations may cross-cut this factor. My own opportunity to research the same topic as Myers, with the same group, came in 1996 – though I had been working with the Ngaanyatjarra since 1988 and had done some minor work with the Pintupi in the intervening years. By 1996, the Pintupi were living in a relatively well-resourced modern-style community, Kiwirrkura, that is centrally located in their own country. Vehicular tracks had been blazed that gave access to many of the remotest parts. Undertaking research for a native title claim, I had at my disposal several late model, well-equipped Toyota 4WDs, another anthropologist to help, and the resources not only to buy copious stores for trips but to

11 Bourdieu 1972.
pay the people for their time in the field. Being provided with a house in the community as a
base for extended periods, it was easy enough to plan, mobilise and complete one 'bush’ trip
after another, and to re-group comfortably in between. With much improved communications
and with back-up available if necessary, the need to be concerned about and to plan for
factors like possible break-downs in remote locations was much alleviated. In other words,
the conditions of living and working in the desert had changed dramatically. Other things had
changed too. Some of the desert people had come to understand Western-style maps to the
point of being able to work with them with the anthropologist, greatly facilitating the research
effort in this vast land with its many widely spaced sites. Similarly, there was now among the
people a much greater facility with the English language, giving the anthropologist an
alternative to the use of Pintupi or Ngaanyatjarra — a factor particularly helpful when trying to
unravel complex issues. In other words, there were a whole variety of ways, some of them
less obvious than others, in which the context for the undertaking of research into land tenure
had markedly improved by the time I and others of my ilk came on to the scene.

It was not because of any desire to reproduce or 'check’ Myers’s work that I began a task
whose goals were to some extent the same as those that he had pursued some 20 years before
me. Rather, it was because I was asked to research and write the native title ‘connection
report’ for the Pintupi. Thus it came about that I worked with the same ‘group’ of people as
Myers had. I was helped by the fact that they were now living back in their country, and by
other factors that I have alluded to. On the other hand, many of the most knowledgeable
informants with whom Myers had been able to work had died in the meantime; and in fact
very few people remained who had grown to adulthood under full classical conditions. Apart
from these losses, there had of course been changes, large and small, in Pintupi life as a
whole, changes in orientations, priorities and interests. But it was clear enough as I did my
bush trips with the people that 'country’ remained a huge focus; and certainly the material I
gleaned was rich and copious.

**Deciding on the thesis scope**

Having completed the native title work for the Pintupi, I could have left it at that and, for this
thesis, concentrated solely on the Ngaanyatjarra, the group that I knew best and with whom I
have worked for a long period. But the idea of being able to present material that covered two
groups, something that most researchers do not have the opportunity to do, was very tempting. Also present was the thought that these two groups comprise two of perhaps only three groups that have been able to continue to occupy the desert (that is, their own portions of it) in the wake of the ‘colonial encounter’ as experienced in the first half of the C20th.\footnote{Other significant Western Desert groups, like the Martu, the Mantjiltjara and the Kukatha still retain or have recovered a connection to their desert country and in some cases have returned to live within it, but historically they experienced a major hiatus in these links. The Pintupi also suffered a hiatus of occupation, but it was much shorter in length (no more than 20 years), and was followed by a full-scale return to a life in the heart of their country (at Kiwirrkura community), with the result that they were able to ‘pick up the pieces’ – if not seamlessly, at least to a significant extent.}

The third group is the Pitjantjatjara, the immediate eastern neighbours of the Ngaanyatjarra. I have also undertaken some work with these people, though far too little to give me any thought of writing about them. Much has been written about the Pitjantjatjara, including several ethnographic studies and articles that address the subject of relationship to country, though none of these have had as much impact as Myers’ for the Pintupi. Myers’ work has made the Pintupi probably the most ‘famous’ Western Desert group, within the discipline of anthropology, but before his book was published the Pitjantjatjara were far more well known than them. Indeed in terms of the world outside anthropology this remains the case. The Pitjantjatjara, who live primarily in South Australia, although they extend into the eastern portion of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, are the most numerous and politically influential of the Western Desert groups, and their cultural impact across Australia has been considerable. For instance, the Pitjantjatjara language is among the most widely spoken of contemporary Aboriginal languages, and is taught as an ‘indigenous language’ to non-Aboriginal children in a number of Australian schools outside the Pitjantjatjara Lands. By comparison, the Pintupi are a tiny group with very few resources or ‘infrastructure’ and very little influence, other than what they have gained through their renowned artwork.\footnote{For a recent publication presenting and discussing this work, see Johnson (ed) 2007.} The Ngaanyatjarra are a different case again. While nothing has happened to make their name widely known, they are ‘quiet achievers’ who have consolidated their hold over their extensive lands through their own infrastructure and service development. As a relatively numerous group (currently around 2,000 strong) on a similar scale to the Pitjantjatjara, and with a similar history, their story is every bit as deserving of being told. What is more, in terms of the anthropological record as it relates to the documentation of the association to country of Australian Aboriginal groups, the lack of an ethnography of the Ngaanyatjarra is quite a glaring one. Yet the omission is a fact. Many other people who have gone to work with them have found, as I have, that Ngaanyatjarra people not only display an extraordinary depth of the kind of cultural
and social resources that tend to interest anthropologists, but that they are generous and patient in revealing themselves and their thoughts to the interested whitefella, and generally very good to work with. The paucity of research undertaken here is partly attributable to the hostility to anthropologists of the United Aborigines’ mission, who ran the Warburton mission and were the dominant agency there until the early 1970s, and to the ‘Richard Gould affair’. When Gould, an archaeologist who also undertook ethnographic research in the Warburton region, published his book ‘Yiwara’ in 1969, the men at Warburton were furious to find that it contained photos of male initiation procedures. The resulting distrust of anthropologists was still palpable when I began my own work with the Ngaanyatjarra people twenty years later. Other than these factors, it seems to be mainly the low profile of the region and also its distance from Alice Springs (which has functioned as a centre or base for the undertaking of Aboriginal research in central Australia generally), that has kept it out of sight as a potential research area.

The preceding discussion explains some of the background to the present study and argues part of the case for the relevance and value of such a study, even if there are some pitfalls in the task I have set myself. But there are also other reasons why it is valuable to be providing new material and new insights into Western Desert ethnography. One such reason relates to the emergence in recent years of certain type of phenomenologist anthropology that has a new focus and set of research interests, and that happens to have particularly concerned itself with hunter-gatherer groups, including the Australian Western Desert people. The most prominent figure in this development is Tim Ingold (1996). What seems to characterize this new wave is its focus on the ideas of a people. By ‘ideas’, is meant not only their epistemology, the ways in which they ‘know’ the world, but, and more crucially, their ontology, their way of ‘being-in-the-world’. Ingold argues that studies of human groups, notably hunter-gatherers, who are clearly deeply different from Westerners in the areas of epistemology and ontology, have suffered from the failure of ethnographers to fully grasp the extent and nature of these differences. It is indeed true that authors like Elkin and the Berndts, and in a different way Tindale, while adding enormously to the store of knowledge and insights about the desert people, spent an inordinate amount of time going down blind alleys with such questions as ‘who is the prescribed marriage partner?’, and trying to rationalize the nature of a local descent group which they, a priori, presumed to be present in some guise or other – when in

fact, as writers now broadly agree, there is no prescribed marriage partner, and local descent
groups do not necessarily exist at all. For Tindale (see 1974), the ‘tribe’ was the entity that he
was convinced must be present, and he famously continued to maintain this from the 1930s
through to the 70s, against all the evidence that accumulated over the years. Much early
anthropology worked with a fairly standard ‘check list’ of topics to be investigated in the
field, and of course, sometimes wrong assumptions were made about the meaning of
informants’ responses and statements. The modern phenomenology argues that the latter
problem was more than just a matter of the occasional mistake, but rather a more systematic
form of misunderstanding that tended to find confirmation of the researcher’s assumptions
where this was not due. The root of the problem, practitioners say, stemmed from that deep
difference alluded to above. Fundamentally, it is alleged, the early researchers were caught
within their own Western positivist paradigm of the world, which is dominated by prescribed
rules, fixed entities, systems and statuses, well-defined relationships, and a series of key
dichotomies, such as those between nature and culture, animal and human, body and mind,
thought and action, and the like. Hunter-gatherers, on the other hand, are said to have
approached or constructed the world from a radically different paradigm, one characterized by
among other things an emphasis on negotiability, process and event (as opposed to form),
individual choice, and a fundamental sense of relatedness between human beings and other
species and presences in the world.

On the face of it, the idea of pursuing a better understanding of indigenous people’s ways of
knowing and of ‘being-in-the-world’ is a progressive and even exciting development, and in
the recent anthropology of the desert it has stimulated two interesting pieces of work in the
form of Poirier (2005) and Vachon (2006), which investigate in detail the ‘ethnography of
ideas’ of two Western Desert groups. I too, in this study, am participating in some respects in
the project of investigating further the ‘epistemology and ontology’ of Western Desert people.
I do, however, have some reservations about this new phenomenology. In the process of
elucidating these, I will refer to how the ‘new phenomenology’ relates to the work of Myers.

To a certain extent, although Ingold (ibid) mounts an explicit attack on Myers, the new
‘school’ follows in the latter’s own path. Myers himself could perhaps be described as a
phenomenologist. He departed in some fundamental ways from the earlier positivist tradition
- as indeed, it must be acknowledged, did the Berndts before him. But he took the case further, and produced a much more consistent model than did the Berndts. Ronald Berndt (1959) saw that the ‘tribe’ was an inappropriate concept for the desert but did not question the place of the ‘local group’. Myers argued that in the desert there is no inherent system of social groups to be found; and that what groups do exist must be seen as outcomes of processes. As such, he said, their durability will always be problematical. So convincing was he on this and similar matters that it seems doubtful that anyone will ever again argue for the inherent nature of social groups in the desert. Many of the distinctions referred to above that have been made by the ‘new’ phenomenologists, such as those about the focus on process rather than forms, human agency, individual choice rather than prescriptive rule, and the importance of relatedness, had already been explicitly made by Myers.

The broad problem with Ingold and others who have followed in his footsteps is to do with their focus on the ‘ethnography of ideas’, a more limited project than the traditional anthropological one in which the aim was to illuminate the life of ‘a people’. Thus while Vachon, for example, provides rich material and analysis concerning how his informants view the world and how they act in it in terms of the presences (not recognisable by the positivist mind) that they perceive to be in it, he does not really address the full range of forces and circumstances that must have played a part in the generation of this understanding of the world. The sociological dimension, which is surely integral to the anthropological project, is all but missing, as is any serious consideration of issues that would have faced the people in respect of the physical environment, demography and the like. Consequently he can offer little by way of explanation of why the ideas he explores might be as they are. It is indicative of the extent to which Vachon’s attention has been caught up in the ideational sphere and by phenomenological concerns, that he does not make a serious attempt to examine the system of land tenure of the group he is studying, despite the fact that this subject has represented the major focus of the anthropology of remote Aboriginal people for the past 30 years or more. For my part, in this thesis I situate myself within what I see as the broader anthropological tradition, in that I include the sociological dimension (and the environmental and the demographic) within my project. I also continue to pursue the debate over land tenure as a major focus.
The other matter about which I have reservations has to do with the radical distinction that the new phenomenology makes between the Western and the hunter-gatherer paradigms, as expressed above. While I agree in general terms that there is a deep distinctiveness in the two orientations to the world, I think it is important not to take this too far. Ingold’s writing often seems like a critique of what he identifies as ‘Western thought’, as much as an investigation of hunter-gatherer society. Moreover, some of the things that indigenous people think might be quite similar to the thoughts of their Western counterparts. It is a matter of looking case by case; and it is also a matter of looking at what factors from outside the realm of ideas might be playing a part in any given instance.

A third reason for the relevance of this study relates back to the particular way in which Myers has characterized the Pintupi, and to the way that this has been taken up by contemporary researchers working on land tenure issues in the field of native title. Most of this work is unpublished and is hence difficult to either cite or critique, but I will take two papers as representative, one by Peter Sutton, the other by Dousset and Glaskin. Sutton argues for what I consider to be a radical interpretation of Western Desert land tenure, in which a very strong emphasis is placed on the lateral dimension of connectedness and in which there is almost a hostility towards any recognition of vertical connectedness and to the idea of descent. This position, which from what I have seen of the rest of this native title literature has become the orthodoxy, seems to tap into a vein of thought that identifies vertical connectedness as an imposition of Western thought – and in this respect it resonates with the ‘new phenomenology’ discussed above. Here again, desert people are being employed in the cause of a kind of anti-Westernism. Sutton and the others can be seen to have followed the lead of Myers, who himself thoroughly documented the existence and nature of the horizontal dimension. In comparison to these more recent writers, Myers was somewhat equivocal about the vertical, but it was clear enough that he considered its presence in the desert was problematical. My argument, which I develop in detail in Chapter 5, is that both vertical and horizontal dimensions are in fact present.

15 Sutton, 2006; Dousset & Glaskin, 2007. The Sutton article is marked as ‘Draft of November 2006, not for public reference’, but it is available on the internet, so I am referencing it.
16 Annette Hamilton (1982), working in the desert in much the same period as Myers and apparently independently of him, identified much the same sort of difficulties and was similarly equivocal about them. Her resolution involved postulating the presence in the desert social world of two modes, corresponding essentially with what I have called the horizontal and vertical dimensions. For her, the horizontal mode is the ancient desert form, while the vertical is a newer form; and in her ethnographic present the new is in the process of taking over. While this solution appears neat, she leaves unanswered – she does not suggest that European influences are part
Thesis focus and content

As indicated above, the subject of this thesis is the relationship of people to land, including the question of their ‘tenure’ of the land. I employ the notion of ‘connectedness’ to country, partly in an attempt to begin from as broad a base as possible, but also because of some connotations of the term that fit with my perspective. Not only does ‘connectedness’ evoke a picture of a vast configuration of elements and dimensions all linking together or related to one another in some way or other, it also has the capacity to include an idea of extensive relatedness among people, as well as between people and country. This vision of the Aboriginal world as a place of wide-ranging yet intensive interconnections is hardly new, but it has become an increasing focus in recent years, and I have been influenced by it too.¹⁷

Thus it is my intention in this thesis to explore all those aspects of the desert life that seem to have a bearing on issues of how people relate to land and how they relate to one another in regard to matters that have anything to do with land. These will include economic and social considerations, but inevitably there will be a major focus on the tjukurrpa (the Dreaming), for it is through this domain that the desert people’s relationships to country, and to one another, are to a large degree mediated.

The Dreaming is so profound and encompasses or informs so many aspects of the desert life that it is difficult to get away from generalities in describing it, or else from following particular well-worn paths of discussion. Certain authors have expressed remarkable insights about its nature and characteristics, none more so than W. E. Stanner (e.g. 1966, 1979), and many have written in detail about particular aspects of it, but there have been few attempts in an ethnographic setting to thoroughly document all of its apparent component parts; to dissect it and to consider exhaustively how it deals with or relates to the various aspects of a people’s life; to think around what questions it poses and how it might provide ways of answering them; and to consider the question of its limitations as a system of thought and practice. Much of this thesis – chapters 2, 3 and 4 – represents an attempt at such a task.

¹⁷ See Poirier (2005) and Vachon (2006) for recent examples in Western Desert studies.
But even while giving this attention to the Dreaming, I try always to keep in mind the basic material circumstances of the desert life. When one’s environment is as harsh as it is in the Western Desert, issues of sheer physical survival, as well as of maintaining ‘society’, must be considered problematical. While every feature of a phenomenon like the Dreaming does not have to be directly functional, the whole needs to represent a viable response to the material conditions. For example, one of the main themes that emerges in the relationship between desert people and the country is the ‘pulling power’ that the latter has on the former, and this must be addressed not only in terms of whatever ideational elements might apply, but also in terms of how it relates to these underlying conditions.

In the three chapters devoted to the Dreaming, I begin by considering the more evident manifestations and functions of the Dreaming. In chapter 2 I consider such matters as how the Dreaming ties together places through the phenomenon of the ‘track’; and how it constitutes an explanatory framework for the origin of the resources and bounty of the natural world, for the social and cultural system, and for people as physical beings as well as ‘human’ beings with identities and linkages to country and to other persons. I then develop the idea of Dreamings as ‘complexes’ that reflect and refract ideas drawn from other domains of life, in particular the species domain, the environmental domain, and the domain of humankind itself. I show how the Dreaming works, and is used by the people, in such a way as to integrate the information and understandings that derive from these domains. I also consider the matter of the ‘holism’ of what I call the ‘great tradition’ of the Dreaming as a structure, pointing out that while in some respects its elements can be seen as comprising a whole, it is actually a historical product and as such has been ‘pieced together’. The holism, and the appearance of holism, is not inherent, but represents an achievement, something that has been fashioned out of initially disparate elements.

Chapter 3 continues the track of looking at the less obvious or apparent dimensions of the Dreaming. A consideration of how the Dreaming may act, or may be used, in a destructive or negative sense is followed by a consideration of the subject of the sacred. I argue that, partly because of the way that the Dreaming works to create holisms and to integrate understandings from different domains of the world, as described in chapter 2, there is the potential for people to experience a sense of the numinous – to feel that they are in a space where the answers to
the mysteries of life are close at hand, and where they themselves seem to be almost ‘at one’ with the world’s constituent powers. I analyse how this potential can be realised, in a ritual context, at certain types of ‘sacred site’. I also consider how this sense of the sacred relates to the idea that the Dreaming as a domain is quite separate from the human world as such, an idea that seems to serve a certain purpose but to be far from true to the actual ways in which the Dreaming works – but that has often been taken at face value in the literature.

Chapter 4 deals with a range of other phenomena related to the Dreaming, and also contains a review of the literature related to the topic. In order to talk about the particular style of thinking about the world that is based on the Dreaming but that is employed in all kinds of situations, not just in clearly demarcated ‘Dreaming’ situations, I have coined the term ‘tjukurrpa-thinking’; and in this chapter I show how people have applied ‘tjukurrpa-thinking’ to the interpretation of various historical and also archetypal events. I then move to a consideration of the idea that as pervasive as the Dreaming is in desert society and culture, it is not necessarily the basis, or the only basis, for the relationship to country. This emphasis specifically on relationship to country is something that flows through to the two following chapters, both of which have a more ‘social organisational’ content than chapters 2 to 4. The argument that I develop is that in many ways the heart of the relationship to country may not lie in the realm of ideas but in experience. The experiences of early life are associated with the notion of one’s personal origin place, an idea that seems to be critical in the emergence of the attachment to place that is itself such a fundamental part of desert Aboriginal life. This sense of an origin place may be, and often is, augmented by a Dreaming connection, but such does not always happen. Since one’s early life usually unfolds in the presence of one’s mother and father and other close kin, the connectedness to country of these persons will also be critical to the sense of his or her origin place that emerges for a child. In turn, this suggests that the degree to which closely related people participate in a shared connectedness to place will be important for an understanding of the phenomenon of connectedness to country in general. These ideas are pursued in chapter 5.
Map 1B: The Study Area, Showing the Northern and Southern Sectors.
The other, related theme that I develop in this chapter is similarly grounded in the experiences of the desert life, rather than at the ideational level. I argue that wherever it is possible – and this is basically a matter of the fertility of local conditions – people will attempt to establish some level of stability of connection with a particular set of others and with a particular place or area within the landscape. High mobility and flexible group formation may be good adaptations to an extremely harsh environment, but in themselves they come at considerable cost. They place the individual at a high risk in terms of personal insecurity, particularly with advancing age. They also suggest that notions such as the primacy of ‘me and mine’ have to be foregone. My observations however, are that many desert people in fact are quite wedded to the latter sorts of notions, and that they seek to surround themselves with their own close kin wherever possible. In line with this, I describe the ‘family’ groups that I have found in some parts of the study area – groups that are genealogical in nature and intrinsically connected to particular areas of country. Chapter 6 contains case studies of nine such family groups in the southern sector, and of several groupings in the northern sector that are to some extent similar. I should emphasise that I am not attempting to ‘go backwards’ here to an older view of a system of estates owned by local descent groups. Fundamentally, I am following Myers (1986) in approaching these questions from a ‘processual’ perspective. It is just that I see the process as sometimes, and for particular reasons, generating forms that have a degree of continuity and of enduring identity.

In the course of chapter 5 I also address questions of classical demography, and issues for mobility that are related to environmental conditions. The chapter includes an analysis of the system of ‘landholding’ and the concept of land ownership.

**Introduction to the Lands**

As I have a great deal of detailed material to get through in this thesis, I have space only for an abbreviated coverage of introductory and ‘background’ matters. In particular, the history of the area, which in an ethnography like this would normally be the subject of a chapter of its own, can only be addressed in a summarized form. Hence my decision to incorporate all matters that I class as ‘introductory’ to the main concerns of the thesis into this single chapter.
The area that I refer to in this study as the ‘Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands’ (which I will sometimes call simply ‘the Lands’) comprises a total of around 200,000 square kilometres lying entirely within the state of Western Australia. The Lands are in the desert country that comprises most of the central part of the continent, and they lie adjacent or near to the borders of the Northern Territory and South Australia. The area comprises much of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Native Title determination area and includes the whole of what is known as the Kiwirrkura determination area.\(^{18}\) Map 1A shows the Lands and the significant administrative and native title areas.

For ease of reference I have been using, and will often continue to use the terms Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi in relation to broad groups and areas of country. However, as with other parts of the desert, these sorts of terms are problematic from an analytical point of view. Thus the ‘Ngaanyatjarra Lands’ should not seriously be considered to be the ‘territory’ of any ‘tribe’ as such. As part of the Western Desert Cultural bloc\(^{19}\) the concept of tribe does not accurately apply to this region. However, the area of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands as I demarcate and describe it does represent most of the country of the indigenous people who identify as Ngaanyatjarra; and a large proportion of those who so identify live in these Lands, although a significant number have come, as a result of historical processes that started in the 1890s, to live in towns in the Eastern Goldfields of WA, while some now also live (mostly temporarily) in Alice Springs. In the case of the Pintupi, their Lands as described here represent most of what the historian Dick Kimber (1990) calls ‘inside Pintupi country’, as opposed to the more peripheral Pintupi country that lies to the east of the WA/NT border. Pintupi people currently live in both the ‘inside’ country, predominantly at Kiwirrkura community which is centrally located in this area, and in the more peripheral areas, at Kintore, Nyirrpi and some other smaller communities in the NT. Some also live at Balgo, well outside Pintupi country and to its north. I must also point out that internal to the larger Lands areas as I define them recognition is often given to other identities that refer to smaller numbers of people. These include the Ngaatjatjarra, Mantjiltjarra and Winanpa. Within the Lands, the most significant of these ‘smaller’ identities is Ngaatjatjarra. In a case of a slightly different nature, the people of Wingellina, easternmost community of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and some of the people of

\(^{18}\) The two (determined) native title claims of ‘Kiwirrkura’ and ‘Ngaanyatjarra Lands’ covered together 210,000 sq km (43,000 for Kiwirrkura and 167,000 for the other), but I have configured the study area differently for the purposes of this study.

\(^{19}\) See Berndt 1959.
Blackstone (see Map 1A) are commonly identified as Pitjantjatjara. As previously indicated, the Pitjantjatjara are not a small ‘minority’ group like say the Ngaatjatjarra or the Winanpa. Instead, their presence in this quarter of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands represents a ‘spill-over’ into Western Australia of a large and powerful group that is predominantly located to the east of the WA /SA border.

The central point to make here is that this study is a study of two regions within which certain groupings of people live. The regions are respectively recognised as their own by the people who live in them and by their neighbours. The subject of the study is not however two clearly recognised, single groupings as such, whether tribal or otherwise. The nature and strength of whatever social cohesion exists among these people is an issue that is explored in this study. Currently the people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands number around 2,000 and live in ten small widely spaced communities of the general kind that are to be found today throughout much of remote Aboriginal Australia. The people of the Pintupi Lands number around 200, and they live in one community, Kiwirrkura. The people’s association with Europeans has been comparatively limited and recent, due to the fact that their country is located in the remote desert regions of the continent.

Like the rest of the Western Desert the Lands are poorly watered, contain a low overall biomass, are subject to climatic extremes and generally constitute one of the harshest environments in the world to sustain a human population.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) Gould (1969: 273) observes that compared to other desert hunter-gatherers such as the !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari, the Australian Western Desert people ‘must subsist on significantly less water, game, and plant foods.’ Cane (1990: 156) says that the population densities of the Western Desert are ‘lower than anywhere else in Australia and lower than any other permanently occupied desert landscapes in the world.’
### Table 1.1: Temperature and rainfall figures for the study area, as recorded at Giles Meteorological Station.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
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<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Annual</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean maximum temperature (°C)</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean minimum temperature (°C)</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rainfall</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean rainfall (mm)</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>307.1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decile 5 (median) rainfall (mm)</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>259.0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of days of rain ≥1mm</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The archaeological record shows that the desert has been subject to significant ebbs and flows of population over the millennia, in response to large scale climatic changes. Archaeologists consider it likely that the desert, or the portion of it considered in this thesis, was probably completely emptied at the Glacial Maximum (Smith, M.A. 2006). The underlying pattern of population movement appears to have been that on the one hand people were ‘forced’ into the desert in good times, when the population of neighbouring areas rose too high, and on the other hand that they moved out of the desert when conditions there became too harsh in comparison with the neighbouring areas.

Europeans, since they began their occupation of Australia, have found the region so remote, unproductive and unattractive that they have never settled here in any numbers. Apart from the missionaries, the small trickle of non-indigenous peoples to brave the hardships that prevail here have mainly been the transient explorers, doggers and prospectors of the late 19th and early 20th century and the modern day counterparts of the prospectors, the mining exploration companies. There have never been any pastoral establishments in any part of the Lands. Leaving aside the case of Giles Weather Station, built by the Commonwealth government in 1956 as a service facility for the Woomera Rocket Range, the only permanent or semi-permanent whitefella presence in the Lands has been connected with the care and/or administration of the Aboriginal people themselves. Even this has been minimal, considering the size of the region. For 40 years from 1933 there was only the Warburton

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22 For an account of the circumstances and local impacts of the Weather Station, see Dousset 2002.
mission, following which the contemporary government-supported communities gradually came into being.

Despite the hardships, for many thousands of years these lands and surrounding regions were home to desert hunter-gatherers, forebears of the contemporary people of the Lands. These people not only survived physically and sustained a viable society, they invested the seemingly inhospitable and rather featureless landscape with an impressive array of meanings, and developed a vast corpus of ritual activity that familiarises and celebrates the land.

The Lands covers parts of the Gibson and the Great Victoria Deserts, with the country consisting mainly of arid sandy desert interspersed with small hilly sectors. The southernmost part of the Lands is dominated by one extensive belt of hills known as the Central Ranges. In fact these Ranges represent the westernmost reaches and ‘poor relations’ of longer chains of hills that primarily lie due east within South Australia and include the more lofty and substantial Mann and Musgrave Ranges. Within the context of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands however, the Central Ranges are dominating features, which because of their relatively plentiful and long lasting water holes and their generally higher level of fertility sustained a denser population than the other areas.

Roughly 100 km to the north of the Central Ranges are the Rawlinsons, which are less extensive and were less highly populated than the former, but are similarly the westernmost extensions of the larger and more well known Petermann Ranges, which lie mainly in the Northern Territory to the east.

Apart from these two ranges, the Lands contain few areas of high elevation even by desert standards, and little in the way of individual river channels, let alone any large co-ordinated drainage systems. Further to the west of the ranges, the country of the Lands begins to change again, becoming dominated by the high lateritic plains and associated breakaways known locally as rirra. To the north of the Rawlinsons, towards Pintupi country, salt lakes of varying sizes are to be found, though sand dune country predominates.
Boundaries of the study area

The four corners of the study area are roughly in the regions of Lake Mackay in the NE, Redknap Mound in the NW, Kanpa in the SW and a point some 20 km south of Latitude Hill in the SE. Its northern side is a line connecting Lake Mackay and Redknap Mound (lat. 22 deg. 15 min. S). The western side is in the vicinity of the Gary/Gunbarrel/Heather Highways (long. 125 deg. 20 min E). The eastern side runs along the WA /SA border (long. 129 deg. E). A line beginning near Kanpa and passing south of the Townsend Ridges and Skirmish Hill to the SA border constitutes the southern boundary (see Map 1B).

Thus the area is 4 deg 30 min in longitudinal extent (north to south), and 3 deg 40 min in latitudinal extent (west to east). As mentioned, the area comprises nearly 200,000 sq km. Of this, 120,000 sq km is in what I call the ‘northern sector’ and 80,000 sq km in the ‘southern sector’.

The northern and southern sectors

The distinction between the northern and southern sector of the study area is of critical importance in the context of this study.23 The dividing line between north and south is roughly at the Rawlinson Range (south 25°). Not only are there two relatively distinct groupings associated with the respective areas, but there happen to be a number of fruitful contrasts between them.

The northern country is dominated by sand dunes, with many of these dunes (or ridges) being up to 10 metres high, and extending for tens of kilometres in a predominately northwest to southeast direction. This terrain has proven a particularly serious obstacle to the construction of vehicular roads, which to this day are few and far between. Today as in the past the region has the flavour, for all but the Pintupi themselves, of a vast unknown expanse, lying beyond the frontier. I have referred to the high mobility that characterises the Desert way of life, but the northern people were required by their particularly harsh environmental conditions to be

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23 The Kiwirrkura native title determination area of 43,000 sq km represents less than half of what I have designated as the ‘northern sector’, which is 100,000 sq km in extent. The balance of 57,000 sq km lies to the south of the ‘Kiwirrkura’ area and forms part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands native title determination area. In many ways, however, it is more naturally associated with the Kiwirrkura area and with a ‘Pintupi’ label, than it is with the southern Ngaanyatjarra area. Hence its inclusion in the ‘northern sector’ in this study.
even more highly mobile than their neighbours to the south. Culturally, the north is characterised by the ‘conception site’ as the basic form of connection between people, the Dreaming, and the land. It is also the stronghold of the famous Western Desert Tingarri Dreaming. The Tingarri stories feature the mythological travels of great hordes of people, and often the sand ridges themselves are seen to be the streams of moving people. Reflecting these characteristics, the Pintupi whose country this is have a profoundly expansive view of the landscape. A Pintupi man when drawing a map of his country in the sand is likely to require a space many paces in breadth to encompass the sites he wants to include; whereas a man from the southern sector may accomplish the same task within the space he can reach from a sitting position.

In keeping with the general remoteness and impenetrability of the area, European contact even of the early sporadic type was initiated much later in the northern sector than in most other parts of the desert. The early prospectors, doggers, sandalwood collectors and other European ‘explorers’ who were quite numerous in the south from the 1890s onwards were far less evident here. Much more significantly, no centre was ever established here by whitefellas as occurred in the south with Warburton mission. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that penetrations by outsiders first occurred, in the form of government patrol officers making short trips into the area. Thus there was a 30-year time gap between the decisive ‘moment of the encounter’ in the south and the equivalent moment in the north.

The south by contrast with the north feels much more settled. As of 2005, it was over seventy years since the Warburton mission was established. Along with the higher population, there is a much more extensive road network, more communities, more funded projects of various kinds, and generally more activity. Environmentally the south is more varied and certainly more fertile from the hunting and gathering point of view. It even seems to be more prospective for mining and has experienced something of a flow-on developmental effect from the activities of mining companies. Because of the greater fertility, not only has the population always been significantly greater than in the north (see chapter 5), it has also been more stably located in place. The well known high mobility of the Pintupi way of life has always been less pronounced here, and this has influenced many aspects of social life, culture and even personal style and pre-occupation. The ‘flavour’ is markedly different.
In the south the paramount Dreaming is the Marlu, the red kangaroo. This Dreaming now dominates male initiation practice throughout most of the desert, but appears to have only come to do so during the past hundred years or so. It is of interest to take a brief look at the circumstances and background here. One effect of European penetration was to open up pathways between desert groups that had previously been much more isolated from one another; hence, the earlier engagement with white Australia of the southern sector people meant that they also ‘stole a march’ on the northerners in terms of an increased level of engagement with some of their other desert neighbours. The Pitjantjatjara, the direct eastern neighbour of the Ngaanyatjarra, had experienced the arrival (quite separately) of missionary parties at almost exactly the same time; and following this, interpenetration across the lands of the two groups increased markedly. One result was that a particular version of the Marlu ritual, which had originated in the Pitjantjatjara area, soon became firmly established among the Ngaanyatjarra as well. The Pintupi, whose entry into the larger field of inter-Aboriginal relations was delayed for some 30 years, have taken steps to link their own Dreamings into the complex that surrounds the Marlu ritual, but the effects of their late start continue to be apparent, and they remain essentially on the periphery as far as Marlu is concerned. It is true that they have the Tingarri, which is respected as a considerable force in its own right: indeed, the southerners, for their part, have gone about establishing connections into this complex. But for all that, the Tingarri, and the Pintupi, remain somewhat outside the ‘Marlu-centred’ mainstream of the desert Dreaming and ritual life.

With both direct and indirect forms of European impact on the north having being delayed in comparison to other regions, prima facie the change from classical lifeways resulting from this contact is likely to have been much less. This would give us two major axes along which the north and the south differ from one another, with both possibly reinforcing one another. The south was more fertile and arguably less ‘desert-like’ in the first place, plus it has had more than a generation longer of externally inspired change, which may have made it less desert-like still.

24 McConvell (1985) explains how this happened in the case of the section system, which spread rapidly across much of Aboriginal Australia in indirect response to settler impact. This case represented only part of a more general opening up of mechanisms and lines of communication between and among Aboriginal groups.
25 Details relating to this will be found in Appendix 2, under the heading ‘Eastern Marlu Dreaming’. 
However there are at least two qualifications that must be made to the picture that this implies. Firstly, the impact on the northerners might have come later, but when it did arrive it was sudden and acute. In the mid 1950s, the Pintupi still had a viable existence in their country, albeit the population had suffered some depletion during the previous decade as a few groups had drifted off the east and the north. Ten years later, their country was completely empty - apart from one or two isolated groups that represented special cases. This is very different to the slow and gradual pace of early change and adaptation to ‘the whitefella’ that occurred in the south; and much of the resulting difference in the fates of the two groups can be attributed to this. Secondly, although it may be thought that a group like the Ngaanyatjarra must have changed considerably as a result of their contact with settler society, this is not a question about which assumptions should be made. Indeed, when one looks at the anatomy of Ngaanyatjarra society and culture, as I attempt to do in this work, it is possible to see that in terms of the nature of their connectedness to country, they have changed remarkably little.

**European impact in the south: a brief summary**

As mentioned earlier contact with Europeans or the impact of Europeans upon this area has been relatively recent. It was only in the 1890s that the European settlement of the continent began to impact on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. However, at this stage it did so only in an indirect way. Impact came via the gold rush that occurred in this period around Kalgoorlie and Laverton. This area, now known as the Eastern Goldfields, is several hundred kilometres from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the impact occurred in the form of a drift of people from the Lands west to the Goldfields. There was also a much smaller impact associated with the few prospectors who ventured into the Lands from the Goldfields, and occasionally from the Northern Territory.26

The main substantial impact, though, dates from the early 1930s when William Wade and Fred Jackson travelled from Laverton to the area now known as Warburton, and established a mission there.27 The mission has been of enormous significance in the subsequent history of

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26 This early history is documented in Gara 1994a, 1994b and 1995; Gara and Anderson 1999.
the area. There are still living indigenous people who were at the location of the new mission when Will Wade first visited the Lands. Indeed, it can be said that the oral memory of contemporary Ngaanyatjarra people extends back through that period, perhaps even as far as the 1890s. Because of this strong ‘corporate memory’ it is possible to be confident about various aspects of history, including the identity of most of the persons who have been associated with the Lands from around the 1890s to the present. This information also shows beyond doubt that the people living in the Lands now are the direct descendants of the people who were there in the 1890s. These people continue to comprise by far the major set of people who live in the Lands. The other contemporary residents of the Lands are either indigenous persons from neighbouring desert regions who are marriage partners of the local Ngaanyatjarra people, and the staff who work for them, the majority of whom are non-indigenous.

Warburton mission

It was not long after Wade first came to the Elder Creek area in 1932 that the Ngaanyatjarra people of the immediate locality began to show an interest in him and in what he had to offer. An energetic man, he immediately began making contact with the local people and encouraging them to become involved with his mission. He was assisted in this by one or two indigenous people who had originated from the Lands but had been down in the Goldfields for some time and had acquired a knowledge of ‘whitefella ways’ and a facility with English.

Wade set out to capture the people’s imagination, with a view to attracting them to stay at the mission and gaining Christian converts. To this end he staged some dramatic performances involving such things as making a giant damper out in the open and handing it out to everyone, and giving sweets in copious quantities to the children. It was also his practise to lead frequent hymn-singing sessions, largely involving Salvation Army songs, which seem to have been much enjoyed by the people. Though it would in fact be many years before converts were achieved in any meaningful sense, he did attract followers quickly, and before long a small community developed. While local Aboriginal accounts make mention of the colourful aspects, and of the fact that Wade was a man who always engaged directly with the people and who tried hard to learn the language to facilitate this, it was in fact his ability to offer European food, albeit in limited amounts, that was the major factor in the early
relationship that developed between him and the local people. His helpers from the Goldfields travelled around the nearby hinterland contacting small groups of desert dwellers and exhorting them excitedly to come to the mission to obtain the food that they claimed was ‘easily’ available there. The lure was a very effective one. The people’s appreciation was no doubt exacerbated by the drought that prevailed in this period. But food was not the only basis to the relationship. It is evident from the start that Ngaanyatjarra people were intrigued by white people. It seems that they saw the opportunity to add something to their own lives through contact with this ‘whitefella’ who was himself so eager to engage. Indeed it was partly for similar reasons that many of them had gone west since the 1890s to the Goldfields. Perhaps their primary motivation was the eternal hunt for food, but many discussions with my informants on these subjects have revealed how they also wanted to ‘have a look’, and to learn about the new world that they were gradually becoming aware of. They wanted to create contacts and to able to acquire what we might call ‘leverage’ of one kind or another vis-a-vis others: perhaps parties in this wider world, perhaps their own compatriots.

People such as the ones who accompanied Wade and the other missionaries from the Goldfields and worked as their helpers and emissaries were quite pivotal in some respects to developments at Warburton; and though I cannot develop this theme here, the role of the intermediary as taken up by some Ngaanyatjarra people continued to be an important one in subsequent years and decades.

At any rate, during the early months and years the people whose personal connections to country were in the general locality of the mission did come to see and usually to engage with it in some way; and to make what they would of Will Wade preaching the gospel to them. Before long some of them were leaving their small children in the care of the missionaries for varying lengths of time while they went off on their hunting and gathering travels. The missionaries encouraged this practice, which within a few years later was formalised into what was called the mission Home (operational from 1937 to 1960). Many of the older group of contemporary Warburton adults grew up in this relatively institutionalised setting.

Initially, then, the people came to the mission, perhaps for food, perhaps driven by curiosity, but they soon found that in fact there was not much food to go around, the mission settlement
being extremely small and under-funded. Thus while a small number ‘sat down’ to a more sedentary life quite quickly, and ‘started to get learned for the whitefella’ (as people express it), most continued with their own hunting and gathering lives. For some groups the range of their annual travel actually increased in this period, due to the child care role proffered by the missionaries. As time went by they oriented their movements more and more towards the mission as a focal point for periodical visits. The role played by the dingo scalp trade encouraged this symbiotic process. The people, while continuing to live their lives in their own areas of the desert, learnt to hunt for the scalps and periodically bring them to the mission to exchange for the flour, tea and other items that they were becoming increasingly fond of. From the missionaries’ point of view, the resulting government bounty dividends supplied critical funds for the maintenance of the mission.

At first it was people whose main attachments were in the general region of the mission who were most affected, but as time went by people further away in the hinterland, primarily to the east and the north, came more and more into the orbit of the mission. These areas included those that we now know as Papulankutja (Blackstone) and Irrunytju (Wingellina) in the Central Ranges; and Warakurna (Giles) in the Rawlinsons to the north. A vagary was that the area of Mantamaru (Jameson), though closer to Warburton than these three others, actually remained more isolated for longer than they did. This was because of the configuration of the road network, which when created in the 1950s and 60s happened to bypass a large area of country around Jameson.

By the late ’60s virtually all the desert people in the Lands had finally come to be living a life that was almost totally centred on the mission. In context, the ‘transitional’ period was quite a lengthy one. The people, considered collectively, effectively had a 30-year time frame in which to ‘adjust’ to settlement life. The contact experience of a ‘clash’ between the two cultures, societies, or ways of life that was the norm across the continent and that was so traumatic for many Aboriginal people was not generally replicated here. As I have already intimated however, the situation to the north was very different.

Even in the south, however, there eventually came a time when the ability to choose the pace of ‘adaptation’ would evaporate, when irresistible pressure would come to bear on the
remaining 'nomadic' people, as the whitefellas of the day called them, to leave behind their way of life. By the mid 1960s there were in the south only a few of these groups remaining – small groups that had inhabited the remoter parts of the hinterland or that for whatever reasons had delayed their entry into mission life. The Patjarr or 'Clutterbuck Hills mob' studied by Richard Gould in the mid 1960s was a case in point. These groups that suddenly found themselves the subject of a new and intense scrutiny by government officials experienced some indignities of a similar nature to those that were undergone, in the same years, by the Pintupi at Papunya (see below).  

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the details of how and why things came to a 'head' in this way, and why a people who had hitherto been virtually ignored by all but the missionaries, suddenly became an embarrassment to state and commonwealth governments.

The ‘encounter’ in the north

I have indicated that the whitefella impact in the north arrived much later than in the south – 30 years later. When it did occur, it came not in the form of a settlement being established within the country of the people concerned, as was the case in the south with the Warburton mission. What happened with the Pintupi was that native welfare patrols from the Northern Territory entered the area at roughly the same time as the people themselves were in the process of moving out of their own accord.

This wave of ‘autonomous’ emigration effectively began in the mid 1940s, and between then and 1956 four known groups (averaging around 20 adults each) left the area, three of them in an easterly direction and one in a northerly direction. Important motivators in this emigration included the fact that the adjacent country (to the east and north) had become depopulated; drought conditions; and the fact that specific relatives had disappeared beforehand in the relevant directions. Thus although the emigrant Pintupi groups can certainly

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28 Brooks 2002:76.
29 See McGrath and Brooks, 2010, for a detailed consideration of these matters. Also, Davenport, Johnson and Yuwali in Cleared Out (2005) give an account of the background to some of these developments, as they applied to the people of the Percival Lakes area far to the north west of the Lands. Their account reveals the interplay between the state and Commonwealth governments and the failure of both – but particularly the state government, whose responsibility it primarily was – to act at all effectively in these matters in regard to Aboriginal interests.
31 I have assembled these facts myself, from oral histories that I have collected. I have also been greatly helped by information provided by Jeremy Long.

Chapter 1
be said to have left the country voluntarily, they did not have the same kind of ‘choice’ as their southern counterparts had when they paced their entry into life at the mission. The northerners must have been experiencing a level of anxiety, wondering what had happened to their missing relatives, and wondering why large areas of adjacent country were now depopulated. Such concerns must have added to the problems created by the increasing decline in population itself.

The native welfare officers and patrol officers began their forays into ‘inside Pintupi country’ in the late 1950s, with trips becoming more frequent in the early to mid 60s. Their arrival on the scene in this period was not unrelated to the concerns of the national government as flagged above, but in this part of the desert the conjunction of circumstances was different. The sort of embarrassment that saw a group like the ‘Clutterbuck Hills mob’ almost harassed into settling at Warburton had not yet arisen, and when they did they were more focussed on the southern parts of the desert than the northern. The officials working in the north, most notably Jeremy Long, undertook their trips into Pintupi country not so much from any desire (or instruction) to bring the people under administration, but in response to the concern that was being expressed by Aboriginal people in settlements in the NT about the Pintupi who were known to be still ‘in the bush’.

Among the Pintupi who had earlier found their own way to the NT settlements like Hermannsburg and Haasts Bluff were some who proved to be effective political operators, notably Nosepeg Tjupurrula. By the time Jeremy Long arrived, this man had long wanted to get back into ‘inside Pintupi country’ to find out what was happening there. The question from where he stood was the same as that which was pre-occupying the people that remained in the bush: What has happened to my missing relatives?

Thus the Northern Territory patrol officers ‘fed into’ a pre-existing local situation of a very particular kind. Jeremy Long and Nosepeg went out west of the border together. Long has reported that he did not necessarily think that it was a good thing for the groups that they found to come in to the settlements (ibid), and that he certainly did not pressure them to do so. Nosepeg, though he was ostensibly Long’s guide, had his own agenda. It seems from discussions I have had with the people concerned that he definitely did want them to come,
and though ‘pressure’ may not be the right word, he certainly ‘encouraged’ them with talk of plentiful food, reunions with long lost relatives and the like.

The real downfall of the northerners stemmed from the fact that, in a situation where it was inevitable, sooner or later, that a transition would have to be made to a life that was essentially settled and inside the net of the state, there was no site within their own country at which the transition could occur. Long himself realised this at the time and pushed unsuccessfully, for an administrative outpost to be established close to the WA/NT border. The results were alluded to earlier in this chapter.

Returning to the southern sector, a somewhat paradoxical observation may be made about the history I have briefly recounted. For many indigenous groups across the continent the permanent incursion into their country of Europeans was the first step in a process of dispossession. Yet for the people of my southern sector, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the arrival of the missionaries was what in a real sense ‘saved’ them from the kind of long term dispersal and loss of identity that was the usual legacy of this dispossession. The establishment of the Warburton mission not only halted the ‘drift’ to the Goldfields which otherwise would undoubtedly have seen the eventual depopulation of the region, it allowed the transition to settlement life to be ‘paced’, in most cases, by the people themselves. But the explanation for the benign rather than destructive effect of the whitefella incursion into the Warburton area is again ironical, because it has to do less with what the missionaries did, than with what they were unable to do. The mission was never really supported by the state government and was forced to run ‘on a shoestring’, meaning that it was never able to hire many staff or expand its operations geographically within the Lands. These limitations, frustrating as they were for the missionaries, proved to be a boon to Ngaanyatjarra people. The Pintupi, on the other hand, never have experienced a permanent incursion from outside, yet they lost contact with their country in a way that the Ngaanyatjarra never have. It is true that they were able to achieve a re-occupation of their land, which had remained empty in the interim, but the impact of the interruption has certainly not been eradicated.
Conclusion

The focus of this thesis is on the connectedness to country of Western Desert people in a 'classical' context. I do not ignore the process of historical change and the 'encounter' with the state, and I acknowledge the difficulties that face the anthropologist who seeks to look back to an earlier era. But the past still remains close to the present here, and I have taken what I believe to be a genuine opportunity to discover a little more about it before this does in fact become an impossible idea. As interesting as the Western Desert 'case' is for anthropologists, there have been, for various reasons, few detailed ethnographic studies dealing with the Dreaming and the nature of people's core relatedness and groundedness in the physically harsh environment in which they live. Certainly, it seems compelling to pursue the unique opportunity — an outcome largely of the research scene as it has developed in recent times — that arises to 'compare and contrast' two neighbouring but largely separate groups of desert people within the one study.

The thesis aims to be particularly thorough in regard to the Dreaming, a domain of Aboriginal life that the literature universally recognises as important, but that usually only receives a partial treatment. The Dreaming-related material in the text is supplemented by a considerable amount of further material in the appendices. The other major subject area, involving the presentation of case study material, addresses how individual and group connectedness to place is distributed and organized in relation to the landscape. While considering all such matters, I try to keep in mind a picture of a living society of people in the desert, and not to get too far away into abstractions or ideological concerns. The thesis is primarily an ethnographic work.

For lack of space, I have had to omit any detailed consideration of historical matters and of the differences between the desert world as I have described it here and that of the 2000s. I also have been unable to include any material on the three systems of social classification: the alternating generational moiety system, the kinship system and the section system. These are all fascination subjects in their own right, and I hope to deal with them in the future. As far as these three 'systems' are concerned, I hope that they are well enough known in the literature that no difficulties of understanding will occur in relation to the present work. For the Pintupi, these three systems have been described by Myers (1986), and there are only minor
differences in the case of the Ngaanyatjarra. The only notable difference is that Ngaanyatjarra have what is basically a four-section system rather than the more complex eight-section system of the Pintupi.
Chapter 2

The Country and its Dreaming

'Every rock has a human connection.' (Ngaanyatjarra man Mr. I. Ward, June 23, 2006.)

Almost without exception observers of Aboriginal society have pointed out the critical place occupied by country itself and by notions of country in their life worlds. The people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands speak of country in ways that leave no doubt about the centrality of its significance to them; and the same message is just as clearly demonstrated when we observe their characteristic activities, the way they conduct their lives, and indeed most of their whole historical trajectory as we know it. This chapter is geared towards developing a sophisticated understanding of how and why this is so.

As a starting point it must always be borne in mind, in whatever aspect of the desert life we might be considering, that the people here lived at the lowest levels of population density that have been found anywhere on the planet, even among other hunter-gatherers. The harsh physical environment for the most part permitted only the bare minimum to emerge in terms of a stable society with enduring forms. As Myers has put it, 'Society' represents a precarious achievement here (1986:48). It was in this context that on the one hand country came to constitute such a focus for the desert people, while on the other, mobility was such a ubiquitous feature. With resources so meagre and thinly spread, people had to be regularly on the move to survive. The importance of the theme of the mobility has been strongly emphasised by Myers, and more recently by Poirier, who has revived the notion of Aboriginal 'nomadism', in my view usefully, arguing that mobility should be considered not only its 'geopolitical and socio-economic aspects', but also as 'their specific way of apprehending the world' (2005:12). However, while the physical harshness and its direct consequences, like the extreme sparsity of the population, are uniformly noted in the literature, the implications of living in such an environment tend not to have been kept centrally in view by recent writers as they have analysed the various aspects and dynamics of the desert life – Poirier's allusion to nomadism notwithstanding. It is as if, once the physical facts have been stated, one can move on and talk about the people as if these facts made little difference.

32 S. Cane, 1990:156
The desert life, as all have recognised, was a highly mobile one, but despite this – or maybe because of it – critical importance was given to specific places lying within the vast areas of land that people traversed. Again, Poirier has noted this two-sidedness: ‘[Aboriginal] nomadism is tied to a strong sense of territoriality... [Their] places and itineraries are the basis of the formation and transformation of the complex and dynamic networks of social belonging and ritual responsibilities’ (ibid:12). In classical times in my study area, the identifications established with country at birth and through early experiences stayed with a person through their life and constituted the key to defining who they were. In the northern sector the moment of first definition was set back prior to birth, to the time when the fact of pregnancy of the mother became apparent, but here just the same, it was association with country that basically defined the person. Here the place where the initial event defining the person is deemed to have happened has been termed the ‘conception site’.33 But whether it was birth or conception, the initial manifestation of the person was understood to be not simply about a tie to country in a geographical and physical sense, but about a linkage to the tjukurpa (Dreaming).34 As I shall show, the Dreaming, for the people of the study area, was and continues to be the most significant constitutive feature of the world as a whole, including the ‘world’ of country.35 In light of this, the exploration of country must proceed in tandem with an elucidation of the Dreaming.

33 In this chapter I will be referring frequently to the work of Poirier and Vachon, both of whose ethnographic areas are to the north of my study area; and in both cases they report that the cultural emphasis, in terms of the individual’s ‘given’ connection to the Dreaming, is on the conception site, rather than the birth site, conforming with the distribution that I have noted.

34 The people of the study area use the term tjukurpa to refer to a multitude of different parts or aspects of the overall Dreaming phenomenon, a practice that makes sense on the ground, but cannot always be followed by the writer whose goal is to ‘unpack’ such multivocal concepts. Poirier (2005:53, 54) provides a short discussion of the attempts that have been made since the 1920s to translate into English the concept of the tjukurpa, and its counterparts in other Aboriginal languages, and the associated pitfalls and dilemmas. The term ‘Dreaming’, popularized by Stanner in the 1950s, continues to be favoured by most writers, and I follow that usage here. Not just one single term, but many pages of exegesis are required to actually capture anything like the full significance and functionality of the concept in Aboriginal life.

35 Until I read Dan Vachon’s thesis (2006), I would have had no hesitation in applying this statement to the whole of the Western Desert. But according to Vachon, the people of the northern Great Sandy Desert do not give paramount place to the Dreaming (here called walijirri), but instead regard kalpurtu, water-snakes who inhabit the major wells (tjila) of their country, as the primary beings for both country and the world as a whole. Ethnographically, this is very unusual, as Vachon himself readily notes. However, to avoid introducing too much clumsy phraseology, I will proceed with my general discussion of the Dreaming as if this exception did not exist.
The Dreaming

For Ngaanyatjarra people, the Dreaming is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Among many other things, it relates people to country and to one another, explains origins, and comprises a repository of knowledge both practical and esoteric. In one important aspect it comprises a set of ideas, beliefs and rules for behaviour, which is seen as a coherent, organized and immutable system, which the people often now refer to by the English term ‘Law’. It can be said to provide a ‘design for life’. The people of the study area, and it is the same throughout the Desert, make a point of stressing the idea of the unchanging and rigid character of the Law, and that contraventions will meet with dire consequences; to the extent, as Myers noted, that they possess a reputation throughout Australia for conservatism and the strength of their adherence to the Law (Myers 1986:297). Bound up with the Law are what could be called the accepted ‘customs’, or patterned behaviour elements of society in their part of the desert, such as the avoidance relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law, the necessity to hold both a first and a second funeral for all deceased persons, the use of a particular ‘skin’ system for classifying relatives, the need to follow particular rules in the preparation and distribution of *kuka* (meat food), and the like. The esoteric sort of knowledge associated with the Dreaming is particularly valued, and issues to do with access to it are of huge importance in desert society. Indeed they can be said to constitute one of the great structural dynamics within it. So central is the Dreaming to Ngaanyatjarra life that the people’s characteristic way of thinking about all manner of subjects can be seen to be founded upon it, or upon the set of propositions about the nature of the world that are contained within it. I have referred to this characteristic mode of intellectual engagement as ‘*tjukurrpa*-thinking’.37

The pre-eminence of the Dreaming

One of the notable features of desert culture is that it is not the environmental and productive capacity of country that exerts the strongest hold over the minds and the activities of the people. Considering how marginal the desert is as a human habitat, it might have been expected that such matters would be of foremost concern, but such is not the case. Certainly, whenever I have been with contemporary older people driving through their own particular country out from their community of residence, they have not stinted in proudly pointing out

36 In fact, as shall be seen later in this chapter and the next two, there is much evidence that the Dreaming realm is not so unchanging and rigid as this viewpoint suggests – a point made strongly by Piorier (2005).

37 In Brooks (forthcoming 2011).
any notable features or qualities, such as any greenery or other signs of productiveness that might be currently apparent. But should their area be utterly desolate and devoid of the slightest sign of bush food, scenic attributes or any beneficial quality at all, it will not detract in the least from the owner's enthusiasm. What counts is the Dreaming presence, together with the connections of people to it (many of which are themselves linked to the Dreaming presence), and, related to these, the historical details of past personal and family occupation of the area concerned. These factors account for a part of the 'pulling power' that country has for the people. Thus although the climatic and ecological conditions imposed such huge constraints on desert society and exerted such an influence on its structure, the consciousness of the desert people was constituted on a different basis. Yet at the same time a possible adaptive advantage can be seen in the prioritisation that exists, for it would have tended to encourage an even geographical distribution of the population, rather than the unmitigated clustering around productively superior localities that might have been the result if only utilitarian considerations applied.

The Dreaming Beings and the foundation of the world: Dreaming tracks

In 1959 Ronald Berndt wrote that 'the whole Western Desert is criss-crossed with the meandering tracks of ancestral beings' (1959:97). The description applies aptly to the study area, where the Dreaming is manifest in a multitude of tracks in the landscape that represent the travels of a host of powerful beings. These beings established what we might call the 'foundations' of the world, and I will henceforth refer to them as 'foundational' beings, or else simply as Dreaming beings. Some of these beings are major figures that travelled vast
distances across the desert and performed important foundational acts; and in a fundamental way, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi people do actually see the world in terms of a far-reaching framework constituted by the great movements of the major Dreaming beings through the landscape. In many parts of Aboriginal Australia the tracks as such of the Dreaming beings evidently do not play such a central and striking role as they do in the desert, but in my time with the Ngaanyatjarra and the Pintupi I have been left in no doubt about the fundamental role the major Dreaming tracks of the desert play in their life world, their culture, their land tenure system, their relationship to country and their ritual life; and in accordance with this emphasis I deal with them extensively in this thesis. When we are driving together through the country, my co-passengers will invariably be more interested in the configuration of Dreaming tracks around us than in whatever local and personal attributions may be present in the landscape. It is the Dreaming track framework that they ultimately orient themselves to: it is the key, for them, to the way the world is constructed. In that the great tracks enable vast stretches of country to be envisioned in a strong sense as an integrated whole, they constitute, among other things, an enormous ‘stage’ which is the backdrop to the desert men’s lives. There are also many minor Dreaming beings whose travels and activities were on a more modest scale. It is as if the large scale epic heroes established the spinal cord and other great bones of a giant single skeleton that comprises the country, with the many smaller, more localised tracks then fitting into the large framework somewhat in the way that networks of fine bones fit into a skeleton.

The overall ‘cast’ of Dreaming beings is subject to a ranking system that relates not only to factors of size and scope but also to the differing amount of power and ‘sacredness’ that each possesses – matters that will be considered in some detail in the next chapter. The travels and activities of the beings are described in *turlku*, songs, and in ‘stories’ or myths (referred to by the all-purpose term *tjukurrpa*); and particular designs, carved on to wooden boards and painted on to the bodies of participants during ritual, correspond with these narratives.

Many of the foundational beings are often referred to by the desert people as Men or Women of particular natural species that are found in the desert, some of which are food sources for the people: examples are ‘*Wati Marlu*’ (‘Kangaroo Man’), ‘*Tjilkamarti Minyma*’ (‘Echidna definitely. Given the problematical nature of ‘creator’ and ‘ancestral’ as descriptors, I have settled on the admittedly rather awkward-sounding ‘foundational’.

Chapter 2
Woman’) and Kampurarrpa-ya’ (‘Bush Tomato People’). Not all however, are desirable or beneficial: there are, for example, Kurnma (March Fly) and Pupalirri (Blowfly) Dreamings. Whatever their identity, they are often envisioned as ‘larger than life’, as Tonkinson also noted (1991:20). For example, from what I have gathered when people have referred to such matters in my presence, Wati Marlu is often pictured as a kangaroo-shaped being (but with some human traits) who is perhaps five or six times the size of the real-life red kangaroo of the desert.\textsuperscript{42} Gaining an understanding of the nature of these beings is a goal that will be pursued through this and the next two chapters, but some basic features may be stated now that are generally accepted by the people of the study area, and in the literature dealing with these sorts of beings as they appear among Aboriginal groups throughout Australia. Each of the beings is postulated to have had a ‘lifetime’ as such, with a beginning and an end. In most cases, it is said that they came out of the ground (parnanguru pakarnu) and eventually returned into it (parnangka tjarrpangu). While they were not all living and active at the same time, Aboriginal people allude to something like an ‘epoch’ in which they all lived, that was evidently sometime in the past. There are however some complex issues here, involving consideration firstly of the cultural understanding of time, and secondly of how the ‘life’ of the beings is conceptualised, together with their relationship with human beings. In the most general terms, the Dreaming beings are understood not only to have laid down the physical, cultural and moral world ‘writ large’, but to have been crucially involved in the origin of each species and even each individual human being that has been born into this world since it was established. The influence and efficacy of the beings still remains in the world and is the major defining influence in it, even if the period of the great travels and foundational activities is over.

Documenting the Dreaming tracks and sites of the study area

In line with the fact that these matters are of such consuming interest to my informants, I have documented across the region, over many years, seventy or more Dreaming tracks – as well as hundreds of sites, which are the places where the beings paused or stopped in their travels. I have undertaken trips (which have invariably meant departing from the sparse network of vehicular roads that now crosses the Lands) along many of these tracks with people knowledgeable about them. I have supplemented this work, at times when I am in one of the

\textsuperscript{42} It is said about two places on the Marlu track near Warburton (Ngungku and Purkurritjarra) that if you take a young child to them and rub them against features of the site, the child will grow tall and will be far-sighted.
contemporary widely spaced communities, by recording lists of sites along these or other tracks that such people are able to recite from memory. Opportunistically, I will elicit details of the activities of the Dreaming beings at these sites: that is, the ‘stories’ of the sites.

In Tables 2:1 and 2:2, below, are two lists of Dreamings that I have documented in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The lists should not be considered to be exhaustive. I have entitled these lists ‘Major Travelling Beings’ and ‘Localised or minor Dreamings’ respectively, but it should be noted that although there are some truly major figures and some that are definitely minor, the distinction in many cases is far from clear-cut. It is even the case that some of the beings that are Major Travellers have their ‘stay-at-home’ counterparts. The Possum Dreaming, for instance, features a Possum Man who travels great distances but often stops for a while in areas inhabited by localised Possum People. Discussing the same topic, Tonkinson (1991:20) phrases the distinction as between ‘jilganggaja’ (‘travellers’) and nguranggaja (‘home-bodies’); but again, in a case like the Possum, one Dreaming could be represented in both categories. (For the Ngaanyatjarra, the terms equivalent to those identified by Tonkinson are ‘yurritjarrangkatja’ and ‘ngurrangkatja’ – the latter being the same word that Tonkinson cites, but rendered in Ngaanyatjarra orthography.) Despite these issues, the lists do provide some perspective on the number and range of Dreamings, as well as reference points for future discussion and comparison. The Dreamings that in my understanding are of greatest importance are highlighted in bold type. Detailed descriptions and discussions of some of these Dreamings will be found in Appendices 2 and 3.

**TABLE 2.1: Major Travelling Dreamings**

| Kanyarla | Euro Dreaming |
| Karlaya | Emu Dreaming |
| Kiparra or Nganurti | Bush Turkey Dreaming |
| Kungkarrangkalpa | Seven Sisters Dreaming #1 |

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43 Other researchers have also documented some of these Dreamings, not only in other regions, but even within my study area. It is difficult to acknowledge most of this work, which is unpublished and often difficult even to identify. One major contributor has been anthropologist Lee Sackett, who undertook extensive cultural (and other) field research in the southern sector, around 2000, for native title purposes. His documentation was subsequently amalgamated into a larger claim and hence no referenceable document survives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreaming</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Kurrpulurrpulu</em></td>
<td>Seven Sisters Dreaming #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lungkarta</em></td>
<td>Blue Tongue Lizard Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Makurra</em></td>
<td>Golden bandicoote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Marlu #1 (West)</em></td>
<td>Red Kangaroo Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Marlu #2 (East)</em></td>
<td>Red Kangaroo Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minyma Kurrkarti</em></td>
<td>Woman goanna Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minyma Kutjarra</em></td>
<td>Two Women Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minyma Kutungu</em></td>
<td>Devil Woman Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngirntaka</em></td>
<td>Perentie Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nirru</em></td>
<td>Bilby Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Papa</em></td>
<td>Dingo Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nyii-Nyii</em></td>
<td>Zebra Finch Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tingarri</em></td>
<td><em>Tingarri</em> People Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tjilkamarta Minyma</em></td>
<td>Echidna Woman Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tjilkamarta Wati</em></td>
<td>Echidna Man Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Warnampi Kutjarra</em></td>
<td>Two Water Snake Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wati Kutjarra</em></td>
<td>Two (Goanna) Men Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wati Nyiru</em></td>
<td>A Man Named Nyiru Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wati Punyu</em></td>
<td>A Man Named Punyu Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wati Yirna</em></td>
<td>Old Man Dreaming (northern sector)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wati Yula</em></td>
<td>A Man Named Yula Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wayurta</em></td>
<td>Possum Dreaming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2.2: Localised or minor Dreamings:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreaming</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Kakalyalya</em></td>
<td>Pink Cockatoo Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kaarnka</em></td>
<td>Crow Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kampurarrpa</em></td>
<td>Bush Tomato Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kilykilykarri</em></td>
<td>Budgerigar Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kuniya Kutjarra</em></td>
<td>Two Python Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kurli Minyma</em></td>
<td>‘Kurli Women’ Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kurnma</em></td>
<td>March fly Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kuurrkuurrrpa</em></td>
<td>Owl Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kurrparu</em></td>
<td>Magpie Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mala</em></td>
<td>Hare-Wallaby Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Dreaming Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingkiri</td>
<td>(Native) Mouse Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirnu</td>
<td>New Initiates Dreaming; often equated with Patirlpa (Parrot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minyma Mamu</td>
<td>Devil Women Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minyma Nyintjirri</td>
<td>Lizard Women Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minyma Pirni</td>
<td>Many Women Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minyura</td>
<td>Desert Mulga Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitjalan</td>
<td>(A type of Possum) Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngarnamara</td>
<td>Mallee Fowl Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngatapuka or Marnpi</td>
<td>Bronze Wing Pigeon Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyinmi or Kirlilpi</td>
<td>Small Parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyinnga</td>
<td>Ice (or Famine) Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngiyari</td>
<td>Thorny Devil Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyurna</td>
<td>Snake Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parrtjarta</td>
<td>Marsupial Cat Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patirlpa</td>
<td>(Pt Lincoln) Parrot Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patupirri</td>
<td>Bat Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pira or Kirnara</td>
<td>Moon Man Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piwi</td>
<td>Tawny Frogmouth Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punpunpa</td>
<td>Bush Fly Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupulirri</td>
<td>Blowfly Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purnu</td>
<td>Tree Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purnurpa</td>
<td>Praying Mantis Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatjalypa</td>
<td>Carpet Snake Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawalpa</td>
<td>Crescent Nailtail wallaby Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirnka</td>
<td>Goanna Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjakurra</td>
<td>Skink Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjalpintarri</td>
<td>Frill-necked Lizard Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjintirr-Tjintirrpa</td>
<td>Willie Wagtail Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjirrkarli</td>
<td>Yam Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjitari</td>
<td>Python Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjitji Kutjarra</td>
<td>Two Children Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjuliltjulilpa</td>
<td>Mulga parrot Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjurratja</td>
<td>(Tree) Honey Dreaming; aka 'Lupul'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walarlarra</td>
<td>Brown Snake Dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walpatju</td>
<td>Crescent nail-tailed wallaby Dreaming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considering both lists together, the observation may be made that they largely define the set of phenomena that in the classical context were significant in the world of the desert people, in terms of both ‘use value’ and what we may call ‘agency’ in the world. In regard to the latter, they are all capable of being cast as protagonists. A notable exception is the sun, which was obviously of great significance but which, in the desert, did not enter the company of Dreaming players.

Most of the major kuka (game meat) varieties of the Lands and of the desert as a whole are to be found within Table 1:1, i.e. kangaroo, emu, euro, bush turkey, perentie lizard, possum and goanna. Forms of plant food figure in Table 1:2 but not in Table 1:1. As has been uniformly observed by other writers, meat (hunted by men) is preferred by desert-dwellers to vegetable food (collected primarily by women), although it constituted only 20% to 40% of the diet in classical times.\footnote{Myers 1986: 74 (where he cites both Gould 1969 and Meggitt 1964).} There is evidently an association (of a cultural rather than a utilitarian nature) reflected here between game animals, particularly the larger and most prized ones; wide-ranging movement; the male domain; and the ‘broad stage’ dimension of the Dreaming that I referred to.
All of the Dreaming Beings listed above, then, are represented in tracks or constellations of sites (or in a few cases, a single site) that criss-cross and/or punctuate the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi landscape. The location of the major tracks is shown in Map 2A below. Most of the tracks that traverse the Lands approach from far to the west or north, with many travelling right across the Lands and then continuing on into country to the east (in the Northern Territory or South Australia). Most Dreaming beings travel basically in a linear fashion, though the line may be far from straight. In rare cases, as with the Eastern Marlu (Kangaroo) Dreaming, the being completes a large loop, bringing him ultimately back to his starting point.

In broad terms the Dreaming is ubiquitous in the study area, though generally less ‘densely’ present in less fertile regions, no doubt because in such areas the human population was even more sparse than the desert norm. Other than this, the distribution of the Dreaming imprint across parts of the landscape can be markedly uneven, with some localities and regions having more than their fair share either of the general ‘Dreaming presence’, or of the more highly-ranked Dreamings, or both. There is often little apparent correlation between such a Dreaming surfeit, or deficit, and any other factor. For instance, the immediate Warburton area is imprinted with the Marlu Dreaming, as (quite separately) is Jameson, 130 km to its east. But in between the two is a region that lacks Dreamings of major significance. Men have often pointed this out to me when we, say, drive out of Jameson on our way to Warburton. As we cross the Marlu track some 12 km out from Jameson, travelling westwards, someone will say, ‘Now the country is free [i.e. unmarked by significant, hence in a sense burdensome Dreamings], through to Warburton.’ And they might go on to add: ‘And we’re free too!’ It is not that there is no Dreaming imprint at all through this wide strip of country. There are several tjukurrpa present, but none of them have the kind of ‘weight’ that pertains to Marlu, among others. Most of the country concerned, however, would have been relatively fertile (by desert standards) and thus would have been among those regions that sustained a relatively high population. There is no apparent difference between the Warburton locality, the Jameson locality, and the country in between, in relation to this matter of fertility.

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45 There is frequently a sense of burdensomeness that men feel in relation to the major Dreaming figures and the ritual obligations that they have in relation to them (see chapter 3).
Different ‘types’ of Dreaming beings; and multiple protagonists in a single Dreaming

The most common ‘type’ of Dreaming being has a clear principal protagonist who is either a named ‘person’, such as Minyma Kutungu or Wati Punyu, or a member of an animal or plant species, such as Wati Marlu (Kangaroo Man). However there are a few cases, for example Nyinnga the ‘Ice’ Dreaming, which relate to a different type of phenomena, in this case meteorological phenomena, and as such may not seem to fit some aspects of the preceding discussion, such as the idea of the beings having ‘lifetimes’. It may not seem that we are even talking of a being at all here. In fact, though, this is not really a different ‘type’ at anything other than a surface level, for Nyinnga too is seen, at least at times, as ‘Wati’ Nyinnga (Ice ‘Man’). There are also cases that are different from the ‘norm’ in other ways. For example, most of the Dreamings in Tables 1:1 and 1:2 have a single protagonist and are identified by the name of that protagonist, but then there are the multiple, but unnamed, Tingarri beings. There are also cases like that of Yula and the Seven Sisters. Here, as the myth indicates (see Appendix 2), we have what could be seen as a symbiotic pair of protagonists. Yula, as the archetypal ‘lecherous older man’ is in many ways no more than the product of the symbiosis that is posited between him and the complementary group of women (the Sisters), who are on the one hand vulnerable, but on the other hand very adept at avoiding and even making fun of their pursuer. Yula never appears in the ‘Dreamscape’ other than in conjunction with the women. If we leave the matter thus, then this is simply a case of a single Dreaming that embraces more than one protagonist. However, another consideration arises here. For living women, the ‘Seven Sisters’ constitutes an important Dreaming ‘entity’ in its own right. In this context, Yula is very much a background figure. There are detailed songs and ritual practices, the province only of women, that are to do with central features of ‘women’s business’, and that are bound up with ‘the Sisters’. From this point of view, it fits the desert reality better to see these as two separate Dreamings. This is not a question that needs to be resolved, but the example indicates how apparently clear-cut characterisations can start to dissolve when subjected to closer scrutiny.

There are further degrees of complexity as well. Most of the Dreamings in Tables 1:1 and 1:2 interact with one or more of the others. Such interaction may be simply a matter of the two beings ‘seeing’ one another on a single occasion, at the point where their tracks cross, or it

46 All examples are taken from my Tables 1:1 and 1:2.
may be of a more sustained nature. If the latter is the case, the question might arise as to whether the two Dreamings should be seen as a single unit. For example, as detailed in Appendix 2, the major Dreaming protagonists the *Wati Kutjarra* have a critical on-going role to play with the very important *Minyma Kurkarti* (Goanna Woman). Viewed in one light, there is a ‘symbiosis’ here that is comparable to what exists with *Yula* and the Seven Sisters. Yet, for a great amount of their time, *Wati Kutjarra* are in places, and engaging in activities that have nothing to do with Goanna Woman. They are much more multi-faceted mythological figures than Yula, and as such they are found in almost every corner of the desert, undertaking a great range of activities. Clearly, they need to be classified as a Dreaming in their own right. Yet for the men of the Ngaanyatjarra region (where the Goanna Woman complex is found), the ‘meaning’ of *Wati Kutjarra* is indelibly influenced by the connections that they have with *Minyma Kurrkarti*. These kinds of considerations serve to remind us not only that the Dreaming world is far more complex than a mere list of ‘component’ Dreamings can indicate, but that the act of creating a list of supposedly individual Dreamings can itself be misleading. Nevertheless, as long as this is borne in mind, such a list has its usefulness in conveying an idea of the extent of the Dreaming world and of the sorts of identities that populate it.

To take these considerations one step further, it should also be pointed out that many Dreamings feature other subsidiary participants as well as the obvious protagonists. Sometimes, there are even elements that appear to be merely ‘objects’, but that can turn out to have agency in their own right, and thus could also be classed as protagonists. None of these entities appear at all in the lists of Dreamings set out above, but they are nevertheless constituents of the Dreaming world. For example, in the *Minyma Kutungu* story (see Appendix 2) some of her ‘women’s’ items, like her *wirra* (digging dish) are able to move and initiate action independently of her. Similarly, in some men’s stories, a penis becomes detached from its owner and acts on its account, becoming in effect another protagonist in the story. One of the marked features of the Dreaming world is the way in which there is a greater amount of agency attributed to, or allowed to, various entities, including things that in the everyday world are simply objects, and lack any animation at all.
Tracks and Sites

Logically the sites and tracks associated with the Dreaming beings are aspects of the same phenomenon, but in practice the relation between the two is variable. In some cases it is plainly the track that dominates in the desert people’s imagination – and as I have indicated there is a sense in which the whole phenomenon of tracks dominates - but instances exist where an individual site will overshadow the track that is associated with it. Just as it is possible to speak of say the ‘dozen major Dreaming tracks’ of the Lands, it is equally possible to speak of the ‘dozen great sites’ of the region, and the two lists will not completely correspond in terms of the identities of the Dreaming beings involved. (Appendix 1 contains a list of the major sites of the Lands.) For such reasons, it is often useful to employ a term such as the ‘Dreaming imprint’ or the ‘Dreamscape’ of an area, to cover these different sorts of manifestations.

Another caveat should be mentioned here, concerning the concept of the ‘track’ itself. Richard Gould used the term yiwarra (road) for the title of his 1969 monograph on the Ngaanyatjarra, explaining that, among other things, this was the term that Ngaanyatjarra people applied to the routes travelled by the Dreaming beings (ibid, p. vii). This usage seems to have disappeared. Apart from the English term ‘track’, I have only ever heard people using the word tjina, which means foot or foot track, in connection with the Dreaming travels. But not every Dreaming has a tjina in this precise sense. For example, there is the very sacred Minyma Kurrkarti, Goanna Woman, who mostly travels underground and only comes to the surface at certain points. Some other Dreaming beings fly between sites, like Walawurru, the eagle hawk, and Kipara, the Bush Turkey. There can be a hundred kilometres or so between the sites on the ground with which some of these larger ‘bird’ beings are associated. These above and below ground characteristics also have a symbolic significance, as will be seen. A useful alternative notion that Poirier (2005) extensively employs is that of the ‘itinerary’ of a given travelling being.47

47 There are some Dreamings that do not travel at all as such and that are therefore manifest only in sites. In most cases these do, however, have an integral connection with another travelling Dreaming that interacts with them at their home place, and so they might be classed as ‘sub-Dreamings’ of the travellers.
The Dreaming imprint of the study area in a larger geographical context

In the article referred to earlier, Berndt went on to name the Dreaming beings that he had found, on the basis of his work in the south of the desert, to be among the major travelling beings. He made the comment that there were actually ‘not many’ of these - although there were a large number of minor players. The main ones he identified were (and I have adjusted the orthography and in some cases the names to contemporary renderings): the Papa (Dog); Mingari (Mountain Devil), Kapitji (small Wallaby); Nganamara (Mallee Hen); Nyiru and Yula (Dreaming men); Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters); Wati Kutjarra (Two Men, sometimes considered to be Goanna Men); the trio of Marlu, Kanyala and Tjurriki (Kangaroo, Euro and Owlet-nightjar); Wayurta (Possum); and Kurnika or Patjarra (Native Cat) (ibid). Most of these are also found in the study area, and are listed in Tables 1:1 and 1:2.

Berndt’s list of Dreaming players is a reminder that other corpuses of Dreamings and associated tracks exist in other parts of the desert. Because of this fact, there is a need to give some consideration to questions of how the ‘Dreamscape’ of different regions might inter-relate with one another (if at all) at the level of Aboriginal reality; and to the problems associated with conceptualising a large-scale integrated picture of, say, ‘the Dreamings of the Australian Desert’.

In a 1990 paper entitled ‘The pulsating heart: large scale cultural and demographic processes in Aboriginal Australia’, Peter Sutton raised some questions about the category of Dreaming tracks that are of ‘continental proportions’, commenting that they pointed to connections of some kind between people ‘who, in the pre-colonial period at least, were so far apart that they could not have known of each other’s existence’ (1990:72). My earlier Map 2A showed the major Dreaming tracks of the Lands as configured over the Lands themselves, but Map 2B places this diagram within in a larger continental context.

It must be understood that the identity and distribution of the Dreamings in this map is essentially the picture as seen by the Ngaanyatjarra people themselves (as I have pieced this together): it does not purport to represent a ‘socio-centric’ picture of the larger Dreaming configuration. How closely the Aboriginal people who live to the west, north, south or east of the Lands would agree with the way in which the map depicts the passage of Dreamings
through their own country, or reflects their own view of the overall large scale configuration of tracks, could only be determined on the basis of field research undertaken with them. There would undoubtedly be some points of correspondence. I have personally observed confirmation being provided, by men of Balgo, of their recognition of some of the Kangaroo sites in the Balgo region that go to comprise the (Western) Marlu Dreaming track as it appears on the above map. The same applies to some of the Wati Kutjarra sites near Kalgoorlie. But I am sure that any map comparable to Map 2B that depicted the detailed views of members of any of these other groups would show a picture that differed in a great many respects. For example, I would expect that some Dreaming tracks in Map 2B would feature minimally, or not at all, in the reckonings of some or all of the other groups; and that there would be other tracks that are not recognised at all by the people of the Lands.

I noted earlier how most of the major Ngaanyatjarra Dreamings as shown in Map 2A are seen as originating far away from the Lands, generally to the west; and that there are no major tracks that originate in the Lands and go from here to other regions. This feature is also reflected in the perspective provided by Map 2B. We might conjecture from this pattern that the social and cultural ‘source’ of much of the Dreaming of the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi has been located far away, with the study area region occupying the role of a receiving ground for important Dreaming tracks that originate in distant places, in the home territories of other Aboriginal groups. There could in fact be some substance to this idea, for in a long term historical perspective the interior of the desert has experienced periodical declines in population, for reasons that can mostly be traced back to climate change. Thus it is possible that the more fertile (and more continuously occupied) coastal regions and hinterlands may have functioned as the source, over long periods of time, of social and cultural replenishment for the Lands. However as I have said, in a contemporary sense Map 2B needs to be seen as the representation of a strictly Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi view rather than necessarily reflecting any kind of broader reality.

**Functionality of the ‘Dreaming track phenomenon’**

One of the more obvious functions played by Dreaming tracks relates to the way in which they constituted an integrated corpus of information about the absolute and relative locations

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of places (and sometimes of resources) across vast stretches of country. Although this information, in the form of stories and songs, is explicitly focused on the Dreaming beings and carries great import in that aspect, it also constitutes a guide to country in a geographical sense. During the period of my working life in the Lands, it has been common for people to want me to take them (with 4WD vehicles) into parts of the hinterland to search for a ‘long lost site’; and on these trips I have noticed how much they use as a guide topographical information and any other clues that are contained in the words and images of the story or ‘song cycle’ for any Dreaming being that might have been through that landscape.

If we consider the detailed material in Appendices 2 and 3 about the stories of the Dreamings and the itineraries that they followed, we will see a wide range in the degree to which there is an expression of a clear motivation, need or impulse on the part of particular beings for the travel that is undertaken. We may note that while the beings display some of the needs and interests of humans (that is, of the desert people), they differ in some interesting ways. For instance, none of their journeys seem to be motivated by the purpose of re-joining distantly located kin or affines and thereby maintaining sociality, even though this is one of the main drivers of human mobility in the desert. They are less ‘social’, one might say - not that as a class they are actively anti-social. There are references to Beings travelling to participate in rituals (in the case of the Kuniya People) and in funerals (in the case of the Emu People), but not to just ‘visiting’ for social purposes. The Emu People were however among those who did have a very clear purpose for their journey. So did Young Turkey, who headed off from home to seek fire for his people. The Warnampi Son did not have a specific destination or goal in mind, but there was a clear reason behind his wanderings and subsequent disruptive return home – they were all sparked by his initial ostracism by his own people. At the opposite end of the spectrum we have the fearsome Minyma Kutungu, who seems to move around solely for the purpose of seeking food (which for her is preferably human meat). Her role in the Dreaming domain, and that of others like her, is to represent the demonic, which is felt to be lurking ever-present in the shadows: the concept of the journey is actually irrelevant here, except insofar as it enables her to plague a lot of different people. The Dingo People’s movements are motivated by their nature, which is to chase kangaroos. With the Tingarri People, movement is again integral to their nature, but here it is overtly celebrated. The Tingarri Hordes stream through the landscape, flexing their muscles, over-running everything in their way. Tingarri Dreaming sees a direct focus on movement to an extent that is rarely
Map 2B. Some dreaming tracks of the study area in the larger geographical context (very rough)
evident in the rest of the Dreaming domain, which perhaps explains why it is so dominant in
the particularly infertile Pintupi country, where high mobility is more necessary than say in
my southern sector. The *Wati Kutjarra* (apart from the role they play in relation to Goanna
Woman) are perhaps best seen as not ‘on a journey’ of a specific kind at all, but just as
travellers, their movements evidently being largely dictated by whim, or perhaps by a desire
‘to see the world’, although their sometime role as ‘mentors’ or helpers to the human race
would have required them to circulate extensively in order that people in all parts of the
country could receive their boons. As regards the question of the applicability in some cases
of the concept of the journey, it is actually apparent sometimes that a ‘track’ has been pieced
together from the prior presence of geographically separate Dreaming ‘imprints’: thus the
Dreaming has been made to conform to the track ‘model’, rather than the track having arisen
from a journey. This is the case with both the *Wati Kutjarra* and the *Minyma Kutjarra* in
some regions.

As to the kinds of activities that the Dreaming beings engage in, the myths show that in most
respects they ‘grapple with the same problems of existence as humans’ (Stanner 1965).
Stanner went on to say that ‘their exploits provide answers, however imperfect, for human
concerns’, but on the basis of the myths I am aware of for the desert, I would say rather that
they ‘reflect’ or ‘express’ human concerns. ‘Answers’ of any clear kind are few and far
between. It is difficult to determine whether the Dreaming can be said to incorporate a ‘moral
code’ as such. As Berndt (1970: 218) puts it, there is little in the way of ‘pronouncement of
moral precepts’, and no clarity about what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but some
sort of framework of ‘rightness and wrongness’ can be discerned (ibid: 220). Questions of
morality were not dwelt upon in this society, which was more concerned with the protection
and promotion of ‘me and mine’ than of ‘people at large’. (By this I mean that a given person
would be concerned mostly with the welfare of himself or herself and that of close kin, with
concern diminishing as social distance widened.) Workable arrangements over a broader
zone, including peaceable relations, were essentially achieved by regular attempts to expand
the circle of ‘me and mine’. The most clear cut rules for behaviour were primarily focussed
on the protection of the system of the Dreaming itself (and of its elements), not on how
people should behave towards one another in everyday life. None of this is to say that acts of
altruism, compassion and the like never occurred outside the ‘me and mine’ framework. The
interactions of the Dreaming beings in the myths are often (in fact most often) with strangers,
and they behaved in a variety of ways, not all of them hostile. Tonkinson comments that the Dreaming beings ‘lived in a creative milieu where they sought to impose themselves indelibly on one another and on their natural environment (1991:24). This is true of some of them, but there are many others that only imposed themselves lightly, while some tried to attract as little attention as possible. I think it would be truer to say that the beings acted out their own natures (and in some cases their specific missions). These natures were very variable, and as a result the Dreaming ‘complexes’ associated with different beings were engaged with in quite different ways by the desert people, as will be illustrated many times in this and the next two chapters.

Some other observations can be drawn from the accounts of the Dreamings in the appendices. Often the beings in the stories, even those that most resemble ‘role models’ (like the Wati Kutjarra), behave in strange and frequently very destructive ways. But as would be expected, the stories do focus on a number of issues that are perennial in the desert life. For instance, the violence and associated wilfulness so prominent in Desert people’s behaviour, especially that of young men, is depicted in the Warnampi Kutjarra story, where it is counter-posed to the (also characteristic) inept efforts of a father to appease both his son and other parties who have suffered at the young Warnampi’s hands. (This story also incorporates a warning about the consequences of alienating a child from the group.) Vanity and pride are given an extensive airing in the Ngirntaka stories, and in Wati Kutjarra, though the attitude towards such ‘vices’ often seems ambivalent. The perils of failing to share are abundantly revealed, especially in the outcomes of the story of Wati Lungkarta (Blue Tongued Lizard Man).

**Dreaming tracks as establishers of connections among places**

Earlier I noted that the existence of some grey areas in terms of whether or not certain Dreamings should be seen as separate or as part of a single entity; and that some Dreamings are heavily influenced by their associations with others. I now want to pursue this theme into the area of country itself. The travels of the Dreaming beings through the landscape necessarily work to establish some kind of linkage or common identity among the places visited. In a broad sense the overall ‘Dreamscape’ of a region can be said to create a (more or less) integrated framework of the ‘places’ of a region, but a much more well-defined inter-linking goes on at the level of each particular Dreaming track. A track often defines an actual
sequence of places in the landscape, for example in cases where the protagonist is undertaking a specific mission and is getting closer and closer to his destination. Sometimes another basis for the unity of such a ‘line’ of places would also have existed, in that it might have comprised a route of regular travel for the desert people; but in many cases there was no close correspondence of such a kind. At any rate, all the places along a Dreaming track, and sometimes the strip or area of country in between and alongside the sites, are given some kind of unity by virtue of the track phenomenon itself. In the cultural understanding this unity is based in the identity of the Dreaming being concerned. Thus the Dreaming perspective on the world makes it possible to envision the landscape through which a track proceeds, and some of the surrounding area, as possessing a single identity, say that of the Dreaming Kangaroo. This has been an important consideration in the analyses of both Berndt and Myers. For Berndt, it is at the root of his whole approach to the land tenure system, as I explain in chapter 4. For Myers, Pintupi people may seek to extend their claims in country from their particular place of conception to other places that are part of the same Dreaming track; or even to places on a second Dreaming track that is associated with the primary one, by virtue of the tracks crossing one another (Myers, 1986: 129, criteria 2 and 3). But while such observations about Dreaming tracks and the common identity of places and areas are certainly often applicable to the desert people’s practice, we need to be wary of taking too much at face value in regard to these matters. For example, cases considered earlier, such as that of Yula and the Seven Sisters, showed that what may be a single Dreaming (and track) in the eyes of one person may be two different ones in the eyes of another. I will be considering many other ways in which the apparent configuration of Dreaming tracks in the landscape does not itself reveal, and may sometimes obscure, some of the important dimensions of distinction that the people are operating with, in terms of the Dreaming world.

The Dreaming track phenomenon is important because it is through the movement of the Dreaming beings (along their respective tracks) that connections and unities are created both between and among places, and between and among the Dreaming themselves. This dual-

49 Vachon (2006) particularly emphasises this point about the sequential nature of the component sites of a Dreaming: more so, I believe, than is warranted, for as I mentioned above, many tracks do not have this feature. Some are not even really ‘tracks’ but are amalgamations of sites that have been joined together.

50 Berndt (1972:187), in a detailed analysis of some ‘maps’, containing itineraries, that were drawn by desert people at Balgo, observed that there was a major difference between what they showed about the tracks of the Dreaming beings on the one hand, and on the other the routes of the ‘lines of waters’ between two points. He noted that the Dreaming beings tended to meander around a lot more, and ‘were not interested, it is assumed, in getting from point A to point B in the shortest possible time’.

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level property of the Dreaming track as a phenomenon is part of what makes the Dreaming such a potent domain. The potency is tied up with the number, but more particularly the nature, of the interconnections that occur between some of the Dreamings in particular. I will first consider the question of ‘how much’ interconnectedness occurs in different cases. Firstly, all the major Dreaming beings in Table 1:1 above interact with other Dreamings in the course of their travels. It might be thought that this is virtually inevitable, considering that so many Dreaming tracks exist that it would be hard to travel a long way without ‘striking’ others. But as we have seen, some beings travel underground, or in the sky, and hence could conceivably meet no one. There are also cases where one being is said to have done something like deliberately ‘looking away’ when crossing another’s path; or where one is said to have travelled through a place after the other one has been and gone. Nevertheless, all the major Dreamings do interact with at least one other, and most with several. Secondly, even most of the minor Dreamings interact with at least one other. The Skeleton Man Dreaming is an example of one who does not. This is a case of a sequential Dreaming track, in that there is a distinct progression of the narrative or ‘plot’ of the story from one site to the next. Hence Skeleton Man not only connects the sites he visits in a general way (as does every Dreaming being), but defines each one of them as an integral part of a whole. However, the fact that he does not interact with any other Dreamings leaves him standing on his own and limits him to a very minor role. In general, the more interaction with other Dreamings that a particular Dreaming has, the more important its mythological and symbolic content; the more significant the ritual use to which it is put; and the higher its ranking. The second matter concerns the nature of the interaction that occurs. Briefly, what is at issue is whether or not the activity that takes place at the point of intersection of two (or more) Dreamings is defined as sacred. If it is, then this anchors the Dreamings concerned at a deep level in terms of both their individual importance and the part that they play within the totality of the overall Dreaming domain. This will not become fully clear until ‘the sacred’ has been discussed (in chapter 3), but it is necessary to at least flag the matter here. Apart from this, the point may be made that conceptualizing a total Dreaming ‘domain’ allows one to see the interactional dynamics of the protagonists, and other participants, of the various Dreamings as a primary field of interest and not merely as a by-product of the individual pursuits of the Dreaming travellers considered separately.
The historicity and circulation of particular Dreamings

I have been emphasising the interconnectedness that exists within the Dreaming domain, a feature that implies considerable longevity to the presence in the area of the constituent Dreamings and of the entire corpus. Various others considerations tend to support this view, like the fact that most of the Dreamings of the Lands have a relatively complete internal structure: that is, there is ritual, song and a set of designs that corresponds to the mythology, which in turn corresponds to a set of sites and landscape features. On the other hand, it is important to point out that the Dreaming world is far from a static thing; a point made earlier by Tonkinson (1971) and recently stressed by Poirier (2005). What she has spoken about is the way in which, in the Balgo area, the larger mytho-ritual structure has been subject to feedback from the on-going world of human activity. For my study area, I suggest that the distinction between a ‘great tradition’ and a ‘little tradition’ is a useful one in this regard.

The main way in which I see ‘feed-back’ and additions to the great tradition being made at the local level is not via the phenomenon of human dreams (as Poirier describes for Balgo), but via the conception or birth-related stories of individuals. Detailed illustrations of this are provided in Appendix 4. There are other mechanisms and sources of change that I would like to point to. One concerns the fact that much of the ritual life of the desert is driven by the circulation over huge areas of sacred boards. The people of a given area are stimulated to – in fact, have an obligation to – perform the rituals associated with a particular set of boards after they receive a ‘consignment’ of these boards and before they are required to pass them on to the next group. The nature and scope of these circulatory networks are such that from time to time a given group is bound to encounter a new ritual, often together with a new Dreaming. These phenomena may – or may not – eventually come to fully establish themselves in the new area and become ‘complete’ through being grafted on to the landscape itself.

Another mechanism for the introduction of new Dreamings relates to the phenomenon of the ‘cult’. By this I refer to a body of information and practice, integrally related to a particular Dreaming, that develops through the inventive activity of particular people at a particular time and is capable of spreading to new areas. The Dreaming that is at the focus of a cult may be one that has previously existed as part of the corpus of the region in which it arises, but in the

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52 Details about the nature of these boards and about their circulation are set out in Appendix 5. In Chapter 5, I take up the issue of how the phenomenon of these circulating boards relates to the landholding system of the desert.
emergence of the cult it gains a new energy, and much of its mythology and ritual is ‘re-invented’. Again, if it ‘becomes permanent’ in a given area, a new ‘Dreaming track’ conforming with its structure will unfold in the landscape. In Appendix 2 I elaborate on this phenomenon in the course of describing a particular Dreaming of the Lands (Eastern Marlu), which seems to have been the subject of cult development within the past century or so. It should be noted that my use of the term ‘cult’ does not mean that there is any group of adherents following it around as it spreads: it is only the ‘body of information and practice’ that may move to new places. The cult as a mechanism for change in the corpus and configuration of Dreamings in a particular region may sometimes coincide with the operation of the other mechanism, the circulation of sacred boards, but usually these will be separate. The circulation of boards is cyclical and does not entail creativity, whereas the emergence of cults is sporadic and implies that some inventive and compelling activity has occurred at the point of its source.

An endowment of foodstuffs, living aids and ‘positive behaviour models’

At sites where they stopped, the Dreaming beings sometimes performed formative acts, such as the shaping of landscape features, and the endowment (to use a term of Myers\(^{53}\)) to the people of the world’s animal and plant food. The places and areas visited by and associated with the Dreaming beings may be described as *tjukurrjarra* or *tjukurrtja* (‘having Dreaming’). Very importantly, at certain places they also left behind some of their power in latent form. (As I discuss in chapter 4, it often turns out that such sites also have a value in ways that are meaningful in the modern economy, in that they prove to be the locations where minerals are particularly discovered.) Such power remains able to be activated at the sites concerned, under certain circumstances, by knowledgeable adult persons, who may undertake ritual activities for this purpose. What this power consists of, and exactly how it works, are among the complex issues that I consider in this and the next two chapters. In general terms, what is activated is a sort of capability that is in keeping with the character of the particular being and with the foundational activities that it originally performed. Thus, in the most

\(^{53}\) 1986:47. Just as Myers avoided terms like ‘Dreaming beings’ (as mentioned in a footnote earlier in this chapter), he was careful not to use the word ‘creation’ for the process leading to the appearance of the world, the animals, plants, moral systems and so forth. I agree with him here – bearing in mind that this process as conveyed in the stories and songs of the people does not delve into questions of creation as such, a term like ‘endowment’ is much more apt. In the next chapter I will show, however, that the people of the study area are in fact interested in the subject of creation, and that some of the less obvious parts of the Dreaming realm are concerned with it too. But at this stage of the discussion ‘endowment’ is the appropriate term.
straightforward kind of case, since the Bush Tomato People were the beings who originally moved around establishing the bush tomato plant at various locations, the performance of the required ‘activating’ ritual at one of the sites where the Bush Tomato People left their latent power will be expected to achieve the further propagation of the current season’s crop of this plant. Some Dreamings beings went further and laid down the techniques whereby a particular natural resource could be made use of. Thus while *wangurnu* (woollybutt grass) is extremely plentiful in the desert, it has only tiny seeds, the possible use of which is not immediately apparent. The *Wangurnu* People laid down this plant, in the same manner as the Bush Tomato people laid down their eponymous products, but in this case the ‘missing link’ – how might one turn this plant into food – was supplied through the revelation to the people of a technique of grinding. The benefactors here were another pair of Dreaming beings, the *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men). With many Dreamings the steps followed or objectives pursued become more complex than in these examples. Much of the ‘story material’ or mythology relating to specific beings concerns such things as their (often stumbling) attempts to ‘find’ – and hence to ‘establish in the world’ - some item or institution, or perhaps some behavioural characteristic, that from the present perspective has become part of the order of things. I will illustrate this with a fairly extended example, involving the *Kipara* (Bush Turkey) story. Fuller details of this Dreaming are set out in Appendix 2.

The story tells of the attempt of a Dreaming Turkey being to find fire. Turkey in the story is an immature ‘big boy’ (boy just prior to initiation to manhood). At the outset he is actually unaware that he is seeking fire as such, because the very idea of ‘fire’ is still unknown to him and to everyone in his part of the desert. It was winter and all the Turkey people of the area (Warutjarra, near Blackstone) were suffering from the cold. Young Turkey was the one who took the initiative. Every morning he climbed to a high point of the Blackstone Range and craned his neck to look this way and that, while feeling the air with his hands, trying to detect any sign of warmth in whatever quarter it might lie. One day he felt a glimmer of something to the north, and he set off in that direction. So began what turned out to be a long journey,

54 The old questions in anthropology about whether or not Aboriginal people ‘knew’ about the physical facts of the procreation of human beings, given their focus on ‘supernatural’ forces in the reproductive process, rear themselves also in this context of the reproduction of plants and animals. It is clear enough, however, that regardless of the extent of their knowledge about physical reproductive processes, the fruits and game animals they depended on varied markedly in their abundance at different times. The ‘supernatural’ side of things tried to ensure abundance.
involving him in many adventures and misadventures. Eventually he obtained a fire-stick from some people far away, and brought it back.

Although this is evidently a myth about the getting of fire, one does not go to a Young Turkey Dreaming site – to one of the places he visited in his travels – to activate anything to do with fire. One certainly may go to one of these sites for the purpose of activating the propagation of more birds of the bush turkey species, in the same vein as with the Bush Tomato sites. But there is something more to this Dreaming as well, a deeper (though in this case not particularly esoteric) meaning that the myth carries, quite apart from the explicit matter of the getting of fire. The myth is about an important aspect of (human) boys and their maturation to manhood. For the desert people, boys who are on the verge of physical maturation are prone to the display of characteristics of inquisitiveness and a tendency to go off impetuously on ill-considered forays. The role of the senior generation is to bring them into line, and one strategy taken to achieve this is to steer or ‘re-construct’ them in accordance with a model that best fits what society wants of young men. Boys need to learn to assume independence, but in a responsible manner. They need to learn the lesson that growing up involves becoming a person who can see when something needs to be done for his people, and be ready to go off and find a way to do it. On the other hand, there are always likely to be some boys around who have the opposite problem, a lack of enterprise and undue attachment to the cozy childhood sphere. The Young Turkey myth has its application in both sorts of cases. One of the messages of the story lies in the fact that Young Turkey ‘took the initiative’, in a responsible way. We should also note that, in keeping with the foundational status of the Dreaming as a whole, there is a ‘meta-message’ that comes with all these myths, to the effect that this was the ‘first time’ that these particular things happened. In this case, Young Turkey ‘established’ the whole idea, which he then put into action, of a young person showing initiative and going independently on a quest whose goal was the social good.

In keeping with these associations, the Young Turkey Dreaming has come to constitute a symbol of and for ‘big boys’ in desert life who are about to embark on the process of initiation to manhood. After they have been ‘grabbed’ for later circumcision, boys enter a phase of seclusion, as a group of age-mates, and during this time they are referred to as kipara, turkeys. They will be told the Young Turkey Dreaming story, or some of it, and will come to appreciate, among many other things, that as men they will have to leave their
childhood home with its safe domesticity, and set off into the often dangerous wider world, but not without being properly informed, nor without purpose. They see that they will need to start thinking of themselves as ‘men of the world’. Evidently the reason that the bush turkey features in this myth, rather than some other desert species, is because turkeys are seen to regularly fly very long distances and hence appear to be ‘creatures of the world’, rather than ‘stay-at-homes’; and because they have a demeanour that suggests curiosity, in the way that when on the ground, they typically stand with their necks stretched out, looking around. There are also overtones of ‘harmlessness’ and vulnerability that adhere to the turkey as a species, that have a clear relevance.\(^5\) The messages focussed on here, it should be mentioned, are far from the only ones that can be, and are, taken from this Dreaming, but they are among the main ones and they are sufficient for me to make the point. At the seclusion camp, certain rituals will be performed around the group of pre-initiates, most of which they cannot at this stage see; but there are times when they will be painted up as Turkey and will do the Turkey dance, as demonstrated by the older men. Upon their circumcision they lose the appellation of kipara and enter a new phase. Importantly for the thread of the present discussion, while they are in the kipara phase they should be taken to one or more of the Young Turkey Dreaming sites (perhaps the starting-point at Warutjarra\(^6\)), so that the influence of Kipara’s character and nature can, as it were, ‘rub off’ on them. They can become ‘more like Turkey’, in terms of the desirable qualities he possesses. As I put it above, what is activated at a site is a sort of ‘capability that is in keeping with the character of the particular being associated with that site’; and in the example described it is the being’s imputed qualities in the matter of being ‘a responsible man of the world’ that the desert men are seeking to put to use, by inculcating them in the young.

Thus with the Dreaming Turkey, the main occasions for visiting a site where his ‘latent power’ lies will be either when there is a wish to increase the present supply of turkey birds (which are seen as very desirable meat), or in the context of the initiatory cycles for the young males of the group.

\(^5\) In Levi-Strauss’s phrase, for the Ngaanyatjarra the turkey is ‘good to think’ about boys and the transition to manhood. Another large bird that does not live in a flock and that flies long distances is the walawurru (eagle). But with his predatory characteristics, piercing stare and general air of danger he would hardly be ‘good to think’ about questions to do with youth on the point of maturity.

\(^6\) This name, incidentally, means ‘having fire’.

Chapter 2

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The ‘class’ of Dreamings that are associated with foodstuffs or other required resources, and that are represented in sites that draw people for the purpose of propagation (or ‘increase’) activities in the manner mentioned, is large. For almost every available natural resource there is a Dreaming ‘counterpart’. There are also many other cases like that of Young Turkey, where people are drawn to visit the sites of that Dreaming for the purpose of the actual acquisition or ‘inculcation’ of a quality or characteristic that is considered to be either inherent to, or to have been demonstrated by, the Dreaming being concerned. As we saw in the Young Turkey example, these two roles or purposes – of propagation and of the ‘passing on’ of properties - are often combined in the one Dreaming. This is a significant point, because it gives a glimpse into the extensive ‘layering’ that exists in the Dreaming realm, of which we shall see much more.

The question now arises at to what role the physical environment itself might play in the sorts of processes we are considering. Throughout most of the literature on the Dreaming, the environment is assumed to have been in effect a clean slate upon which the Dreaming beings went about their work, but it is surely of interest to consider whether some of the qualities or characteristics of particular areas, in an environmental sense, might have found their way into the equation, in a manner analogous to what has happened with an animal species like the bush turkey.

The Dreaming and the Environment

Questions about the relationship between Dreamings and their real-life counterparts in the animal or plant world, of the kind considered in the preceding discussion of Young Turkey, have long engaged the interest of writers, but the idea that environmental characteristics or landscape features may comprise a third active element in how the Dreaming is constituted as an experiential phenomenon has not been taken up. There are several dimensions to this that can be sketched out. I will deal with the environment as such first, and then with the landscape (as a sub-set of the environment) in the next section.

57 A vast amount has been written on the subject under the heading of ‘totemism’, e.g. Frazer (1910), Durkehim (1915), Elkin (1934) and Levi-Strauss (1963, 1974). For an account specifically of the Kangaroo Dreaming as found in the desert, and how the mythology relates to ecological factors, see Newsome (1980).
One question is whether or not the environment can be regarded as purely a passive player in regard to the existing configuration of Dreaming tracks across the broad landscape – as often seems to have been assumed – and another, that needs to be considered in conjunction with this, concerns whether or not any relationship can be perceived between Dreaming being, its natural species counterpart, and the characteristics of the environment in which both being and natural species may be found. In the case of Dreamings associated with animal species, I have found that some Dreamings, though far from all of them, are regularly associated with their own characteristic environmental features, just as are their counterpart animals. I will use the kangaroo, and the Kangaroo Dreaming, for my first example in considering these matters. In the desert, the kangaroo is often associated with groves of mulga (Acacia aneura), a type of tree that in ecological terms tends to prosper in relatively low lying country with some clay content. As a species, the kangaroo itself will often be found in such country, utilizing the shade the trees provide in the heat of the day and grazing on the grasses found in the mulga understorey. The mulga woodland environment also provides some protection from the kangaroo’s predators, dingoes and humans. These associations are not just my ‘objective’ observations, they are understood, and indeed taken for granted, by the desert people. And indeed, for much of his long journey from north to south through the study area, the great Western Kangaroo Dreaming (details in Appendix 2) is understood by the desert people as following the frequent patches of mulga woodland that are found in something of a line along sections of his route. When I have been travelling in those parts of the Lands and our party has been looking out for Kangaroo Man’s track, I have often heard people refer to the need to ‘look out for the mulga’. On the other hand, I would certainly not say that Kangaroo Man’s route was ‘dictated’ by the environmental presence of mulga. I think ‘partially shaped’ would be an accurate way of putting it. There is much mulga country in the entire region of the western part of the Lands, but if he had made his journey at a few degrees of longitude to the east or the west, would he have found other patches of mulga distributed in similar manner to his actual route? I think probably not. There is a definite sense of Kangaroo following a ‘line’ that is not replicated everywhere.

In the earlier example I showed how certain characteristics of the bush turkey as a bird have been ‘appropriated’, as it were, to a place in the realm of the Dreaming where, cyclically, in connection with male initiatory ritual, they are put to use for the benefit of humankind. Part of the process involved the identification of a certain recognised category of person (pre-initiate
males) with the Young Turkey Dreaming and with its species counterpart, reinforced by the designation of the individuals involved by the appellation ‘turkey’, by the painting of turkey symbols on their bodies, and so forth. When we come to look at Kangaroo and the kangaroo species, some very similar aspects and dimensions are present. I will not go into the details here, but in this case too there is a clear cut association (again applying to young males) with ‘marlu’ (kangaroo), as part of the cyclical initiatory process – in fact, it is the subsequent phase after the ‘turkey’ one - and processes are similarly enacted that are aimed at achieving the inculcation of certain properties and precedents that were ‘laid down’ by Kangaroo and are also associated with perceived aspects of the nature of the kangaroo species. The link to the mulga environment, in terms of the ‘message’ that goes to the novices, is not a particularly tangible or determinative one, but it is certainly present. The fact that the kangaroo likes to live, feed, hide and rest in the ecological domain of the mulga understorey receives considerable recognition in the mythology, with many kangaroo ‘sites’ being located in such areas and many story incidents existing that involve interplay in these settings.\footnote{See chapter 5 for a review of the types and distribution of environmental zones and ecological types in the study area.} For various reasons that include this mulga environment association, the kangaroo is seen in desert culture as having a particularly close association with the ground (parna); its essence being regarded as literally ‘grounded’. It does not partake of the substance and nature of either the sky above or the deeper subsurface below, but rather of the ‘middle zone’ of the earth’s surface, together with a shallow layer beneath. The most esoteric and profound knowledge is essentially associated, in the desert view, with the earth; and the deeper (hence more valuable) the knowledge, the deeper in the earth it is embedded, where it is, literally, more and more deeply hidden from view. Kangaroo partakes of the sphere of the solid ground itself, though not of the deeper underground, which is the preserve of other more esoteric Dreaming entities. The standing of Kangaroo in the Dreaming hierarchy (a concept explored in Chapter 3) is appropriate to individuals who have become men (\textit{wati}), but who have yet to advance to later stages where deeper levels of knowledge can be acquired. Thus we get a glimpse of how the process by which knowledge is both released and restricted in this society – a process that as alluded to earlier comprises a great structural dynamic in itself – may be grafted into the intricacies of the Dreamings and the relationships among them, and simultaneously into the perceived characteristics of animal species and of the environment. Young Turkey, on the other hand, is largely air-bound. He flies from place to place, only coming down to earth occasionally. At these times he as it were ‘dips’ into the pool of knowledge, but mostly he
flies above it in blissful ignorance - which is another reason (apart from those considered in the last section) why he is a suitable symbol for boys at the pre-initiate stage. The kipara are allowed to, and expected to, learn 'a little bit', but not too much.

The correlation between environment and the Dreaming needs to be further explored. In relation to the kangaroo example there are, firstly, many places where mulga country, as this animal’s favoured habitat, is absent for long stretches of the Kangaroo Dreaming tracks; and conversely, mulga is found extensively in the Lands without the presence of any Kangaroo Dreaming. I will consider another example, this time involving plant-related food.

The sorts of trees from which tjurratja (tree honey) can be obtained, in season, tend to grow in small groves. In every site associated with this Dreaming such trees will be found; although as the Dreaming travels through the landscape, its track will no doubt have to pass through areas where there are no such trees. One may also find that at a particular Tjurratja site there is only a dead or burnt specimen or two remaining, or even perhaps just an old dead branch on the ground. In such cases, informants will normally explain that there used to be a grove there. On the other hand it does not follow that wherever honey trees are found the Dreaming will be present. Since these trees can spring up in new places in a relatively short space of time this can hardly be expected.

In general, it must be said that across the Lands there is a limited but significant extent to which the environment actually correlates with the presence of associated Dreamings; and also that the environment functions only on a limited and piecemeal basis as an independent variable with respect to the geographical patterning of the Dreamings. However, the environment plays a more prominent role than this would suggest in the way that the people think about the Dreaming, and indeed in the way that the Dreaming is constructed. Associations with the environment and its particular features abound. They are ramified and multiplied beyond the limitations that might be supposed to exist from a mundane, geographical perspective, and are built into the complex of understandings and activities.

59 The feeling of the people in these sorts of instances seems to be that the latent power of the Dreaming has become weakened. There is often speculation about whether a revival would be possible through ritual activity or some other form of stimulation.
associated with the Dreaming. For example, it hardly matters that the Kangaroo Dreaming track only sometimes goes through mulga country, for Dreaming Kangaroo Man can still be regarded as intrinsically associated with this kind of country. This association can mean that certain perceived properties of this country – some of which I have referred to - can be regarded as his too. They can be regarded as having been given to that type of country by him, or as given to him by that type of country, or both.

I will continue with my example of the kangaroo, this time involving an environmental connection that is different from the mulga but shares something crucial with it in terms of cultural ideas. This time it is the Dreaming track of the Eastern Marlu to which I turn. In this story, the genesis of a (Dreaming) baby Kangaroo was set in motion by an old Kangaroo Man. He did this by cutting his arm, causing blood to spurt into the air. The blood landed a long way from where the old Man was sitting, at a spot situated in country famous for its intensely black rocks, near the present-day community of Jameson. The blood formed a clot there that swirled across the surface of the ground, creating what is now seen as a claypan there, named Pamtirrpi. This claypan is a vivid bright red colour, and its surface is dotted with small round stones that are of a deep black colour, tinged with dark red, that informants say are ‘like blood clots’. This black/red colour is characteristic of much of the local landscape. The story tells how, by stages, the blood clot, absorbing the essences of the land upon which it was swirling, formed itself into the shape of a boy. First a kultu (torso) became defined, then arms and legs and finally a head. The newly animated boy ‘came to life’ and began to experience hunger and other sensations and desires. He began to hunt and build himself a cooking fire, then made a shelter, and started to roam the local area and survive there in the manner of a desert person, albeit on his own. In time he was found and taken in hand by a messenger that the old Kangaroo Man had sent out to find him.

What I want to point out is the way that life in the form of ‘Kangaroo’ is shown here to emerge in a particular way, from the active combination (‘swirling’) of two ingredients, a vital life substance (blood) from the body of the Old Man, and the parna (earth, country) of a particular place somewhere in the landscape. Very literally, it was ‘country-man’ that came into being here. Integral to the meaning is the way in which liquid red blood turns inevitably,

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60 As explained in Appendix 2 (and as is shown on Map 2A) there are two Kangaroo Dreaming tracks, both of them very extensive, in the study area. I refer to them as the ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ tracks respectively.
on exposure, into black coagulate (the clot), a substance that is denser and seems more complex (and durable) than the blood itself. Likewise, the vivid red (‘blood-like’) earth of the claypan throws up from its depths (more solid and ‘object-like’) black stones, which then sit atop it.

These are associations (and propositions) of a much more powerful kind than those we saw applying between Kangaroo and mulga country – yet the two complement one another. Both establish Kangaroo as intrinsically connected to the ground (parna). The environmental linkage established in this second case is both more intense and more specific than the link to the mulga country. By the same token it may be said to be a more limited one. There is only the one area, near Jameson, where this kind of vivid black/red combination exists as an environmental feature. In a geographical sense this is, therefore, a ‘one-off’ linkage, though, as remarked earlier, associations between Dreaming and environment are not necessarily constrained by these kinds of considerations.

We might say, contrariwise, that the very distinctive environmental ingredients of the Pamtirrpi location have ‘demanded recognition’ by the Dreaming; or that the Dreaming has ‘taken advantage’ here of some unique environmental opportunities offered. Whichever, an appropriation by the Dreaming must have been almost irresistible, given that red and black, particularly in vivid shades, are such resonant symbols, in a culture where blood is let in ritual and where it is consequently often seen to undergo that intriguing transformation into the blackness and gluey density of a clot.

**The Dreaming and the landscape**

In one sense, of course, the landscape is part of, or a dimension of the environment, but what I want to focus on here is the role played with respect to the Dreaming by the ‘shapes’ in the environment, as opposed to its other ingredients and aspects, which we have already considered.

I will approach the subject by moving from the minor to the major sorts of shapes. Certainly the Dreaming gives recognition to some common and often humdrum environmental features as hills, sand dunes, creeks and trees. While their journeys in the larger sense might be
oriented to higher concerns of one sort or another, all the Dreaming beings tend to orient their
travels at a local level to take in any of these kinds of features that might be in the vicinity,
especially any water holes. (In such instances, of course, it is sometimes less a matter of
'shape' than of function, but shape will become more important as I go along here.) At the
same time, Dreaming travellers have a tendency to single out whatever is unusual in the
landscape, or particularly large or particularly small. Periodically, one finds in the landscape
certain topographical features of a puzzling nature: for example, there are occasionally gullies
that are shaped like water-courses, but that do not seem to be connected to an actual water
drainage channel. These will often be incorporated into a Dreaming story, being accounted for
by say the Kangaroo having thumped his tail into the ground to dig out the trench-like shape
that is there.

In a small number of cases (perhaps a dozen or so that I have seen in my entire time in the
desert) the topography of a place is so spectacular that it has not merely been incorporated
into a Dreaming but has clearly played a major part in the shaping of the whole understanding
of the Dreaming being concerned, and of his or her story. One such case involves the site
Yawulyurru (a.k.a. Kulkurta), essentially a large meteorite crater entirely unexpectedly
located within a vast, remote expanse of sandhills in the northern sector. The power and
violence evidently involved in the creation of this great physical formation has become an
index of the capabilities of the Tingarri Dreaming beings, one of which is described in the
story as having blasted the hole out of the earth in a search for some transgressors who have
been hiding from him.

A more complex case is offered by the site known as Minnie Creek, the end point of the
Dreaming track of one of the great Kangaroo beings (the Western one). Here an intricate
sequence of events relating to Kangaroo's final showdown with his besiegers, the packs of
Dogs, is tracked out over some 100 sq km of unusually variegated landscape. Many
components of this landscape have obviously been highly determinative of the elements and
configuration of the various battle scenes. At one stage towards the end of the battle,
Kangaroo runs off from the central creek-bed area of the site towards what he thinks is open

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61 See the list of Major Sites in Appendix 1. Myers (1986) makes many references to this very important site.
62 This site is not included in Appendix 1 as it lies outside of the study area, but full details of the story are
included in the discussion of the Western Kangaroo Dreaming in Appendix 2.
country. Coming after a few kilometres to the curved rise of a hill called Mantjal, he bounds up its face, seeing at first nothing but clear sky beyond. But as he ascends the top of the rise, a vista suddenly appears before him of a multitude of boulders, his Dog tormentors, spread out across a broad plain that slopes away to the distant horizon. This vast ‘army’ (a term that was used by an informant in my hearing), extending as far as the eye can see, elevates the scope of the threat to Kangaroo to a vastly greater level than was comprehended before. Though he turns to flee once more, he is now terminally demoralised, and his end comes soon after. Young men who are brought to Minnie Creek at the appropriate stage of their initiation are (or were in the past) guided along the route of flight that led to that sudden dreadful revelation, so that they can appreciate what Kangaroo experienced as he crested that rise on that fateful day. Rarely can a natural landscape have been used to such sublime imaginative effect; and there seems no doubt that the deep sympathy expressed by many Ngaanyatjarra men for the fate of Kangaroo has been contributed to by their experience of this enormously effective meld of narrative and topography.

The connection of the Dreaming to the human domain

I have shown at some length how the Dreaming, as a domain, is linked (in an essentially bi-directional, or more accurately recursive, manner) to both the domain of the species world, and to the domain of the environment (including the landscape considered as a ‘sub-set’ of the environment). The fourth domain that is tied into the complex is the human one. So far, we have had a glimpse of the human connection as it is displayed in the material about the novices of the Turkey and Kangaroo Dreamings, but now I must begin to give the subject the full attention that it requires.

The point must be made here that in principle, in terms of the tjukurrpa-thinking of the people of the study area, inter-linkages that involve all four domains should exist in the case of every Dreaming. That is to say, the ‘complex’ of any given Dreaming, as we may call it, should in every case be manifested in all four domains. Also, the interconnectedness should ideally be as tight and resonant as what I have demonstrated to exist with turkey. It will be noted, however, that the material I have presented in relation to turkey only covered three domains, with no connection mentioned into the environmental domain. This is because while there is

63 Myers uses this term in the same manner as I do: 1986, ch. 2.
an environmental association that I am aware of – it is in the dark-coloured rocks of the ranges around Warutjarra, that are considered to be the faeces of the shivering Turkey people (prior to fire having been found for them by Young Turkey) – there is not much complexity demonstrated here, of the sort that would add to the tightness and resonance of the whole complex. There may well be other environmental associations of the turkey that enter the complex that I have not heard of, but in any case, it is not to be expected that the ideal of high levels of interconnectedness across all four domains will always be attained.

Turning now to the human domain. The sorts of connections into the Dreaming complex that exist in the study area may be divided into two sorts, those applying to the individual and those applying to a set or group of persons. Near the beginning of the chapter I referred briefly to the matter of the linkages to country of individuals, and the importance of these in defining a person’s fundamental identity. Subsequently I alluded to the fact that the Dreaming beings are considered to have been involved in the origin of all human beings in the desert; but until now I have only considered the human dimension in the context of ritual, showing how sets of novices are ‘put through’ (as people refer to it in English) parts of the Turkey and Kangaroo Dreamings. There is also a whole area of personal human connectedness, not directly linked with the ritual arena (but not completely unconnected with it either), that requires consideration.

**Personal connections to the Dreaming**

In the northern sector the nature of how an individual obtains their personal connection to the Dreaming is spelled out more precisely than in the southern, by means of the phrase *nyina tjunu wantingu*.64 This phrase means literally that the Dreaming being came to a place and ‘put down and left behind’ the new person (in the mother’s womb). The site where this happened is the individual’s ‘conception site’. The Dreaming to which the individual is linked in this way is sometimes said to be that person’s *tjarrinypa*, and the process whereby it happens is referred to by the verb *tjarrinymanu* (‘put the *tjarrinypa*’). As an example, I was once taken to a site Ngatarn,65 south east of Kiwirrkura, and shown a place that was the conception site of a woman named Muwitji napaltjarri. A Dreaming Being, a woman named

64 Myers (1986:130) also cites this phrase as being used by the Pintupi. He does not mention the terms *tjarrinypa* and *tjarrinymanu*.

65 This site is mentioned by Myers (1986:86) as one of the places visited by his informant ‘Maantja’.
Kutungu, is associated with this site. As explained in her entry in Appendix 2, this being has a
demonic nature. Her travels brought her through this area to the Ngartan rock hole, which she
freshly dug out to obtain water. She then killed a snake for food. The killing of the snake was
the specific ‘great tradition’ event that happened at this site, differentiating it from other water
holes that she visited. Then, before moving on, Kutungu ‘deposited’ Muwitji there. Translated
into English, this was conveyed to me as follows:

The woman [that is the Dreaming woman Kutungu] dug out the rock hole, got up and hit a
snake and then she put down and left Muwitju napaltjarri.

In a valley below the waterhole there is an old tree, which is bent into a shape resembling a
woman who is departing the scene but stops to look back. This tree is in fact understood to
‘be’ Kutungu at a moment when she turned back to the waterhole to call out ‘Muwitju, come
with me. I’ll take you to Tjintjintji and to Yaran.’ These are places that she subsequently
visited just to the east of here. But Muwitju said, ‘No, I don’t want to go. Leave me, I want to
stop here.’ And so Kutungu went on by herself, and Muwitju remained here. Muwitju herself
is ‘captured’ in the moment of refusal, in the form of a straight tree near the water hole that
‘stands tall’. In this way the place became her conception site.

We see that much more is conveyed here than the simple fact of a woman ‘obtaining’ her
conception site. A moment of drama occurred between the two protagonists, which is
rendered perennially ‘present’ in the forms of the respective trees standing opposite one
another at the site. The moment takes its meaning from the Kutungu’s demonic nature. While
at one level Kutungu is performing a function at Ngatarn of the same kind as all the Dreaming
beings perform when they act as the means for the appearance in the world of a new human
being, Kutungu, because of her character, is not satisfied with leaving her ‘progeny’ to
proceed with her independent life in the human world. She wants Muwitju to remain with her,
and Muwitju has to ‘stand tall’ to achieve her independence.

For the southerners, by contrast, it is at the birth site that the connection with the Dreaming is
understood to exist. Exactly how the newborn baby becomes infused with the Dreaming at the
birthplace is not specified here. Southern sector persons may still, however, be ‘represented’
in physical features at the birth site, in the same manner as described for Muwitju. Also, some
of the stories about the genesis of individual's totemic connections in the south are as detailed and complex as any found in the north. Two examples of very extended personal Dreaming connection stories, one from the north and one from the south, will be found in Appendix 4.

Some people, though far from all, have this kind of 'representation' at a site. Much more commonly, a person will possess a birthmark, or some other physical or behavioural characteristic, that resembles or evokes the Dreaming progenitor in some way. For want of a better word, I will refer to the identification of a person with a Dreaming, created and manifested in these kinds of ways as their 'totemic' connection with the Dreaming concerned. A Kangaroo totem man who has a good record as a hunter of kangaroos will doubtless attribute his skill to the affinity with the animal that his totem gives him. Some people declare themselves unable to eat ngirntaka meat, for example, because it is their totem. Somebody will say that their child's relatively light coloured skin is explained by their totem being the (red) Kangaroo, whose coat is considered to be of a light shade. There is some individual latitude in how these attributions work. People may focus on different phenomena or aspects of association and may interpret the meaning of their 'totemic' connection in different, even opposite ways. There will however always be a resonance with the cultural construction of the being concerned. In the ideal case, the connection ties in with the kinds of dimensions that we have been considering in the preceding sections: that is, the connection will relate deeply to how the Dreaming concerned 'lives' in this society, to the level where the environmental, species, Dreaming and human 'domains' are all inter-related. This kind of a deep level and multi-dimensional connection can be seen in the case of Muwitju, and we can appreciate that the same kind of thing would apply if a person who had the Turkey totem was believed to have attributes of curiosity and a willingness to take the lead in ventures into unknown territory.

66 I do not know of any new instances of this having been generated in the post-classical era. 67 I will also sometimes use the term 'totemite' to refer to a person who has such a connection. The Ngaanyatjarra do not possess a specific term for the connection between persons and the Dreaming as described here. They simply use the term tjukurpa, which as previously indicated is an all-purpose term covering most aspects of the Dreaming.

68 In recent times, there was in fact such a man at Warburton, the recently deceased Mr I. Ward. Deeply interested and involved in the ritual and mythological life of the Lands, this man was also known as a constructive and innovative player in the context of some of the contemporary challenges facing the region. But sometimes, as is so easily done, he over-stepped the mark on some issue, and was accused of extending himself.
As well as the totemic connection that applies to the individual, a set or group of people may have the same totem for the same place and thus possess a common connection into the Dreaming complex. While in practice this phenomenon is realised only sporadically across the study area, for the people it is a natural occurrence. Its existence as an idea and sometimes a reality is significant in my analysis since it represents a manifestation of the attempt to develop structure and continuity, which is an aspect of the desert life that I argue for throughout this thesis. Where the phenomenon is realised, it usually involves the manifestation in the form of certain physical features in the environment of a Dreaming site (or track) of various individuals who are closely related kin. For example, I discovered that it was not only Muwitju who had the totemic connection to Ngatarn. Her mother Yankurna was conceived there too. Moreover, at another Kutungu site called Yaran, which is not far from Ngartan, three sisters, closely related to Muwitju and her mother, were conceived. There are specific stories, and corresponding physical site features, associated with each of these persons. This case and others similar to it are discussed in chapter 6.

The Bilbies of Watja and Nyiingka

The following is a case where the involvement of all four domains, including the human, is clearly illustrated. The Nirnu (Bilby) and the Warnampi Kutjarra (Two Water Snakes) Dreamings are discussed in Appendix 3. As indicated there, the Two Water Snakes came from the far west and caused mayhem among some Bilby people that had been living at Watja, 60 km west of Warburton. Some of the Bilbies scattered to a swampy locality to the north, Nyiingka, a place where yams grow abundantly. In one sense this story is a ‘foundation myth’ for the ‘country’ of Nyiingka: that is to say, in the ‘tjukurrpa-thinking of the Ngaanyatjarra, there would not have been a country known as Nyiingka had these Dreaming events not occurred. (Also in Appendix 3 there is set out a similar sort of ‘foundation myth’ for another country in the southern sector, Kuniyapirti. This country also features in Case Study 9 in chapter 6.) Ngaanyatjarra people know that the presence of nirnu in certain areas is partly a matter of natural habitat selection (nirnu like the soils of low areas and they like to eat yams), and this is no doubt why the local Dreaming beings in the story have the Nirnu identification. However, not every suitable nirnu habitat is populated with the animals, so the
story about them being chased there by the Water Snakes helps make sense of this discrepancy.

As we saw previously in the case of Young Turkey – and there are many other illustrations in the Dreaming stories in the Appendices - animal-form beings in Ngaanyatjarra Dreamings display a combination of species and human characteristics, with the two feeding into one another. In the story we are considering here, the Nirnu live in a group like a human band of classical times. When the children of a Mother and Father Nirnu at Nyiingka are killed by the Two Water-Snakes, they suffer an extremity of grief, as humans do. One parent wanders around, lost and ‘crippled’, and eventually dies not far off from Nyiingka; while the other keeps going in one direction, finally reaching a place 300 km away to the south, never to return. The story deals with the grief experienced by people who lose the closest of family members, and it also highlights a distinction that Ngaanyatjarra people know well, between two ways in which such grief can make itself felt. On one hand, there is the single-minded desire to get as far away as possible from the place of the death, as did the parent who undertook the long journey. The alternative effect that such a deep loss can have is to cause the sufferer to lose his or her will and to wander around aimlessly. This is what happened with the other, ‘crippled’ Nirnu parent.

In these ways the complex of this Dreaming can be seen to have involved and created interlinkages between the three domains of the Dreaming story itself, the species form and the environment. The fourth domain, that of the human, enters the complex in the following way. To the Ngaanyatjarra listener, the story, set in the location where it is, will suggest not just that some Dreaming Nirnu lived here and that they were dispersed in certain directions as a result of a Warnampi attack, but that there must, at some time, have been an actual group of Ngaanyatjarra people associated with this area, whose circumstances are somehow reflected in the story. For one thing, it would be expected that those who lived there must have been of the Nirnu totem. But with the story having such a powerful theme, the suggestion would be that this theme had a specific relevance to the group concerned. And indeed there was such a

69 In the context of talking about their collective history over the last 100 years, the most common way in which Ngaanyatjarra informants explain the departure of many people from the desert down to the Goldfields between the 1890s and the 1950s is in terms of groups of people abandoning the Lands because of the death of a kinsperson.
group, the Banks family, who lived the classical life in this area until the mid 1960s. They were one of the last groups in the region west of Warburton to abandon this way of life, having become more and more isolated as other neighbouring groups disappeared and settled in the Goldfields or in Warburton. It is said that they finally left the bush after the death of a child, itself said to have been attributable to revenge party activity. In other words, the constructed ‘history’ of this family is inseparably intertwined with the Dreaming story. The desert people expect to find such intertwinnings, and if circumstances do not display them, it is reasoned that there are probably facts that would supply the connections, but which people are currently unaware of. The Nirnu story, incidentally, is accepted as being the (Dreaming) story of the survivors and descendants of the Banks family, who now live in Goldfields towns. This story establishes the connection of this particular group of people into the Dreaming of Watja and Nyiingka country, making them (along the lines discussed in chapters 6 and 7) inalienable ‘owners’ of it.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with an overview of ‘what the Dreaming is about’ in this society, with particular emphasis on its role in mediating the strong and complex relationship that the desert people have with the country in which they live. I considered some aspects of the nature of the Dreaming beings and of the tracks that they formed through their travels, and surveyed the range of these beings that are present in the Lands. I pointed out that a simple list of the various beings does not do justice to the complexities that in fact exist within and among the phenomena associated with them. I then went on to consider the Dreaming in its aspect of providing an endowment to human beings of a fully shaped world that contains the resources that they need to live, and a ‘set of instructions’, where necessary, about how to use these resources, and how to ensure the propagation of them. This part of ‘what the Dreaming is about’ has been described many times in the literature, and in its fundamentals seems to apply in the same way to almost all Australian Aboriginal groups. Using the Young Turkey Dreaming as an example, I then demonstrated how the ‘endowment’ can also operate at a less concrete, and sometimes very subtle way, in providing templates for such things as desired behaviour traits, together with systems of ritual for the ‘inculcation’ of such traits into human beings. The rest of the chapter has been devoted, in effect, to a fuller investigation of some of the ways in which the Dreaming is inter-connected with what can be seen as three other ‘domains’ of experience: the species form, the environment and the human itself. From the
material of experience, the desert people have created constructions within, or applying to, each of these domains, but the important point is that these constructions continually feed across and back among all domains, without recognising any boundaries between them. Thus it could be said that the Dreaming domain ‘appropriates’ constructions from the other three domains, but it could equally be said that the species domain (that is, the way that the desert people understand the species) appropriates the constructions from the other domains; and the same applies in the other two cases. Because of all this feedback and interpenetration, the ‘complexes’ associated with each Dreaming have an enormous power and resonance whenever they are invoked. Thus, for example, one only has to mention the Banks family, or the swampy country of Watja and Nyiingka, or nirnu animals, or the Dreaming story of the killing of the Nirnu by the Water-Snakes, for each of the other elements to come to a Ngaanyatjarra person’s mind. Even the mention of such a general subject as that of families having left the country for the Goldfields, might call to mind the Bankses, and thus all the other elements.

But there are other dimensions to the Dreaming apart from the constructive, unambiguous life-affirming ones considered here. The Dreaming has its uncertain, sometimes dark side too; and it can also comprise a space in which people may experience the mysterious, numinous side of life. These matters are taken up in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Ritual, the Sacred and the Phenomenology of Dreaming Sites

Much of the discussion in the last chapter proceeded from a starting point that took the Dreaming unproblematically in its aspect as an ‘endowment’ to the desert people. This perspective on the Dreaming, which sidesteps the investigation of more complex subjects such as the nature of the power behind the endowment, is adequate for the exploration of many of the more straightforward ways in which the Dreaming impacts on the desert people’s world. But there are also other less transparent and affirmative dimensions to the Dreaming. I begin this chapter by considering what we might term as the range of engagement the desert people have with the Dreaming as imprinted in the country, pointing out that there are some sites and tracks that are deemed dangerous, and are avoided – except perhaps by persons bent on malice. Then, returning to the more common scenario in which such explicitly negative themes are absent, I move to consider more exhaustively the things that can happen when people visit sites. In the last chapter I discussed two factors that physically ‘pulled’ people to sites, one to do with the propagation of the corresponding species, the other to do with the transmission (in the case considered, to a set of young initiates) of certain properties considered to be intrinsic to the Dreaming concerned. Now I will examine other sorts of reasons for visits, or contexts in which visits may occur. These involve the experience of the realm of the numinous, and the feeling on the part of participants that they are gaining revelations about the nature and meaning of the world. I have referred to the presence of power at some sites and characterised it as a ‘capability’ that partook of the nature of the Dreaming concerned, but now I focus on the ways in which this power arises at sites, and what brings about the kind of experience that visitors have. I discuss the concept of miirlmiirlpa, the sacred, and this in turn leads to a discussion of the realm of ritual. My analysis of the sacred and the emphasis I develop on the idea of the ‘setting’ associated with sacred sites leads to a consideration of the Dreaming as an ontological realm and of the way in which this ontology has been treated in the literature. I question Nancy Munn’s analysis of the transformation of ‘subject into object’ (1996), which rests on a notion of a sharp divide between the ‘Dreaming’ as a prior epoch on the one hand, and the present on-going world of Aboriginal people on the other. I develop an alternative view, that the settings at Dreaming sites create a context in which participants experience the sense of an interchangeability
between human, Dreaming, species and environmental entities, rather than a one-way transformation from one kind of entity to another. Lastly, in illustration of the subtle possibilities of the Dreaming perspective on the world I briefly consider an example of a somewhat unorthodox view of the sources of originating power held by one of my informants, followed by an account by another informant of how he ‘sees’ the activities of the Dreaming beings in the everyday landscape.

Sites, power and the sacred

Most of the time, and assuming they have the right credentials in terms of any gender and seniority issues that might apply, the Desert people will go out of their way to visit sites associated with the Dreaming. There is certainly no reason for them to avoid visiting any sites associated with Dreamings like Turkey or Bush Tomato, or the many others that are plainly beneficial. But to visit a March Fly site would be to risk activating the power for the propagation of these pests. For the record, there are no March Fly Dreaming sites (or Dreaming sites associated with other undesirable creatures) whose powers are concerned with the control or elimination of the real-life pests, nor to my knowledge does any ritual exist that is directed at achieving anything like this. Rather, these sites are as they seem – places where unpleasant elements are concentrated. Just as a particular ritual action (which may be as minimal as rubbing a certain stone) at a Bush Tomato site may cause the activation of the power of propagation of that species, so it is with the March Fly. In another scenario, in the case of Dreamings of the March Fly type, physical damage to a site, whether intentionally caused or not, can result in the release of the undesired forces, to the detriment of humanity.
There are also places of actively malevolent potential associated with some Dreamings.\footnote{Morphy (1991:102) says of the Dreaming power of the Yolngu that it ‘can be dangerous and ... have terrifying manifestations’, \textit{but} that ‘it is intrinsically good’ and that ‘it cannot be used by human beings for negative or aggressive purposes’. According to my research in the desert, although Dreaming power is predominantly used for what we could regard as the social good, the contrary also occurs. Some examples of this have already been given here. I have found it axiomatic here that what can be used for positive purposes, can also be used for negative ones. This duality is one of the things that underpins the way in which Dreaming power is understood by the Ngaanyatjarra, and indeed how the world as a whole is understood. Morphy’s portrayal rests on an understanding that Dreaming power resides in and emanates from sacred materials that are intrinsically linked to clans. There is an \textit{ancestral} link from the particular Dreaming being of a clan to the living individual who is one of its \textit{descendants}. The very reproduction of the clans is dependent on the activation and then the control of the powers of the Dreaming beings by senior clan members in ritual (ibid, p. 105). Therefore the powers must be unambiguously good. In the desert, as is explained in chapter 5, such a ‘tight’ interconnectedness between the Dreaming forces and a social group is rarely to be found. Here it is impossible to imagine humans having the Dreaming ‘under control’ to the extent that Morphy describes. In the Ngaanyatjarra view, and I believe in the desert generally, the Dreaming is a vast, limitless realm with its own rules and its own contradictions and paradoxes. It would not be at all amenable to complete human containment.}

These should be avoided by ‘people of good will’, but they exist to tempt, or actually to be utilised by, those with a grudge or a malicious streak. An example is the \textit{Walawurru} (Eagle), whose mythology is bound up with images of aloneness and sudden predatory strikes. The \textit{Walawurru} associated with a site Partutatjarra far to the west of Warburton is a being that can act all on its own to terrorise people. Another \textit{Walawurru} site north of the Rawlinson Range works slightly differently. This is said to be the place where a mother distraught at the death of her son might go. So deranged might such a woman be, that she could seek to unleash from there forces of destruction that would indiscriminately affect people anywhere. There are many similar cases. West of Warburton, towards Tjirrkarli, is a site associated with the malevolent \textit{Tjitji} (Child) Dreaming. The story for this Dreaming involves the premature birth of twins, caused by the mother having been hit in the abdomen by a flying club. The club was not thrown at her deliberately, rather she got in the way during a conflict that had its source in the predatory lust of another (Dreaming) man, who was an interloper from afar who had got the woman pregnant, though he had no right to her. One of the twins died and ‘turned into’ a small rock - actually a malevolent child being - that perches atop a pointed hill near Tjirrkarli. It is said that a man who has lost his ‘promised wife’ to another man may come here to seek the help of the malevolent \textit{Tjitji}, who may cause the woman to have a miscarriage, as his own mother tragically did. The \textit{Tjitji} has the power to cause the foetus to develop savage fangs and claws, and to inflict fatal internal injuries, from within, on its mother.
Integral to what is portrayed in these stories is always some aspect of what is considered to be the nature of the particular type of being that is involved, whether the being takes a species firm or that of a ‘human’ figure. I previously described the same sort of phenomenon, in a benevolent context, in the practice associated with Young Turkey Dreaming. The perceived qualities of the bird were instrumental in determining the use to which the Dreaming complex was put – in this case, it was considered ‘good to use’ in the context of the initiation of boys into men. The image of the *Tjitji* in the ‘miscarriage’ story draws on (and feeds into) one view of the child that exists in desert culture: the notion of the ‘scary child’ (*tjitji mamu*). This figure is obviously ‘good to use’ in situations where a person desires to perpetrate a particularly cruel form of retribution.

Lastly there are some sites and Dreamings that appear to be devoid, or almost so, of potential to make things of any sort happen, and that have little ‘pulling power’ for people. With some of these Dreamings, the point seems to be more about the story itself than about the connection to country or to any of the other ‘domains’ – species, environment or human – that would normally be part of the complex. Such Dreamings and their associated places are likely to be regarded in something of a light-hearted way and to be primarily enjoyed for their entertainment value. An example is Skeleton Man, whose flesh and organs progressively fall away from him as he travels from place to place through an area between Jameson and Varburton. But such cases are relatively rare. For the most part, the whole Dreaming realm is held in very serious regard, and this applies to both the Dreamings that are associated with beneficial endowment and those that are feared and avoided. This seriousness is present in part because the Dreaming realm is always regarded as intrinsically true (*mularrpa*), and is cast as such in opposition to the everyday world, with its doubtfulness, uncertainty and propensity to change. But it is present also because of the latent power that is associated with the country, or with places in it, and that is regarded as having been derived from the Dreaming. Wherever this power is found, the place concerned is designated as *miirl-miirlpa*, a term that possesses the following connotations: numinous or awe-inspiring (‘sacred’);

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71 There are many (non-Dreaming) stories that focus on the supposed ‘scariness’ inherent in children. One sort involves someone seeing a child – or rather, half seeing it – playing among a group of known children. The child will be half there, half not. It will be doing the same things as the other children, but there will be a sense of it only going through the motions, and having another goal in mind. The observer will only see it when not fully concentrating - when she looks directly, the shadowy presence cannot be seen. But instead of the children continuing to play happily, something bad may happen – perhaps an injury, or an argument.

72 Vachon (2006) discusses at some length the reasons for the importance attached to truthfulness in societies such as these.
weighty, suffused with power; dangerous, and therefore not to be physically damaged or used inappropriately; and requiring restrictions on access. Far from every place where the Dreaming is present is regarded as *miirl-miirlpa*. On the other hand, a whole Dreaming track can be *miirl-miirlpa*, though this is rare: normally only some of the sites associated with a particular Dreaming are so designated.

The concept of *miirl-miirlpa* is essentially a ranked one. This matter of the gradedness of the concept of *miirl-miirlpa* and of the consequent different levels of importance among Dreaming sites appears, strangely, to have been largely ignored in the literature. Even recent works like those of Poirier (2005) and Vachon (2006) make no reference to it. Tonkinson (1991:23, and 107) states that there is no ranking in terms of importance or efficacy: ‘all are equally powerful because they derive ultimately from the Dreaming’; although in the next sentence (ibid:107) he acknowledges that there are ‘secret-sacred’ rituals that are especially significant because of their ‘intimate link to the Dreaming’. In this matter I concur with Morphy (1991:78), who argues for the Yolngu that while the boundaries of the domain of the secret are essentially moveable, this does not mean that restrictedness on information is purely a matter of creating domains of social exclusivity appropriate to the context, for purposes of social control. There is actually a difference in the complexity and quality of the information across the Dreaming spectrum. Thus, also, it must be appreciated that although different Dreaming complexes may come and go on a happenstance basis, usually over long historical periods, and may also undergo internal change, the corpus of existing Dreamings does to some extent comprise an inter-connected system of ideas, with progressively graded levels of complexity and importance.

In terms of the Dreamings considered so far, there is a certain amount of numinosity, power, and accompanying danger associated with The Bush Tomato, though not a lot; and less with the Skeleton Man. There is more with Young Turkey, though not enough to put him into the higher echelons: the very fact that this Dreaming is so closely connected with boys in their pre-initiate phase points, in such an age-ranked society, to the limited amount of status that it has. Nevertheless, despite this graded aspect, the point must be made that every Dreaming that has any power, even if it is of the beneficial variety, also possesses some potential danger. The two are essentially two sides of the same coin.
Essentially, it is the nature of the latent power of Dreamings and Dreaming places that determines their ranking. It is not necessarily the case that the sheer amount of power, of a physical kind, translates into a high ranking. The *Wati Kutjarra* possess great physical abilities, but they are not rated among the most sacred Dreamings. Among other things they shaped landforms and defeated demonic forces, but they did not themselves propagate life. Any Dreaming that is associated with the power to propagate life will be rated at least moderately highly. Dreamings like Bush Tomato and Echidna come into this category. Turkey Dreaming, in addition to the value it possesses in this ‘propagative’ respect, also derives (some) status from its role in relation to pre-initiate boys.

Higher in the rankings are those Dreamings that deal with, or can cast some light on, matters or issues of key importance to humanity. One set of key issues has to do with the question of what life consists of and how it is created - as distinct from merely propagated or reproduced. Reproduction refers to the periodical renewal that occurs in connection both with human life itself (in the socio-cultural as well as the physical sense) and with the ‘endowment’ to humans of the formed world and its resources, as described in the last chapter. The endowment that the Dreaming gave to humans includes both the forms of life (together with their sustaining environment), and the forms by which the on-going reproduction of this life can be ensured. Considered in these terms, this is an ideational system that can give answers to questions about how the bush foods appeared in the world, where individual persons come from, and why young people possess curiosity and the desire to travel; but it does not elucidate the nature of creation itself. There are, however, parts of the Dreaming corpus that do this, as has already been indicated, in the previous chapter. The complex of cultural practices and understandings associated with the Kangaroo Dreaming not only enables the reproduction of kangaroos and plays a role (at a higher level than Turkey) in the initiation of young men. It also sheds crucial light on the question of what substances life (for which we can read ‘human life’) is constituted from. The message of the story associated with Pamtirrpi claypan and to a lesser extent the sites located in mulga country, is that, among other things, living human beings partake of the earth. The Pamtirrpi story also goes further and identifies a very event in which the creation of life took place. These are powerful and important revelations. Thus the Kangaroo Dreaming ranks highly. But it only answers some of the questions about life and

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73 It might be said that Turkey Dreaming has only ‘character-explaining’ potential, while Kangaroo Dreaming has a degree of ‘life-explaining’ potential.
creation, and not necessarily the deepest ones. It does not explain, for instance, the nature of the life force itself, and where it is located. This is what the Goanna Woman Dreaming tells about, and it is what ensures the topmost ranking for her (see Appendix 2 for full details about this).

Thus particular Dreamings of the *miirl-miirlpa* kind contain within them answers, or the possibility of answers, to vital questions. But it is at the *sites* of these Dreamings that the opportunity can arise for people to participate in a realm where such revelations may be experienced, and where, in a few cases, one may even seem to be in the presence of the source of life itself. Just as certain Dreamings are *miirl-miirlpa*, so are certain sites. This sounds like a tautology, but the *miirl-miirlpa* attribution as applied to a Dreaming is operating at the level of ideas, while as applied to a site it refers to a context for action and experience. *Miirl-miirlpa* sites draw people for purposes that are readily apparent, such as the reproduction of a food species or the transmission of certain properties of the Dreaming to a novice. But some of them also draw people because of these opportunities to participate in the more profound aspects of the *miirl-miirlpa* realm. Such participation is linked with the concept of ritual, whether it be ritual of the highly formalised or less formal kind - hence it is necessary, before going on to further direct consideration of the *miirl-miirlpa* domain, to sketch in some background on this subject.

**Ritual**

Underpinned as it is by the Dreaming, ritual is a central activity and focus in the lives of the desert people. Known in English as ‘Law business’, or simply ‘business’, it is, like the Dreaming itself, a multi-dimensional phenomenon, but for the desert people its central purpose is bound up with the latent power of the Dreaming – its *miirl-miirlpa* dimension. Through ritual the recognition, maintenance and celebration occurs of the Dreaming’s power in all its varying characteristics, together with, on occasion, the generation of a context in which participants may have experiences of numinosity and revelation.

The planning of a ritual performance always incorporates the imperative to include everyone who is available (and who is of the right category in terms of factors like gender and level of seniority), particularly in the case of ritual focussed on the initiation of young men, which also
always requires highly formalised procedures. Initiatory rituals may be carried out at locations
determined on the basis of convenience, and it is not necessary that these be Dreaming sites as
such. When the ceremony ground (walupurrku) for a particular occasion of initiatory ritual is
marked out, however, it will be designated as miirl-miirlpa, connoting in this case mainly
‘restricted’ (rather than intrinsically powerful, or numinous), for the duration of the events. It
is, however, more effective if phases of the ritual that involve the inculcation of the properties
of a certain Dreaming (of the sort that we looked at in the case of Young Turkey) take place at
a site associated with this Dreaming. ‘Reproductive’ (or ‘increase’) rites are normally
conducted at a site of the Dreaming one wishes to activate.

Despite the desire to have as many participants as possible, in the case of reproductive ritual
the event may proceed with only a small group, if circumstances dictate. This will also mean a
shortened, and less formal version of the ritual. These rites, it must be mentioned, also
incorporate an ‘initiatory’ dimension, in that there will usually be one or more novices to
induct into the specifics associated with the place. From an analytical point of view any visit
to a site of power, whatever its motive and whatever the size of the party, is essentially to be
considered as a ritualised occasion, and as such may bring about whatever it is that the
particular Dreaming has the ‘capability’ to achieve, whether it be an increase in species
numbers, the transmission of certain properties of the Dreaming to persons who are present,
or something else, such as the experience of numinosity. Integral to the idea that a visit is a
ritualized occasion is that the dangerous aspect of these sites is scrupulously attended to. Not
only must the physical elements of the site be undamaged and undisturbed, but the protocols
of respect and reverence must be observed in the way that the site is approached, the way that
people move around the site area, and so forth. This is the case no matter how large or small
the visitor party, and whether or not the occasion is highly formalized.

The ritual realm is subject to a deep gender division, although women do play a part, and a
crucial part, in some of the rituals that are basically under male auspices. The reverse is not
usually the case. While there are many other aspects to the way in which people are oriented
and aligned to the Dreaming world, at one level both men and women consider themselves as
whole groupings, distinct from one another, that have crucial responsibilities for the welfare
of the country and its people - and for its animal and plant life. Thus there is ‘men’s business’
and ‘women’s business’. Men uniformly acknowledge that the women have Dreamings, sites,
songs and ceremonies specific to themselves that it is not the men’s place to interfere with or enquire about; and likewise with the women towards ‘men’s business’. There is a difference, though. It could be said, as Poirier does (2005:65), that the men’s side and the women’s side fit together complementarily. But most men (for personal variation on these questions must be acknowledged) do not really consider this to be the case. While they acknowledge the women’s right to their part, and do not in practice seek to exclude them from making the decisions about their sites, in contexts where this is relevant, they consider that their own corpus of Dreamings and associated ritual actually ‘underlies’ those of the women. Especially in the case of the major men’s Dreamings, they see their ‘business’ as being at a deeper level. As well as conferring on them the privileges of greater access to knowledge and a higher status, this is experienced as a responsibility that can be distinctly burdensome. While it would not be the most desirable outcome – and would cause a lot of difficulty for their relations with their female kin - they believe, therefore, that they could, if necessary, make all the decisions about country without there being any real fear of upsetting the Dreaming realm and its forces. While I am sure that many women would disagree with the idea that the male domain underlies the women’s, relegating the latter to a secondary importance, they do not make for themselves, as a group, anything like an equivalent kind of claim to precedence vis-à-vis men. In general, they seem content to acknowledge that the major role in tjukurrpa-related issues is played by the men, while asserting that their own part is also critical. I have given some attention to this matter because I wish to establish several things in relation to the important matter of gender: firstly that in the desert there is an undeniable dominance of men and the male point of view; secondly that there is much that is contested in the gender domain; and thirdly, in partial mitigation of the second point, that on the whole, in everyday life there is a reasonably comfortable accommodation between the genders. Yet tension exists and it is never far from the surface.

The staging of ritual is the primary context in desert society for the all-important transfer of knowledge, that is such an important part of the process of social reproduction in the desert.

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74 As Myers notes (1986:250), citing Isobel White (1975), ‘a conflict of wills is central to the relations between men and women in Western Desert myth.’

75 Gender matters have of course been considered many times in recent literature, often at length. Tonkinson’s discussion of these issues for the Martu is ethnographically applicable to my study area, except in regard to the absence of any tension between the sexes that he conveys, and it canvasses more aspects than I have space for here (1991:107,8). I acknowledge that my brief discussion does not deal with the detail and complexity raised in some of the other literature. It is intended only to convey the general ‘tone’ of the desert scene in regard to gender.
In the case of young people, it was the on-going requirement across the successive generations that they learn the general Law as well as that which applied to their local area (or areas), and this required progression through the organized stages of ritual seniority. In this way, ritual as embedded in country and dictated by the Dreaming effectively provided the momentum for the life cycle of the individual, particularly males. Acquisition of the Dreaming-related knowledge about a particular tract of country was also a precondition for any newcomer – say an initiated man from another area - who wished to enter and remain there. Thus visitors at a given ritual performance, in addition to novices, would be ‘inducted’ by the hosts. As suggested by one of the connotations of the *miirl-miirlpa* attribution, parts of the Dreaming domain contain heavy restrictedness in relation to issues of access to both place and information, hence the portals of advancement for young people through the ranks of Dreamings and ritual, especially the early ranks, were well guarded. In the desert, the demanding nature of the physical initiation practices for males – particularly subincision – indicate the huge importance that was attached to the acquisition of respect for (and fear of) their seniors, the quality of stoicism, and a disciplined attitude. The young man progressing through the ranks could not hear the more sacred songs, see the ritual paraphernalia and participate in the ritual acts, including dancing, that are associated with the higher *miirl-miirlpa* levels until he had proved himself at the more basic stages. Once he had been ‘put through’ a particular Dreaming complex, a ‘youngfella’ would be subjected to a barrage of questions about what he had learned, and faced relegation in the ranks if he did not measure up. He soon learned that any mistake he might make in ritual would attract severe punishment. Most importantly, he learnt about the dire vow of silence that applied to any ‘restricted’ knowledge that he acquired. If he impressed the seniors through the early and middle stages, he would be allowed to move more quickly through to the higher levels, and come to be treated as something of an equal by the more experienced men.

The stress on the restrictedness of knowledge is ever-present. Although it is so central to what the Dreaming is all about, the whole area of the Dreaming and of ritual that relates to the powers and to the deeper mysteries of life, as referred to above, is deemed too serious and

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76 As is explained in Appendix 2 under the account of the Marlu dreaming, circumcision followed by subincision are the two major physical initiation procedures for young males in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. These two operations, which are still performed on all ‘youngfellas’, have no doubt been practised in the desert for a very long time. Other physical operations associated with initiation are tooth-evulsion, nasal septum piercing and chest and back scarification, all of which have been reported for other parts of the desert. Tooth-evulsion is still carried out in the Lands today, but the other two practices mostly ceased by about the 1950s.
‘dangerous’ to ever be alluded to, let alone discussed, openly. When ‘Dreaming stories’ are related, always by a knowledgeable senior person, in front of the general Ngaanyatjarra public, these aspects will be avoided, and no questions about them will be tolerated. At such time the stories will simply be told as a set of travels and adventures, often with the emphasis on any ‘just so’ elements that are present, such as explanations about how the possum came to be able to see in the dark, or why the bush turkey has only one chick while the emu has several.

Apart from its main purposes as just alluded to, ritual has many other aspects and roles to play. It instantiates some of the more crucial social structures of the desert. For example, most ritual is governed by the structure of both the section system and the generational moiety system. Ritual serves a socially useful purpose by the reinforcement of these structures in its performances, since they are structures that function to maintain order and predictability in such matters as the selection of marriage partners. Ritual also inter-relates with many other activities, all while entertaining and indeed engrossing its participants. One thing that ritual gatherings do is to provide a context for desert people, especially senior people, to perform in front of their peers. The great scope of the Dreaming, manifest particularly in the corpus of major Dreaming tracks, provides opportunities for men, and women in their own ritual sphere, to gather together and display a knowledge of cultural detail ranging far and wide across the desert. Individuals also demonstrate their prowess as performers through enacting the many and varied parts of the panoply of often very colourful Dreaming characters. Important here is a quality that is integral to ritual and to the act of visiting Dreaming places in general. This is the quality of drama, and its presence is obvious enough where full-scale ritual is involved with its singing, dancing and episodic structure, but even when a small group visits a miirnmiirlpa place and there is less outright display and exuberance, the atmosphere is still inherently dramatic.

In ritual men and women separately co-participate in the singing of sacred song, and often sit for prolonged periods in the closest of physical contact. At special moments in ‘men’s only’ ritual all present will participate in the spilling of the vital bodily fluid of blood. In such ways ritual gatherings can provide the basis for a secure envelopment of the individual in what seems an almost seamless human world. Contrarily, it can throw up images, and sometimes experiences of cruelty, isolation and pain. Ritual comprises an arena within which the
extremities of elation and fear are at times experienced. In major ritual, when all goes well, a person will be re-invigorated by the power of the Dreaming that the ritual releases, and will feel the thrill of seeming to participate in the propagation or even perhaps the creation of life itself, or to have other key secrets revealed. On the other hand, and precisely because it is at times so bound up with the ultimate concerns of life, the ritual context can engender great fear: a woman will be terrified of the consequences if she thinks she might be judged as having infringed on the male domain; a man who drops and breaks a sacred stone during a performance will feel that he is as good as dead; the novices prior to the circumcision or subincision rituals will sit waiting for hours in trepidation of the pain to come.

The last point I briefly wish to make here about ritual relates back to the discussion in the last chapter about ‘cults’. While at a macro level the whole Dreaming phenomenon is a testament to what might be called the ‘inventive spirit’ of its Aboriginal creators, it is fair to say that on an on-going basis this spirit was manifest most clearly in the occasional outbursts of creativity associated with the ‘re-invention’ of Dreaming meanings and roles that took place when a new ‘cult’ emerged and captured the imagination of people over a broad area.

**The concept of miirl-miirlpa and of the sacred**

With this background to ritual practice in mind, I will return to the subject of the type of experience and engagement that occurs in the realm of the numinous and the mysterious, on the occasions (which as I have said will always have a ritualized aspect to them) when miirlmiirlpa sites of the higher-ranked sort are visited.

There is, however, a question of terminology and clarity of concept that needs to be addressed first. It concerns the term *miirl-miirlpa*, together with the English term, the sacred, the use of which I have so far kept to a minimum in order to avoid confusion, but that clearly has much in common with it. Recent anthropological literature on the Dreaming seems to have shied away from direct discussion of the notion of the sacred, but I think it is a subject that needs to be considered. For one thing, the term ‘sacred’ is still extensively used as an adjective, attached to nouns such as ‘site’, ‘objects’ and ‘knowledge’, and for this reason if for no other, it should be explained.
It would clearly be untenable to equate the sacred with the Dreaming in its totality. Apart from anything else, there is the fact that a very meaningful differentiation in significance pertains among elements all of which are part of the Dreaming domain. For instance, some sites are miirl-miirlpa, as defined above, while other sites lack this attribution or possess it to a lesser degree. Similarly, it is only at the former type of site, and not at the lesser ones, that a person can experience the numinous, or be impacted by powerful and perhaps dangerous forces; just as it is only in the case of miirl-miirlpa sites that physical damage to a place, or contraventions of visitor protocol, can bring about misfortune and perhaps catastrophe, through the disturbance caused to the Dreaming forces. All in all, it is evident that the concept of miirl-miirlpa, and not that of the Dreaming, is the closest indigenous concept to a notion of the sacred. However, the several connotations of 'miirl-miirlpa' give it a broader scope than the English term sacred. Two of its connotations, 'numinous or awe-inspiring'; and weighty, 'suffused with power', taken together, are at the core of the word's meaning. The other connotations, 'dangerous' and 'requiring restrictions on access' are somewhat secondary, and more easily accounted for. They allude to what surrounds the powerful and mysterious elements that dwell at the centre. Powerful forces, some of which may not be fully comprehended by persons involved, are dangerous to approach or to handle, and the secrets associated with them, so far as they are known to humankind, have themselves to be hedged with restriction, for the benefit of the knowledgeable as well as for the safety of all.

The core meanings of the concept of miirl-miirlpa are more difficult to fully describe. As explored in earlier paragraphs, the concept refers to something like a space in which the potential dwells - and can sometimes be activated - for the propagation and even the creation of life. I would now like to suggest that it may also be considered as referring to a space in which a special type of relatedness, that may amount to interchangeability, can pertain among the constituent forms, including the living forms, that are to be found here. At a place that is miirl-miirlpa, and in the context of ritual, these forms can stand for one another, sharing each other's identities and characteristics. This is one way of expressing what happens when, for example, the 'kipara' pre-initiates are taken to a site of the Young Turkey Dreaming. I have previously explained this as a matter of the 'inculcation of' or the 'transmission to' a specified ritual participant of certain capabilities or properties associated with the Dreaming being. But we can also think of the ritual performance undertaken at a miirl-miirlpa site as setting up a context that fosters the dissolution of the everyday state of separation of the participating
figures, such as the Dreaming figures and the human participants. It is at such times that the whole Dreaming ‘complex’, as I have referred to it, in all of its domains (those of the Dreaming itself, the corresponding species, the relevant environment and the human correlation) may be fully realized. Particular forms cease to have priority, and whatever it is that is shared by all of them - what might be thought of as the essence of them - comes to the forefront. At a Turkey site the essence will have something to do with ‘turkey’. It will be a quality or a force that contains all of the turkey’s species characteristics, separated from his form as a bird; all his human characteristics, but not his human form; and all his ‘Dreaming protagonist’ characteristics, but not his Dreaming being form. The participants and significant elements at the site become permeated with this essence and hence the differences between them, the constraints that apply to them as different forms, cease to be relevant. Hence arises the sense of the numinous, and the feeling of interchangeability, that one thing can ‘stand for’ another. In the case of a Turkey site, where pre-initiates are being ‘put through’, the seniors present will not be ‘participants’ in this sense – they will remain ‘outside’ as onlookers and supervisors. But at the site of a high-ranking Dreaming all persons present will participate and become ‘engrossed’ in the numinous in the way my exegesis suggests.

These considerations return us to the question, touched on before, of the nature of the experience that the visitor to such a site has; and to the need to see that the capacity to provide an insight into the ultimate questions of life and an experience of the ‘numinous’ kind are major elements in the ‘pulling power’ these highly ranked miirl-miirlpa sites have. A detailed illustration of all this follows shortly. To conclude the terminological issue, it is clear that the notions of ‘miirl-miirlpa’ and ‘the sacred’ cover much the same core territory, but ‘miirl-miirlpa’ has the additional connotations that I have mentioned. Since these secondary connotations are not germane to many of the matters to be considered, it is necessary to have the assistance of the English term ‘sacred’. Exactly what it is that we are trying to capture by the use of either term is, however, something that will require much more work to discover.

77 Most older people have a strong desire to visit, at some time in their lives, as many as possible of the great sites and tracks of their part of the desert, and this is essentially for reasons of the insights and numinous experience that they can provide, not for reasons of a more mundane sort.
Visiting miirl-miirlpa places: an introduction to the sacred

I mentioned in chapter 2 that places and areas visited by and associated with the Dreaming beings may be described as 'having Dreaming (tjukurrtatja). As this implies, there are also many landscape features and areas that are not specifically identified by the people as part of a Dreaming. This is partly a matter of practicality. In a hilly locality, for example, it would be overly complicated, and indeed virtually impossible, to attribute the Dreaming presence to every hill. But the question of how people might make distinctions between ‘tjukurrtatja’ and ‘non-tjukurrtatja’ in the landscape raises some interesting issues. I have indicated that the most sacred part of the ideational system is connected with both life-explaining and life-creating potential, but there are a vast number of places that are not at this topmost level, though they still have a Dreaming imprint of some significance. Then there are places where the imprint is at much lower levels. In classical times, the need to pronounce an area as ‘with or without’ any Dreaming imprint would not have arisen, except possibly in a hypothetical way, but contemporarily it does arise, in the context of heritage documentation exercises, mining-related clearances and the like. In these situations site custodians must often make decisions and judgements that are complex and multi-layered. It may be easy enough in the case of core site elements for a custodian to confirm the ‘tjukurrtatja’ status of a place or area, but the certainty of the matter is likely to fade away on the margins of sites and track areas. There will rarely be a clear point or boundary where the Dreaming influence abruptly cuts in or out. Other considerations aside, it is in principle quite problematical for a custodian of the land to positively assert that a tract of country lacks any association of a Dreaming kind. It is problematical even if the custodian does not know of any association and is reasonably confident that no peers exist who may later gainsay him or her. Consideration of why this is so brings us by another route to the question of ‘what constitutes the sacred’?

I draw attention to the quote at the beginning of chapter 2: ‘Every rock has a human connection’. This statement may not be meant completely literally, but it does contain an important insight into the Ngaanyatjarra view of country and of the sacred. Ngaanyatjarra people have sometimes raised a question with me in the context of mining exploration. They

78 Custodians engaged in such exercises must typically juggle two conflicting imperatives. One is pragmatism (the desire, and the pressure from whitefella parties, to get the job done in a reasonable amount of time and also to be ‘cooperative’ - meaning they should not ‘over-do’ the amount of Dreaming identified). The other is caution (not wanting to jeopardise relationships with peers, and with Dreaming forces themselves, by under-estimating the Dreaming presence).
ask: ‘What do the companies do with those [soil] samples that they take down to Perth, after they’ve finished testing them?’ Thinking of the few hundred tiny bags of sand that are involved here, in comparison with the vast cubic capacity of the land from which they are taken, it took me a long time to understand why anyone should be concerned about such a thing, especially given that a heritage clearance would have been undertaken in all areas where drilling occurred. ‘I suppose they just throw them away if they don’t find any minerals in them,’ I would reply. ‘Well, they should bring them back and put them back in the ground’ would be the response. This seemed as absurd as it was impractical, but finally I realised that in a certain perspective that is characteristic of desert culture and not just idiosyncratic or pedantic, all the soil of the country is indivisibly a part of a whole; and thus all of it has some kind of importance, even bits that may seem to contain no Dreaming presence as such. I referred in the last chapter to the term *parna*, meaning the earth or the ground, and to how the concept is linked with the Kangaroo Dreaming. Through the story for the site Parntirrpi, *parna* is identified as one of the two fundamental constituent elements of the living (human) person. In its ordinary meaning, the term can denote *both* a particular portion of soil or earth and the entirety of the soil or earth in an area or region. In line with the associations indicated through the Kangaroo Dreaming connection, the term also strongly connotes what the contemporary people of the area euphemistically call ‘culture’, by which they mean matters pertaining to the *miirl-miirlpa* realm. Thus it is apparent that the Ngaanyatjarra have (or can have) firstly a sense of the importance of all the land, and secondly a sense of a special human linkage to it. This importance, and the linkage, extends even to its apparently minute or nondescript components.

One aspect of this human linkage with the land is signalled in the belief, commonly expressed in the study area, that persons, as well as Dreaming beings, are able to ‘turn into’ features of the landscape – an instance of the interchangeability of forms I referred to above. I have considered this notion in relation to the experience that persons can have at *miirl-miirlpa* sites, but now I want to give greater attention to the content of the notion itself. The changing of one form into another is often seen as something that happens at or after death. One frequently finds special rocks at Dreaming sites that are clearly regarded by the desert people as

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79 This is expressed in the Ngaanyatjarra language by the very commonly used verb ending ‘*-irringu*’. When a boy has undergone initiation, it is said that he *watirringu* (turned into a man); when the sun comes up in the morning, people may use the term *tjirnturringu* (it became daylight). Similarly, when speaking of a person, it may be said that he *yapurringu* (turned into that rock that we are looking at).
associated in a very intimate way with deceased persons who had connections (of birth and the like) to the site. Would it be correct to regard such rocks as transformations, in a singular and permanent sense, of these deceased persons? In fact, it is not really the case that death is understood as a necessary preliminary to the occurrence of this intimate association. A person may ‘turn into’ such a rock while still alive – or in some cases, before they are born. It appears that it is not transformation, but interchangeability, that is the fundamental metaphysical operation at work here. Saying that such a rock is a transformation of the person implies that a one-way irreversible process has taken place, which it has not. Rather, the rock is considered to be another form of the person. As I indicated before, notions such as this contribute to the experience of the mysterious and numinous, that occurs when the desert people visit such sites.

I will elucidate all these ideas by reference to the Possum site Katangara in the Cavenagh Range, in the southern sector of the study area. In this locality the landscape is dominated by hills comprised mostly of ‘higgledy-piggledy’ piles of black boulders that appear almost as if they had been heaped up by a giant hand. At the bases of these piles the rocks are partially submerged in the soil, and beneath all this the larger internal bulk of the range is an indistinguishable amalgam of soil and rock. Atop and alongside one of the more spectacular ‘piles’ at Katangara are several particularly smooth-surfaced, rounded and elongated individual rocks of between 50 and 100 cm in diameter. Each of these is identified with a particular known person. When I went there and had these things pointed out to me, most of the persons identified with the rocks were deceased, but one was not. It is said of each of these persons that they yapurringu (turned into the rocks concerned). I gleaned from my informants, during the visit and later, that the particular timing of these events, or the sequencing – whether the supposed ‘transformation’ might have happened before, during or at the end of those persons’ mortal lives – was not a matter that was considered to have any relevance or that was given any thought. The persons were all ‘totemites’ of the Possum Dreaming, and Katangara was their country, their ‘home’ area. It was either known or assumed that they had all been born in the vicinity. For each of them, their origin had been associated with the activity of the Possum Dreaming beings, and as human personalities many

80 In connection with matters that will be taken up in chapter 5, all of the Katangara totemites that I have alluded to are closely related to one another genealogically. Most commonly, though not at Katangara, the core of such a group of totemites is a set of brothers, who comprise a group of antecedents for a living person A, who might be one of the extant custodians of the site.
of them had possessed markings, and qualities, that related to the way in which the possum animal is culturally perceived. The rocks that they turned into are treated in the same reverential manner as the parts of the physical landscape that the Dreaming beings themselves had ‘turned into’. Indeed, at Katangara, and within sight of the rocks associated with the totemites, are other rocks that are identified with Dreaming protagonists and events in the Possum story as it unfolds at this place. (This does not mean that any of these rocks are thought to be ‘alive’ in the sense that a living person or animal is alive.) For example, one half-hidden rock just below the skyline is said to be one of the Possum people who was hiding from a pursuer at a certain point in the story. On the occasion of our visit both ‘sorts’ of rocks, together with their surrounds, were cleared of weeds and debris, brushed with parrka (cleansing leaves), and touched (pampulku) with the hands. It is evident that there is a great deal of commonality seen between humans and Dreaming beings in this context, but how far does this go and how should we understand it? These are questions that require us to go back and consider the whole subject of the separation that I mentioned in chapter 2 as being culturally posited between the Dreaming ‘epoch’ on the one hand, and the on-going world on the other.

A ‘split in time’?

It has been regarded as axiomatic in the literature, from Spencer and Gillen, to the Berndts, Stanner and Strehlow, and to Munn and Maddock, that the Dreaming beings were active in an ‘epoch’ that ended at some point in the past - vague as the details about this are often said to be. While many authors have acknowledged the existence in fact of a good deal of interpenetration between the supposedly ‘creative’ Dreaming world of the past and its counterpart, the purely ‘receptive world of on-going reality, no one has directly examined and questioned the idea that there is in fact a decisive split between them in the Aboriginal worldview. It has been taken for granted that there is a fundamental distinction in Aboriginal thought between the Dreaming world and the world as it is now. Nancy Munn set out this orthodox position very clearly, saying that the Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara conceptualize a past Dreaming period that is distinct from the everyday present and recent past, with a ‘split in time’ dividing the two (1976:144). The formation of the world and the establishment of its rules was undertaken in the first period by the Dreaming beings, acting ‘freely’ (ibid:157). The ancestral order, the ‘locus of free creativity, [is] set off from the Aborigines, hidden away as it were within the determinate forms of existence, (literally, “inside” the country)”
Human beings, denizens of the later period, are confronted by a ‘fait accompli’ (ibid:147), a fixed order of determinate forms that includes not only the topographical structure but the ‘constraining moral imperatives, the “lawful” behaviour patterns or mores’ (ibid:151). ‘The human individual is therefore born into a world that is wholly formed, visually defined, named, socially segmented and morally constraining’ (ibid:151), within which he must operate. All of this is associated with an orientation by the people of ‘receptive submission to a given order of things’ (ibid:159). Maddock (1982:180) wrote similarly, that Aboriginal cosmology ‘posits a metaphysical discontinuity, a duality, between men and powers: the latter shaped the landscape in which the former dwell, formed the species with which they share the earth and off which they live, and laid down the plan of life to which they should conform.’81 Myers is more circumspect in his formulation. He does not refer to a past epoch and a split in time, nor does he paint such an uncompromising picture of the determinative relationship between the two spheres. But he does state that ‘the distinction between the Dreaming and all else underlies every feature of [the Pintupi] universe’ (1986:48); and that ‘the Dreaming constitutes the ground or foundation of the visible, present-day world.’ (1986:49).

Sylvie Poirier (2005) has undertaken what I take to be an important re-evaluation of this position. She draws on Stanner, who, while stressing the association between the Dreaming and the ‘forms of permanence’ in the world, also acknowledged the power of the people to adapt these forms ‘to the unfolding of history’ (Stanner 1966:80). He saw that while the ‘traditions’ of the Law might be strongly adhered to, these traditions themselves were a constant source of inspiration, and that it was through such inspirations that the ‘mythopoetic thought [characteristic of the Dreaming] nurtures and is nurtured.82 One of the main themes of Poirier’s 2005 book is that the relationship between the Dreaming world and the on-going present is much more over-lapping and interactive than has previously been recognised.

This development, with which I substantially concur, does not contain the implication that the Dreaming is any the less primary in or foundational to the Aboriginal life-world than it has always been understood to be. There is no question that Aboriginal people themselves,

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81 Like Myers, Maddock does not use the term ‘creation’ for the process undertaken by the Dreaming ‘powers’. In fact he goes further to explicitly state that this process is not to be understood as a ‘creative’ one (ibid:180).
82 Poirier 2005:13, citing Stanner, ibid:85. The interpolation within the brackets is mine.
including the people of the study area, portray the Dreaming as primary, and cast themselves as following in its footsteps. But acknowledging this primacy does not preclude questioning the notion of the radical split into a ‘before’ and ‘after’, and the idea that there is essentially a one-way flow from the one to the other.

Poirier focuses primarily on the area of people’s dreams as an important means through which ‘a continuously negotiated…dynamic’ (ibid:4) is carried on between the ‘forms of permanence’ … and [the] structural transformations’ of these that are sustained in the on-going world (ibid:4). The part played by the human inheritors of the Dreaming legacy, far from being a matter of the simple ‘execution and repetition’ of what was laid down, has to be understood in terms of the ‘sociality’ (ibid) within which they live. This sociality, as Poirier finds it, involves the desert people creatively drawing both from the Dreaming, and from the circumstances and influences of on-going life. The relationships between the two areas, or what I would call ‘domains’ is recursive. It can be seen that Poirier’s direction here is the same as the one I was pursuing in the last chapter. There I identified four domains that inter-relate recursively in this way, the additional two being those of the species and the environment.

There are apparently some differences between the world of Balgo, which Poirier is writing about, and my study area. I have not detected dreams as playing anything like the kind of role vis-à-vis the Dreaming as she speaks of. Her treatment of dreams as a phenomenon fits my ethnographic situation closely, except in respect of the role dreams play as a vehicle for the ‘structural transformations of the mytho-ritual elements of the Law’ (ibid:5), I have not seen this happening. Which brings me to my second observation. I do not see much in the way of transformation of this kind happening at all, no matter what the vehicle might be. In comparison with the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands, Balgo seems to be a powerhouse of vitality and change in the areas of myth and ritual. The use of Dreaming imagery and propositions in interpreting the on-going world and its events is very much a part of life in the Lands, but actual changes to the larger mythic and ritual structure are not so evident. These differences aside, the development that Poirier has made in terms of conceptualising the kind of relationship that pertains between the Dreaming and the on-going world is very much

83 Poirier, ibid:4, citing Sahlins 1985:xii.
applicable to the Lands. However, she does not take what I consider to be the next logical step, which is to question the other idea that writers on the Dreaming have always assumed, which is that the ontological status of the Dreaming beings, as understood by Aboriginal people, must be completely different from that of human beings. If the beings are seen as contained within their own epoch and to have been the sole possessors of (formative and reproductive) power, it stands to reason that they are completely differently constituted. But if we consider what Poirier argues, and what I have argued in this and the previous chapter, it would appear that there are not necessarily many axiomatic distinctions between the way in which they are respectively seen. In fact I would argue that the only really ‘bed-rock’ distinction between them relates to the magnitude of their capabilities. The Dreaming beings formed the world ‘writ large’ and laid down laws and customary practices at a universal level, things that are certainly considered beyond human beings. But in small ways people can do most of these sorts of things - other than physically shaping the world. They do so not separately from or in opposition to the Dreaming beings, but in close engagement with them. By the same token, and contrary to what the ‘dualist’ position would suggest, it is clear that for people of my study area the Dreaming beings are still active in the world, not in the sense that they still carry out those large scale foundational acts, but in the sense of engaging with the world as it now is.

Going back to the questions I was considering in relation to the site Katangara, I would suggest that the implicit understanding is that both sorts of beings are (or were) sentient actors who can (and have) taken the form of objects in the landscape (the rocks) that unlike them, remain permanently present in the world (at certain places, like Katanagara). In terms used by Munn (1970), both people and Dreaming beings ultimately withdraw from the world as active, sentient subjects, and are no longer seen, but they and the power associated with them are still present in essence in the objects that they ‘turn into’.

When a party of desert people visits a site like Katangara, for it is almost axiomatic that no one would go alone to such a place, all these rock transformations together are part of a numinous and extraordinary quality that is present – the quality of sacredness. This quality involves the idea of the presence within (both sorts of) the rocks concerned of some essence that is associated with both the Dreaming and the human domains – and possibly also the animal and environmental domains. Indeed, I was told one day that one of the totemites
represented in a specific rock at Katangara, a woman named Tjimunkurr, had *wayurtakukarringu*, ‘turned into a possum’ (that is, into a possum animal) at Katangara. Tjimunkurr did not just change into a rock, with its linkage to the Dreaming domain, but an aspect of her ‘changeability’, as it is understood, was that she actually turned into a living possum animal, or as we might put it, into the species form of the Dreaming complex. By all accounts possums were prevalent in the locality until recently, before they became extinct in the desert as a whole. Thus in this place, the idea of the possum animal presence is intertwined with the other co-present dimensions of the Possum Dreaming complex.\(^{84}\)

I have indicated how the Dreaming and human domains, with echoes of the species domain also, are represented in the two sorts of rocks already considered. But it is not simply these specifically identified rocks that are so regarded. It is also all the other rocks that are in the piles – rocks in uncountable numbers, most of which are less singularly defined in a physical sense than the small number of ‘select’ specimens that are specifically identified with the ‘totemites’ and with the Dreaming beings and events. A senior man introducing this site to the party of visitors on the occasion of my visit waved his arm to indicate that all the rocks in sight, and the soil beneath and among them, were ‘part of the one thing’, and went on to say ‘*wati pirni*’ (literally, ‘multiple men’- meaning ‘Possum people are everywhere, in those rocks’). As he was pointing to these and other attributions of the physical features of the site, he sketched in the threads of the story, about how one of the Possum beings, a man from afar, had been searching among the local Possums here for a woman who had much earlier stolen a critical ‘men’s object’ and who was hiding with it somewhere. Eventually he located her because of the flash of reflected sunlight from the object, which she had hidden behind the fringe of her hair. The telling of the story was interspersed with snatches of song and dramatic gestures, together with references to the human parties, relatives of those present, who had turned into rocks here (and/or into possum animals); and to past ritual performances that had been conducted here. The remains of an old ceremonial ground were pointed out, and the spots where the dancers who had used that ground had made various movements, enacting parts of the story, while wearing the feathers and body markings peculiar to the Possum dance; and where the singers had sat chanting. While the host provided this exegesis and definition, the listeners adopted attentive and respectful poses, positioning themselves

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\(^{84}\) As indicated elsewhere, not every Dreaming place in the landscape is a literal habitat in this way for a corresponding natural species.
carefully to avoid stepping on or otherwise possibly disturbing sacred elements, and to be ready to ritually touch (*pampulku*) certain objects at the right time. It is expected that with the help of the host’s explanations, listeners will be ‘picturing’ in their minds the dancing of their predecessors; the Dreaming protagonists searching and hiding, the flash of the reflection, and the other events; and the possum animals themselves swarming in the nearby trees. Many people carry an image in their heads of what the various Dreaming beings look like, so they will be visualising the story unfolding with flesh and blood characters, ‘like a movie’, as someone put it to me. The Possum beings in these mental images are likely to be dark in colour and ‘chunky’ in shape, like the possum animal itself, and like the rocks of Katangara.

Clearly the role of the host in these situations is an important one. It may sometimes be shared among two or more persons. The style is typically similar to that adopted by the desert healer (*maparn* man’), who through word and mood establishes a context for his actions before apparently extracting a *warta* (wooden sorcery missile) from an afflicted person. More than simply introducing the elements that are plainly present, the host at a site, like the *maparn* man, paints in ‘what is to be attended to’ - some of which may be far from obvious. His art is plied against the background of a set of understandings that the audience is fully familiar with and ready to be immersed in. Thus as the ‘performance’ unfolds, everything makes perfect sense, and yet, depending on the degree of prior knowledge particular audience members may have, things are revealed that may seem wondrous and new. It is expected that the ‘inductees’ will be visibly moved, as indicated by the use of the term *tjarrpatjunkula*, ‘putting them through’, 85 for such an experience – and in my observation this expectation is widely met. The host conjures up the setting of the site as a space charged with numinosity and with action and vitality: the Dreaming Possums are in the midst of an intrigue over the possession of the special object, the antecedent dancers are in full flight to the sound of the songs and the rhythm of the ‘music’ sticks; dust is in the air; the possums (and Possums) are watching from the trees and slopes - and perhaps getting ready to steal something in the way that possums do, and in the way that the Possum woman in the story actually did. 86 A multi-dimensional

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85 This same term is often used for the experience of young men undergoing explicitly initiatory ritual.

86 When it is a case of a group of senior peers visiting a site, with no younger persons present who need to be ‘put through’, the atmosphere may be more subdued – but there is always likely to be an intensity to the occasion, with an underlying if not overt sense of drama. An illustration of the kind of mood that can be present in such circumstances appears in Gould 1969:121-127. The occasion was a visit to the important ‘Two Water Snake’ site of Pukara, south of Blackstone,
picture is evoked, in which the individual elements are vivid in themselves, but are also in a sense transcended by the total ‘sacred setting’.

Munn’s observations about the particular matter of the transformation of (Dreaming) subject to physical object have little relevance in such a situation. Transformations, if one wishes to call them that, have happened and are happening in many directions between many entities and forms. In fact, the concept of transformation is too heavy-handed, which is why I am using the notion of ‘interchangeability’. Munn, it must be acknowledged, is asking a very different kind of question, hence maybe there are no implications for her analysis in what I am demonstrating here. Her interest is in accounting for how the various elements of the Aboriginal worldview can be reproduced over time through successive generations of persons. The objects that are the transformations of the Dreaming beings play a crucial role in her analysis because they are the mediators between the two sides of the equation as she sees it, ‘the Dreaming’ on the one hand and the ‘present and recent past’ on the other. But as I have said, there are many reasons to think that the emphasis on this duality has been misplaced. I would argue that the idea that multiple recursivity and interchangeability occurs at a site like Katangara (and by extension that it is a general feature, albeit to a less concentrated extent, of Ngaanyatjarra sociality [to use Poirier’s term]) is in fact a corollary of the idea that there is no such hard and fast dualism, and that therefore Munn’s emphasis upon, and analysis of the particular Dreaming subject to physical object transformation is in fact called into question by the portrayal of the ‘sacred setting’ that I have provided.

At other sites the details, including the environmental setting, may be different, but the logic that informs and evokes the setting as experienced by the desert people is the same. For example, part of the great Kangaroo site Minnie Creek, mentioned earlier, is comprised of a secluded area behind a grove of trees - and quite out of sight of the other spots where the episodes of Kangaroo’s battle with the Dogs occurred, including the hill Mantjal where he had that awful revelation of the vast Dog army. In this quiet spot are several stones that, like the ones at Katangara, are identified with particular now-deceased persons, ‘totemites’ of this place. Here, however, the stones concerned are not part of the natural environment of the site, as they were at Katangara, for this is not a rocky area. It is clear that the stones, which are also much smaller than the Katangara ones and quite easily portable, have been brought here from elsewhere. The setting in this case is not constituted per medium of rocks and hills, but rather...
through the small bushes and trees that happen to grow here. This vegetation is actually scruffy and unimpressive, but this does not matter, for it is equally able to be brought to life on the occasion of a visit. When I was taken here, our host moved animatedly around, gesturing at the bushes in general, referring to them as ‘wati pirni’ (‘multiple men’) as in the previous example. He touched some of them, speaking as he did so of the white emu or turkey feathers with which they had been decorated on past visits in which he had taken part. Again, the saying of such things immediately evoked the scene for the listener, so that it was unnecessary for actual feathers to be deployed in order for the setting to be created. Once more, a total setting is conjured into existence – a setting imbued with, indeed seeming to be constituted by, life and presences.

The ‘setting’ of sites like these are understood to be alive, not so much with significant objects but with the subjectivity and vitality of a plurality of subjects and presences, all of which are somehow suffused with ‘possum-ness’ or ‘kangaroo-ness’ or whatever the Dreaming association might be. This sense conveys to the visitor that something is present that is fundamental to say the possum, and to human beings. Informing this is an understanding that there are aspects of ‘possum-ness’ that, if brought out, can go some way towards answering the deeper mysteries of life. The evocation of these sorts of dimensions also contributes to a sense for participants that they are actually in the presence of the forces themselves that are responsible for both the creation of life and for the particular ‘nature’ that life has. In such ways can these Dreaming sites provide opportunities for the desert people to experience what seems to be a kind of contact, or near contact, with the ordinarily non-visible essences - and sources - of life. Much more than simply a closer contact with the Dreaming beings themselves, the point of contact is with the whole complex of the Dreaming, as I have described this term. As this contact occurs, the desert people can seem to see some distance into the nature of these mysteries.

The existential status of Dreaming beings and of humans

Earlier I said that while the idea of a person transforming into a rock is often understood as something that happens after death, it is important to note that it is not mechanistically linked with the event of death. It is not inconceivable for a living person to be considered as also present in a rock or other sacred feature at a Dreaming site. This relates to the same issue that
I have just discussed, that it would be misleading to think in terms of a clear cut separation between the Dreaming and the on-going world. It is evident that some investigation is needed into Ngaanyatjarra understandings of the existential status of both Dreaming beings and human beings, including into what notions of mortality might apply, before we could can fully come to grips with these matters. The analysis I have been pursuing would suggest that desert understandings about questions of ‘what it is to be human’, including questions about mortality, will reflect recursive thinking across domains: that is to say, ideas about human beings will be modelled in various ways on those about Dreaming beings and vice versa, with the species and environmental domains also playing their parts.

In the Ngaanyatjarra world, human beings are understood to have some ‘internal’ existence as well as their bodily existence. It is also understood that this internal existence or presence continues, for a time, after death. The terms used for the internal existence are kuurti or kurrurnpa. The Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra Dictionary translation of these terms is ‘spirit’. The examples of usage given in the dictionary make it clear that these terms can denote the internal existence of a person both while they are living and after they are deceased. From my own experience I concur with the points about usage, but I think that the ‘spirit’ translation could be misleading, to the extent that it seems to imply a unitary entity. There are in fact many accounts in the literature that would give the same impression as the dictionary does. For example Myers says that ‘accounts of traditional mortuary rites indicate that the spirit survived the body after death and remained around the grave’ (1986:135). Earlier work on the Western Desert by authors such as Berndt and Elkin took it for granted that there was a personal spirit of this kind, and that there was a concern on the part of the living to control it to prevent it causing harm. That something of this kind is so among the Ngaanyatjarra is illustrated by one of the examples of usage set out in the dictionary (Glass and Hackett, 2003:99), in which an informant was describing what happens when a person needs to approach a recent grave-site for some reason:

‘Puwi’, kurrum-kurrurnpa mirratjaku. (He will shout ‘puwi’ so that the ghost will shout back [i.e. so that the ghost will acknowledge his presence and not make trouble].)

Another example from the dictionary illustrates ideas about these matters in the case of a living person (ibid:117):

*Kuurtitjirratja. Ngangkarilu mantjilku tjarrpatjunku ka palyarriku.* (She’s lacking her spirit (and so she’s sick). A traditional healer can get (the spirit) and put it back in her and she’ll recover.)

However, on the basis of my experience, I do not believe that what Ngaanyatjarra people have in mind when talking of the *kurrurnpa* or *kuurti* is necessarily a singular entity in the sense of what is meant, for example, by the ‘soul’ in the Christian tradition. While the *kuurti* remains around the grave for a time, and has to be taken account of, this does not mean that there cannot be *kuurti* of that person in another place too, at the same time (e.g. in the vicinity of the birth-place). When the ‘traditional healer’ puts *kuurti* back into a listless or sick person, it is more like putting their ‘life force’ back in than ‘restoring the soul’. This life force is not abstract or generalised, it relates specifically to the person, but it is not a unique entity as such. The meaning of both *kurrurnpa* and *kuurti* is closer to ‘the inside aspect’ and ‘the animating force’ than it is to ‘spirit’. This does not mean that the matter of dealing with the *kuurti* of the recent dead is not an issue. It can still be felt as a disturbing presence. But it is noteworthy that Ngaanyatjarra people do not engage in any practices of a ritual nature that would indicate that they are unduly pre-occupied with the presences of the dead. They certainly do not evince any concern with anything like cycling spirits back to the land, as Warner (1937) reported for the Murngin. Their orientation in regard to death is dominated not by issues to do with the deceased as a presence (nor by any implications for the living in terms of transmission or continuity of connection, or any similar hypothetical matters), but by a concern with the loss that has occurred. In this they follow the same orientation as Myers describes for the Pintupi (1986:133-135), notwithstanding the particular statement cited above.

Ngaanyatjarra conceptualisations of the Dreaming beings seem to reflect the same kind of thinking in regard to the matter of their existential status and mortality. As I mentioned in chapter 2, these beings are understood in a general way as having ‘lifetimes’. More specifically, it is understood that an end point comes, as far as their larger travels and primary foundational activities are concerned. At the last place of these travels, they are usually said to ‘go into’ (*tjarrpangu*) the ground. This has echoes in the way that dead persons are referred
to. People say that such-and-such is ‘in the ground’ (at the burial place). As I have put it previously, they leave behind latent power, not only at the final place, but at many of the places visited. It would be equally valid to say that their presence persists, in a sense, at each of these places. I do not believe that culturally there is any ‘preference’ for one of these conceptualisations over the other. The following extract of a conversation I had with an informant is illustrative of a situation in which Ngaanyatjarra people would think initially in terms of the on-going presence of Dreaming beings, rather than in terms of the power left behind by them:

IW: You have to have follow the proper way of doing it, if you want to go to a sacred area.

DB: What could happen if you didn’t?

IW: Once a man tried to get away with sneaking in, by himself, to Ngawarr [a Ngirntaka (Perentie Lizard) Dreaming site near Warburton]. He went there and saw a fat juicy ngirntaka sitting on a rock [i.e. validating the principle that animals are likely to be found in the Dreaming country that is associated with them]. He caught it, and hung it round his neck to carry it off. But then it whispered in his ear, ‘Cook me, I am lovely meat, cook and eat me quickly’. When he heard this, his mouth started watering and he couldn’t wait to make a fire, cook the meat and eat it. But after he had eaten he felt something big and alive moving inside him. It was the Ngirntaka still alive! The man died when Ngirntaka ate him from the inside out.

The apparently ‘normal’ ngirntaka animal that the interloper found was clearly more than it seemed. Was it actually a manifestation of the Dreaming Ngirntaka or do the animal ngirntakas ‘conspire’ with the Dreaming ones to maintain the ‘Law’? In the Ngaanyatjarra world-view such questions are irrelevant. The principle of ‘interchangeability’ of forms applies. This is what is paramount, and it is also why it would be misleading to think of the Dreaming Ngirntaka in this story (or in the mainstream myths of the Ngirntaka) as a singular entity. The sort of event that IW relates could happen anywhere, at any time, in Ngirntaka country.

In summary, the Dreaming beings differ from humans in that it was the former who established the world ‘writ large’ through their foundational activities and who left latent
power at various places (that can be activated by humans). For their part, humans in a general sense act within the framework that the Dreaming beings established. Humans do not possess anything like the powerful potential that was demonstrated by the Dreaming beings in their foundational acts. Humans do however have some power. They are active and inventive players in the world. They can add to and modify parts of the Dreaming framework. Existentially, they share characteristics with the Dreaming beings. Both have an ‘inside’ aspect to them -- they are more than what they seem to be from the outside. This aspect, during their lifetime, is normally located inside the body, but it is not confined there. It can reach out into the world. It can be found at places important to the individual, it can largely desert the body at times of sickness, and it can go on travels in dreams.\footnote{This happens in much the same way as Poirier describes for the people of Balgo. Myers also mentions the ‘dream travels’ of the Pintupi (1986:51), and his comments apply equally to the Ngaanyatjarra.} This internal aspect or part of a person’s (or a Dreaming being’s) existence has an animating force or energy inherent to it. The internal aspect together with its force continues after physical death (or ‘finishing up’ in the case of Dreaming beings), but whereas for the Dreaming beings it goes on indefinitely, for humans the continuation is only temporary: it gradually fades away.\footnote{The so-called ‘second funeral’, which seems to be universal in the desert, is an observance that among other things marks the end of the existence of a person’s kuurti. For a person in the prime of life, the second funeral is held several months or more after the death, but in the case of a young or old person, where there are less social and domestic issue involved, it usually occurs much sooner.} Thus while in the case of Dreaming beings there is a legacy of on-going latent power, this does not happen with humans. As to a question like: ‘Do human beings’ spirits return to the Dreaming after death?’, this is largely irrelevant because humans are understood, while they are alive as well as while they are dead, to in many ways partake in the Dreaming realm, just as the Dreaming beings in many ways partake in and of the human realm. Furthermore, the lifetime taken together with the ‘post-life phase’ of a human being should not be seen as having the same kind of unity, interconnectedness and value as is implicit in a notion such as the Christian soul. In the desert, the interior part of the human being is essentially much more interactive, on an on-going basis, with the outer world, including the Dreaming realm, than is the case in societies having the Christian tradition.

The Stanley slant on the Dreamings versus the human realm

While it will normally be said that say the Dreaming Emu Man formed the Emu sites in the landscape and laid down ‘Emu people’, as well as the emu species, it has sometimes been said to me that it was a (human) man who first set all this in motion, ‘dreaming up’ as it were,
Emu Man, with the rest following. The basics of the major Emu *tjukurrpa* appears in Appendix 2. In this Dreaming story in its conventional form, a large number of Emus converged on a place called Karlayapirti (‘home of the Emus’) for ceremonies undertaken for the funeral of a senior Emu Man there. I will call this Man Karlaya, for convenience. The interpretation I am considering now I will call the ‘Stanley slant’ as it was told to me one day, in the hearing of a group of senior men, by a man named Raymond Stanley (b.1946). Raymond said that Karlaya was not himself a Dreaming man, but a human being. As such, he was the actual originator of both Emu as Dreaming and emu as animal species. Emu did not exist in any form, anywhere in the (known) world, until Karlaya set things in motion, which he did by means of a dream that he had. Furthermore, Raymond said, on the death of Karlaya – the event that caused all the Emus in the story to gather together – emus as animals stopped reproducing, or at least they suffered a major decline. People sometimes still do ‘increase’ ceremonies for them, with some efficacy, but not much. The on-going, central energy or life-force has gone. This is why, Raymond said, ‘we do not see emus much any more on the Lands, when they used to be everywhere’. Raymond does not see the whole matter of this rise and fall of the emu as anything unusual, but as a natural and inevitable process. The loss of the emus is not essentially a drastic thing - though it is sad that they have gone - for it is within the capacity of men (or of a man) to bring new species into being at any time, in the same way that Karlaya did with emus. The emu as a species might have come and basically gone with Karlaya’s life and death, but somebody can envision a new form of life and bring it into being to replace the part that the emu species played in the world. A new ‘Dreaming’ will simultaneously arise as well. Raymond basically thinks along the same lines as this in relation to all the Dreamings.

This is a very different ‘slant’ on the orthodox position, in that here the Dreaming itself is sheeted back to humans as the drivers, on an on-going basis, and there is no ‘past epoch’ of prior foundational activities at all. Few people would put things in this way, but his peers who were listening to his account did not consider it to be anything that contradicted basic principles. The consistency is there because the mechanisms involved are the same. Integral to the process of ‘dreaming’ as Raymond intended it – and his peers must have taken this for

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90 While I said earlier that in the Lands personal dreams do not play such an important role vis-à-vis the Dreaming as Poirier describes them doing at Balgo, this is a different situation. I am speaking here of actual origins, not of the modification of the existing mythic structure via dreams.

91 In this instance I have made a substitution for this man’s real name.
granted when listening to him - was also the performance of (formal or informal) ritualised action, the singing of songs, and the like. These things might be thought of as occurring inside his dream, or outside, in the company of other men - it does not matter either way. What is important is that Raymond knows, and so do his peers, that a man is not acting in his own solitary realm when he engages in inventive activity. He acts in his social, interpersonal and cultural environment, and all this is brought to bear in the arena of action. This is another instance of the recursivity that applies between domains. It is only because of the existence of the whole edifice of the Dreaming in this life-world that Raymond could come up with this particular variation on it. It is not any human man that could set in motion the invention of a new species through dreaming, but only one who lived in a cultural world largely constructed through tjukurrpa-thinking.

‘Seeing what happened before’

As a final illustration of the reflexivity or recursivity that I have been exploring in this chapter, I will quote my informant Mr. I. Ward (1956-2008). One day when we were driving in to Warburton on the high stretch of main road that comes in from the west, he said to me:

The old people teach you to look deeply and carefully not only at the type of trees and soil, et cetera, but at the landscape. Look at that breakaway over there, with all the holes down into the caves underneath. And all the black marks. And there, close by, see the two bloodwood trees. When you look at those things you can see what happened there [in the Dreaming],

I knew he was talking about the Wati Kutjarra, who had passed through this area, and that where we were looking they had had an engagement with some Patupirri (Bat) people who lived at the caves. The Bat People tried to trick the Two Men, but were outsmarted, and ended up getting burned when the Two Men pushed spinifex into the holes leading down into the caves and lit it. Thus the Bat People became black in colour, as did the stone and earth in that vicinity. The Two Men can be seen still standing nearby in the form of the two tall bloodwood trees that Mr Ward was pointing to, watching and laughing uproariously. As he spoke to me it was clear that he was visualising the action in this story. He went on, pointing out the many other Dreamings that exist in the Warburton landscape and that were visible from our current high vantage point. In talking about the need to ‘look deeply and carefully’ at the forms in the landscape to see its Dreaming ‘reality’, I believe he wanted me to adopt the kind of reflexive standpoint I have referred to in this chapter. If this is so, the message could be phrased as:
The more carefully you look at the landscape, the more you will see there that resonates with the content of the Dreaming stories that you have been told about, and that already incorporate much of the form that is there, as a result of the ‘seeing’ of previous people. From this, you will be able to feed the results of that careful seeing into the domain of the story itself, and from this again, you (and potentially others) may see still more in the landscape the next time you look at it.

It might be asked why he did not say this to me if it was what he meant - rather than what he did say. I think that what he did say expressed an insight that has validity on its own, the clarity of which would have been blurred in the more complex and clumsy message above. But in addition, he has also many times told me of his continual efforts to behave towards his elders in such a way as to ensure they would pass on the Dreaming stories to him – and I saw myself how he committed himself to this project over the years. It goes without saying that he would not have put in such efforts needlessly - if he thought he could simply see everything for himself in the mere given forms of the landscape.

Conclusion

In chapter 2, I identified the idea of the ‘capabilities’ of Dreaming beings as crucial to the understanding of how particular Dreamings come to be variously engaged in the world of desert practice. Thus, Young Turkey is employed in the sphere concerned with the social and moral development of boys who are about to become men, because of the characteristics and potentials seen in the Bush Turkey as both a species and a mythological player of the Dreaming. In this chapter I have further developed this idea to show that it is their capacity to reveal deeper levels of knowledge about the nature of the world and to provide experiences of the numinous to human participants that distinguishes certain Dreamings as particularly powerful, and that causes the desert people to rank them highly. I have described the experience of the numinous that can occur for desert people at certain sacred sites as involving a sense of the dissolution of barriers between forms and states, and an apprehension of essences, and that this accompanies a feeling of attaining revelations about the inner

92 A part of Myers’ discussion about ‘Geography as Code’ has relevance for my line of reasoning here. He writes (1986:67): ‘The Pintupi use the visible evidence of the world as a sign to interpret that which happened and is invisible.... However, the information visible in the landscape is not sufficient in itself to illuminate the underlying reality.’ I am suggesting that although Mr Ward is saying that he can discern the underlying reality from the visible, it is implicit that he actually also needs, and in fact has access to, the Dreaming ‘complex’ as it pertains to this piece of landscape. The complex includes the Dreaming story.
meanings of things. It seems that the ultimate level of truth as it is understood in this culture is bound up with the kinds of essences that are expressed in the Dreaming complexes.

Nancy Munn has argued that it is via the objects formed by the Dreaming beings that the reproduction through the generations of the paradigm of the Dreaming is achieved. In her analysis, it is the physical objects and landscape of the Dreaming sites that mediate the 'gap' that would otherwise exist between the world of the Dreaming and the world of living people, especially the as yet un-socialised people of any given up-coming generation. My view is that there is not necessarily any issue associated with such a gap in the first place. The desert people, including the younger generation at any given time, are socialised from the beginning, and in multiple ways, into the 'tjukurrpa-thinking' of their elders, which integrally involves the idea that the Dreaming is part of the everyday world, albeit the beings are normally invisible. Yes, the Dreaming beings – not humans – undertook the initial and major foundational acts, but rationalising this is not something that preoccupies people. Thus the physical objects and landscape forms at Dreaming sites are not emphasised particularly, or solely, because they are the objectified forms of the Dreaming beings: rather, they are part of the charged, multivocal ‘setting’ of the Dreaming site, which is an experiential context. The setting is not simply a given, but is something that is ‘evoked’, by means of culturally familiar actions and symbols. Within such a setting, interchangeability of all sorts of forms seem possible, even the notion that a person can change literally into an animal. While it is true that certain rocks or other objects present at the site are forms of the Dreaming beings, they may also be forms of human beings or of the animal species associated with the site – and it is this very range of possibilities that is the far more powerful point.

The next chapter addresses a number of issues connected with the Dreaming that have not so far been covered, leading to a consideration of what may be thought of as the ‘limits’ of the Dreaming’s ability to incorporate the self of each individual person completely within its schema. This is followed by a review of how the subject of the Dreaming has been dealt with in the literature.
Chapter 4

Thinking through the Dreaming

In chapter 3, I focussed on the experiences of the numinous that occur for the desert people – experiences that contain messages about the underlying meanings of the world - and on the way in which these experiences are concentrated in the ritualized context that may be evoked when people visit sites. Among other things, these experiences, socially generated as they are, help to reproduce the basic cultural viewpoint of the desert people. Now I want to make the point that the principles and elements, if not the more esoteric aspects, of this basic viewpoint are ever-present and operative in everyday situations as well. Thus, among other things, there exist stories - not Dreaming stories, but purported accounts of historical happenings - that display the same elements and principles.

I begin the chapter by considering some examples of these kinds of stories; and then I move to a particular sort of variation on how Dreaming complexes may feature in desert life, related again to the particular nature of the being concerned. In the case considered, I show how a specific set of character traits associated with the Ngirntaka (Perentie Lizard) Dreaming makes Ngirntaka ‘good to use’ as a symbol of the way in which a particular man may come to stand out from his fellows in the desert life. This example reminds us, incidentally, that the Dreaming does not always work in the interests of ‘social inclusivity’ in the way that is implicit in most of the practices associated with it. Then, after a short excursion into how emotion is expressed at Dreaming sites, I turn to some other issues of symbolism, to do with how the people of the Lands identify some of the higher level Dreamings with substances or items of great value in the external world, and how this provides them with a means by which they may measure themselves against their desert contemporaries in other regions. Before a concluding section in which I review the literature on the Dreaming, focussing especially on the 1996 article by Tim Ingold that I referred to in chapter one, I consider whether or not the schema of the Dreaming can be said to fully account for the connectedness to country, and to particular places within it, that is experienced by desert individuals and sometimes by sets of persons. I argue that despite the enormous overall importance of the Dreaming in desert life, the connectedness of people to country is in fact grounded first and foremost not in the Dreaming, but in the identifications associated with personal experiences, especially the
experiences that occur early in life. As I will explain, my approach to this question is what provides the link between my treatment of the Dreaming in these early chapters, and my consideration of the more sociological aspects of connectedness to country that follows in chapters 5 and 6. But first, I will deal with the other subject matter of the chapter, beginning with the stories of the intrusion of Dreaming characters and capabilities into everyday life.

Interchangeability across domains: ‘real-life’ examples

My first example of such a story is a celebrated oral history narrative that tells of a local man Pawunkurnu Parker, who is said to have been shot, apparently in the 1940s, by a European prospector travelling through the Lands. The incident occurred at a place Talala, some 30 km south west of the present-day community of Jameson. Pawunkurnu had been accompanying this whitefella for some time, when an argument arose, and:

the whitefella shot Pawunkurnu in the shoulder, then went off to his tent to get his knife, to finish him off, probably by cutting his throat. Pawunkurnu had previously seen him sharpening this knife. But when the prospector came back Pawunkurnu was gone. The whitefella was bewildered. All he could see was an eagle (walawurru) sitting in a nearby tree. Pawunkurnu had changed himself (kutjuparringu) into this eagle. He then flew off. He went to several places in search of his family, finally finding them at a place called Nyalangarta, south of the Cavenagh Range, a distance of some 50 km from Talala. It was here that his daughter, who was about five years old at the time, found him sitting on a hill. Though recognisable as her father, there was something strange in his appearance and pose, and he had an ugly wound. She ran excitedly back to where the family was camped, to tell them. It was a puzzling scenario that she described to them, for not only was she saying he looked strange, but a man would not normally be found in such a spot high on a hillside, and alone. They doubted her story at first, but they followed her and saw him there, with his shoulder covered in maggots from the bullet wound. They took him back to camp and put ashes on his sore. They were delighted to have him back and much crying went on.

Until she died in 2000, the daughter that found him, Nyungkiya Holland, was often to be heard telling this story of how her father escaped by turning into an eagle; and many other people continue to repeat it. The idea of turning into an eagle is not unique to this case. Ute Eickelkamp (pers. comm) describes a Pitjantjatjara case in which she saw an apparently dying elderly man, half crouching in his back yard with arms in an outstretched pose. In response to Eickelkamp’s question to the man’s daughter about why she did not seem to be helping him,
the daughter replied: ‘Can’t you see? He’s turning into Eagle.’ In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands the Eagle Dreaming is a prevalent one, and as I mentioned earlier Eagle can be associated with predatory behaviour and aloneness. Other associations include the notions of freedom and personal power, which clearly are relevant to the Pawunkurnu case. There is however no Eagle Dreaming imprint in the actual area covered by this story. The narrative makes no explicit link to the Dreaming, but it is clear enough that the full meaning of the story can only be appreciated against the background of the basic cultural viewpoint that I have spoken of, with its resonance between the four constituent domains of Dreaming ‘complexes’.

A story told to me by Tjingapa Davies (b. 1935) about her father ‘Captain’ West, formerly a powerful man in the Warburton area, illustrates another sort of interchangeability:

Trying to smoke out some kuka (game meat, probably a wallaby) that he knew to be in there, Tjingapa’s father made a fire in a cave at Tjukarta, a site associated with the Warnampi Kutjarra (two water snake) Dreaming. The smoke from his fire turned into a big cloud, and a torrential rainstorm ensued, from which many people had to shelter. One person was hit by lightning and killed.

Tjingapa’s father’s fire had ‘activated’ the latent power (in this case a destructive power) of the Water Snake Dreaming, which is often bound up with the control of water supplies and rain, and which is characteristically temperamental. (The behaviour of the ‘Son’ Water Snake has been referred to before and is more fully described in Appendix 2.) The ‘interchangeability’ in the anecdote of Captain West is manifest in the turning of smoke into cloud, which in this case becomes the mechanism by which an action in the everyday human domain results in repercussions from the Dreaming domain. Significantly the use of the interchange here makes it uncertain whether the response to the initial action was an intended one or not. In one interpretation, the main protagonist is the Water snake Son, who, angered by the fire being lit in their country, acted ‘true to his species’ and retaliated against the offending humans by creating the storm. But with some further information, another interpretation is possible. Captain West, apart from wanting to catch meat, had a score to settle with certain people in the area. Thus it could have been that he, looking (as people often do) for a covert form of retaliation, engineered the wrath of the Water Snake on his behalf by means of the fire. This version makes him the main protagonist. Captain West was certainly considered to have the ability to do this sort of thing. Thus while the implicit logic of the story
is that some form of transaction occurred between man (Captain West) and Water snake, its nature remains a mystery. Was the man an unwitting catalyst for Water Snakes' wrath or was he at the bottom of it all? In fact, the Ngaanyatjarra people with whom I have discussed this story all considered it self-evident that both scenarios would have been, or could have been, happening at the same time. The same intention – in this case reprisal against an adversary - can be ‘interchangeably’ associated with different protagonists. Indeed when the people hear such a story they are implicitly attuned to the underlying level where the concern is no longer with the particular participants but with the play of the kinds of forces that are seen to be ever-present features of the ways of the world. What is of interest to them, apart from the drama and the cleverness of the associative chain of elements, is what the anecdote has to say about such forces as self-interest, the desire for retribution, and the imperative to defend one’s own patch.

The Dreaming, the landscape and the individual

In chapter 3 I discussed how in certain cases, features of the landscape are so unusual or impressive that they have taken something of a determinative role in relation to the construction of the Dreaming story with which they are associated. I now want to make another point about the larger and more distinctive landscape features, which is that they often have an association in the desert with certain particular Dreamings. The most pronounced case I am aware of is the association between the Ngirntaka and prominent rocky hills, ridges and bluffs. I also want to observe that there is an evident fit between the prominence of the environmental correlate and the character of the Dreaming concerned, certain particularities about the role it plays in human affairs, and the ‘ranking’ that it possesses in the Dreaming hierarchy. As regards the first matter, the character of the Ngirntaka is discussed at length in Appendix 2, where I point out that this tjukurrpa focuses more on appearance than any other

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93 Morphy (1991: 83) writes that the Yolngu operate with a distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ that reflects a worldview in which ‘everything ultimately stems from ancestral power and ancestral design’. Thus, ‘inside knowledge ... is concerned with the ... more true, with the underlying properties of things, with the generation of surface events (my italics).’ What I am talking about is something slightly different. When the Ngaanyatjarra are exploring the underlying level of meaning in a story like the Captain West one, they do not take cues from the Dreaming beings as fonts of wisdom or as measuring rods in any sense. They ‘see through’ the motives and behaviours of Dreaming beings just as they see through what the humans in the stories are doing. Their goal is a clear understanding of what events mean. They should not be seen as having any goal of paying reverence to the Dreaming beings or as seeking anything from them along the lines of dogma. But the personae and actions of the Dreaming beings encode much of their worldview, while also being interwoven in so many dimensions of their lives, and it is because of this that I identify their characteristic mode of intellectual engagement with the world as ‘tjukurrpa-thinking’.
Dreaming, with the emphasis on the elegance, glamour and visibly taut power of the protagonist. Like the singular bluffs that are often associated with him, he is a ‘show pony’. He does however have a flip side. In common with the power suggested by those bluffs, he has magic powers that can be used to harm an enemy or otherwise influence events. He is a ‘maparntjarra’. This darker side was suggested in the story (see chapter 3) of how he killed an interloper at Ngawarr, by eating him from the inside out. As regards the ‘ranking’ of Ngirntaka Dreaming, the prominent, showy side of his character debars him from occupying a high position. All the high-level Dreamings tend to be hidden, often literally spending most of their time underground. Yet that other dark side makes Ngimtaka ideal for a certain part that he in fact plays in human affairs. This role relates to a phenomenon that is quite important among older men, and no doubt was more so in the past. Such men keep about them certain personal paraphernalia of a ‘magical’ nature - objects, small in size and often made of wood, that are kept in a little bag, and might be brought out sometimes and examined, and possibly made use of, in private or with a few like minded fellows. These items can be used in the course of ‘laying curses’. I had often heard about such things and occasionally seen these objects at Warburton, but I did not put together a larger picture about such matters until several things had happened.

The first thing involved my taking a helicopter trip over the landscape around Warburton. The Ngirntaka features extensively in this landscape. Just to the south of the community is a low, narrow range with a markedly uniform flat crest, like the ‘table top’ hills often found in the desert but much extended. This range is of weathered rock with little vegetation and is denoted on maps as the Brown Range. It is some 30 km long and is oriented west/east. Continuing eastwards along the same general line is a series of individual hills of the same height and appearance as the Brown Range, and beyond these stands a higher, more spectacular formation known as the Townshend Ridge. This is evidently more recent in geological terms, and is more bulky and boasts more vegetation, but it continues the topographical theme of the broad flat top exhibited by the Brown Range. This too is in a west to east line. The whole formation, all of it identified with the Ngirntaka, is about 80 km long. I had been aware of this Ngirntaka for many years and had frequently seen it, or parts of it, from various vantage points, all of them at ground level, without taking a great amount of notice of it. Then I had the opportunity of a flight above it in a helicopter. With two Ngaanyatjarra men also on board, we followed the whole line of the range from west to east,
and I was struck by three things. One was just how strong the topographical continuity between the Brown Range and the Townshend Ridge actually is. The second was how much the whole formation actually resembles the long, muscled, sleek, flat-topped back of the ngirntaka lizard. The third was how dominating of the Warburton region landscape this whole Ngirntaka formation actually is, although it is not easy to appreciate this from ground level. Within a radius of at least 50 km around Warburton, there are no other topographical features to remotely rival it.

The other thing that happened was that I witnessed an incident that involved Tommy Simms (1928-2004), at the time one of the most senior Warburton men and a particular spokesperson of this Brown Range and Townshend Ridge Ngirntaka country (see chapter 6). He was one of the men who possessed the kind of personal sacra that I mentioned above, much of it connected with the Ngirntaka. This man was an immensely complex human being with a strong sense of history and particularly of that part of it related to the colonial ‘encounter’. He was the leading ‘land rights’ man in the 1970s and 80s in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, which was not a region particularly known for its advocacy of this cause. He was also a perfectionist who often tortured himself about the shortcomings of reality. He was born in the Barrow Range area and the Ngirntaka was one of his tjukurrpa. Unusually, he laid claim to several personal tjukurrpa, all of which are manifest in the vicinity of his birthplace.

The incident I allude to happened during work on a heritage clearance near the site Ngawarr, in the context of a mining exploration program. Because of its Dreaming associations with the Ngirntaka the indigenous heritage party had agreed to exclude the company from access to the whole 80 km range area, but in the middle of my facilitating the negotiations with the company geologist about this, Tommy, the senior man present, produced a large rock with yellow flecks (the ngirntaka lizard’s colours are black and yellow) that had come from the heart of the range. When he demanded that the company take it and assay it for its value, I was dumbfounded. His action complete undercut my role, as well as the rationale on which the exclusion of Dreaming country from mining was based!

Normally, Tommy went along with the conventions of the heritage clearance process as organised by the Land Council, even though he was inclined to chafe at the rather
emasculated role that this process forced upon him. He was a man who in an intimate sense felt himself to be part of the essence of the *Ngirntaka* Dreaming, the *ngirntaka* as a species and the ranges near Warburton as I have described them. His connection with the *Ngirntaka* was deeply ingrained in his perception of himself, and in certain habits and practices that he had, such as those associated with his *Ngirntaka* sacra that he habitually carried around. As far as he was concerned he had the right, and virtually the unique right, to say and do as he pleased when it came to the *Ngirntaka* country in this area. I think that when he found the unusual rock in the course of the clearance, his action in holding it out to the geologist was an almost irresistible one, but it also gave him a chance to dramatically shift the terms of engagement with the various parties present. One of these parties was the mining company, whose presence and agenda on this country represented at a certain level a denial of what Tommy stood for, in terms of his history with ‘land rights’. Another was myself, who represented the Land Council, the modus operandi of which defined Tommy himself in a particular way. There were also the other Ngaanyatjarra people present, men and women, co-members of the clearance team, some of whom he doubtless considered to have very little authority, in comparison with himself. Some of these people were clearly dismayed as I was, at the time, by Tommy’s action.

In shifting the terms of engagement in this way, it might be thought that Tommy was transgressing against the ‘Law’ of the desert men. In producing a component of the sacred in public in the way he did, flourishing it in front of a total outsider in the form of the mining company geologist, and indicating that he would sell it if the price was right, he appeared to be directly flouting the injunctions about how the sacred should be approached only in certain ways and should remain undisturbed. He was indicating to his colleagues, in dramatic fashion, that he cared not about such injunctions or about their views or feelings in the matter. Indeed, he was eliminating them from the project in which they were engaged, which was to provide a carefully considered verdict – arrived at on a consensus basis - on the company’s ability to access various parts of the country. He was also effectively pushing me out of the picture as the point of contact between the company and the people. His act was about asserting his own primacy - asserting that he, and by clear implication no one else, had a right to take unilateral control of this situation. I want to stress that this right was based on the

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94 No doubt part of his motivation involved the hope that money might be forthcoming, but there were far less public means he could have pursued if this was all there was to it.
idea that he in a sense *personified* (that is, was interchangeable with) the *Ngirntaka* (and, for that matter, the *ngirntaka* as a species, and the landforms that so dominated the locality and were themselves in a sense interchangeable with Dreaming being and species). From this point of view, it was almost as if the *Ngirntaka* himself, not just Tommy Simms, was directing the situation.

The further point that comes across from this story is that it reveals the Dreaming functioning in a different way from how what we have previously seen. What is different here is how the Dreaming complex operates here in relationship to a particular individual. On the whole, the practices and ideas associated with the Dreaming are of a socially inclusive nature. Decisions, initiatives and so forth related to a given Dreaming are shared by those who have rights to be involved (bearing in mind the restrictions associated with gender and age). But while the ‘rules’ pertaining to *Ngirntaka* are not explicitly any different in this respect, and while most people, like the other members of the heritage survey party, would not approve the concept of an individual taking charge, there is something about the *Ngirntaka* complex that lends itself to this special relationship with the individual. (Not just to any individual though, only to a ‘stand-out’ one.) This ‘something’ is in the character of *Ngirntaka* Man as a Dreaming player, and also in the nature of the landscape features with which he is associated. Those prominent hills and bluffs, too open and obvious as they are to be associated with a Dreaming of a high degree of sacredness, are the ideal image for the man who ‘stands out from the crowd’. Again, the familiar theme emerges of the ‘capability’ of a given Dreaming being the driver of the role it plays in the human world. As far as I know, *Ngirntaka tjukurrpa* is not used in collective ritual, which is usually for the purpose of the social good, as where Turkey and *Marlu*, for instance, are used in the cause of ‘transmitting’ desired properties or characteristics to young persons. In these ways, *Ngirntaka* Dreaming is suggestive of a remark that Berndt once made, to the effect that the Aboriginal relationship to land can have a quality that is not captured by ‘the bare social relationship’ (1970:1). In this sense the bond with country has more ‘intimacy and familiarity’, he said, than the relationship between parent and child, brother and sister’ (ibid:2). Mostly I do not think this could be said for the Ngaanyatjarra, at least as they are today, but *Ngirntaka* as associated with a man like Tommy Simms does have such a flavour.
Visiting the sacred and crying for country

I have alluded to the careful clearing of any weeds or foreign objects from the immediate area that is one of the first things done on approaching any miirl-miirlpa site. Any sacred stones are touched (pampulku) with the hands, and often with parrka (leaves) from a nearby bush, gestures that occur in ceremony and at other times to establish a connection between people and the sacred. If suitable tools are available a wider area may be cleared.

I have referred to the main sacred part of the site at Pilpirrin (Minnie Creek), where Western Marlu was finally killed by the Dogs, which is located in a secluded spot behind some trees. Here I was shown three small stones, two of which are the ngampu (testicles) of the Dreaming kangaroo, the other being the ngampu of a man of the Marlu tjukurrpa, who was born here, and who since birth has possessed only one ngampu of his own. This man is still living, and resides at Warburton. In the heat of the Dreaming battle as it raged near the waterhole, Marlu’s own testicles had been ripped off and thrown to this spot. Though the overall Dreaming ‘battlefield’ comprises an area of some 100 sq km, these ngampu in a sense represent the distillation of the sacredness of the whole complex. On the occasion of our visit (which I referred to in chapter 3 in describing how a ‘host’ will evoke the ‘setting’ at a site) we touched these as required, then the host picked up a little piece of red ochre which was lying nearby and rubbed it on to the stones, as had obviously been done many times before in the past by other people who had visited this site.

The other two stones had names associated with them, the names of men now deceased who were ‘bosses; for this Dreaming and were associated with the country where the site lies. Perhaps they too were born with single real-life testicles. They probably died in the C19th and nothing is now remembered about them, unlike in the case of Rururr (see Appendix 4).95

As the ochre was rubbed on, the host and the other men present called out: “Many kangaroos come up!”, exhorting them to multiply - particularly in the Warburton area which was the

95 With regard to the fading of knowledge, Takupalangu, Rururr and Pilpirrin may be seen as three steps along a continuum. Pilpirrin is one of the most significant sites in the whole of the desert, but for almost a century the region where it is located (which is well outside the Lands) has been depleted of connected Aboriginal people and effectively outside the system of the ‘Law’.

Chapter 4
home of the men concerned. Then and later, they talked of their hopes that rich pickings of kangaroo meat would soon be available. They commented that full-scale ceremony used to be done here at this very location and that white feathers from turkey and emu used to be arranged in the mulga trees that surrounding the area. They pointed out some very thin vertical lines in the stones, like miniature reefs through the middle of the rock. These marks resemble the design that people paint on themselves in Marlu ceremony. One of the men went around touching everything in the vicinity with the parrka that he was carrying, marking out all the bushes and the ground and the trees, demarcating an entire area of 20 or 30 metres in diameter that he considered to comprise the core of the site.

The visit just referred to took place in 2003. Seven years earlier I had been down to the same place with the man Brian Jennings, who as described in the story in Appendix 4 was closely associated with the site Rururr, and another man Stewart Davies, another well known Warburton man. Rururr is Brian Jennings’ father’s birthplace, and his own birthplace is Mantanya, which is a site associated with this same Marlu (i.e. Western Marlu) just to the north of Warburton. But Brian spent a good part of his life down in the Goldfields and also around the Minnie Creek region, so he knew this site well. On this occasion we did not go to the sacred ngampu place, but remained at the main more public site area in the creek bed.

At one stage we were sitting at the waterhole and digging it out, and Brian began to cry. He remarked to me after a few minutes that he was doing so because this was his Dreaming. (His birth place Mantanya is some 500km to the north of here, albeit on the same Dreaming track.) A couple of days later when we were back in Warburton and I was alone with Stewart Davies, he commented about Brian crying there at the place where the kangaroo got killed, saying he cried ‘because he’s the only one looking after it now.’ ‘A lot of people used to look after that place before,’ Stewart said, ‘but they’ve all died.’ He went on: ‘It made me feel no good, hearing Brian crying like that.’

In my experience it is quite common for old people to have a cry when they go back to sites that they have not visited for many years; and for others to say, very respectfully, that they are crying for the other people that used to be there who have died. As many other writers have noted, Aboriginal people will not tend to recall a deceased person at a certain time, such as at
the anniversary of their death, but place is expected to evoke memories powerfully. This is the counterpart of the urgent imperative at the time of a death to get far away from the scene.

There are some persons whom I have seen cry at a number of places – all of which are places with personal associations dating from their early lives. At a given site more than one person may cry, but it is always the oldest person present, or the one with the greatest number of personal associations, who leads the way and assumes overall responsibility for the crying.

Orchestrated crying is also a critical part of initiations, when a boy is being separated from his youthful social environment in order to enter the adult world of men; and at funerals. In all these situations crying is about loss, while also affirming the meaningfulness of the bonds among kin and close associates. Crying on the occasion of visits to sites also affirms the linkages between people and country. The crying of Brian at Pilpirrin, that disturbed Stewart, is to be considered just as much ‘orchestrated’ as the other types (though no doubt emotionally felt as they are). Stewart’s disquiet was perhaps attributable not to the crying itself, but to the way it pointed to the loss of the on-going reproduction of connectedness and relationships of care and responsibility that has occurred in the case of Minnie Creek, and at other places too.

**Role of the highest level Dreamings**

Earlier I alluded to the fact that the Goanna Woman Dreaming tells about matters such as where the life force of the world resides and what it might consist of, while in Appendix 2, I also show how as a being she is regarded as the ‘cradle of life’. As such, she is at the apex of the Dreaming rankings, a position she shares with Possum Man. These two Dreamings, despite their outwardly different appearances, have much in common, their mythological and symbolic content being very similar. The Goanna Woman complex is centrally to do with the creation of human beings, while the Possum complex can be seen to be concerned with the nature of the key to the crucial maturation process of males through the stages of life. Through their possession of these two complexes, the senior men are made privy to insights into these mysterious matters, and given the means to ensure both the reproduction of human life (the ‘increase’ of human beings) and the on-going reproduction of their whole hierarchically-based system for the categorisation of the male population. Other tjukurrpa
such as *Marlu* and even Young Turkey – and several others - also play important parts in the initiation of males, but the Possum Dreaming in a sense underpins all these.

In the entry for Goanna Woman in Appendix 2, I explain how the *piti*, the wooden dish that was a central component of the desert women’s ‘toolkit’, is (unbeknownst to living women) used in the secret men’s Goanna Woman complex. Here the *piti* symbolises a unique amalgam of fertility, nurturance, home, the earth and ‘country’. The same symbol is used in the Possum Dreaming complex. In both cases, the sacred wooden objects used at the heart of ritual performances are representations of the *piti*, while at the key sites of both Dreamings there lies a hollow in the ground, shaped like the inside of the bowl and regarded as an instantiation of it. Both Dreamings also pose profound gender questions for the desert men, including the question as to why the protagonist of one of the most sacred male *tjukurrpa* should be a woman.

In chapter 2 I referred to the fact that mineral discoveries often turn out to have been made where Dreaming sites are located. In the Ngaanyatjarra context, this has proven to be particularly the case where Goanna Woman and Possum sites are concerned. From the Ngaanyatjarra point of view, the most prominent cases of ‘value’ (as defined by the wider external world) yet found in the whole arid zone – the gold of the WA Goldfields and of the Tanami, and the oil and gas of Mereenie – were respectively deposited in the earth by these two Dreaming beings. The famous goldfields of Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie and Wiluna, among others, all lie on the track Goanna Woman made as she approached the Lands. Thus not only was Goanna Woman the ‘cradle of life’ for human beings, she also laid down the substance (‘gold’) that most powerfully represents the idea of ‘high value’ in the eyes of the world at large. Possum Man, for his part, laid down oil and gas deposits, as well as the gold at Tanami. Mining company exploration work has given indications that there may be similar valuable deposits along the tracks of these two beings within the Lands as well, though all such investigations are still in the very preliminary stages and have yet to result in any concrete mining proposals being put to the people.96

96 No mining as such has yet occurred anywhere within the Lands (which is yet another indicator of the region’s remoteness as far as the wider world and its interests are concerned). A considerable amount of exploration is now occurring, however.
Comparing ‘us’ with ‘them’ through the Dreaming framework

The Dreaming track form can work not only to create interconnections, but as a means for the articulation of contrasts and differences between groups of people associated with the country through which the tracks pass. The latter aspect particularly comes into play over larger distances and, in the modern era, across jurisdictions.

The particular Dreamings that function most prominently in this way, for the people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, are Goanna Woman and Possum Man. Precisely because these two Dreamings are associated with what are regarded as the most valuable ingredients of the land, as well as with some of the most mysterious issues of life in a metaphysical sense, any activity that might revolve around these Dreamings is always a focus of huge (though suppressed) interest on the part of the senior men. Naturally enough, there is a particular preoccupation with the gold mining that occurs along the respective tracks and with the oil and gas extraction associated with the track of Possum Man. Their belief that the sites of these two Dreamings that lie within the Lands must also be replete with valuable minerals puts them in a conflicted position, because while the idea of riches is tantalising, they also very much fear the idea of damaging the Dreaming landscape, particularly where such sacred Dreamings are involved. They also fear arousing the wrath and retribution of their peers around the desert, for failing in their duty to protect the sacred. Another thing they dwell on, is the idea that the Aboriginal people in the other regions, who are the owners (in Aboriginal terms) of those areas where the big mines and wells are located, have been able to make money out of the mining. At times they talk about these presumed gains with envy, and at other times they declaim against these men for having sold, or at least lost, a part of the Dreaming that they should have been looking after. Whichever view they take, they certainly have a major preoccupation with the idea that many sacred places integral to this Dreaming have been destroyed/exploited in distant areas, whereas in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands the equivalent places remain intact and untapped. In this way, this Dreaming has come to comprise a means by which Ngaanyatjarra men measure themselves against their Aboriginal coevals to their west and east.

97 In fact the indigenous men of the Goldfields of WA would probably tell a much more negative tale about mining money received by them, the amount of say they have in what happens, and the kinds of impacts on their lives. The people in the NT, along the Possum track, have probably done better in financial terms.
Impact of contemporary issues and ideas on mythological content

The material presented in Appendices 2 and 3 indicates that there has been very little impact on the themes and content of the Dreaming narratives as a result of changes and influences since the encounter with the settler world. The Dreamings are all still focussed on matters internal to desert culture and society as it was in classical times. Even though there has been a definite fading in the immediacy of the Dreaming presence among Ngaanyatjarra people over the post-classical period, it can hardly be said that the Dreaming has ‘lost its relevance’ – the Ngaanyatjarra still predominantly interpret the world around them through ‘tjukurrpa-thought’ – and so this lack of change is an indication of the degree to which the people are still in many ways ‘contained’ within their own world. They have absorbed very few narratives from the broader Australian or international scenes into their deep-level corpus of thought and symbolism. One theme that has evidently entered the Dreaming in this way, though even here it has happened not overtly but only implicitly, is the idea of ‘black’ as opposed to ‘white’. Tindale’s record of the Wati Kutjarra Dreaming, recorded in 1934, contrasts significantly with contemporary versions in regard to the presence of this contrast. In Tindale’s account little usage is made even of the duality itself, let alone the colour dimension involved. Today, there is a great deal of focus on the possibilities of contrast and interplay that the dual nature of this tjukurrpa provides; and informants invariably mention that the Two Men are respectively Mulumaru, the ‘black goanna’ and Kurrkarti, the ‘white goanna’. At one Wati Kutjarra site two boulders stand on a plain, one slightly smaller and darker than the other, and with numerous small markings etched on it, while the larger pale one is unadorned. The former is Mulumaru, who informants describe as the ‘actor’ and dancer and younger of the two while the other, the larger, older, lighter-coloured, plainer-featured party, is Kurrkarti. Use is sometimes made of the polarity as revealed here between ‘white (or light-coloured), older, responsible, grave, pragmatic’ on the one hand, and on the other ‘black, younger, irresponsible, humorous, decorated and artistic’. It seems clear enough that this development reflects the impact that ‘whitefellas’ have made on the Ngaanyatjarra world since the mission was established (at much the same time as Tindale made his visit). But there is still no explicit mention in any of the main corpus of stories of the existence of white people or of anything connected with them, the only exception being that there have
The Dreaming and connectedness to country

Everything that I have said so far in this and the last two chapters would indicate that in classical times the Dreaming was at the absolute heart of the way in which the desert people have constructed their world in response to the given material conditions of their lives. I have shown how the Dreaming works as a complex to bring together the four main domains of desert human experience; and how observations made (in the cultural perspective) about features of the world are incorporated into this complex and made use of, through ritual, in the attempt to reproduce the future in a way that has continuity with the past. Through the case of Watja, I have shown how the understandings related to the Nirnu Dreaming, the nirnu species, the local environment (this being favourable for nirnu) and the Banks family, as the set of totemites and landholders, are all reflexively intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Even the historical facts germane to this family have been incorporated into the reflexive complex, via the Dreaming story. In the text and appendices I have also given indications of how meaningful to the individual the Dreaming can be. Many people have the marks of the Dreaming on their bodies, or are understood to display its characteristics in their personalities. Some people are represented in stones at sacred sites, or as in the case of Muwitju and her family members, co-present in such site elements as trees of a certain shape that perennially ‘tell the story’ of what happened at that place in the Dreaming. The fullest example I provided of an individual’s closeness to a Dreaming was that of Tommy Simms, whom we saw to be almost a living incarnation of Ngirntaka.

However it is not totally the case that the Dreaming always and in every aspect of classical life occupied such a prime and pivotal place as all this suggests. In respect to questions of connectedness to country, the situation was inevitably complicated, such that the kind of ‘seamless’ world reflected in the preceding discussion must suffer at least some disruption. Firstly, one’s ‘pre-given’ connectedness to country is not only a connectedness to the

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98 See Brooks 2011.
birthplace⁹⁹ and to the Dreaming with which that place is associated. There are also, potentially at least, connections to places and Dreamings associated with one’s father and mother and various other antecedents, and even if some of these are in the same place as the birthplace, they cannot all be. Secondly, connectedness is not solely about these pre-given entitlements or about the personal possession of the Dreaming identity of the birthplace. In large part, connectedness is a matter of the experiences in relation to country that people have, particularly in the crucial early years of life, and of the feelings of identification that arise from these experiences. These experiences may or may not unfold at or near the birthplace (or any of the other ‘pre-given’ areas). For many people, it was the country with which their early experiences and feelings were associated that constituted what they came to regard as their real ‘home’ or origin place, even if this involved giving a lower priority to the birthplace and its Dreaming (and to the other places) – not that these would ever be ‘discarded’. The notion of origin place has connotations of lasting feelings of personal connection, and expectations of people being drawn back to this place during their lifetimes, even if their most active years are spent on the move and largely in distant places. Another connotation is that one would ‘finish up’ one’s life here.

In fact this process would often go further, and a ‘collective’ origin place based on these criteria of ideas, experiences and associated feelings would arise for a grouping of people that had some continuity over time. Again, this was not necessarily based on the tjukurrpa

I will elaborate on these matters, beginning with a statement by my southern sector informant Andrew Watson (b. 1944) that illustrates the ‘orthodox’ position in regard to the significance of the birthplace:

Wherever a man or woman born, that’s their first home, all the time. You can’t take that away from them. Once you born in a place you own that place.¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁹ The conception place is to be taken as the alternative to the birthplace here, according to which sector one is talking about.
¹⁰⁰ To clarify, he does not mean that the person owns the place exclusively - others born in the same place also ‘own’ it. The subject of ownership is considered in detail in chapter 6.
In addition, most people would agree that the individual has a right, of some kind and some degree, to country associated in various ways (sites of birth and death and the like) with the father, mother, mother's brother, grandparents and various other antecedents. Some at least of these places may be widely spaced. One could ask then whether there was any way in which such circumstances of dispersal could be reconciled so that a singular sense of an origin place could arise for people. However as I have said, the sense of an origin place was more likely to be grounded in the early experiences of individuals and in the feelings of connection that arose from them, than it was to be derived from any ‘pre-given’ considerations. The following statement from informant Jonathon Bishop (b. 1947) gives something of the flavour:

Your country - that is those who look after it and were born there and walked around there. Those whose father brought them up and walked around rock hole to rock hole. An owner had to have walked around there and was brought up there by mother and father. Where all the people saw them walk around that place.101

This suggests firstly that for any given ego ‘A’ the extent to which the ‘band’ to which he was attached as a child concentrated its residential focus in one particular area would be an influential factor in whether or not A came to acquire a strong sense of having an ‘origin place’ of the kind I have mentioned. If there was no such concentration, with movements being habitually spread more or less equally over a variety of areas, A might simply come to have a dispersed ‘personal configuration of belonging’, and a ‘composite identity’, which Poirier says is the norm for the people of Balgo (2005:92). Secondly, it suggests that the country in which the residential focus was concentrated (if this did occur) would be the country to which A would come to have primary feelings of attachment, regardless of other factors. In chapter 6 I set out case material (Case Study 8) that shows how a mother, whose husband had died when her boys were young, made sure that the band spent as much time as possible in country associated with the antecedents of the father (the deceased man) of her three young sons. (This matter is also discussed in some detail in Appendix 6, beginning at p. 6.) At the same time, while this kind of direct exposure would have been the most critical in terms of generating associations with the corresponding country, considerable influence could have been exerted by a father or mother or other close adult who wished to arouse a child’s feelings of attachment to a particular area by verbal means. Why would a person in a parental

101 Although Jonathon includes birth as a criteria here, on other occasions he acknowledged to me that a person might be born in a different area from where this ‘walking around’ occurred. He clearly believed, at any rate, that the walking around was the crucial matter in arousing a sense of identification.
role make these kinds of attempts to influence a child’s sense of attachment to country in such ways, and in relation to what country would they do it? As to the first question, the undertaking of active socialization of this kind would surely depend on whether they themselves felt a sense of the significance in their own lives of the area concerned as an origin place. At to the second, there would doubtless be a variety of possible options in any given case, but if a whole band as such was spending a more than average amount of time in one area it would surely suggest that a sense of connectedness was shared among a number of people, rather then being confined to one or two. In other words, there is an intrinsic association between the notion of an origin place as I have described it, and the existence of a collective kind of connection to country. In the absence of relatively stable groupings linked to country, there would be no basis for any significant development of a commonality of feeling in relation to it. Every individual would simply have their own set of associations, whether these were the ones given at birth or ones developed afterwards – but it would be hard to develop a strong attachment to a specific place afterwards because of the constant state of residential dispersal. In any case, it is my argument that the notion of the origin place was a common one in the study area, although it was far from universal: it was more characteristic of the southern sector than the northern, for reasons that will become apparent. The emergence of such a notion was in fact closely related to the existence of groupings associated with particular areas, which in turn was underpinned by conditions of environmental fertility, as I explain at greater length in chapter 6. In chapter 5 I address in detail the question of the nature of the groupings I am talking about.

The question remains as to what would happen about the birthplace, or conception place, as the case may be, when an individual developed a sense of an origin area that did not include this site. The quote above from Jonathon Bishop envisaged a situation where the birthplace was also part of the area where the juvenile ‘walking around’ occurred, but what about when the two did not coincide, as often happened? The desert people are well aware of the issue themselves, and I have often heard statements about how people used to try and have their children born in ‘the right place’. In a structural sense the discrepancy represented one of the ever-present obstacles to the further development of the ‘group area’ phenomenon; or seen from the opposite angle, it functioned as one of the means by which the diversity of connectedness to country continued to be ensured. From the personal point of view the discrepancy seems to have often been experienced as something of a division of the self,
although less so when the distance separating the two places was not great, which in the southern sector was often the case. At any rate, despite the precedence in the desert discourse that is attributed to the birthplace as the prime place of connection, and bearing in mind Andrew Watson’s statement to the effect that this place can never be alienated from its ‘owner’, there are many people in the study area who see their ‘origin’ area not as their birthplace but as another place or area, which is usually a ‘group’ area of the sort I have referred to. Such an area may or may not be associated with a distinct Dreaming imprint.

The treatment of Dreaming tracks and the general Dreaming phenomenon in the literature

In the course of these three chapters on country and the Dreaming I have made various references to the literature on these phenomena. I wish now to consider the gaps in my consideration of the writings of others on this subject. Dreaming tracks have been widely referred to in the literature on the desert, but little detailed exploration of the subject has occurred. Berndt, in 1959, was the first to clearly emphasise their importance, but for a long time little more was said about them, other than by Berndt himself (1972). His analysis, sketched out in 1959 and still basically the same in 1972, rates them as critical phenomena, inasmuch as he sees the configuration of country through Dreaming tracks as underpinning the whole system of what he calls land ‘ownership’. After many years of considering issues to do with whether or not the more significant level of desert social organisation might be local or regional, and what might constitute the organising factors or principles at either of these levels, his conclusion was that the ‘physiographic mythology’ was at the heart of the matter (ibid). I have made it clear that I agree that the Dreaming imprint creates much interconnectedness at the level of country, and that it forms a framework for some of the connections that people have with country and with one another, but I do not agree with Berndt that it systematically binds particular groupings of people to particular

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102 Richard Gould named his book, set in the Warburton region, ‘Yiwara’; explaining in the preface that he used this word because it has several references, one of these being to the tracks of the Dreaming beings (1969:vii). Curiously, however, he makes no further reference to Dreaming tracks in the book. I find this difficult to understand, given the pre-occupation of the people with these phenomena that I have found in my years of work in the region.

103 A number of writers, like Meggitt, Tindale, Mountford and the Berndts themselves have set out extensive sections of ‘song-lines’, with English translations. But the emphasis here is on the meaning of the passages, and on how they correlate with ritual phases, not with the linkages to country.

104 A term such as ‘landholding’ would probably have suited his own expressed views better. (‘[It] is not so much “ownership” as trusteeship’, he writes.1972:189.
areas of country. Sometimes things actually do all come together in this way, but I concur with Myers that the systematic connectedness of ‘socio-centric’ groups with country across the landscape is a problematical matter. On the other hand I do see the existence of a significant number of cases where groups have come to be associated with country, though often without the presence of a Dreaming correlate. However, far from being a ‘given’ the emergence of such groups is the result of a process that is dependent on the existence of the right conditions. These exceptions to the rule of fragmentation and dispersal in fact comprise an important part of my analysis and have been influential in the development of my understanding of ‘land tenure’ in the desert, as I will elucidate in the following two chapters.

A recent exception to the dearth of material about Dreaming tracks in the desert is Poirier’s 2005 book, in which she emphasises their importance (ibid:52). Poirier, who has clearly been influenced by Berndt, although she follows a largely different theoretical course, writes at length about what she calls the ‘mythical itineraries’ (ibid:63), and discusses over several pages the main Dreamings of her ethnographic region, including details about the routes they travel (ibid:70-82). In an earlier article (1992) she made an interesting observation relating to the issue of how Dreaming tracks can be ‘open’ to the introduction of new connections at sites along their length (Poirier 1990:760). Apart from the specific issue of tracks, her whole 2005 book is about the Dreaming in one aspect or another, as my reference to her over the course of these three chapters has made clear.

Tonkinson (1974 and 1991) refers clearly enough to the existence of Dreaming tracks in the desert and provides some material about them, but does not consider the subject directly or extensively. The same comment might be made about this treatment of the Dreaming as a whole. Although his 1991 book is sub-titled ‘Living the Dream in Australia’s Desert’, the treatment of the Dreaming is piecemeal and the reader is not given an integrated vision of the many aspects of the part that it plays. In one useful paragraph he refers to the fact that Western Desert people frequently emphasise the cultural homogeneity of the whole Desert area, commenting that they attribute this homogeneity to ‘the fact that the ancestral beings roamed over [these] wide areas and frequently came into contact with one another, …exchanging sacred and nonsacred objects, songlines, rituals, and decorations, thus
spreading these cultural elements to the extremes of the desert and beyond.... Cultural variation, too, is often explained by certain myths’ (1974:7).

Myers (1986), while giving extensive attention to various aspects of the Dreaming – particularly inasmuch as it relates to the question of the individual’s connection to country – has little to say about Dreaming tracks, what purposes they might serve, their qualities and attributes, and the implications of the desert people’s pre-occupation with them. This despite the fact that he is keenly aware that ‘[o]rientation in space is a prime concern for the Pintupi’ (1986:54). As he says: ‘It is impossible to listen to any narrative, whether it be historical, mythological, or contemporary, without constant reference to where things happened’ (ibid).

Apart from this issue in relation to tracks, Myers’ treatment (1986) of the Dreaming, while relatively brief, is situated firmly within his overall analysis of Pintupi social and cultural processes: the Dreaming as such is far from a major focus for him.

One of the areas in which Myers’ work has been particularly influential concerns the concept of the ngurra, which I now wish to address. Ngurra is a term to which Myers has given great attention, in terms of how it relates to a homology between the human and Dreaming worlds that is integral to Pintupi culture. I will turn to that question shortly, but will begin with the meanings that the term has in the southern sector. It is used here for the birthplace, although the latter may also be referred to by the specific term yirti ngarrinytja (‘place where the baby is laid down’). It is also the term used for the origin place (where relevant) as I have described this, whether or not it is in a different location from the birthplace. Also, as Myers says for the Pintupi, it means ‘camp’. Thus when a southern sector individual says of a certain place that it is his ngurra, it might mean that this is where he camps, whether on a short term or a longer term basis. But if it is evident that he is making a more significant statement, the intended reference will invariably be to his birthplace/origin place.

Ngurra usually denotes a single place, but it may also have (and I am referring to classical times here) a slightly larger geographical scope, as when applying to an origin area, where it indicates a constellation of contiguous or closely spaced sites. Whether or not a group type of

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105 In the contemporary context it might mean the community where he lives.
origin area is indicated, ngurra has a personal reference. Its sense is of ‘my home area’, or ‘our home area’. It does not refer to ‘country’ conceived of in a descriptive or categorical way. There is another term, parna, for this.

Another point of contrast between my material, and that of Myers and others, arises in relation to questions of how durable over the course of a lifetime the initial identifications of a person with place might be, whether these were grounded in the ‘given’ entitlements or in early experiences, or both. It is my understanding on the basis of my research throughout the study area that, despite the endemic high mobility, there was a preference, at least, for a pattern of movement through the seasons and through a lifetime that would see people (especially senior men) oriented to the country of their own early identifications as a place or places to be periodically, and ideally finally, returned to. The realities of the desert’s harshness dictated the need to be flexible about where one resided, and because of this, a person might turn out to live for long periods and even indefinitely in another place, perhaps in a distant part of the desert. If this occurred there would be implications for the continuing centrality and resonance of the country of initial identity. The questions are, how often did a major ‘dislocation’ of this sort occur, and what was the response to it? In the southern sector, though admittedly not necessarily in the northern, an enduring dislocation from the origin country – where a lifetime or most of it is spent living far away - is something that seems to have been relatively rare. It certainly happened to women more than to men, but even with them it happened less than perhaps would be expected, since in this sector marriages tended to be contracted ‘closer up’ than in some other regions of the desert (see chapter 6 for evidence about this). Even in post-classical times most Ngaanyatjarra people have remained in close contact with at least the general area of their own particular home places. This latter represents a significant point of difference with the people studied in recent times by Poirier and Vachon respectively, who have been living for decades in country far from their home areas. The point of contrast with Myers here is an important one. While Myers does concede that there ‘is a strong feeling’ that the origin place of a Pintupi person (which would normally be the conception site) ‘really is his place, that those conceived at a place should remain there’ (1986: 131), he places greater overall emphasis on what he terms the ‘processual character of identification’ (1986: 137). This emphasis would in turn appear to be based on the ethnographic observation that the mobility of people is so high that most people do in fact end up in different places and may even find ‘homes’ in a series of different areas during their
life times. While he does not quite spell it out this way, he cites a number of cases that support a view that an individual may adaptively acquire identifications, seemingly of more or less equal weight, with a multiplicity of places as he or she successively spends time in them (1986: 136-137). Indeed, there is a deeper message that is suggested (and that has been taken up widely by writers on the desert), which is that the mobility of desert people is so high that it is in fact theoretically and factually unsound to try to picture their society in terms of particular histories, enduring groupings of persons, and the like. Poirier (2005) appears to hold this perspective. In both Myers’ and her portrayals, the desert people do not seem to identify to the same extent with places of the ‘pre-given’ type or with what I have called places of personal origin as I have found many of them to, nor to be so concerned with orienting their lifetime movements with these places in mind. In Poirier’s account, every individual has a ‘composite identity’ (2005:92). This concept could no doubt be applied to some people in my study area, but most, even as older adults who have inevitably acquired other attachments to various places as a result of a lifetime’s movements, still retain a primary identification with the home as acquired through the circumstances of birth and/or early experiences. Vachon’s findings seem to be much more similar to mine in this respect, than do those of Myers and Poirier. He makes it clear that his informants still regard their initial ‘home-place’ connections as primary even though they have all spent decades living out of contact with them. In my observation, most desert persons who do move permanently away from their original country tend to have difficulty in fully adjusting to the new place and/or achieving acceptance there.

**Ngurra and Parna**

In the last section I discussed how the term *ngurra* is applied to either a camp or to a person’s birth site or area of intimate early associations. Unlike what has been reported (separately) by Myers, Poirier and Vachon, I have found that the people of the study area do not generally use the term *ngurra* in reference to sites associated with Dreaming beings, unless it is in reference to a place where a Dreaming being actually ‘made a camp’. I have tested this on a number of occasions with my informants, asking them whether such and such a site along a Dreaming

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106 At one point Poirier in effect weighs up the two alternatives, on the one hand initial identification with country (through birth and conception, and/or through maternal or paternal affiliation), and on the other hand, identifications arising through experiences that come later in life (2005:101). It seems that she acknowledges that the former type are more basic, though she does not quite say so. In my study area, there is an unmistakable consensus about this.
track is a *ngurra*, and having them reply with something like: ‘No, he didn’t make a camp here, he only had a dinner-stop’; or ‘No, he just did a *kumpu*’ (i.e. urinated, perhaps making a channel in the ground); or ‘No, he blasted through and made that gap in the range here, so he could get to the other side, but he made his camp further on.’ The places where the beings did make a camp and that are thus termed ‘*ngurra*’ are usually among the more important places, but even this is not necessarily so. Individual Dreaming ‘sites’, if not referred to by their names, are normally designated by the main physical feature (waterhole, hill, etc) or by a reference to the activity that the being performed there (such as having dinner, doing a *kumpu*, or blasting through a rocky ridge), with these latter sorts of places not being thought of as camps. A larger area associated with a Dreaming being may be referred to as that being’s ‘*parna*’.

While it may be used for the constellations of sites that an individual considers to be ‘home’ on the basis of intimate early associations, when people are thinking about an area of ‘country’ as such, as opposed to an idea like ‘my home area’, the term they will use is *parna*, or its synonym *manta*. As discussed when speaking of the sacred in chapter 3, *parna* connotes earth or country as seen in its largest dimensions down to its smallest; and whether the reference is to the places carved out by the Dreaming beings or to any areas used by, or associated with people (including groups of people). Thus this term, and not *ngurra*, is applied also to the areas of country, usually containing several sites, that sometimes (but not systematically) occur and that are associated with the ‘group formation’ that I alluded to above and that I discuss much further in chapters 5 and 6. The reason I remark on this matter is because Myers made a significant analytical point (in which he has been followed by others, including Poirier) out of the homology that he proposed between the desert ideas of Dreaming ‘country’ and the living places (camps) of human beings, as mediated by the notion of ‘*ngurra*’ (1986:54-57). If I understand what he said there, it was to the effect that while the idea of the human camp embodies the fundamental human zone of dwelling (which is a small and intimately ordered social space), in the everyday world the camp is always a transitory phenomenon; but that, as projected into the Dreaming realm, it takes on a timeless, enduring (and geographically extensive) character that appears to be outside of human creation, and that also provides a vision of a social interconnectedness that is much larger and more

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107 According to Tonkinson (1991:66) the Mardu also use the term ‘*manda*’ (i.e. *manta*) for the country that comprises an estate.

108 2005:62-3
inclusive in scope, while retaining its apparent basis in those intrinsic human bonds typified in the camp. I believe this insight to be correct and valuable, and I am not arguing with it, but simply saying that, for the Ngaanyatjarra at least, the picture does not seem to be so neatly reflected in the use of the same term (*ngurra*) for the two orders of reality. Indeed it would appear that there is another way in which the Ngaanyatjarra may understand ‘country’, in which it is not associated with the domestic space, but in which (as discussed in chapter 3) the concept of the physical earth is brought into the nexus. ‘Country’ itself is many things to the desert people: for instance it comprises or supplies a set of resources and a place in which to live, and also an index of individual and social connections. Importantly, it is also a medium through which the social and cosmological order is understood and constituted. The connotation of the physical earth in the Ngaanyatjarra notion of country links these issues of order with the realm of the sacred and the mysterious. That earth is associated with this realm is shown by the difficulty that Ngaanyatjarra people find in excluding from significance even the smallest portion of it; and by the fact that, as shown in the Dreaming story for Pamtirripi, it is considered to have something to do with the very substance and character of humankind. Thus we may predict, for example, that any questions to do with the constitution of social groups and their connectedness with country (even if it is a simple matter of the use of an area as a ‘range’, to use Stanner’s term\textsuperscript{109}) are liable to be tinged, at least, with the idea of the sacred, and as such to be felt to have a degree of unknowability about them. This is certainly a different image from the one in which country is imbued with the qualities of the domestic realm, but there is no reason why both images should not be present.

**Ingold and ‘direct perception’**

In my discussion in these chapters about cultural identifications and associations between and among persons, animals, the Dreaming and the physical environment, I have ventured significantly into the territory of Tim Ingold, who has written extensively and influentially in this subject area. There is a particular need for me to address the similarities and differences between my approach and his, since his work, interesting as it is, is problematical for an anthropology that seeks to base itself firmly in the social. He has been involved in a debate with Myers over issues that relate to this. As Peterson comments, Ingold’s work represents

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{109} ‘Range’ in Stanner’s usage referred to ‘the area used by the members of a band supporting themselves day by day’ (Peterson 2008:185); and is explicitly distinguished from notions of ownership, which are dealt with under the concept of the ‘estate’. I am merely making the point here that even the ‘range’ can come to be thought of as having a more lasting or deeper meaning for the people who use it.}
the clearest statement of a strongly phenomenological (and sometimes unduly asociological) trend that has emerged among a number of recent writers on Aboriginal culture.\footnote{Peterson 2008:190-1. Examples mentioned by him include Deborah Bird Rose (1992), Elizabeth Povinelli (1993), Sylvie Poirier (2005) and Daniel Vachon (2006).}

In his article entitled ‘Hunting and gathering as ways of perceiving the environment’ (1996), Ingold pieces together other writers’ ethnographic material that shows certain common threads among the perspectives of various hunter-gatherer groups. The threads generally concern the making by these peoples of some sort of homology between persons and their sustaining environment (the Pygmies of the Ituri forest); persons and animals (the Cree of northeastern Canada); and persons and the landscape (the Pintupi of the Australian Western Desert). Much of the material he assembles is reminiscent to some degree of Ngaanyatjarra ideas. For example he cites Feit (1973:116):

In the culturally constructed world of the Waswanipi [a sub-group of the Cree Indians]
the animals, the winds and many other phenomena are thought of as being ‘like persons’
in that they act intelligently and have wills and idiosyncrasies, and understand and are
understood by men.

There is also a quote from Tanner, for another Cree group:

The facts about particular animals are reinterpreted [by Cree] as is they had social
relationships between themselves, and between them and anthropomorphized natural
forces [such as the wind], and furthermore the animals are thought of as if they had
personal relationships with the hunters.

While appreciating the ethnographic material of these two authors, Ingold’s thesis is in
opposition to the position of both of them, inasmuch as they take it for granted that the
‘homologies’ that they cite are culturally constructed or ‘reinterpreted’ by the people. For
Ingold, both these writers, and others including Myers for the Pintupi, fall into the trap of
viewing hunter-gatherers through the lens of Western thought, which makes certain
assumptions about what is real and what is imagined, and what is the same and what is
different. Faced with interpreting the Cree view of the world as illustrated above, Western
thought (argues Ingold) sets out with an assumption of a dichotomy between the human and
the animal and assumes that the Cree are making analogies or homologies between them
This dichotomous Western viewpoint that he speaks of may also be expressed as nature versus culture or mind versus body. In contrast, Ingold’s view is that hunter-gatherers do not see humans and animals as fundamentally different. They do not restrict the domain of ‘the mind’ to humans, but attribute mind to both humans and animal. Similarly, they do not confine animals to ‘nature’. Nature and culture are attributions applicable to both humans and animals. It is from the starting point of this fundamental unity (not dichotomy) that the hunter-gatherer then may go about ‘exploring the differences between humans and animals’ – not the analogies between them (ibid:133).

He writes that hunters are engaged in an ‘exploratory quest’ for knowledge about the environment that they live in, about the animals that they hunt and eat, and so forth (ibid:145). ‘Hunters and gatherers, in their practices, do not seek to transform the world; they seek revelation. The intentions of non-human animals ... are revealed to ... hunters in the outcomes of their endeavours. And [turning to Myers’s work] Pintupi are forever alert to signs in the landscape that may offer new clues to ancestral activity in the Dreaming.’ (ibid:145).

In Ingold’s view, what is revealed to the hunter-gatherer is something (information) that is truly ‘there’ in the nature (and behaviour) of the animals concerned. Apparently, with his reference above to the Pintupi, Ingold equally thinks of the activities of the Dreaming ancestors as truly ‘there’ to be seen. He elaborates:

‘Knowledge of the world is gained by moving about in it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed. Learning to see, then, is a matter not of acquiring schemata for mentally constructing the environment [as the anthropologists he is critiquing see it] but of acquiring the skills for direct perceptual engagement with its constituents, human and non-human, animate and inanimate... [It is] ...a process of enskillment’ (ibid:141-2).

Thus, as the hunter-gatherer dwells in his landscape – assuming that this physical world has not been transformed by humans or their machines as has happened in agricultural and post-agricultural societies – he learns it more and more thoroughly and it becomes home to him in an increasingly profound way (ibid:144). Self-evidently, for Ingold, the hunter in his home world has to ‘get things right’ in this learning process, for his survival will depend on him not
having some fanciful idea about the kangaroo he is hunting, for example, but on having accurate knowledge of the habits and characteristics of kangaroos.

Some of this one can readily agree with. I would not exactly characterize the Ngaanyatjarra, as on a ‘quest’ for revelations about the nature of their world, but I have argued that their construction of the Dreaming domain is partly about pursuing such revelations; they do become ‘enskilled’ at living in their world; and they feel deeply at home in it. They do ‘get things right’ about the animals they hunt, or they get enough right to be very successful at it. But even in hunting, it is not all about ‘direct perceptual engagement’. For example, there is a widespread Ngaanyatjarra belief about kangaroos (the animal most prized in the hunt) that has nothing to do with perception. The belief is that every kangaroo has a creature like a small ‘bardi’ (witchetty grub) that lives in its nostril. Sometimes this creature will fall out on to the ground, in which case the kangaroo will stop and search for it before moving on. Even if the kangaroo is in imminent danger through being pursued by a hunter, it will not move from its spot without its *bardi*.

This belief has not developed from careful observations of the noses of kangaroos (or not these alone). It is actually drawn from a Dreaming story concerning Kangaroo. At one particular site along the (Eastern) Kangaroo Dreaming track, near the present day Jameson, the Kangaroo stops when self-preservation would dictate that he move off rapidly. He is compelled to stay put until he finds his *bardi*, that he has lost on the ground. I have spoken at length about reflexivity, and in accordance with this I would expect that there would have been some ‘feedback’ in this case, as in others I have described, between domains. For example, a kangaroo will sometimes inexplicably stop when being chased, a fact that has no doubt fed into the Dreaming story. There is also something particular about the *bardi* that probably accounts for the particular nature of its involvement in this story, though it is not necessary to go into that here.

In my view, though Ingold would presumably disagree and call me ethnocentric, the belief cited above is not based in ‘fact’ as such, and I would say that it does not help, although it is unlikely to hinder, the Ngaanyatjarra hunter in the art of spearing kangaroos. There are many other similar kinds of beliefs that I would put in the same category, but nevertheless a
Ngaanyatjarra man knew more than enough that was based in fact to be as successful in the hunt as anyone with a spear is likely to be. In like manner, I do not believe that the transformations, or the interchangeability as I have referred to it, between and among humans and other creatures or phenomena that are postulated by the Ngaanyatjarra actually occur, although most of the time these non-factual beliefs are of no conceivable practical hindrance to the people that hold them.

I set out earlier a statement by my informant Mr I. Ward about the desirability of looking ‘deeply and carefully’ at the landscape, in order to see what has happened there before – by which he meant the Dreaming events that have happened there. Taken at face value this sounds like exactly the kind of thing Ingold would seize upon, as an illustration of his ‘direct perception’. But I went on to explain how I interpreted my informant’s statement, pointing out the reflexivity that I thought was implicit in what he was saying. Throughout the article discussed here, Ingold accuses various writers – those who view cultural phenomena as culturally constructed - of ‘flatly contradicting’ the understandings of their hunter-gatherer informants (ibid:141). But as illustrated in my discussion, the statements of informants should not necessarily be taken at face value: in fact it can be quite misleading to do so.

Unlike Ingold, but like most other anthropologists, I think that the world that the Ngaanyatjarra see and engage with is a culturally constructed one – and in some respects a great deal of imagination indeed has been demonstrated, though when it comes to survival issues they cannot, and do not, fly too much in the face of the solid reality that impinges from so many directions. While I do not consider their constructions to be objectively true, I do not think that the people are simply ‘fooled’ about these matters, for the constructions serve a variety of purposes. I also do not accept that an anthropology that works with and from the idea of cultural constructedness is thereby destined to ethnocentrism. Such an anthropology is not incapable of comprehending the viewpoint of people of another culture; moreover it is less prone to sociological naivete than writing such as Ingold’s that, for its part, seems to reflect an ingratiating kind of interest in alterity and even an advocacy position with respect to it.
As indicated, Ingold argues that for the hunter-gatherer there is, as he puts it, a ‘fundamental indissolubility’ of elements such as mind and body, human and animal, and human and environment (ibid:141). Unlike Westerners, for whom the world is profoundly divided, hunter-gatherers live in a basically unified world. I have also argued in these chapters that the notion of the ‘dissolution’ of separate forms is applicable to an understanding of the worldview of the desert people, but I have treated it as something that is seldom realised in everyday life. Its manifestation needs rather to be seen in terms of an experience for the persons involved, that requires a special setting and the evocation of presences, past activities, memories and the like. I have also suggested that when such a dissolution of forms as such does occur, what emerges is a sense of ‘essence’ – that is, of the essence of the Dreaming that defines the site where the experience occurs. Possibly this is similar to Ingold’s idea that the hunter-gatherer, starting from his point which is devoid of the profound divisions characteristic of the Western worldview, goes about ‘exploring the differences’ between humans and animals, or between different animals. But this aside, as I see it the concept of indissolubility’ is only one of the ingredients of the desert worldview. Distinctiveness and hierarchy are just as fundamental. So is uncertainty. For example, everything that is sacred is part of a whole, but it is not completely clear cut as to what is sacred and what is not – or how sacred particular things are. We have seen how ‘all the earth (parna)’ can be seen by the Ngaanyatjarra as essentially one, but in a way this is ‘playing it safe’. Parna, understood as an integral part of the human person and of ‘culture’ is unquestionably sacred, but given this, how does one go about deciding on a quantitative basis how much or how little should be affirmed as sacred? All is not ‘seamless’.

I find Ingold’s work useful to the extent that he has brought together some of the ideational or cultural commonalities of hunter-gatherers, and provided a focus on some interesting issues of ontology in a way that others had not previously done. I regard his fundamental thesis, though, as unacceptable. Contrary to what he argues, we are still always talking about ‘views’ when it comes to these cultural phenomena. We are not talking about reality apprehended directly.
Conclusion

The Dreaming, basically, is a component – and a very significant, almost all-encompassing component - of the desert people’s response to the given material conditions of life. These material conditions were at the most challenging end of the spectrum in terms of what was viable for a human society, and the depth of the response to this challenge is shown in the way in which the Dreaming framework is able to meaningfully integrate so many aspects of life, and even to some extent to integrate people themselves, over vast tracts of country, thereby giving them so much the better chance to survive and prosper.

The Dreaming incorporates a certain vision of country, or rather a range of visions. The most spectacular is that of the huge, sweeping framework of the major Dreaming tracks, which apart from enabling a number of different sorts of interconnectedness, provided some sort of comprehensibility to the vast reaches of the landscape that from time to time the people might be required to traverse. But some of its formulations are focussed on localised areas and in some instances on personalised creations (that still were ‘of the Dreaming’); and its ability to accommodate the local and the individual in this way is also critical.

Underlying the edifice of the Dreaming as an ‘already produced’ structure, albeit one that is in various ways ‘re-engaged’ with by successive generations of people, is the ‘tjukurrpa-thinking’ that gave rise to it, and that is also employed in many spheres and situations that are not directly part of ‘The Dreaming’. By the same token, it is because tjukurrpa-thinking is, or can be, ubiquitous in this way that the other ‘domains’ of the species, the environment and the human can be drawn into a ‘complex’ together with the characterisations and mechanisms of the Dreaming itself. This reflexivity quality of tjukurrpa-thinking, between the various domains, is integral not only to the sense of getting close to the unravelling of the mysteries of existence that can occur for the desert people at their Dreaming sites, but also to the experience at these places of being in the presence of the numinous.

In these chapters, apart from examining in detail the more well known, ‘middle of the road’ roles and functions of the Dreaming, I have considered both the heights that it can sometimes reach, as well as its inherent limitations. In relation to the former I have shown how the passing on of the ‘capabilities’ of a given reaming being is not just as matter of propagation
or ‘increase’ issues, but that it can extend to perceived behavioural characteristics such as those of Young Turkey; how it can incorporate a detailed vision of the landscape over an area as large as 100 sq km; how it can sometimes have the most intimate of associations with an individual, as with Ngirntaka and Tommy Simms; and how it can be associated with deep revelations and experiences of the sacred. As for its limitations, the vision that the Dreaming possesses for the incorporation of each new human being within in its beautifully integrated, multi-levelled schema comes into conflict with some basic forces associated with human physical reproduction and with the human impetus to seek continuity and stability. The fact that each baby born has a father and a mother gives rise, in some form or other, to the idea that there must be some significance, for the child, in the places associated with both of these persons (if not others as well). If even in the desert, with its dominant discourse about the primacy of the conception or birth site, some kind of notion of a pre-given connectedness to the country of one’s parents is universal, as it appears to be, the logic of the Dreaming’s proposition of ego’s origin in the Dreaming is compromised from the start.

But it goes much further than this. I have indicated that many Ngaanyatjarara people do not necessarily see their connectedness to country only, or even primarily, in terms of their connection to the Dreaming, as important as this is. In so doing I have pointed out the importance of the notion of the personal origin place and have given some consideration to how this notion relates not only to the issue of connectedness to the Dreaming but also to the connectedness to country of key other persons in the individuals’ life. In a sense, the next two chapters represent a further exploration of this avenue of enquiry. I will be discussing in these chapters the more practical aspects of the way in which the desert life was lived, in an attempt to identify the major factors involved in what we may term social organisation. My particular questions are about the extent to which social group formation occurred. I wish to explore to what degree individuals could be considered to be embedded within enduring groups of close kin in relation to both their connectedness to country and the conduct of their everyday lives. Part of the issue here concerns the practical constraints that would inhibit group formation in the harsh conditions of the desert. Hence in chapter 5 I give attention to the environmental conditions, the nature of the people’s adaptation to them by way of cyclical patterns of living, and the levels of population that were achieved in these circumstances. I then describe the type of research I undertook to try and discover how particular people, past and present, were configured in space across the landscape; and I relate how this research showed the presence,
in some instances, of groupings, that are referred to as ‘families’; while in other instances no such groupings were present. I then draw some of the threads together in a discussion of the desert ‘landholding’ and ‘land ownership’ systems. In chapter 6 I continue with further discussion of the sort of group structuration that I have identified, assisted by the consideration of a set of case studies. The thrust of all this is to try and achieve a more multidimensional understanding to the nature of desert connectedness to country that I have begun in the past three chapters on the Dreaming.
Chapter 5

Population and Environment; Family Groups; landownership and ‘landholding’

This chapter is in three parts. The first considers population issues, including the numbers and densities of people living in the two sectors of the study area. These are critical concerns for an ethnography of the desert, where people were living at the limits of viability in terms of both the sheer difficulties of survival and the amount of predictability that they could introduce into their life-ways. Before approaching topics like social and territorial organisation among a people who were so dispersed and so few in total numbers, we need to have a good feel for exactly what these numbers and conditions were. At the same time it is difficult to obtain this information, since it was only when the classical way of life was virtually over that outsiders became interested in (and had acquired the wherewithal to) collect data on a people who had been occupying the desert for millennia without records being kept. Necessarily, most of my information comes from the oral memory of the people themselves. The second part of the chapter begins with a consideration of the nature of the social interconnectedness among people and between people and country. I present the evidence for the existence of two models relating to these matters: one built on an ego-centric, largely lateral type of relatedness across a relatively broad social and geographical landscape; and one in which there is a development of more delimited, stratified groupings of a socio-centric kind, that have linkages to particular areas. My argument is that while the former model, which I will refer to as the ‘lateral’ model, reflects an adaptation to the harshest of desert conditions, the latter, which I call the ‘lineal’ model, is regularly trying to emerge wherever and whenever a local group of people with a distinct identity is able to gain some sort of secure foothold and traction. The lateral model, which in general terms may be said to be the model described by Myers (1986), enables the people to make the best of a very harsh set of material conditions - though this does not mean it is to be viewed as in any sense deficient as a template for a way of life. Every aspect and dimension of life is catered for: some, like the Dreaming domain, with a marked degree of sophistication and elegance. But it seems that there is a human impetus to take opportunities for the enhancement of the predictability of life, and the achievement of some sort of security and continuity for ‘me and mine’ whenever these present themselves; even in the desert, where there are few enough
such opportunities. We shall see many examples of the various ways in which such rare opportunities have been taken up with alacrity. Because the ‘lateral’ model has been so extensively described by Myers, I tend to concentrate my discussion on the lineal model. In chapter 6, I consider the nature of landownership and landholding within the lineal model.

The third part of the chapter turns from issues of social structure, connectedness, owning and holding country and the like, to classical population distribution and movement. I begin with a review of the environmental conditions and zones of the study area, as these relate particularly to the resources used by the desert dwellers. In the course of this I elucidate what I argue to be the two characteristic ‘modes’ of desert living, the pirnangu (rain-time) mode and the kurli (dry time) mode, pointing in the process to a major contrast in this regard between the northern and southern sectors. I then consider the role of other ‘drivers’ of population movement, paying particular attention to the part played by ceremonial gatherings. Finally, I focus on the social composition of ‘camps’ as the fundamental ‘living unit’ of the desert, arguing that these need to be seen as entities that are based on theconjugal family rather than on the individual. I relate this back to my point in Part 2, arguing that although it is important for survival in the desert to develop extensive lateral relatedness, the narrower, more inwardly-focussed types of bond that are characteristic of the conjugal family and of a ‘me and mine’ perspective are persistently emergent and ready to consolidate into more enduring, lineally-based kinds of entities.

PART ONE

Populations and cohorts – the southern sector

In 1990 I began a project of attempting to identify the names and identities of all people who have been born and lived in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for as far as back as the recollection of informants extend, which is to the late 1800s. I will refer to the persons identified in this way as ‘Ngaanyatjarra antecedents’, bearing in mind that the list includes some (older) living persons, although it is mostly the earlier generations that I am concerned with under this heading.
Map 5A: The Study Area, showing high density portion of southern sector (Area A + B) and core southern demographic zone (Area A).
The work that I have done on this project has been supplemented by material collected by several other anthropologists who have worked in the region for shorter periods.\textsuperscript{111} All information collected by others has been cross checked against my own. It is obviously an ambitious task to try to compile this kind of information comprehensively across such a large area, and the project will never really be complete. Effectiveness relies firstly on plumbing the limits of the memories of as many informants as possible; and secondly in being aware of all the factors (and there are many) that might produce inaccuracies in the figures. However I think that the information as it stands is good enough to give some fairly reliable indications about a number of matters, such as the size and density of the population of the region in classical times.

The most complete portion of the compilation work has been undertaken for an area of about 37,000 sq km in the southern part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. This area, which was more fully researched because of native title considerations that have no bearing on the present study, represents about 75\% of the area I am calling the ‘southern sector’. Within this 37,000 sq km area, there is a smaller zone of 22,000 sq km, covering the Warburton and Jameson areas, for which the best information exists at this stage. I will refer to this as my ‘core southern demographic zone’. It is from the figures for this area only that I have produced the population projections presented below.

I have organised the Ngaanyatjarra antecedents for this core zone, from the earliest period of informant recollection to the turn of the C21st, into seven cohorts. These cohorts are defined as follows:-

\textit{Classical period}

Cohort 0 - covers the people born between 1860 and 1879.

Cohort 1 - covers the people born between 1880 and 1899.

Cohort 2 - covers the people born between 1900 and 1919.

Cohort 3 - covers the people born between 1920 and 1939.

\textsuperscript{111} Such work has mainly been undertaken in the context of native title research.
Post-classical period

Cohort 4 - covers the people born between 1940 and 1959.
Cohort 5 - covers the people born between 1960 and 1979.
Cohort 6 - covers the people born between 1980 and 1999.

I have called the first cohort ‘Cohort 0’ because the data is much less reliable than it is for the others, its membership being artificially low for the reason that information pertaining to this long-ago period sorely tests the memories of informants. As would be expected, for the same reason, Cohort 1 is also smaller than Cohort 2, which is smaller than Cohort 3. However the discrepancies between these are not so large as the gap between Cohorts 0 and 1.

I have organised the seven Cohorts into what I call a classical period and a post-classical period respectively. I have grouped cohorts 0 to 3 under the classical period and 4 through 6 into the post-classical period. This is because I identify 1940 as the cross-over point between the classical period and the modern period. This decision to identify 1940 as the critical date I have arrived at through a consideration of a variety of (qualitative) historical factors. It was with the establishment of the Warburton Mission in the heart of the southern area of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in the early 1930s that critical changes were heralded for the classical way of life. Initially only a small number of people were seriously affected, but by about 1940 conditions may be said to have reached a point of transition.\footnote{112}

In fact, as I indicated in the introduction, the overall transformation in the southern sector of the Lands from the classical independent hunter-gatherer way of life to a basically settled way of life involving a form of integration within the Australian state is something that we need to understand as having occurred fairly gradually, over approximately a 30-year period. The period extended from the early 1930s to the mid 1960s. As is indicated at many points throughout this study, the population was highly dispersed, meaning that for most people, their primary attachment was to country that was distant to varying degrees from the mission.

\footnote{112 The idea of a single ‘watershed’ date of 1940 is only applicable when the issue is of a general nature. When it comes to particular persons and groups, there may be specific circumstances that render the date inapplicable. For example, people of the country in the immediate locality of Warburton were impacted almost immediately by the mission.}
which until 1956 (when the Giles weather station was built) was the only external agency in the Lands. While almost everybody eventually began pursuing a pattern of life that brought them periodically to the mission, where they often traded dingo scalps for food, the most distantly located groups were the last to come into contact with the mission and the last to adopt this new pattern of movement. Given the drought conditions through much of this period, and bearing in mind that some of the people came to use the mission as a ‘child minding centre’ for varying periods, the presence of the mission in many ways supported the prolongation of the largely classical way of life beyond what would have otherwise occurred, while also introducing gradual changes to it. Thus, in the 1940s and '50s there were still many people living as ‘nomadic’ hunter-gatherers, or primarily living that way of life, but I take it that conditions were beginning to become substantially different by about 1940. So, I consider that Cohort 3 (covering people born between 1920 and 1939) must be considered as the last cohort born in the time when virtually total classical conditions prevailed.

Having identified the watershed dates and periods in this way, I must go on to acknowledge that the southern area of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands had in fact been affected to some extent from outside since considerably earlier, from the 1890s onwards. The 1890s is when the gold rush occurred in Kalgoorlie, Laverton and many other places on the western fringe of the Desert, as far north as Wiluna. Associated with this was a loss of population from the southern part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (including from my core 22,000 sq km zone). However, it has been possible to allow for much of the population loss that occurred to the west as a result of the Goldfields phenomena, by having access to information pertaining to many, perhaps most, of the people from the Lands who actually ‘emigrated’ during that period, particularly when it comes to the period of Cohort 3, those born 1920-1939. The oral memory of informants relating to the people who departed during that period is relatively good. Moreover, the people who left in that period (or their descendants) in many cases have maintained connections with the people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Many have in fact returned, particularly during the 1990s, to live in the Lands; many pay occasional visits; and many retain some knowledge of their connection to particular geographical places through remembered genealogical linkages. For people whose antecedents departed from the Lands at an earlier time, from the 1890s through to the late 1910s, all this is less likely to be the case.
Most relevant to our present concerns is that there remains a good ‘corporate memory’ about cohort 3, the 1920-1939. Contemporary informants well remember those born in this period and what happened to them. The figures for this cohort are the most reliable ones as far as the classical period is concerned. Although the figures for earlier cohorts are less reliable, for obvious reasons I did not leave those periods out of account altogether. Part of my task was to try and assemble as complete a record as possible of the classical days as can be achieved by plumbing surviving people’s memories. Even if the demographic figures are relatively unreliable, the information is still valuable in a number of ways.

On the basis of the research as it presently stands, figures for the numbers of persons in the early cohorts, for the 22,000 sq km core southern demographic zone are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort number</th>
<th>Number of persons ('Ngaanyajarra antecedents') identified as cohort members for the core southern zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 2 (combined)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5A: Classical cohorts and their membership numbers, core southern sector demographic zone**

Utilising the figures of cohort 3 as the most reliable ones, we need to correct to allow for the fact that the members of more than one cohort are alive at any given time. If we estimate the life expectancy in classical times to have been around 50 years, we will need to multiply the figure of 123 by 2.5.\(^{113}\) This would give an indicative population figure for this zone of approximately 300. (Bearing in mind that, if anything, the figure would have been higher than this, since there are sure to be have been some people who have been forgotten or otherwise overlooked.)

Within the 22,000 sq km of the zone, this population of 300 would represent a density of around 1 person per 75 sq km. This is higher than the figure of around 1 per 100 sq km

\(^{113}\) This life expectancy figure seems reasonable, in that it refers to people who attained adulthood. The figure for ‘life expectancy at birth’ would of course have been lower.
estimated by Berndt in 1959, with whom Gould agreed in 1969.\textsuperscript{114} They are the most relevant previous writers in the present case, as they were both considering the same or comparable parts of the desert.

I suggest my relatively high figure results from the fact that the zone I am dealing with here is particularly fertile. The more northerly part of the southern sector would almost certainly show lower figures – more in line with the northern sector (see below). I would judge that the higher rate would apply to the other 15,000 sq km of the 37,000 sq km of the southerly part of the southern sector (See Map 1B). So the total for this zone would be 300 plus 200, which equals 500. The remaining 13,000 of the southern sector is more likely to have been populated at the rate of 1:180, which results in a population of about 70. On this basis the total southern sector population would have been around 570.

Population in the Northern Sector

For the calculation of population figures for the northern sector I have had to adopt a somewhat different approach, for two reasons. Firstly, I did not work for as long a period with the northerners, consequently I never got so far here with the ‘memory plumbing’ exercise with informants; and I am also less confident of having a grasp of every aspect of their history that might be relevant. Secondly, there are the historical differences, particularly the relative shallowness of the ‘contact period’ in the northern case, and the fact that the northerners have not had an unbroken continuity of residence in their country. These factors make it much more difficult in the northern case to undertake an exercise like looking back over the people’s entire antecedent population and assigning individuals to a sequence of cohorts.

On the other hand, I was able to make use of an existing body of information of a kind that did not exist in the southern case. I refer to the documentation of the Department of Native Welfare Officer Jeremy Long, whose unique personal experience with the people was

\textsuperscript{114} Gould (1969: 64), drawing on the estimate of Berndt (1959: 86) suggested 1: 35 to 40 sq miles (90 to 103 sq km). Writing about the area of my northern sector Myers (1986: 27) concurs with Long’s (1971: 264) figure of 1: 200 sq km, while Doussett has recently also proposed a figure of 1: 200 sq km. As stated below, my figure for this sector is 1: 180 sq km, which confirms these estimates. Cane (1990) estimated 1: 150 sq km (presumably for the whole of the desert): again, I imagine that this would not be far off the mark.
fortuitously supplemented by an interest in detailed documentation (and an ability to undertake it).

This information, together with figures and names from Balgo Mission (which was the other main centre, apart from the NT locations covered by Long, to which emigrations occurred from the northern sector) formed the basis for a count, undertaken for native title purposes, of the classical population of the Kiwirrkura native claim area. This area was roughly 40,000 sq km in extent, and comprises 40% of the area that I have delineated as the northern sector for the purposes of this thesis.

I arrived at a total of 176 people who left the 40,000 sq km area, by the two major routes, to the north and the east, between the 1940s (or in an unusual case involving two men, the early 30s) and the mid 60s. By the latter time the area was completely depopulated, apart from a handful of persons. Allowing for the fact that a (much smaller) number departed to the south and the west in the same general period; and that some will have inevitably been overlooked, it would seem reasonable to give a population estimate for this area of 200 – 250 persons (say 220).

Extrapolating from this figure to the rest of the northern sector gives an overall figure of 550, at a density of 1:180 sq km. Remembering that our figure for the southern sector was 570, we have a total population figure of around 1,120 for the 150,000 sq km of the study area.

Finally, the date of the transition from the classical to the post-classical era obviously came later in the north than it did for the southern sector people. Given that in the north the first direct contact with Europeans in the form of the patrol officers - between the mid 1950s and the mid 1960s - was associated with such a dramatic change in the people’s circumstances, it might seem an easy matter to propose that the appropriate transition date for the north lies within this period. But there had been a drain of the population for some years prior to this, to the extent that considerable attention has been given in the literature to whether or not the configuration of people discerned by patrol officer Jeremy Long could be considered to be representative of the classical situation. Given this, it would be unwise of me to venture an
opinion on this particular matter without a much deeper consideration of relevant material than I am able to undertake in this thesis. In any case, the matter is not critical for me, as I am not attempting such a definitive portrayal of these kinds of issues for the north.

PART TWO

Country of identification; genealogical groupings; land holding and ownership

The population research project for the southern sector is not solely about demography. An important part of the project has involved assessing the place that each person occupies within the relationship networks of the Lands, and indeed it has been primarily in the course of undertaking this task that my understanding of the nature and configuration of these networks has emerged.

As the material built up, one of the first things to become apparent, though it was hardly unexpected, was the high density of interconnectedness exhibited within the desert population, or whatever segment of it we might choose to focus on. That is, each individual has – or is considered to have - a relationship with a large proportion of the other individuals in the segment. Moreover each will often relate to particular others via more than one relationship pathway. The chief reason for the latter phenomenon is the tracing of relationships through affinal pathways as well as through consanguineal ones. Networks of people constituted in this way are not easily divided into component groupings. There is no clear-cut ‘principle of descent’, for example, working systematically to drive the emergence of such groupings.

With this kind of society, it is not surprising that attempts on the part of the desert people themselves to depict their kin networks often produce results that are essentially formless. Sometimes a young person working on their own to produce a ‘family tree’ (a term that Lands people are familiar with) will produce quite a small diagram that traces back to their own grandparents and looks something like what a young non-Aboriginal Australian might produce, although it is unlikely to be so neat, because it will almost certainly include some people who are not ‘biological’ relatives. With an older person the exercise may result (if enough time is allowed) in a diagram that ramifies laterally in a seemingly endless and
shapeless way, reflecting the extensive (and necessarily messy) nature of their life experiences, which will include dealings with a large proportion of the membership of the known social universe. Essentially such a diagram represents an egocentric picture. No two people, except possibly siblings, would produce a diagram that began from the same point and ramified outwards in the same way – although most of the actual individual inter-relationships would doubtless be depicted in the same way in different people’s representations. Also, on a different occasion the same person would no doubt produce a diagram that, as it developed, diverged in various ways from the original – reflecting changes in which kin currently figured most significantly in the person’s life.

These considerations simply go to show that a representation of a (large scale) desert social group by means of a conventional genealogical grid must clash with the egocentric basis on which the people often operate experience, and understand, their social world; and with the shifting nature of the parts that various related persons play in their lives.

But do the desert people only ever see the world in this egocentric way? Is it impossible for them to see it socio-centrically? Obviously, it is not. Even within the sorts of ‘family tree’ diagrams I have just referred to, while the basic perspective is ego-centred, the vast majority of the actual content is socio-centric, in that it depicts relationships between particular people and sets of people in a way that would be generally agreed to. But over and above this, there are, as I foreshadowed in the latter part of the previous chapter, social and cultural processes at work that actually drive the emergence of a certain amount of socio-centric structure within the population group; and in line with this, there are many people who take very readily to the depiction of their social world by means of a genealogical model. (The existence of this kind of perspective, incidentally, was actually a pre-condition for me to be able to obtain the information that enabled me to work out the picture of the population cohorts discussed earlier. A totally ‘desert’ egocentric view of the world would not enable the historical past to be viewed sufficiently ‘positivistically’ for the specifications inherent in this picture to have been made.)

In the course of my years of work in the desert two things have become apparent to me that are relevant to this question: first, genealogies that are based on a set of siblings at the apex
It is worthwhile taking a step back here and explaining the kind of research on which these findings were made. Basically, the research was of two kinds. One kind simply involved discussions with informants aimed at elucidating the identities of antecedents and looking out for sets of siblings among these. But this method would not have yielded many results on its own. The second method, which was far more critical to the process, involved the undertaking of field trips across as much as possible of the length and breadth of the study area. These trips would be undertaken with informants who were knowledgeable about, and had connections with the areas concerned. The work involved the documentation of all information that the informants could provide, which would include information about deceased persons (usually antecedents of the trip participants) who were connected with the country. It was during the course of this work that I noticed, particularly in the southern sector (and differences pertaining to the two sectors will be addressed shortly), that a set of siblings would frequently be identified with a given area, as their primary place of connection. By ‘primary place of connection’ I am referring to a connection of the ‘personal origin’ sort, as explained in chapter 4. I said there that such a connection may sometimes also be shared by a group of closely related people, and it is this phenomenon that I am now referring to. Not only would there be a single set of siblings (set A) with this type of shared connection to the area concerned, but almost invariably there would also be some persons, the children of set A (and very often all deceased at the time of research, as were the persons of the earliest set), who also were regarded as having had the same sort of connections to the same area. The minimum size of sibling set A would be two, but was often three or four. More often than not, the siblings of set A would be either all male, or the majority would be male, with one sister also included. In rare cases, the entire sibling set would be female. The children, members of sibling set B, could be of either sex. There would then likely be a third generation, the children of set B, and possibly a fourth or even fifth, depending on how far back in time the earliest set had lived, and how many generations of children had subsequently been born. The connection to place was in effect a ‘collective’ one for all the people of these successive generations, although it was based on the assumption that all the individuals of the early sets had possessed their own ‘personal origin’ kind of connectedness to the area. It was assumed that most of the people had been born there, but in many instances the facts about this had
been forgotten, and in any case the matter was not fundamentally important. The crux was that it was believed that each person had had a real personal association with the area, involving living in the area when young and at other times during their lives. This grouping, the living members of which are referred to as a particular ‘family’ (nowadays having a surname) may sometimes be held to have collectively ‘come from the Dreaming’ (i.e. the Dreaming of the area concerned), but this is often not the case, for the parna concerned often does not have a singular and coherent Dreaming imprint. The area of country understood as associated with a family group is not essentially founded on a Dreaming basis, but on the basis of the shared lived experiences of people.

The amount of fieldwork that I have undertaken over the years has meant that I have been able to basically ‘fill’ the entirety of the map of the study area with ‘early’ named persons (usually long deceased). Some of the names are grouped together in sibling sets in the way that I have just described, while others are found ‘sitting solo’ (that is, not joined into sibling sets) on the map. In the latter cases there may be descendants, but they are not formed into the kind of groups that I am talking about. In the northern sector, such cases are prevalent, and there are also some in the southern sector, but wherever fertile conditions are found, the phenomenon of group formation is likely to have occurred. (See chapter 6 for a discussion of ‘fertility’.) There are some areas of the map that are completely vacant in regard to names - usually the most infertile areas - but otherwise no large areas remain unmatched by names. In the case of fertile areas that are reasonably large there may be two or more sibling set groupings (and associated ‘families’) identified with the area.

Almost invariably a past sibling set that is associated with country in the way described will in fact comprise the antecedents of a grouping of living people (conceived of as a family) that is considered to have a collective connection with the geographical area concerned. In a few cases in the southern sector, the persons named in the early sibling sets moved away from the Lands to the Eastern Goldfields (or their children did), and they and their descendants have either never returned or are seen in the Lands only sporadically. In such cases the collective connection of the living family members to their antecedents’ parna is a weak one, and will only be able to be revived with strenuous effort. In most cases in the southern sector, however, the families have continued to live in the Lands. Inevitably, at a certain historical point (sometime between the mid 1930s and the mid 1960s), members of these families
ceased to be born in their own parna, or in any bush locations, and began to be born (and to spend most of their time) at Warburton Mission. Nevertheless, a sense of continuing identification with the same parna was maintained, and the collective connection continues to be recognised. Discussion of such matters as the geographical size of the associated areas of these groupings, and the distribution of the groupings, follows in chapter 6, along with some Case Studies.

The membership of these socio-centric, genealogically constituted groupings with their intrinsic connection to country is only recruited through birth, but on the other hand, as with any cognatic system, any given individual will potentially belong to at least two such groupings, that of the father and the mother respectively. While the ‘early’ antecedents are (putatively) fixed in the one place and have only one set of descendants, persons in subsequent generations will have antecedental connections elsewhere as well. I mentioned that females can be part of the apical sibling set (and of course of subsequent generational sets as well). However, except in the special cases where the apical sibling set is entirely female, the numbers of females in each of the early generations (the members of which are now all or almost all deceased), are consistently less than the number of males. Analysis of the groupings shows that the male and female presence in the early generations of the groupings is weighted roughly 80/20; that is, there are four males to every one female. This means that although people trace themselves back through both male and female antecedents, many more females than males are ‘forgotten’ in the reckoning that occurs. The effects are (a) that the groupings are skewed in a patrilineal direction; and (b) that the number of potential ‘families’ to which a given living individual may belong is greatly reduced. In practice most people, for most of the time, regard themselves as belonging to one family only. The few cases where the apical sibling set is wholly female appear to arise when for whatever circumstantial reason, there are few, or no, men remembered as having been associated with the area concerned.

The sort of genealogical group (the ‘family’) that I am talking about is far from a fully-fledged corporate group of the type that are familiar to anthropology from Africa and New Guinea. As I have made abundantly clear, the desert people travelled widely as a condition of their existence – to use Stanner’s term, the ‘range’ covered a wide area - and this was the case even under the most fertile conditions. For much of the time they therefore did not reside together, or not within the area of their parna. By definition they are not what anthropologists
have referred to as a ‘land use’ grouping, linked as this concept is with the notion of the ‘range’.115 (Thus a ‘land use’ group is one that is associated with a necessarily large area that is able to sustain the group economically during a normal annual cycle.) Nevertheless, the logic of the family groups’ formation involves the idea that their parna areas comprised the ‘fulcrum’ of the group’s land use; and the co-association attributed to the members of this group in its home area relied upon a significant amount of shared residence there.

Nor are these groups quite like the ‘estate’ groups as described by Stanner (ibid). They do have a collective identification with their parna but it is not rooted in ritual obligations and privileges with respect to the Dreaming: and it may or may not involve a shared ‘totemic’ connection. A group’s parna itself may or may not possess a clear-cut Dreaming imprint and contain a major Dreaming site as a focal geographical point. The emphasis in the emergence of a particular parna as an entity is on the shared attachment of a set of closely-related coevals (usually around a core sibling set) through early-life experiences, rather than on the conformation of the Dreaming imprint within the landscape. Living members of family groups are considered to have strong rights in the parna of the family, rights of the same kind as those of other persons who have individual personal connections (such as birth connections) to particular places and areas. These rights are considered by Ngaanyatjarra people to amount to what is meant by the English term ‘ownership’. In contemporary life, the families are recognised entities (that are denoted by surnames). The members of a family are bound to one another by ties of obligation: for example, they are expected to act together in a dispute, although in any given dispute situation, the existence of cross-cutting links makes any neat socio-centric alignment in family terms very unlikely. By the same token, the construction of the world in terms of family groups is also regularly at odds with that other worldview in which social priorities and alignments derive from the ego-centred networks of relationships. Nevertheless, people refer to the composition of a community like Warburton or Jameson by reference to a list of the various particular surnamed families that comprise the majority of the population in each case.

In terms of connections to country, most people who are part of ‘families’ consider themselves to share in the collective connection that the family framework gives them,

115 Stanner, 1965b.
although this will certainly not stop them from pursuing connections to other places on other grounds: for example, if they themselves were born elsewhere than in the *parna* of their family, they possess ‘ownership’ rights to this place too. Moreover, it sometimes happens that persons who are clearly recognised as members of one family (family A) may claim connection to the country of family B on the basis of a genealogical linkage that goes back a generation *further* than the generation of the two ‘apical’ sibling sets of A and B respectively. In some cases this ‘extra’ link might involve a woman, or rather two women who were sisters. Thus the mother of the set of apical siblings of family A would be the sister of the mother of the set of apical siblings of family B. Such a situation is still consistent with the notion that siblings are associated with the same country.

Apart from the fact that they do not have their basis in the ritual domain, these groups differ in other ways from ‘estate groups’ as found in the literature. Berndt understood estate groups to be based on patrilineal descent, while in Myers’s analysis, estate groups are essentially open-ended sets of persons that are formed in relation to ‘sacred sites’ (1986:128) and that are only ‘groups’ in relationship to the estate (ibid). He refers to the memberships as including ‘descending kindreds of persons who have or had primary claims to sites’ (ibid:158). The Ngaanyatjarra family groups that I am speaking of are not mere kindreds and do have an existence beyond their common connection to their *parna*. They are not patrilineal descent groups, but cognatic ones having a patrilineal bias of about 80% in the upper generations, which is related to the fact that deceased female antecedents are ‘forgotten’ at a much greater rate than male ones. Living antecedents, male or female, are not ‘forgotten’, but there is still a tendency to identify most strongly with the family of the father’s side. Exceptions to this occur when the family of the mother’s side has a significantly stronger presence in the local community.

**The issue of descent**

I am far from making a case for the reintroduction of a wholesale model of descent groups in the desert, a model that has been severely critiqued by many writers, for many good reasons. I acknowledge that the ego-centred perspective on the world that is so pervasive in the desert, including in the Ngaanyatjarra region, is entirely incompatible with such a model. But my point is that there is also another perspective that is continually emergent and trying to get a
foothold, and a concept of descent is integral to this. It is not just filiation that is occurring here. The concept of filiation involves a dyadic relationship between persons in different generations. It is certainly true that the desert people often think this way. For example a person A might say that area P is the country of his father X, and that area Q is the country of his tjamu (grandfather) Y. Let us say that Y is the father of X. If A was operating with a model of descent, his understanding would logically be that his own connection to Q would be via X: there would be a flow of connectedness through the generations. But very often an A will view his relationship to his tjamu as being a direct one, just like his relationship to his father. In this case he does not conceptualise his father as an intermediary in his relationship to his tjamu. It could even be that the tjamu in question is his mother’s father, not his father’s father, and yet he would not spell out any difference between the two situations. This is filiation, and it is part and parcel of the perspective that is associated with an ego-centred viewpoint. What happens when and where a family group comes into existence, is precisely that this filiative perspective is transcended in favour of a descent perspective. The status of the descent perspective in the desert in classical times was a fragile one. It could only emerge sometimes, under the right conditions, and the group with which it was associated would often turn out to have a transient existence. Now, in the post-classical era, this model has gained a lot more traction - not because of the influence of Western modes of thought but because of the fact that the stability of conditions has hugely increased - and it can only be expected to further consolidate itself in the future. It must be emphasised, however, that this is still far from the ancestor-oriented notion of descent that is characteristic of societies where a fully entrenched principle of descent is found. The desert people do not hold antecedents in

116 In chapter 7 I discuss Hamilton’s (1982) analysis of the Western Desert as being in a ‘state of transition’ with respect to landholding, and compare it with what I am saying here.


118 It is arguable that the emergence of ‘descent thinking’ was facilitated by the diffusion into the desert of the section system, which in the Ngaanyatjarra case happened around the turn of the C20th. This system is compatible with both the desert mode of thinking as I have described it, and with a way of thinking based on a descent model.

119 Many would say that the adoption of (English) surnames is an indication that Western ways of thinking have in fact had a major influence. But I would argue that the influence is more superficial than it appears, and that surnames (which began to be applied to people at the mission in the late 1940s and 50s) were attached to entities that were already existing, or were coming into existence as a result of a decade or more of increased opportunities for residential stability. I think the surname situation is analogous to the case of the introduction to the area of the section system earlier in the C20th. The section system ‘fitted’ with pre-existing social organisational forms in the desert, but its adoption enabled communication and articulation with other Aboriginal groups beyond the desert. The surname system can be understood in the same way, except that the external party in this case was ‘the whitefella’. (Apart from any other factors, Aboriginal people have increasingly been obliged to adopt the practices of using surnames because of the requirements of the proliferation of government and other agencies with whom they need to deal.)
any elevated regard or orient themselves back to them. Rather, it is a matter of linking the
living to an area of country on a collective basis, with the connections having become
collective by virtue of the grouping managing to have sustained itself on an inter-generational
basis.

**Landholding and landownership**

The question of whether the family *parna* as I have described it should or could be considered
as an ‘estate’, despite the differences considered above, is integrally related to the question of
how landholding’ and landownership are conceptualised. In terms of Ngaanyatjarra
ethnography, these two concepts are significantly different. Myers refers to both notions, but I
am not quite clear about how he perceives the difference between them. At any rate, his
model revolves around the idea that there will be certain senior men, whose claims to a given
estate have long been fully accepted, who are the country ‘holders’. They have custody of the
ritual procedures and associated paraphernalia of the sites that are at the core of the estate’s
identity, and they have the rights to tell the stories, and to give or withhold access to the sites.
They have rights of control. These men will not necessarily be genealogically related to one
another. This much corresponds with my understanding of the ‘holding’ (*kanyilpayi*) of
country among the Ngaanyatjarra. People do not ‘hold’ country – and have rights of control
over it - merely by being members of family groups, or by having been born in the place
concerned.

The type of associative relationship among the ‘holders’ – basically the senior men, and in
some instances the senior women - is quite different than it is among the members of family
groups. ‘Holders’ act together over a much larger area than the area of any given family’s
*parna*. The set of men who constitute a given group of ‘holders’ are almost certain to have
personal connections to some of the country concerned – their ‘home areas’ will lie within it -
but the overall area within which they function as ‘holders’ will certainly be too large for any
man to have a connectedness rooted in personal associations to all of it. The emphasis with
‘holders’ is on seniority and knowledge of the Dreaming, and on cooperation. It is not on
issues of personal connectedness, though as indicated, each individual should have some such
connectedness to a part of the country over which he acts as a ‘holder’.
Myers speaks of the 'descending kindreds' of the senior men who are the holders. These people will potentially have identifications and rights to the sites and thus to the estate as such, but the extent to which these are realised depend on their acceptance by the existing holders. Myers writes: '[the] primary custodians are the ones who must determine whether to teach an individual about it; they decide on the status of claims' (1986:158). The situation among the Ngaanyatjarra is very similar, although a younger man who is an 'owner' through personal association and/or family connectedness will be entitled to receive this kind of instruction and hence in time to join the ranks of he holders, unless he has really ruled himself out in some way. Such a young candidate does have to 'show willing' through applying himself to learning the law and by consistently providing the older men with meat. But whether or not he pursues this course and eventually becomes an accepted and respected 'holder', he still has very significant rights (not just identifications) in relation to the country with which he has his own connections, as do even the women, and the as yet uninitiated males, who have such personal and/or family connections. Any person, regardless of age or gender, who has these connections with a particular place or area will have a right there that Ngaanyatjarra people call ownership. Even a young woman who was born near a place that is miirl-miirlpa for men will have such a right. She will not be given access to the site and will not officially be allowed to know the story, but she has a right. This kind of right is not dependent on the validation or even the agreement of the senior men who are the holders. This right of ownership is fundamentally a right to have one's connection to the place concerned recognised. In contemporary times where mining exploration compensation money is involved, such a person will be entitled to receive a share of the compensation, with nobody else being able to gainsay this. Younger people or women will not be able to do things like give or withhold consent to a proposal by a mining company to work in an area – that right lies with the senior people as the country holders – but they will be entitled to attend meetings with the company and listen, so that they are informed about what is happening.

I have said that the senior people exercising the right of control need to have a personal connection somewhere within the area over which they exercise 'holding' rights. Normally this is the case, and those senior holders who also have such a connection will certainly stand first and foremost in situations where the right of 'holding' is exerted. But if is happens that there are no such people, other knowledgeable senior people whose own country is not in the immediate area, but is close by, may take on the role of holders. There are significant limits
on this though. Somebody from say Wingellina will not take any part in issues of control over country in the Jameson area, but somebody from Blackstone might.

How does the system in regard to the holding of country work among the senior men? It is not a question of each individual site area, or say the *parna* of a family group, being seen as a separate piece of country requiring to be ‘held’ and controlled by a corresponding group. Neither is any particular Dreaming area (site, section of a Dreaming track, or whatever) seen in this way. Country and its Dreaming imprint are held in common by senior men over relatively broad areas. Indeed, it is only because of the Dreaming dimension to the country that the latter needs to be ‘held’. What needs to be decided on when say a mining company requests access, is whether or not such an occurrence will interfere with the Dreaming forces and the play amongst them. This is the major question that concerns Ngaanyatjarra people in these circumstances. Beyond the possibility of direct disturbance with ‘outstations’ and the like, and with people who might be living in them, they are not concerned with questions of preventing access to other land users on the grounds simply that they are, say, the ‘property owners’. Interference with the Dreaming landscape and its powers is the only issue, and it can only be the fully informed people who can make a determination on this.

The ‘regionalisation’ of the landholding system as such, is paralleled by what happens in relation to the performance of ritual, including the induction of young men into this domain. A decision to undertake a particular ritual performance, and the subsequent staging of it, is not essentially the prerogative of those persons with specific associations to the place, or to the particular Dreaming that is involved. Organisation and enactment involves the wider group of men who are the landholders on the basis just described. When it comes to the induction of young men, this will be planned so that they progress through the various places and Dreaming within the region – and in the custody of the landholding group - starting with the lower-ranked Dreamings and progressing to the higher. The young men who go through this process will need to have a personal connectedness to a place or places within that regional area, just as it is with the senior ‘holders’ themselves, but again they will only have this kind of connectedness to a part of the region. Certainly, a person with a specific connection to a given place and Dreaming will be able to play a prominent part in the ritual life that revolves around it, even from a young age. For instance, such a man is likely to be the first one selected to play the part of that Dreaming being in the course of ritual performances for that
site. But fundamentally, both landholding and the ritual life as it pertains to the land are organized among the men on a collective, regional basis. Neither landholding nor ritual is fundamentally about the individual or localized entitlements that people have, that are referred to by the term ownership.

Thus recruitment to the ‘group’ of men who are the landholders and the ritual players for a region occurs only through induction into the relevant ritual, though there is an ‘entry’ requirement of personal connectedness to a part of the region. The really important issue for landholding is that the association of men involved not only control the ritual life of the region (plus the decision-making that occurs within it in relation to land matters), but that they actively and regularly co-participate in this ritual life, including in relation to the induction of the young men of the region that they jointly hold. In practice, not all of the men involved are ever likely to be co-present at any given time for these activities, but on the occasion of any ritual or decision-making activity many will be. Logically these groupings are of a bounded, socio-centric nature, even if there is considerable fluctuation of the perimeters over time. They are not ego-centrically based entities as is the case in the desert with entities like the ‘tribe’ or the ‘language group’. (See chapter 7.) In the situation of resource stability that exists under post-classical conditions these landholding groupings have undoubtedly become much more stable than under classical conditions, but possibly the scale of the area covered has not altered greatly. From my observations, it is fair to say that within the southern sector four such regional groupings exist, as compared with three within the northern sector. This means that in the south, a grouping covers around 20,000 sq km, and in the north, around 40,000 sq km. These ‘landholding’ arrangements define regions within which a regime of cooperation exists; and in terms of this aspect, the phenomenon is reminiscent of what Myers (1986: 91) means by the term ‘one countryman’. However, most of the time Myers seems to have in mind ego-centric entities when he uses this term (1986:90). ‘[The concept of] “one countryman” focuses on the set of social relations (of co-residence and economic cooperation) with numerous others that the individual can expect to exercise over a long period’ (ibid:73). The people that a Pintupi individual might consider to be ‘one countrymen’ could be extremely wide-ranging, embracing Warlpiri and even Pitjantjatjara people (ibid:88).

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120 If one thinks of the letters of the alphabet being written in order, left to right, across the landscape, people at the spot F may seem to be at the centre of a ‘tribal’ or ‘language group’ association that starts at A and ends at K; but for people at spot K, the association may seem to start at F and end at P. In other words, every given person or group is at the centre of a perceived grouping extending outwards from them.
Ngaanyajarra people would not consider people at that kind of range to have any country-related connections with them at all, though they might co-participate with them in ‘man-making’ ritual (*tjilkatja*). Any personal associations a Ngaanyatjarra person might have with, say, Warlpiri people would not involve any commonality in relation to country – they would be of a purely personal nature. They would have no sociological significance. On the other hand, when talking of people in relation to country as estates, Myers does use the term in a socio-centric sense (ibid: 91). There is a specific (though open-ended) group of people who look after an estate. But individuals can, and usually do, belong to more than one such estate-owning group. Among the Ngaanyatjarra, in my analysis, this does not really apply, since from a landholding point of view there are not multiple separate estates held by different groups, but one larger regional group; while from a ‘landowning’ point of view there may be separate (also socio-centric) groups, but of a different kind from the ones Myers refers to. As with Myers’ ‘one-countryman’ concept, both landholding and landowning groups in my portrayal involve a certain amount of co-residence and cooperation (ibid: 91), but I see them as constituted differently from the equivalent entities as seen by Myers. Finally, in my analysis there will not be landowning groups as such in some geographical areas: there may be only individuals or perhaps associations of individuals who ‘own’ the land in these areas. There should, however, always be landholding groupings: individuals cannot hold land and the Dreaming on their own. If there was no such grouping for an area for an indefinite period, the Dreaming would gradually cease to be a ‘living’ force there.

Sacred boards, landholding and the organization of ritual

There are more layers to the landholding system than I have so far considered. At the heart of the procedures for the conduct of place-related ritual are the sacred boards (*larra*), that are inscribed with the designs for a given Dreaming site or track. These boards, which are described in Appendix 5, are made by the senior men who have personal connections to and ritual responsibilities for the Dreaming and site concerned. Despite the fact that they are acknowledged to have been made by people, the boards are deemed sacred, because they are part of, and in a sense representative of, the Dreaming complex concerned. They are shown to ‘youngfellas’ when they are put through the ritual for the sites concerned, and their significance is explained. What is critical about these boards is that they are not retained long term at the sites with which they are associated, in the possession of the custodians. The point of them, as portable items, is that they are kept in a state of circulation within a wide-ranging...
circle of groups. In effect, the groups among which they circulate are the groups of ‘landholders’ as described in the last section. The field within which such a system operates can be up to 1,000 km or so in diameter (if we visualise them as circular, though their shape can vary far from this). At any particular period, there may be several such ‘rings’ in operation across the desert, some with a clockwise direction of movement, some with an anti-clockwise. A given landholding group may be involved in more than one such ring. It is important to stress, however, that while sometimes such a ring operates with a regular set of participants for a time, in general the rings change their shape frequently to include new participants and by-pass previous ones, who may be involved in other activities at the time. Likewise, there is not a fixed number of rings. One ring may ‘dissolve’ as its constituent groupings become involved in other rings.

The boards function as one of the main drivers of ritual activity of the type that is concerned primarily with the maintenance of Dreamings and their associated powers (as opposed to ritual concerned primarily with initiation). When a particular set of boards is obtained by a landholding group of men A as a result of the exchange process, the group will be stimulated to perform the corresponding ritual. Although the board is likely to have been made in a place far away, the Dreaming with which it is associated will usually be represented somewhere within the country held by A. There is pressure on the men concerned to perform the relevant ritual within a reasonable amount of time so that the boards can be fed back into the exchange ‘ring’. Thus the boards are part of a system, operating at a high level, by which the corpus of ritual pertaining to country and Dreamings over a broad region is collectively maintained by a very widespread set of senior men. This system is not related in a direct way to the ‘holding’ of country itself, or of sites, though by ensuring the performance of land-related ritual it is indirectly crucial to this cause. In terms of the social constitution of these rings, while some of the men involved in a particular ring would be likely to personally know a few of their counterparts even at the more distant extents of the ring, given the size of the areas involved it was far from the case that ‘everybody knew everybody’. The rings do not define any group within which any sort of economic or social cooperation was expected.
PART THREE

Aspects of the desert life world

I begin this section with a basic description of aspects of desert food production techniques, together with some material about the types of resources of food and water (and some other items) that occur in the study area, and about their differential distribution across this area. I do not attempt any kind of comprehensive treatment of the types and distribution of the many different varieties of flora and fauna, edible of otherwise, that are found in the region, or of other kinds of resources and materials of the land, some of which were used by the desert people and some not. I will only make a few observations where I think the matter could be relevant to issues such as variations in population densities, movements of people, and notable differences between the two sectors of my study area.

Population distribution

Since environmental factors have the greatest influence in relation to population distribution and density, there is a need to identify the various types of environmental zones found in the study area, and their distribution. The focus of interest is in how these matters relate to the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer mode of production. Unfortunately, few such studies of any depth exist for the Western Desert. There are certainly none for the Ngaanyatjarra region. In the main detailed work on the subject, Latz (1995) identifies in general terms the various types of plant communities that exist in central Australia and their correlates with factors such as soil conditions.

One of the interesting points that Latz makes is that there is surprisingly little variation in the amount of food available to the hunter-gatherer in most of the different zones and plant community areas of the desert and of central Australia generally (1995: 22). His other related point, and one that is particularly important for our purposes, is that the greatest availability of food occurs when several different types of habitats are found in close proximity:

For example, a spinifex sandplain will supply a limited variety of food, but if a small hill and a claypan abuts the sandplain, a much greater variety of plant foods will be available, especially in the interzone areas (ibid).

121 Perry (1970) is a useful paper.
While ‘variety’ and ‘amount’ of food are different concepts, they relate to one another in terms of our interest in the carrying capacity of the locality, or to phrase it slightly differently, in terms of the question of how much time will be able to be spent in a given area by a given number of people.

Environmental habitats and their distribution across the study area

(a) Dominance of sand and spinifex

In terms of the larger picture, Latz’s comments about the relative uniformity of food availability in the different central Australian habitats suggest that, other things being equal, the distribution of the people across the central Australian landscape in classical times should have been fairly even, despite the environmental diversity across this broad area. But his focus is on ‘central Australia’ as he delineates it, and while this region does contain some Western Desert-like areas (and in fact extends into the eastern part of the desert), a focus purely on the desert would produce a picture different in some respects. Whereas, as Latz says (ibid: 9), sandplains and dune fields (with their associated spinifex grass) comprise more than half of central Australia generally, they are more dominant again in the desert, and certainly in the study area, where they cover more than 75% of the land area. Moreover, while sandhill habitat can occur in small patches in the desert as in parts of central Australia, the Western Desert is particularly characterized by its many vast tracts of dune fields. Although sandhill habitats rate fairly well in terms of the number of plant foods that they supply (ibid: 22), this is mainly the case on their fringes – that is, in the places where they intersect with other habitats. The interior areas of the large dune field tracts are not hospitable to humans in terms of food availability. Neither, for that matter, do they offer much in the way of water sources. For as Latz says (ibid:18) the ‘availability of water is the most important factor governing the movements of people’ in the desert, and by the same token, it is also the most important factor in terms of the ability of particular localities and areas to support the presence of more or less people for longer or shorter periods of time (though food issues are almost equally important). In practice then, what we need to be looking for when thinking of population questions are areas where several types of habitat are in close proximity (providing optimum food collection opportunities) and where drinking water is also likely to be available in reasonable quantities.
(b) **Mulga country**

The next most dominant type of habitat, after the sand country, is probably mulga country,\(^{122}\) which is generally associated with a red earth soil with some clay content. This type of soil is of medium quality in terms of nutrients. The grasses of the mulga understorey are favoured by kangaroos, which also appreciate the shade and the protection from predators (dingoes and humans) that the often fairly dense groves of this tree provide.

(c) **The grassy plains**

Apart from the spinifex covered inter-sand dune plains referred to already, there are extensive areas of flat plain that are dominated by sparse grasses with only scattered trees (often various types of mallee). This type of country is quite infertile and does not yield much in terms of food for the hunter-gatherer. It does however have the advantage of being easily traversed by people on foot, meaning that its presence did not constitute much of a barrier to people’s ability to access a variety of other more productive locations that might be distributed across the general area. In this it contrasted with the sand dune areas in particular.

(d) **Hill country**

Overall, the landscape of the study area could not be said to be noticeably ‘hilly’, but, at least in the southern sector, it contains enough hill country for all inhabitants in classical times to have had access to such country, at least occasionally. The hills are ancient, heavily weathered and low in height, such that the watercourses that run from them are markedly fewer and smaller than in central Australia proper. Hills here do have considerable food potential (as well of course as water potential), but there are two significantly different types of hill country to be distinguished. The most common type is composed of sandstone and quartzite and is generally covered in spinifex. This is the type that comprises the two major hill areas of the southern sector, the Central Ranges that run east-west between the communities of Warburton, Jameson,

\(^{122}\) Given that this is not a biology text, I am not attempting here to use a consistent set of scientific classifications for types of habitat and similar phenomena, but rather am trying to use terms that seem the simplest and most descriptive, having regard to the primary goal of elucidating factors relevant to the hunter-gatherer way of life.
Blackstone and Wingellina; and the Rawlinson Range to the north, close to which lie Warakurna community and Giles Weather Station. These types of hills are much less fertile than those that are composed of granite, gneiss or schist, and that are free from spinifex. The distinctive red granite outcrops of the study area usually stand alone, often on a flat plain, as opposed to the more sprawling, rugged country associated with the hills of the sandstone/quartzite type. These outcrops and other hills of the same basic sort, while few in number when considered against the vastness of the landscape, are of great importance, for the soil associated with them is high in nutrients. Thus one of the most fertile of all the desert habitats is the ‘woodlands’, often featuring scattered corkwood trees, that occur at the base of these sorts of hills. Annual grasses and herbs, very supportive of game, flourish in these conditions. In close proximity in such a place a watercourse may also be found, with its extremely varied types of edible flora.

Granite outcrops are plentiful on the broad plains south of the Central Range system, particularly in the area of the Pijiantjatjara Lands, to the east of the study area. They would have supported a relatively high population in this region. They are moderately plentiful in the eastern part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, also to the south of the central Ranges, but are found only rarely in the western part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and hardly at all in Pintupi country.

(e) Claypans and salt lakes

In the northern sector three particularly large salt lakes, Lake Mackay, Lake Macdonald and Lake Hopkins together take up a significant portion of the land area, and consign it to the category of the almost completely unproductive. So vast and so totally salt-dominated is Lake Mackay, in particular, that it also comprised a barrier to travel.

The much smaller scale and generally salt-free claypans, on the other hand, though their actual surfaces are bare, are productive in that they support on their fringes some plant species that were well used by the desert people. Notable is the mungilypa (samphire) seed plant, mentioned above. Myers (1986: 77) makes particular reference to this plant, thus: ‘In areas with large claypans, great supplies of ... mungilypa
attracted significant gatherings of people’ after rain. The low country on the western shores of Lake Mackay is a region particularly noted for its claypans and for the *mungilypa* plant.

There are few salt lakes or claypans at all in the southern sector, hence they are not a factor in the equation there.

**Waterholes**

There are basically two types of waterhole in the desert, those that collect and hold rain (*kapi walu*), and those from which water emerges or can be drawn from underground (‘groundwater sources’). The first type varies from shallow dish-like depressions on flat rock shelves, to deeper, more protected rock holes of varying shapes and sizes, to the cylindrical, very regular, vertically descending ‘gnamma holes’ of the south-west part of the study area. These are all ephemeral, some more so than others, depending on the size, form and location. The second type includes, firstly, the springs found within hills, at or near the origin points of small creeks. Occasionally, a spring (in the sense of a spontaneously emergent water point) will be found in the bed of a large creek. Springs are very rare in the study area, but several are found in the Warburton area and in other parts of the Central and Rawlinson Ranges. To my knowledge there are none in the northern sector.

Undoubtedly the most common sort of waterhole throughout the desert is the soakage (*kapi tjurnu*), which is found in low-lying sandy soil. Whenever it is visited, a soakage has to be dug out in order to make water seep up into the depression from below. There are literally thousands of soakages scattered across the study area, and few localities are without one or more. The minor ones frequently dry out, while others are more reliable. The ‘wells’ (*yirnta*) of the northern sector, that Myers refers to (e.g. 1986: 77) are basically soakages, of the more reliable sort. In some cases a soakage may actually be fed by rainfall that has soaked beneath the ground relatively recently, while in other cases there is a more longstanding underground supply. It was on these soakages and wells that the desert people depended during the frequent long dry spells. To my knowledge, there is in the whole of the study area only one large, genuinely permanent open waterhole (of the sort found in many of the gorges of the
MacDonnell Ranges in central Australia). This is Pangkupirri, in the James Range at the eastern end of the Rawlinsons.

Rainfall: Pirnangu and Kurli times

Apart from the predominance of its sand and spinifex, the other great distinguishing characteristic of the Western Desert is the uncertainty of the rainfall from one year to the next. Among many other things, this feature meant both that the diet of the Aboriginal people would have varied considerably from year to year (Latz 1995: 18) and that over a period of years different localities would often have been utilized for food purposes as different plant communities flourished or failed, and as the people responded in their characteristic highly opportunistic fashion to these changes (ibid: 23).

The occurrence of rainfall, whenever it should come (and this could be in either summer or winter), was however important in a more significant way than these observations indicate. This relates to the existence of a pattern whereby a heavy rainfall event would trigger a whole phase in the life of the people inhabiting that portion of the desert, that would be followed, when the availability of water had diminished beyond a certain point, by the commencement of a phase of another sort, which in turn would ultimately be succeeded by another phase of the first sort. In ideal terms the two phases, together, constituted a cycle that repeated itself endlessly (and basically on an annual basis) – although in practice other considerations would at times intervene to make the actual pattern of life more complicated. The desert people designate the two phases of the cycle by the terms pirnangu (summarized as ‘rain time’) and kurli (summarized as ‘dry hot time’). Both Tonkinson (1991: 37-42 and Myers (1986: 77-8) make similar observations about the phases of people’s movements, without identifying a two-part cycle in quite the way that I do. In the very hot months of the summer the people’s mobility was limited, especially if these months were mostly dry, as was often the case. Thus at these times ‘people congregated around a few permanent, well-known and reliable water sources – usually wells.... The great distance between waters [combined with the extreme heat of the season] made movement between places difficult, so people remained somewhat confined during summer’ (ibid: 77). At the kurli time camp, people would experience the satisfaction of being with a number of relatives that they would not have seen during the pirnangu phase, but there was also a ‘down side’ that tended to emerge as time went on. One
sees the same phenomenon in contemporary times when a larger-than-normal group of people has been sitting down together for too long (as in the contemporary 'sorry camps' that precede funerals). Not only will resources be running short, but the level of argumentation and general fractiousness will climb, until it all comes to a climax, and – often with spectacular suddenness – the whole gathering will disperse.

Thus when heavy falls of rain came (and this sometimes occurred in the late summer months), the people would readily split into smaller groups and move off in different directions, taking advantage of the rain-time upsurge of life for which the Australian desert is also renowned. Rain collects in the numerous *kapi walu* in the landscape. Utilising these plentiful sources as they went, the desert people would at such times be able to move widely and freely through the landscape, in contrast to the situation in harder times when their movements, which were limited in any case, would be more restricted to the direct, well worn paths of travel from one known place to another. Hence the aftermath of rain was a time for exploration and discovery in the landscape. It was also a good time for hunting, as the game would be out looking for fresh food in the same way that the people were. With all this ahead of them, the peoples’ spirits would lift with the first coming of the rain; and the freedom associated with this mode of life would tend to ensure that the feeling persisted through much of this phase, provided that the expected supplies of either game or plant food, or both, were in fact able to be found in some location or other. *Movement* was the essence of this mode, or phase, of life. But towards the end of this time, when the heat of mid summer had dried out the *walu* waterholes and the people had been living the small-group life for many months, they might be starting to look forward to seeing more of their relatives again and ‘sitting down’ in the large-group mode that the climatic conditions would shortly be forcing upon them – even though this would itself lead in time to resource shortages and the tensions of large-group living. In my analysis this dual cycle of expansion and contraction, motion and fixity, related as it is to deep patterns present in the desert environment and climate, is a key to the understanding of many significant features and aspects of the desert people’s life world. I would go so far as to suggest that we can usefully describe the two poles of the cycle as corresponding to two ‘modes’ of desert life.123

123 Stanner (1979:34) notes in relation to cyclical time, that ‘each cycle is in essence a principle for dealing with social inter-relatedness’, which exactly expresses what I am pointing to here.
While I think this duality is applicable to the desert generally, it is not such a marked feature in the southern sector of the study area as it is in the north. It is fair to say that in the south, the climatico-environmental conditions imposed themselves in a slightly less direct and raw manner on the people’s life world. The south was a somewhat ‘softer’ place in which to live. In keeping with this, the southern people identify the existence of the two distinct periods much less clearly as the northerners – although the concept of the two ‘times’ is familiar to them, and they use the same words (pirnangu and kurli) to denote them. But especially in the Central Ranges area where springs and other long-lasting water points are relatively prevalent and close together, people were less confined to one place in the kurli phase than was the case in the north; and by the same token the contrast between dry time and rain time was less pronounced. People moved about in either season, while even in the rain time it was not normally necessary to travel so far and wide to obtain a living. In turn, all this meant that (a) the dry time groups at a given water hole did not need to be so large, while (b) for their part, the rain time groupings could be bigger, since in general there would be more food available in any given area. Overall, the contrast between the two ‘phases’ or ‘modes of being’ was blunted.

The duality described relates to what we might call the ‘mainstream’ of desert life. As will be explained more fully in later sections, it refers to the round of life as it is lived out essentially in family groups, or in larger groupings built out of family groups. This is how things were most of the time, but on occasion groups with a different structure emerged. The most common example of this is where a group of men, numbering from two to perhaps a dozen, might hive itself off from the normal sort of grouping and undertake a trip for a specific purpose. There were a variety of such purposes. Sometimes the men would go off by themselves to attend a ceremony; or, it might be a case of a ‘revenge party’ mission. Maybe some young men went off to seek wives in a distant location. Perhaps the obtaining of rare resources like spear wood, or mingkulpa (bush tobacco) might be involved as a subsidiary purpose of such a trip. This sort of event might occur either during the pirnangu or the kurli phase. Travelling ‘light’, men on such missions could to a large degree transcend the constraints on mobility that were so powerfully imposed by the environmental conditions where family-based groups were concerned. Thus these sorts of cases represent an exception to the line of argument pursued in these pages.
Distribution of areas rich in food and water resources

Despite the existence of unpredictable conditions, which would introduce a corresponding unpredictability to the movements of the human population, there were also environmental factors that served, in the long term, to create a degree of predictability in regard to the distribution of people across the landscape. For although the availability of particular foods was subject to much fluctuation as we have just seen, we also saw that certain types of environmental conditions were more likely than others to provide food at any given time. The best places in this regard would be those where several different types of habitat were found in close proximity. Down the scale a little would be localities where the multiple proximity criteria was not so well served but where the soil was rich in nutrients. At the bottom of the scale would be the interior expanses of the great sand dune fields.

Map 5B gives an indication at a very broad-brush level of the parts of the study area where the most favorable conditions are most likely to be found. The more favorable ranking of the southern sector over the northern is clearly apparent. Within the northern sector, it will be noted that there is in effect only one zone where the best conditions apply, counterposed against an extremely large, generally inhospitable zone. This single northern zone, while small in comparison to the whole area of the northern sector, still represented an area of a significant size as an area of relative fertile conditions for its human inhabitants. These kinds of considerations had a significant bearing on population distribution and movement. As we saw earlier in the chapter, such factors also influenced in certain ways the structure of the groupings, both residential and conceptual, that were to be found among the people. Thus, observable variations in the structure of such groupings in different parts of the study area can be seen to be related to significant differences in the environmental profile.

Other material resources

Since some of the more important other resources tend to have an uneven geographical distribution, there are implications for the understanding of population movement issues. One popular resource, referred to above, is the very irregularly distributed mingkulpa, the well known mildly intoxicating 'bush tobacco' (called pituri throughout central Australia). Given that no chemical stimulant other than this plant was available to the desert people, considerable efforts were made, from time to time, by people based far from the sources, to
obtain some supplies. Latz (1995: 63) writes: ‘Pituri was one of the most important, if not the most important, trade item for Aboriginal people of the desert.’ Since I do not have enough information to be able to plot its distribution within the study area on a map, the only comment I will make is that while it was certainly a trigger for the movement of people, the presence of *mingkulpa* in particular areas would not have resulted in those areas having a greater population density over time. Considerations of the availability of food and water would have far outweighed the pulling power of *mingkulpa* in terms of the population distribution profile of a large area in the long term – and the same applies to all the other sorts of ‘extra’ material resources that the desert people used, or liked to use. People motivated to obtain such items would have had two options. As I have already indicated, one would involve a party of men ‘hiving off’ from their families and going on a special journey. This was the easier option, for such a party was much less constrained to stick to the ‘food and water road’. The second option, whereby a group of the ‘mainstream’ kind would deviate from the food and water road in the interests of obtaining what was more of a ‘luxury’ item, would obviously tend to place the group at risk of getting into difficulties.

The issue of spear wood introduces some interesting additional considerations. Spears are items that are very highly prized by desert men, well beyond their purely utilitarian value. The most common and important sort of spear was the long thin barbed variety used in conjunction with the *mirru* (spear-throwing device) for the hunting of game animals.124 Having a bundle of recently made, good quality spears was the *sine qua non* of any self-respecting desert man. There are at least two major types of wood used for such spears across the study area. A rare and particularly large form of *mulyarti* (*Acacia dictyophleba*) having a single tall straight stem that is ‘almost a “ready made” spear...[and that] also has a natural whip (important for accuracy)’ (Latz 1995: 96) is found in groves on certain sand plains in the northern sector. Because of this fortuitous fact, the Pintupi men of that area, which lies to the south and west of Kiwirrkura, were generally well provided in this important area of their kit. In the southern sector, where this plant does not grow large enough to be usable, the tree mostly used for spears is the *yurrtjanpa* (*Pandorea doratoxylon*), a species that happens to be widely distributed in the arid zone. It is a vine-like plant that tends to grow on the type of (fertile) rocky hillsides that are spinifex-free and composed of granite. The Cavenagh Range

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124 A heavier, shorter type of spear (*wirnta*), with a broad blade but with no barb, was used for fighting.
in the central part of the southern sector is one place renowned for this plant. Its curved stems have to be straightened by heating them in hot sand and ashes and then bending them.\textsuperscript{125}

Men were prepared to travel considerable distances to obtain good spear wood or indeed to exchange made spears with other men. This particularly applied to \textit{mulyarti} spears. There are known cases of men from the south travelling up to the northern sector, not solely to obtain such spears, but with the thought in mind of acquiring some in the course of their trip. In this, the same comments apply as with the \textit{mingkulpa} as considered above. The interesting feature arises when we consider the \textit{mulyarti} question in relation to the people of the Lake Mackay region, to the north east of Kiwirrkura. These people were part of the \textit{karli} (boomerang) making culture area that was mainly located beyond the study area, to the north. Boomerangs were not produced anywhere else in the study area. The Lake Mackay men, who fashioned their boomerangs from the dogwood trees that are plentiful in that area, would exchange these for the \textit{mulyarti} spears of the men from the ‘Kiwirrkura’ area. (The northerners possessed their own spears, but again they apparently valued the \textit{mulyarti} variety more highly.) Dogwood and other sorts of trees suitable for making boomerangs do grow in the other areas, but the people did not make this item. This is the only case I am aware of where there is a cultural distinctiveness within the study area in relation to the manufacture and/or use of material items. Possibly this was a case where historical change was under way, or maybe only some of the southerners desired boomerangs. (If they were universally popular, one wonders why the capacity to manufacture them had not spread further.)

In any case, even in this example where the exchange has such an evident ‘use value’, it should not be understood as a purely utilitarian transaction. I have been told by Kiwirrkura-based informants that they would often give their \textit{mulyarti} spears to another party without any return of an equivalent material item, but rather in ‘compensation’, say for a death, or in ‘payment’ for a wife. Nevertheless, the desire to acquire the more highly valued fruits of the country, unevenly distributed as these were, was often a significant impetus for people to undertake a greater amount of travel than was required purely by the need to obtain food and resources at a survival level.

\textsuperscript{125} There is also another type of plant (\textit{ngarrkalya}) that grows in the southern sector, that yields spears from its long transverse roots.
Other drivers of movement

While any interpretation of the movements of classical Desert people would have to give priority to the on-going obtaining of food and water in particular, there were of course a variety of other less immediate, less concrete but ultimately perhaps equally compelling drivers of movement. The obtaining of marital partners, the requirements of reciprocity (whether this involved ‘payback’ for previous offences or the maintenance of harmonious relationships), the participation in ceremonial activity – these and other factors would have at times inspired movement of a more extensive nature than that dictated by the need to obtain food and water. As discussed in earlier chapters, some of the other important triggers for movement were the desire to visit the great sacred sites of the desert, and, for an individual who had come to be based at a distance from his own ‘origin’ place, there was the pull of home that might be given way to periodically. In considering these sorts of drivers of movement, we have reached the point of moving away from situations where differential environmental conditions play, or may play, a role. Even in the case of material items such as bush tobacco and spears we saw that while people would be drawn towards the particular places and areas where these were to be found, there is no likelihood that any flow-through occurred to a permanently increased population density in the areas concerned. (In the case of the mulyarti, these grow in otherwise quite infertile conditions for the hunter-gatherer.)

A further driver of movement that is less obvious than those just cited, is the desire or obligation that was evidently felt by adults, at least in some cases, to provide their children with experiences meant to encourage the development of feelings of connectedness to their ‘origin’ area - or that were perhaps seen to be necessary to satisfy the feelings of connectedness to such an area that were assumed to inherently exist in them. (See Case Study 8 in chapter 6; and also Appendix 4.)

Gatherings for ceremonial purposes

The ceremonial life has multiple types and levels of significance, many of which were canvassed in chapter 3. Clearly, one aspect of the ceremonial life is that it is a very significant driver of mobility among the desert people. But far more than just requiring people to travel in order to participate and thus to serve the immediate or ostensible ceremonial purpose (such as the initiation of boys into men), it performs a broad-ranging function in the service of social
cohesion. There are other customary practices that work in a similar way. For example, the requirement to obtain marital partners at a distance ensures that social ties are created over large stretches of the geographical and social landscape; and building on this, the requirement of a son-in-law to repay the father-in-law over an extended period promotes the maintenance of such far-flung affinal ties over time. But in the way that it draws together a whole spectrum of people to participate in the one extended (and highly structured) event, ceremony stands out as the field par excellence of cohesion-generating activity.

With the ceremonial life being so significant in this respect, it is worthwhile exploring in a little detail some of the dynamics that surround it. In some instances people would simply take advantage of the fact that a relative large gathering was already in existence, to perform certain ceremonial activity. Thus, for example, there would likely be a considerable amount of ceremonial activity at any typical kurli time camp, because of the relatively large numbers present. Thus it may be said that the kurli time camp represents a site for the promotion of social cohesion, to the extent that ceremony undertaken by the camp members will work to create and maintain social connections among a set of people who will spend much of the rest of the year scattered in smaller pirnangu-type groups.

In general, and not speaking specifically about the kurli camp situation, there is a two-way relationship between numbers of people present and the triggering of ceremony. If a large enough group has gathered, for whatever reason, the desert people will start to think about the possibilities of holding ceremony. At the opposite end of the spectrum, when people have been living in small groups for a time, they will begin to crave the social contact that is currently missing from their lives, including the sort of social contact and activity associated with ceremony. As thoughts and feelings turn in this direction, the ceremonial leaders among them will start to plan how to create a situation where their ceremonial life can be resumed. In doing so, they will have regard among other things to environmental conditions of the sort we have considered above. Tonkinson (1991:37-42) makes a number of observations along these same lines.

It should be noted here that the undertaking of ceremony did not in every case demand large numbers. What it did demand, at the least, was a conscientious attempt to round up all
potential participants. It was always better to have more participants than less, and sometimes a start could not be made in the absence of a key person. But for some types of ceremony in particular, large numbers were not so much of an issue. So, for example, a quite small number of men would be sufficient to perform many of the ‘increase’ ceremonies that were part of the desert repertoire. As discussed in chapter 3, such ceremonies would always be performed at a site possessing the creative potential of the Dreaming concerned, and could not be performed elsewhere. Other sorts of ceremony, especially the sort associated with the initiatory circumcision ritual, would definitely require the participation of people drawn from a fairly broad geographical area. By the same token the venue for such ceremony would not be so specifically tied to a particular location, meaning that the event could occur on a more opportunistic basis. On any occasion throughout the yearly cycle, if there happened to be a lot of food and water available in a certain place, a summons to attend one of the more extensive sorts of ceremony was likely to go out far and wide. (Of course, if a circumcision-based ceremony was contemplated there would need to be a suitable candidate – a ‘big boy’ – available: and preferably more than one.)

It might be wondered just how strong was the pull, or the ‘craving’ as I put it above, to attend ceremony when it had been instigated by others. There is no doubt that it was extremely strong. It was regarded as absolutely binding under the ‘Law’ to attend, once one had touched the hair belt that the messengers would bring with them as they moved through the landscape seeking participants. By all accounts, no excuses were acceptable for non-attendance. These obligations were ingrained into young men as they went through their years of induction into full manhood. The Dreaming story of Kuniyapirti tells of the misfortunes that were the fate of a group of people who failed to respond to such a summons. But as shown in chapter two, it is not only a matter of obligations, for participation in ceremony is the positive pathway to many of the particular benefits and satisfactions that the desert life offered.

Thus the occurrence of ceremony does not correlate with the pirnangu/kurli cycle, but the conditions of kurli time do particularly tend to favour the occurrence of ceremony, and thus also the fostering of broader social relatedness.
Circumstantial reasons for population movement

Revenge party attacks represent a variety of conflict that arose from the tendency to perceive people from other areas as potentially dangerous. This perception itself was clearly an outcome of a way of life largely spent in small, intimate groups (this in turn being dictated by the nature of the desert environment). When a grievance arises with a person who is close to hand and a member of one’s own group, the matter is dealt with quickly and heatedly, in the open, and usually without lasting effect. But if a grievance arises with a distant person or group, it may not be dealt with quickly – because the other group is not often seen – and hence it may lead to the sending out of a revenge party to inflict serious damage. The practice indicates a particular way of perceiving injury and responding to it (when a distant person is involved), in which anger is harboured, and the desire for revenge satisfied through a slow process of planning and implementation.

What is of interest here, is that revenge party activity – and more particularly, the fear of it - may have resulted in long term changes in the configuration of the population, to the extent that particular family groups (say) may have moved far away from their home areas, for a long period and perhaps permanently, as a result of it. Where this happens, it represents an exception to the generally-observed practice according to which groups do not ‘leap frog’ other groups in terms of their medium to long term positioning within the landscape. As such, it is hard to imagine that it actually happened very often – for how would a group survive that became isolated in such a manner, with no ‘web of connectedness’ surrounding it? There is no doubt that it happened sometimes, but as with sorcery beliefs, it was probably the ‘fear factor’ associated with it that was more significant than the actual instances of it happening. It is certainly given great currency by many Ngaanyatjarra people. Indeed, the emigration of so many people to the goldfields from areas south and west of Warburton (before and after the turn of the C20th) is largely attributed by Ngaanyatjarra people to the depredations of revenge party activity. Leaving aside the fact that the cause and effect analysis here is suspect, it is significant to note that people who went to the goldfields in this period had somewhere to go to. The mining centres might have been dangerous in a different way, but the presence of the whitefellas had ‘neutralised’ them as domains where the rules and practices of Aboriginal sociality prevailed.
Death as another driver of movement

Extreme grief arising from untimely deaths, particularly the deaths of children, is another factor much cited by desert people as a cause of family groups relocating to distant places. One suspects, however, that such moves would have mostly been of a temporary nature, and would have been made possible by accommodating affinal parties. As with revenge party activity, this phenomenon is used to explain the departure to the goldfields over the last century or so of a number of people from the Warburton area (or from the depopulated country to its south and west) – but the same comments may be made about this. It may be noted that scenarios involving people’s displacements following untimely deaths occur in a number of Dreaming stories.

Life in camps

Whether their current ‘mode’ was pirnangu or kurli, the normal way of life of the desert people revolved around camps (ngurra). A group of people, whether large (in kurli time) or small (in pirnangu time) would base themselves at a particular place, from which they would make day trips out to hunt and gather, the women going in one direction and the men in another. The camp is where they would sleep, have their evening and morning meals, spend the rest periods of the daylight hours, and conduct the various aspects of the domestic routine. Except in rare circumstances such as when the group was in urgent, purposeful transit from one place to another, a camp would be located at a waterhole. Or rather, it would be near a waterhole, for the water itself, precious as it was, had to be shielded from the pollution likely to accrue from camp life. For instance, there were strong injunctions against children playing around a waterhole, and certainly against any impulses they might have to go swimming. The waterhole would commonly only be visited by women, who would fill their wooden bowls with water and take it back to the camp.

Most places where people camped in this way would have a name. The ‘place’ associated with the name would embrace the waterhole (or holes, for there would sometimes be, say, a soakage (tjurnu) as well as a rockhole (walu) at a given place) and the surrounding locality. The locality would not be marked out with any boundaries as such, but there would be an implicit sense of it including any significant nearby environmental features, such as a hill. It would also, of course, include the camping spot; bearing in mind that any group that stopped...
there would usually camp in a slightly different place to where others had stayed beforehand. The place would in some sense be thought of as an entity, as signalled by the fact that people use the term verb *tjarrpaku* (to enter) rather than simply *pitjaku* (‘to come’) when referring to arriving there. The same word is used in modern times for arriving at and entering a community. It is recognised that a transition has occurred which bring protocols into play. For instance, if there is already a group occupying the place, another group when arriving should wait at a distance before being invited to ‘*tjarrpaku*’.

Within a camp, shelters (*wiltja*) and windbreaks (*yuu*) would be set up. In hot weather shade would be the prime consideration, so shelters would predominate; while during the cold weather shelter from the cold winds would be the prime consideration. Each ‘living unit’ within the camp would nestle by or beneath such a structure, maybe ten metres or so apart from the next unit. As described by Myers (1986: 43-4) there were three basic types of living unit. These were themselves referred to by the term camp, but to avoid confusion in this discussion I will call them ‘sub-camps’. The three types were: the family sub-camps of married people and their small children, the sub-camps of widows and as yet unmarried older girls, and the all-male sub-camps of the young unmarried men. The last of these were not strictly speaking ‘camps’, for they did not contain a ‘hearth’. They were really only sleeping places. It is the ‘hearth-places’ that comprise the domestic centres of gravity of the overall camp. Women were central to hearth-places, for it was they who did the routine food cooking and preparation. (The bringing of a large game animal into the camp, an unpredictable and comparatively infrequent but highly exciting event, would cause a different configuration of activity to occur, with men in charge of the cooking and the distribution.)

**The social composition of camps**

Myers says (ibid: 43) that the composition of an overall Pintupi community or camp (which we might call camp A) is best described as ‘an aggregation of individuals based on complex, bilateral ties’. He points out that a camp is in no sense the domain of an exclusive social group such as a clan. On the contrary, for any given person in camp A, there are likely to be relatives, ‘often their closest kin’, residing in other places. At pp. 71-73 (ibid) the topic is the ‘band’ rather than the camp, but essentially he is talking about the same sort of entity, and his argument goes along the same lines. The argument is repeated yet again at pp. 109-110 when
he is talking about ‘waljtja’ (a Pintupi – not Ngaanyatjarra - term that connotes the self in relation to others).

However, while the point is well taken about the need to see groups in the desert not as given but as ‘a social accomplishment’ (ibid: 73), I find the stress on ‘the individual’ problematical here. I argue firstly that while Myers is certainly right in saying that the membership of a given (overall) camp does not correspond with any kind of genealogically-defined unit, his analysis does not sufficiently acknowledge that for the most part it is comprised of sets of persons united by the very closest sorts of human ties. I am referring to the sorts of ties that exist within the conjugal family – ties between and among husband, wife, father, mother, son and daughter. It is surely the case that the core constituents of social life, and thus of most camps (or bands, or whatever residential unit we are considering) are usually the conjugal families present within them. It is hard to imagine a camp in the sense we are talking about that did not have at least one such family within it. In fact, in the context of his discussion about ‘ngurra’ as both (human) camp and (Dreaming-defined) country, Myers, if I am not misreading him, makes the same point that I am making about the primary nature of the conjugal family. He says (ibid: 57) that ‘ngurra is the embodiment and image of sociality, the physical expression of a basic social unit, the conjugal family.’ If he had said the basic social unit, the case would have been clear, but in the context it seems that this is what he meant. But at any rate, elsewhere he seems to downplay these considerations, giving the impression that say women’s sub-camps are to be regarded as of equivalent importance to the family sub-camps, in terms of the structure of the overall camp (ibid: 43). But many camps can and do exist without the presence of any women’s sub-camps.

My material indicates that a conjugal family in classical times was likely to consist of a man (P) and his wife (Q) and their young children (that is, unmarried daughters, and boys who have not yet been ‘made into men’). There could also be a second wife (R), and in some cases a third (S). A pirnangu camp could consist solely of a group such as this – perhaps in total three to ten people. (It is not likely that a group at the lower end of this scale would remain on its own for long.) More often, there would be another close relative or two present – perhaps

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126 At p. 110 (ibid) he does actually refer in passing to ‘the usual domestic unit of a “camp” including husband, wife or wives and small children’, but the fact that it is ‘usual’ does not seem to carry any implications for analysis.
an aged parent of P, Q, R or S; or a sibling of any of these. I showed in Part Two of this chapter that two or more brothers are frequently identified with the same area of country, which in turn implies that in classical times brothers often lived together. Hence, it is reasonable to say that there might have been a second conjugal family, that of P’s brother, also present in the group - but if both such families were at ‘full strength’ that would mean the presence of twenty or so people, which would normally be too large a group for a pirnangu camp, for any length of time. A kurli time camp might in some cases look like a combination of say three or more quite separate pirnangu type groupings, while in rare cases it might have more the form of a single very extended family group.

My main point is that the conjugal family unit is the core unit of residential aggregations of people. Larger residential groupings, whether they be of the pirnangu or kurli type, are built primarily out of the ‘building blocks’ of conjugal family units. While it is possible to have a residential grouping that lacked a conjugal family, this is rare, and it would normally be a case of a group of men ‘hiving off’ for a specific purpose in the way described earlier. The normal, core unit of life is the conjugal family. To put it another way, adult individuals will be found more often living in the company of their spouses (and children if they have them), than in any other situation. Children, although they are frequently given for periods of time into the care of other adults, are most often to be found in the company of their own parents. In Myers’ account, for example between pp. 71 and 73 (1986), it seems that individuals are moving around almost freely, on the basis of their own decisions, between different residential units; and Poirier (2005:104) reflects much the same assumption. But, for a start, such autonomy would obviously not be the case with children. The issue of children seems to have been left out of consideration in these portrayals. But it goes further than this – men spend much of their lives being husbands (and women being wives). Clearly there is a conjugal family form which structures people into a social unit that has a considerable force of endurance over time. The relationships that each family member has to the other members tend to keep each person in place. I argue that pushing too hard with the idea of the individual as the basic ‘unit of analysis’ overlooks the social force of the family unit.

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127 Peterson and Long’s survey of ‘classical era’ residential groups across the continent resulted in the mean figure for the Western Desert of 13.6, with a range of 4 – 28. The average number of households per group was 2.3 (1986:135)
Myers stresses the point about the work that goes into the creation and maintenance of the relatedness of the larger set of known people (1986: 159pp). While I agree that this certainly happens, I have indicated that more delimited groupings have emerged in some areas, facilitated by favorable environmental conditions. I also now want to assert that these sorts of social entities based on genealogical relatedness and given flesh by conjugal families can want to distinguish themselves from other similar groupings. While there is a cultural inhibitor for this kind of development - the principle of lateral relatedness - there is, I argue, another kind of principle actively working in support of it. There is a basis for a ‘family’ to differentiate itself from and perhaps pit itself against other like groupings. This basis is the groundedness of the conjugal family unit – and of the close association of siblings - in central position in everyday life, and it is expressed in the idea of ‘blood is thicker than water’ that one can see to be present in desert hunter-gatherer society as it is in many other types of society.

The consolidation of family groupings

In classical desert life one of the major conundrums revolved around the number of children a man could have or would like to have. Apart from any considerations of prestige, sentiment and the like, having many children was a great investment for a man’s older years. A strong group of adult sons could be expected to defend him against external threats (revenge parties and the like) and supply his food and other needs in his old age. Daughters could also supply food and would attract sons-in-law with similar obligations. On the other hand, in the medium term each child would require more than a decade of considerable investment, in terms of nurturing. Depending on a good many factors, the effort for some men may have been too great or simply too onerous to attempt. Moreover, many a man would basically live out his life as a follower, being satisfied with attaching himself to or being a part of whatever ‘band’, or groups of kin, were in his neighbourhood. But my Ngaanyatjarra informant Andrew Lawson (1939 – 1998), an unusually analytical person, had the following to say about these matters:

A man might be satisfied with one or two children, but if he is ambitious he will want more. But he can’t have more if he isn’t a good hunter, because he will need to feed them all. And he will have to be ready to go out and get extra wives too, if the first one doesn’t give him children, especially sons. Having extra wives can help you with this, but it can give a man a lot of headaches too.
He went on to the effect that if you do get a family of many brothers that is how you can get a lot of power. And, taking it further, he spoke in terms of some people, at least, having a notion that ‘biological’ parenthood matters:

If a man died, a brother of his would have to take the children. His widow’s new husband won’t want them because they won’t be his own. [NB: the woman will not be re-married to an actual brother of the deceased man, as this is disapproved by the Ngaanyatjarra.]\(^{128}\)

These kinds of sentiments and views, indicative of the desire to build up one’s ‘own’ family, are reflected in various ways in the thinking of a number of Ngaanyatjarra men whom I have got to know well.

**Conclusion**

The genealogical groupings I have pointed to in this chapter have to do with the nature of relationships of connectedness to country among the desert people. They do not relate directly to issues of ‘land use’ in any direct fashion, although of course a given genealogical group is likely to focus its use of land around its ‘connected area’ as a central point. I have indicated that while in some cases there may be a particular Dreaming connection with the group and the country, this is often not so. In my analysis, the crux of the matter is the personal and collective connectedness of people to a particular area of country. Connectedness to country is a complex matter that I attempt to elucidate throughout this thesis, but it is not to be equated with the control over sacred objects and ritual performance that men have.

In the next chapter I set out extensive case study material documenting the existence of varying kinds of structures of connectedness relating to country. The material covers both the southern and northern sectors.

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\(^{128}\) If there is nobody to take the children, the woman may not re-marry at all. This is what happened with Parnata Forbes, the mother of three young boys at the time of the death of her husband. She and the boys were looked after by her own brother. This family group is the subject of Case Study 8 in chapter 6, discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 6

Structures of the Lived Social World

In this chapter I consider more closely issues to do with the family groupings as found in the southern sector and present some case material relating to them. One of the objects of these case studies is to document examples of the patterns that I spoke of in chapter 5: i.e., the tendency of sibling sets and their descendants to be associated with a particular area of country. Here I substantiate my argument that this was a feature of the classical world, quite apart from whether or not the pattern could also be discerned post-classically, when a number of new factors would be at play. The case studies contain considerable detail. At the risk of becoming overly lengthy, the dense material is necessary both to ‘breathe life’ into the world of Warburton and to allow a clear delineation of actual evidence from background context.

I then move to a consideration of some examples that occur in the northern sector of what I argue to be phenomena that are essentially similar to, but less developed than, the family groups. I call these northern cases ‘conception groupings’.

Before moving to the case studies I wish to give some brief further consideration to the idea that some regions of the desert displayed a greater consolidation of connectedness to country than others. As indicated, it is my argument that, in general, the southern sector was one of the regions in which such greater consolidation existed. I will set out evidence in support of this proposition through an examination of classical marriage patterns in this sector.

Marriages in the southern sector

My object here is to look at the degree of geographical distance applying to marriage partners. Since my best information for all matters in the southern sector lies within my core southern demographic zone, I am concentrating on this zone for the purposes of the present exercise. I only consider here marriages that took place prior to the establishment of the mission, the presence of which may have begun quite quickly to influence patterns in relation to marriage.
There are 30 marriages in this category, that took place within the area concerned, for which I have reliable information about the countries of both parties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage number</th>
<th>Names and countries of partners</th>
<th>Distance 'as crow flies' (km) between countries of partners</th>
<th>Distance category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Victor Simms (Piyul)/ Nyurriwa (Baker Lake)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mangkartikurnu Simms (Piyul) / Milyka West (Wanarn)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mangkartikurnu Simms (Piyul) / Emma Simms (Pawaltjarra)</td>
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<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oliver Laidlaw (Piyul area) / Sadie Nelson (Rururr area)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oliver Laidlaw (Piyul area) / Tjikuntji (Pawaltjarra)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oliver Laidlaw (Piyul area) / Betty Laidlaw (Kulyuru)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oliver Laidlaw (Piyul area) / Nyumitja Brown (Kumpukurra)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kanturna Lawson (Nth. Warburton Range) / Nyilpiya (Yampil)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kanturna Lawson (Nth. Warburton Range) / Sylvia Richards (Wanarn)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Putjukurnu West (Nth. Warburton Range) / Dora West (Wanarn)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Putjukurnu West (Nth. Warburton Range) / Winya West (Wanarn)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mungalu Green (Nth. Warburton Range) / Sadie Fraser (Warburton)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tjimpurna Holland (Kaarnka) / Tjunkarakurnu No. 2 (Blackstone)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Intjiparti Davies (Tarntumpa) / Tjunkarakurnu No. 1 (Blackstone)</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>far</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Karnatalpa Jennings (Rururr) / Manantja (Cavenagh Range)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Yimpi Jennings (Rururr) / Winya Scott</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage number</td>
<td>Names and countries of partners</td>
<td>Distance ‘as crow flies’ (km) between countries of partners</td>
<td>Distance category</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Piyul)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Parnata Holland (Kaarnka) / Tjikalyikurnu (Blackstone)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Laurie McLean (Jameson) / Yvonne Robinson (Mt Eeline)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mampi Fraser (Warburton) / Yakan (Warburton)</td>
<td>&lt; 20</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Joe Fraser (Warburton) / Lily Fraser (Cavenagh Range)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pinkarri Robinson (Minuntu, nr Warburton) / Karatjarri (Cavenagh Range)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Karalpa Lane (Kuyuku) / Yupuna Woods (Warburton)</td>
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<td>medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Karalpa Lane (Kuyuu) / Waminyna Scott (Piyul)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ngaltawartakurnu (Warutjarra) / Linda (Piyul)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ngalangkarti Davidson (Pilyki) / Kawanwara (Jameson)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yayampi (Cavenagh Range) / Nyintjiyarini (Kuyuku)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yupuna (Cavenagh Range) / Tjingkiman (Mitika)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Distance between countries of origin of marriage partners for marriage contracted in the classical period in the southern sector

For these 30 marriages, the average distance between the countries of the partners was 90 km. I have inserted a column to try and give a qualitative sense to the distances involved, taking up to 60 km as ‘close’, over 60 km and up to 110 km as ‘medium’, and further than 110 km as
‘far’. On this basis, there are 13 in the close category, 9 in the medium, and 8 in the far. These categorisations are of course arbitrary, but they can give some indication. It will be noted that none of the marriages were contracted between people from very distant places. The furthest involved 180 km, which was not a vast distance for desert people.

It is also the case that distance in kilometre terms tells only part of the story in any given case. For instance, while the distance between Warburton and the Cavenagh Range (both of which are in the Central Range region) is about 130 km, 3 of the 30 (numbers 16, 23 and 24) marriages link these two areas. This was in fact a well-travelled route, so the classification of these as ‘far’ is a little misleading. Under classical conditions there was fairly easy travelling all along the east-west strip of range country from Warburton through to Wingellina (a total of just under 300 km). Having said this, on the basis of material about contact between different groups I am sure that Wingellina was regarded as a ‘long way’ from Warburton, whereas the Cavenagh Range was not.

To the west of Warburton matters were different. Tindale’s notebooks show clear indications of a certain amount of social distance, in the early 1930s, between the people of the Warburton area and the inhabitants of the rirra (rolling gravelly downs) country that begins just to the west of Warburton. Indeed there are no marriages in the above list that involve anybody from the rirra country, although Rururr (see marriage nos. 16, 17 and 18) is right on the cusp of this country.

Although Warburton and Wanarn are about 130 km apart, the route between them was another well-travelled one, with a line of well-known water holes linking these places. Four of the marriages on the above list (nos. 2, 9, 10 and 11) are between people at either end of this route.

The overall message that comes from these marriages is that partners in this region did not tend to come from countries that were very distant from one another. This is in line with the

129 In his notebook of his expedition to Warburton, Tindale (1935a) made a point of noting the formality of the behaviour when a group arrived from this direction while he was at Warburton.
fact that no Ngaanyatjarra informant has ever expressed to me that any need (or any injunction) existed to marry ‘far away’. Clearly, this is a matter on which the Ngaanyatjarra differ significantly from the Pintupi. Myers states on a number of occasions that it is the Pintupi expectation to have distant marriages,¹³⁰ and I can confirm that I also received this message from my northern sector informants. Unfortunately I do not have enough information on particular marriages from this sector to make a comparison with the above data.

Turning to the early post-classical era in the south, from about 1940 to the mid ’70s, a fair estimate of the extent of the ‘endogamous zone’, as far as Warburton is concerned, would be the western two-thirds of the southern sector. Roughly, one can say that the zone encompassed Warburton itself, Wanarn and Jameson, but had now come to include the rirra country to the west, as far as Tjirrkarli (140 km west of Warburton). Less inter-marriage took place between Warburton and Wingellina, Blackstone and Warakurna. (The ability to travel actually decreased during this period, as the people were acquiring the encumbrances of a more sedentary life and suffering the decline in physical condition that went with this, while few motor vehicles had yet been acquired.) Since the mid 70s people have increasingly acquiring their own vehicles, and with this have been able to participate in the man-making ceremonial cycles of huge scope that are discussed by Peterson (2000). This has resulted in more marriages being contracted in far away areas, though most continue to be contracted within the Lands.

**Family groups and their countries**

Some of the family groups of the southern sector self identify quite clearly, while in other cases there are just as clearly no such groups to be found in a given area. Yet again, in some cases it is ‘line ball’ as to whether a group exists. To cover the entirety of the 22,000 sq km area of my ‘core southern demographic zone’, I have created 30 diagrams that I call ‘genealogies’. In 20 cases I am confident that the groupings are describable in terms of the model outlined in chapter 5. They are based on actual sibling sets anchored in the landscape, that correspond with contemporary groups of people who trace themselves back to the antecedents, and these contemporary groupings are clearly recognised as such in everyday life (though the strength of the groups in numerical and political terms varies). In these 20 cases,

the anchoring sibling set is predominantly male. In two of the other 10 cases, there is an anchoring sibling set but it is all female, and there is no grouping as such that is recognised in contemporary life. In the other eight cases, I have really only created the ‘genealogy’ to cater for the (living) individuals concerned, who are people whose personal connectedness to country located them within the 22,000 sq km, but who do not belong to the families as per the ‘model’.

In some of these eight cases there is only a single apical antecedent, whether male or female, and not the two or more that are required as the basis for an emergent family. In others there is actually a recognised antecedental sibling set, but the connections to country of its members have a wide geographical spread, too wide for any kind of consolidation to have arisen. I document an example of this sort in Case Study 7 later in the chapter. In none of these eight cases does an entity exist that would be described by Ngaanyatjarra people as a ‘family’. The two ‘all-female’ sibling sets are effectively in the same situation. None of these kinds of links to country have proven substantial enough to create the basis for the emergence of a ‘family’. The descendants in these cases are for the most part absorbed within other families to which they also have antecedental linkages, although in some cases (as in Case Study 7) they have remained separate and unabsorbed. Whichever, the existence of the ‘less productive’ linkages, tenuous as they may be, cannot be overlooked by the analyst, as they are not forgotten by the people. The integrity of the attempt to understand social organisation and connectedness to country relies on trying to do two things simultaneously: one being to investigate all connections to country (and not just those that relate to contemporary families), and the other being to trace back from living persons to the set of connections so documented. In the ‘non-conforming’ cases, where present-day individuals do not trace back to antecedental anchoring sets, it has still been necessary for me to create ‘genealogies’ (false ones, it may be said) that provide records of the connections involved. At the same time, contemporary persons are likely to remember, value and utilise all antecedental connections to country that they have, regardless of issues of affiliation to ‘families’.

131 However, in the contemporary situation where ‘distribution meetings’ for mining exploration compensation monies have become a regular occurrence, it is widely accepted that a person should ‘stick to their own family’s country’ if one is known to exist. One should not try to claim money on the basis of other connections as well.
Size of the antecedental sibling-set countries

Given that these ‘countries’ were not areas of land to which a residential group was restricted in terms of movements or food-gathering, the issue of size is not a critical one. It is also possible to find that the *parna* of one family group overlaps with that of another. Nevertheless, a brief consideration of the question of size may be useful. The general pattern in the southern sector is that around 30 – 40 km is the limit of the distance that can separate two sites if they are to be seen as part of one country. In terms of area, around 1,000 sq km would be the average. I have indicated the presence of 20 family groupings, while the number of coherent countries is about 15, the reason for the discrepancy being that some country areas are shared. Given that the zone we are considering is 22,000 sq km in area, this further tells us that about two thirds of the area is comprised of coherent countries, while one third is not. The proportion would be lower in other parts of the study area. See Map 6A for an indication of the geographical sizes and locations relating to the Case Study families considered in this chapter.

In terms of these case studies, in most cases the ‘anchoring’ generation belongs to cohorts 1 or (less commonly) 2. This means that the history of the grouping dates back to between 1880 and 1919. The next generation, the children of the persons of the first generation, will usually be more numerous. Many persons in this generation are members of cohorts 3 and 4, and often they will not have been born in the family’s *parna*, or indeed in any bush location, but at Warburton Mission. This is even more the case for subsequent generations, until birthing became the responsibility of the Kalgoorlie and Alice Springs hospitals. Nevertheless the persons in these generations are still considered to be associated with the *parna* of their antecedents. Even some members of the early generations may not have been born in the antecedental *parna*, but they are considered to participate in the collective connectedness to the country concerned, in the manner that I described earlier.

Family groupings in the Warburton area

The family groupings that I will be considering first, all of which are associated with the Warburton region, are those now known by the surnames Simms, Laidlaw and Scott; and

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132 Refer to Chapter 5 for a discussion of the term ‘cohort’ and for the delineation of the particular cohort groupings that I have identified for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.
Map 6A: Counties of some family groups in the southern sector.

Legend:

Area C = County of family groups in Case Studies 9
Area B = County of family groups in Case Studies 8
Area E = County of family groups in Case Studies 4, 5, 6
Area D = County of family groups in Case Studies 1, 2, 3.
Lawson West and Green. Within all these families, many persons of cohort 4 were born at Warburton Mission itself, although there were still some members of cohort 4 in these families who were born 'on country', chiefly in or near the same parna as their parents and grandparents. On the whole however, it must be considered that the pattern applying to the earlier cohorts had begun to alter significantly by cohort 4. This is only a corollary of saying that 1940 is the watershed date for the southern sector in terms of the transformation from the classical to the post-classical period, and that cohort 4 should be considered a post-classical rather than a classical cohort.

I indicated in the last chapter that in the exercise of mapping the people of the early cohorts to country, neither individual names nor clusters of names are found to be evenly distributed across the landscape, the primary factor here being fertility. I also said that the most fertile areas in terms of Western Desert hunter-gatherer practice are those where there is a combination of different eco-systems in close proximity. These attributes are present in most of the country around Warburton, and thus in all the parna where the six above-mentioned families were based in classical times.

In fertile areas we can sometimes find two, or even three sets of antecedental siblings linked to overlapping and perhaps almost completely coinciding country. This occurs with some of the families that we are about to consider: three are linked with one area, and three with another. Interestingly, the antecedental sibling sets in such cases seem always to be of the same patri-couple (in terms of sections), which facilitates a possible fusion or merging into a single sibling group. The question can arise, then, as to whether such a pair or trio of such groups could in fact be seen as comprising one larger genealogical grouping (or larger family) and I will pursue this in the discussion.133

133 It should be mentioned that much of the quantitative information that I will provide in the case studies has been obtained as a result of a further project that grew out of the antecedent-oriented population and mapping project that I have previously referred to. This second project, which enables the generating of statistics for many aspects of social organization, has involved the building of a database covering the entire population of the Lands. The database includes several information fields for each person, including place/s of residence and an assessment, according to specified criteria, of the 'degree' of connectedness to the area of the Lands.
The Case Studies (southern sector)

I will begin with three adjacent groupings, all of the Karimarra /Panaka section patriarchal couple, and all associated with the area of the Townsend Ridges, Frank Scott Hill, the Barrow Range and Mt Eveline (see Area D on Map 6A) that is about 40 – 50 km from Warburton and to its east and south east.

The three families concerned are the Simms, Laidlaw and Scotts (ref gens 013, 014 and 015 respectively). The Scotts and Laidlaws actually share almost exactly the same parna, in the northern part of the ‘arc’; and the ‘apical’ antecedents of these two families were the children of two brothers. The country of the Simms family is very close by, on the southern side.

For these and all the following case studies, genealogies of the family groups appear in Appendix 7. The locations of the country of all the groups is shown on Map 6A.

Case 1: SIMMS family (country Piyul - Townsend Ridges; and surrounding areas):
genealogy 13 refers.

Two brothers Victor Simms and Mangkartikurnu Simms, were born in ‘Simms parna’ around 1887 and 1896 respectively (hence both were of cohort 1). Victor had one wife, from the Baker Lake area (100 km away, to the south – in the ‘medium’ distance category), while Mangkartikurnu had two.

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134 There are four section names that will be mentioned in this chapter: Karimarra, Panaka, Purungu and Tjarruru. As indicated in Chapter 1, I do not have space in this thesis to set out the articulation of the section system. For a clear presentation of the system as it is used by the Ngaanyatjarra, see Glass 2002.

135 The English names that appear here and in other places for some of the early cohort people were not of course the names they had at birth or as children. It was only when they began to have contact with ‘the whitefella’ that English names were adopted by Ngaanyatjarra people. Many such names began to be given out at the Mission during the 1940s. Given his date of birth, a person like Victor Simms would not have acquired this name until he was middle aged or elderly, and was being seen regularly at the Mission. But having acquired it, he is now (long after his death) remembered more by it than by his Ngaanyatjarra name. Not every case follows exactly the same pattern. For instance I have never heard his brother Mangkartikurnu referred to by an English name. These comments apply to Christian names, but with surnames it is a little different. Everyone was given a surname by the missionaries fairly early in the piece, to facilitate their recognition of relationships among people.

Chapter 6
Mangkartikurnu’s first wife was part of the WEST family (see case study 5). She may have been born in the Wanarn area (130 km to the north – ‘medium’), but she is associated more with the North Warburton Range country that is the West family parna. This area is only some 40 km away from the Simms parna and is therefore ‘close’. The second wife was from Pawaltjarra (50 km to the east – also ‘close’). Victor had two daughters, both of cohort 3, while Mangkartikurnu had five sons and three daughters. Four of his children were of cohort 3, and four were of cohort 4. Mangartikurnu’s Dreaming was Warnampi Kutjarra, the two Water Snake men, who pass across the ‘family’ area and through a gap in the Townsend Ridges, continuing on to the southeast.

Of the ten persons in this second generation, six were born in the family parna or very close to it (including both of Victor’s daughters). One of these, the eldest male in this generation, and first son of Mangkartikurnu, was Tommy Simms, whose connection with the Ngirntaka Dreaming was discussed in detail in chapter 4. Two were apparently born at Warburton, while two were born at or near a distant subsidiary of the Mission, Cosmo Newberry. The birthplace locations of the children of Victor and Mangkartikurnu indicate that both brothers (together with their wives) were largely resident in their birth area; but the influence of the arrival of the missionaries can be seen plainly enough in the birth place of four of the children. The proximity of the mission to the parna of this family group was such that it was inevitable that family members would soon be drawn into the life that increasingly revolved around it. Indeed, all ten children of the brothers lived primarily at Warburton, even the two who were born around Cosmo Newberry. Subsequent descendants also predominantly live at Warburton, even in the case of the descendants of the five women of the second generation.

The Simms family is a case of a family grouping that has consolidated and enlarged itself, mostly via relationships through males. A summary of the facts about the first two generations of this family is set out below.

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136 In theory, there was an option to ‘reject’ the mission and move further away from it, but none of the people in the Warburton region in fact reacted in this way.
First generation, Simms family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort membership number</th>
<th>No. in cohort</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. born on 'family' country</th>
<th>No. born on 'other' country</th>
<th>No. born in Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second generation, Simms family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort membership number</th>
<th>No. in cohort</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. born on 'family' country</th>
<th>No. born on 'other' country</th>
<th>No. born in Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 Male 3 Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 Male 2 Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Simms family, first and second generations

Undertaking for the Simms family the ‘mapping’ exercise that I discussed in chapter 5, we would have found an initial ‘anchoring’ sibling set of two, followed by a second generation in which six out of ten were born in the same parna. Thus eight persons related to one another by sibling and/or father to son links were born in Piyul country, seven of these during the classical era, prior to influence from Australian settler society.

Beyond this point, we are moving into post-classical conditions. As it happens, only one more person (of cohort 4) was born in Piyul. But from then on (and until expectant mothers began to be taken to hospital in Kalgoorlie or Alice Springs to give birth) almost all Simms babies were born at Warburton. Warburton country, though not far away from Piyul, is not claimed by them to be in any sense theirs. By the same token, all of the descendants of the early generations are identified with Piyul country. The fact that all the Simms descendants are identified with Piyul country does not mean that they share a particular Dreaming. In the last chapter I indicated that while the originating antecedents of a family group would all have ‘come from the Dreaming’ as individuals, and that sometimes they would all have shared the same Dreaming, the parna with which they were associated would not necessarily be built around a major site or set of sites having a particular Dreaming identity. I have mentioned that
Mangkartikurnu was of the *Warnampi Kutjarra* Dreaming; and Victor's Dreaming was the same. I believe that two of Mangkartikurnu's sons and a daughter were also of this Dreaming, but there is also a Ngirntaka connection manifest in one or two of the antecedents, reflecting the fact that the track of this Dreaming also goes through Piyul country. While any descendant of the 'anchoring' siblings will be recognised as a family member and as being associated with Piyul wherever he or she was born, no one would normally claim to be a 'totemite' of such an area and its Dreaming/s without having been born there and in the absence of their personal totemic connection being specifically recognised by all. Thus in contemporary times, while the Dreaming (considered as a whole) is very much part of the life world of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and of Warburton, as discussed in earlier chapters, in terms of the association of people with country, as members of family groups, the Dreaming element is not a critical factor. Nor is it critical to the meaning of the idea of 'families'. His or her Dreaming identity is important to each individual who has one (and this means most people), and if two or more family members share the same Dreaming this will certainly give them a special bond. Today however, many younger people will not even have a Dreaming 'totem' at all. As I have indicated, one of the changes associated with the transition from classical to post-classical conditions has been that people have come to be born either in a 'community' situation, or more recently still, in hospitals far away from the Lands. There has been some uncertainty and changing views about whether a totemic connection could legitimately be attributed to persons born in community settings. When I first started my fieldwork here, such an association would not have been acceptable, but increasingly I have heard claims being made to connectedness to the Dreaming for people who were born in a community, particularly if the birth took place in a (nearby) 'bush' setting and not inside a clinic.

I said earlier that one of the objects of these case studies is to document examples of the tendency, in the classical situation, for sibling sets and their descendants to be associated with a particular area of country. For this part of my argument, obviously the only material relevant is that which relates to classical times. But I am also trying to show something about the families that we see today. I am trying to reveal aspects of their structure, but most importantly I am seeking to show that they have their roots firmly in the classical past, and in particular areas of country. They are not simply post-classical phenomena. Furthermore, at a greater level of generality I am seeking to show that to understand fully the nature of connectedness to country we need also to understand the type of social organization that
exists in and between these families. The phenomenon of connectedness to country is not separate from the phenomenon of social organization: the two are part and parcel of the same thing.

The fortunes of the Simms family have largely been tied up with Warburton for the past 60 or 70 years, in that the great majority of the descendants from the two ‘founders’ have continued to live there; and also in that they have a strong profile in Warburton. Mangkartikurnu’s first son Tommy Simms (1928 – 2004) was a very prominent man at Warburton, and further afield, all his adult life. In late 2008 there were 33 people on my social database with the Simms surname, and 25 of them were living in Warburton. (This is out of a total Warburton population of about 400.) Most of them live together in several adjacent houses in what is called the ‘top side’ of the community. Out of this 33, only three are not descendants of the two founders, and these are wives of sons of Mangkartikurnu. These women were of the generation that changed their maiden names to their husbands on marriage, which is not a practice that occurs any more.\textsuperscript{137}

But while the Simms family has become a part of Warburton community, it critically retains its connectedness to Piyul. This more than anything else is what the family is ‘about’. From the earliest times of their ‘settlement’ in Warburton, family members spent the ‘Christmas holidays’ out in the Piyul area. Harry Simms, a cohort 3 person of generation 2, developed an outstation at Piyul in the 1970s and drove up and down between there and Warburton for many years. Cyril Simms, a cohort 4 man also of generation 2, followed in his footsteps and still runs people in and out, to an outstation in a slightly different place from Harry’s.

The family has not however been so successful in subsequent generations. The five brothers of generation 2 had sixteen children between them, but only six males in total, of whom one died young and another is a long term prisoner. The remaining four have all been seriously

\textsuperscript{137} In the post-classical era, at least, children have been more likely, other things being equal, to end up living in the community of their father than that of their mother (although immediately after a marriage there is often a period of uxorilocal residence). However, it is also clear that the ‘pull’ of the father’s community is closely related to the strength in numerical and other terms of the father’s family. In the case of the five second generation Simms women, four of them actually married Warburton men, so there was little choice of residence location for their own children. But even children of subsequent generations, among whom marriages have been contracted widely, predominantly live at Warburton.
damaged by substance misuse. It is worthy of note that the Simms brothers of generation 2 were constrained in the matter of the number of children they might have had, because of the strong association that they developed early on with the missionaries, who always tried to stop men acquiring multiple wives. Each of the brothers had only one wife, while most of their ‘cohort-mates’ who had not settled at Warburton or become actively involved with the mission had at least two.

Case 2: LAIDLAW, family (country Wirrkural – Mt Eveline; and surrounding areas): genealogy 14 refers.

In c1908, Nyuwi (Oliver) Laidlaw was born, within Area D, but to the north of Piyul. He achieved considerable notoriety at Warburton, acquiring four wives, some of which he took from other men, using violence and intimidation in the process. One of these adventures ultimately resulted in him being killed in a spear fight. Neither was he any respecter of the ‘skin’ (section) system – one of his wives was even in the wrong generation for him. (By contrast, virtually all the other persons considered in the cases discussed in this chapter married persons of the correct section.)

Of his fourteen children, three were sons, all by the first wife, and eleven were daughters. While Oliver was of cohort 2, two of his children were of cohort 3, nine were of cohort 4, and three were of cohort 5. Only the cohort 3 children were born in the Wirrkural area.

Thus only 3 people (one in cohort 2, and two in cohort 3) were born on ‘Laidlaw parna’ (and in the classical era). This is clearly not a case where any consolidation was occurring in the classical era. However, and despite the lack of males in the second generation, there are considerable numbers (currently 22) at Warburton who identify as Laidlaws (see table below). The daughters of Oliver Laidlaw happen to have included several powerful sisters (of cohort 4) who, in three cases, were able to attract husbands from other parts of the Lands and who have continued to live in Warburton to the present day. They live in adjacent houses, and not only their children but even their daughter’s children tend to be known as Laidlaws (though they may officially have other surnames). These women are the ‘face’ of the Laidlaw family and do all the talking at meetings and the like. As I indicated in chapter 5, such a consolidation of a family as a unit based predominantly around women occurred very rarely.
under classical conditions, because in a life based on bands, sisters could not reside together in numbers. So whereas in the Simms case we saw a ‘flow through’ into post-classical times from a patrilineal core that had already achieved some consolidation, with the Laidlaws we see a kind of discontinuity. From a precarious start in classical times, in terms of the potential for any durability, a substantial type of family built around ‘all the sisters’ has arisen, facilitated by post-classical conditions. It should not, however, be viewed as a ‘matriarchal’ family, in the sense of possessing any consciousness of itself in these terms. If any mature (and capable) men were to arise within the Laidlaw family ranks, they would undoubtedly take over as the leaders.

I will shortly be referring to another factor, of a more ‘hidden’ nature, that has also played a part in the consolidation of the Laidlaws. But first I need to provide some material relating to the Scott family.

Case 3: SCOTT family (country Winkangu – Frank Scott Hill; and surrounding areas): genealogy 15 refers.

In about 1890 and 1899 respectively, two brothers, Ngirntakatjanu Scott and ‘Mr Scott’ (first name unknown) were born in Area D. (They were both of cohort 1.) It is noteworthy that the name Ngirntakatjanu means ‘from the Ngirntaka’ in other words, this man’s very name proclaims that he was born of the Ngirntaka Dreaming which as we have seen, is manifest in this country. I do not have documentation concerning the place of origin of the wives of these two brothers. Each brother had only one son, Richard and Bobby respectively, both of cohort 2.

The main relevant fact about this family is that in the early 1930s, at about the same time as Will Wade arrived at Warburton to establish the mission, the two brothers with their wives and families, including Richard and Bobby, all moved down to the Goldfields. Thus they left the Lands earlier and in a more concerted fashion than the Laidlaws; and they have never re-established themselves residentially, to any significant extent, in Warburton. From the

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138 Apparently the reason for the move was to join some other kin who had made the same move earlier. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries there had been something of a flow of people in this direction, but it slowed to a trickle once the mission was operational.
Goldfields, they have however remained ‘in touch’ with Ngaanyatjarra people in the Lands and have contracted a number of marriages, which has led to some of their number living in other Lands communities.

**Linkage of Laidlaws and Scotts**

One of the significant things about the Laidlaws and Scotts is the close genealogical link that exists, or that is posited to exist between them. The link is this: Ngirntakatjanu Scott and his brother (‘Mr Scott’) had another brother, older than Ngirntakatjanu (and like him, of cohort 1), who was the father of Oliver Laidlaw (who it will be remembered was of cohort 2). It is sometimes said by informants that the families should have had one surname rather than two.

From this perspective, if they are viewed as *one family* rather than two, their profile looks significantly different. If we are talking about a Scott/Laidlaw grouping, we have a much more impressive line-up, in terms of both the anchoring set and the descendants. There has continued to be some substance to the idea of a ‘joint’ family, perhaps more so in the Goldfields setting than at Warburton. Various members of the Laidlaws have also had considerable residential exposure to the Goldfields, though they did not go down there at such an early date, or in such a concerted manner. (It should be mentioned that mature male Laidlaws are no more evident in the Goldfields than at Warburton.) It is certainly apparent that the ‘joint’ affiliation has been a source of mutual strength for the two families. In late 2008, my social database showed the following (for ease of reference, the Simms figures are also set out here):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Total numbers</th>
<th>Warburton</th>
<th>Other Ng communities</th>
<th>Goldfields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laidlaw</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simms</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6.3: Numbers of persons affiliated to three Warburton families*
Linkage of Scotts and Laidlaws with Simms

There is no actual genealogical link that I am aware of that is posited between the Simms family and the other two. But Victor and Mangkartikurru Simms are considered ‘brothers’ of Oliver Laidlaw. In terms of the section system, the three of them are of the same group – Karimarra – which supports this view. By the same token, the three are ‘sons’ in section terms of Ngirntakatjanu Scott and his brother, who were of the Panaka section. The issue of the extension of kinship terms to section categories needs to be treated with caution. It is my contention that, at least in the southern sector, when say a person A is called a ‘brother’ of a person B, people generally have in mind that a link of a genealogical kind exists. When the connection is somewhat distant (whether laterally or in terms of time depth) the exact genealogical pathway between A and B may not be known, though it is assumed that it could be known. Comfort is given about the veracity of the linkage by the strong sense of an ancient shared past. The case of section terms is somewhat different. We know that the section system has only been present in the area for about a century, although Ngaanyatjarra people themselves are not aware of this fact. They assume (and sometimes actively posit) that the ‘system’ has always been present. But I would argue that the recency of the system’s arrival is detectable in the way that it is used. Its penetration into Ngaanyatjarra ways of thought seems quite shallow. It is used and referred to sparingly. It is not the practice to give section identity as the explanation for the relationship that is said to pertain between particular persons. Tommy Simms used to speak of Ngirntakatjanu Scott as a tjamu (grandfather), and I am confident he was not basing this on their shared section affiliation. With certain exceptions (a few individuals use it with relish and apply it to persons who are close), there is a definite sense in which its role seems to be to cater for dealings with outsiders, rather than being part of the internal Ngaanyatjarra world. It is precisely this system’s usefulness in an inter-group context that has been identified by writers such as McConvell (1985) as the primary reason for its rapid spread across the continent in the wake of European settlement.139

Thus, in terms of the situation of Mangkartikuru, Victor and Oliver, my interpretation is that their common section affiliation plays only a confirmatory role in the fraternal relationship that is said to exist between them. The fact that they share essentially the same parna is a far more significant matter.

139 Certainly, country in the desert is not stamped with section identities as such, as it is among the Warlpiri.
My observations of these three families over many years leads me to characterize the situation as follows. There is a loose though palpable sense of commonality across the three family span. Simms and Laidlaw people live in the same area on the eastern side or ‘top end’ of Warburton – and any Scotts that are in town stay in this area too. (Simms and Laidlaws occupy 5 households each in this area.) The sense of commonality is stronger between the Laidlaws and the Scotts, perhaps because of the definite genealogical linkage but more likely because of the shared ‘expatriate’ history. Although there was only one Scott living in Warburton as of late 2008, they do remain a ‘presence’ in Warburton as far as issues related to country are concerned. Tommy Simms, when he was alive, used to always say that the Scotts needed to be included in any consultations about land out to the east of Warburton. (It is probable that were it not for the Simms and to a lesser extent the Laidlaws, the Scotts would scarcely be able to maintain their profile here at all.) When meetings about land matters occur, Scotts living in other places turn up.

An even more ‘global’ link-up

At a higher level again, it is possible for all three of these families to be viewed as part of a grouping of five families - the extras being the Frasers and the Davidsons - that are associated with ‘central’ Warburton country and the area to the east and south of Warburton, as opposed to a grouping of eight families whose country embraces the west, north and north-east sides.140 This high level picture is rarely articulated, though, and only by certain of the deeper thinkers of the region. My informant Andrew Lawson (see Case Study 4 below) used to be fond of pointing it out. It is certainly of interest that such extensive swathes of country around Warburton are capable of being seen in terms of a single structure. Bearing in mind what I said above about the ‘shallowness’ of the penetration of the section system, I must acknowledge that when this structure is referred to, the descriptors used to distinguish the two groupings are section affiliations. The ‘east/south bloc’ has been described to me as the Karimarra/Panaka mob, and the west/north bloc as the Purungu/Tjarruru mob. In an instance like this, where such a ‘big picture’ is involved, the section schema is extremely useful as a tool for pointing to the structure: in fact, the very existence of the structure would be difficult to discern without this as an aid. However, I would still argue that the section system has not ‘driven’ the emergence of the structure, but only ‘reflecting’ something that is already present.

140 This sketch does not purport to provide a picture of ‘traditional ownership’ as such of the Warburton region. This would require many complexities and other families to be considered.
I now turn to another trio of closely spaced ‘family areas’, this time associated with the country of the North Warburton Range (Area E on Map 6A) immediately to the north of Warburton itself. The families, the Lawsons, the Wests and the Greens (genealogies 6,7 and 8), are part of the eight-member Purungu-Tjarruru ‘coalition’ referred to above.

**Case 4:** LAWSON family (country Kumpurl, Kunapurul, Katatayin in the North Warburton Range): genealogy 6 refers.

A (cohort 1) man named Kantuma Lawson was born around 1885 at Kumpurl in the range country of Area E. He had two sisters, also of cohort 1, and from the same area. The siblings were of the Purungu section. Kantuma had two wives, one from the Mt Blyth area, south of Jameson (110 km distant, to the east: classed as ‘medium’ distance; and the other from Wanarn (100 km distant, but to the north: also classed as ‘medium’). About ten persons were born in the next generation, six of them to Kantuma himself, but apparently only two (who were members of cohort 3) were born around Kumpurl; these being children of Kantuma. I have never heard much talk about Dreaming connectedness in relation to this family, although the *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men) Dreaming and several others feature in this area.

Thus from the perspective of descendants there are two antecedents who reinforce the ‘anchorage’ of the group to Kumpurl and the other nearby places that was established by the initial three-sibling set. The other second generation individuals (who were members of cohort 4) were born at the mission. The extant descendants clearly consider themselves bound together genealogically, and to have a common connectedness with Area D, and (as with other families) they base this explicitly on the connection to that country of the antecedents who were born there. The ‘collectivism’ is evinced most strongly, however, by the descendants of Kantuma himself, as opposed to the descendants of his sisters. The majority of the descendants of Kantuma have spent their lives at Warburton, while the descendants of the sisters have spent most of their time elsewhere (‘following the father / husband’).

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141 It might be mentioned that people invariably assume that in the more distant past there would have been more antecedents than just the ones specifically identified (in this case the five mentioned). It would be considered that all would have come from the same country.
The table below shows the breakdown of the second generation of the Lawson family (10 members):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort membership</th>
<th>No. in cohort</th>
<th>No. born on ‘family’ country</th>
<th>No. born on ‘other’ country</th>
<th>No. born in Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4: Lawson family numbers by cohort

The particular place of association of the Lawson antecedents has become (if it was not initially) the site Kumpurl, at which a small outstation was built in the 1970s as a result of the efforts of Andrew Lawson, the eldest son of Kanturna by his second wife.142 (Kumpurl was Andrew’s birthplace.) As with previous cases considered, this family also has suffered from a shortage of male sons in successive generations, and has relied heavily on the efforts of a single person (Andrew) for its ‘recognition’ and certainly for its ‘glue’ as a family.

Andrew himself had two wives, of which the first produced only one child, and the second five. Four of the six were male (of whom one died prematurely), and two female. There have been few offspring yet in the grandchild generation, and Andrew’s surviving sons do not appear likely to make an impression on the community or regional civic scene. His two daughters, on the other hand, are powerful and capable young women who have a strong sense of their family name. They are as yet too young, however, to be taken seriously in terms of community or regional politics, or even in terms of family leadership. The family is at the present point an extremely small one. Only eight Lawsons are recorded in my data base (leaving aside Andrew’s two widows who to some extent also identify as Lawsons). All of them live at Warburton.

142 It is of interest to note that Kanturna had his first child when he was about 45, and his last when he was about 68. This phenomenon of ‘late career fatherhood’ is common in the study area. When one considers the likely average life expectancy of perhaps 50 years, it shows that there must have been many men indeed who died childless. It is also indicative of something that I have encountered again and again in the study area – men whom I have known who lost their fathers when they were young.
Case 5: WEST family (country Kunapurul and surrounding places in Area E): genealogy 5 refers

Another man, Putjukurnu West, was born around 1896, at Kunapurul, which is about 15 km from Kanturna Lawson’s birthplace. Putjukurnu’s Dreaming was the culturally important Marlu (Kangaroo man), who travelled through this area on a southerly course. Putjukurnu also had two sisters, and the three of them comprise another sibling group of cohort 1, also associated with Area E. Again, they were of the Purungu section.

One of Putjukurnu’s sisters had no children. The other sister Milyka was the first wife of Mangkartikurnu Simms whom we saw in Case Study 1. None of their children were born in Area E, but rather in their father’s area. It has been this country, Piyul (Area D) with which they have been most strongly associated.

Putjukurnu himself had two wives, both of whom were from the Wanarn area (100 km to the north: ‘medium’ degree of distance.) It will be noted that Kanturna Lawson also had a wife from there. A well-travelled route joined the two areas, as mentioned earlier, but it is unusual for a man to get two wives from the same place.

Putjukurnu had eight children, four male and four female, of whom four were in cohort 3, and four in cohort 4. Six of these, including all four of the cohort 3 persons, were born ‘on country’ (i.e. not at the mission); and four of these six births took place in Area E specifically. Several of these persons are ‘totemites’ of the Dreamings of the area, but no particular Dreaming predominates. One of the women, Hazel West, has marks on her body which connect her to the Wati Kutjarra Dreaming that is present in this area.

Thus for the West family and its country of Kunapurul we have an ‘anchoring’ antecedental sibling set of three, supported by four individuals who were actually born in the family parna in the next generation.
Again, the descendants mutually trace a connection with one another and with the country of Area E on the basis of the genealogical relatedness of their antecedents (particularly the seven persons born in the NWR) and their association with this country. As with the Lawsons, this association is much the stronger in the case of the descendants of Putjukurnu West than those of his sisters. The descendants of Milyka display little sense of connection to Area E, primarily because they have a very strong connection on the father’s side.

Table showing the break-down of the second generation of the West family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. in second generation</th>
<th>Cohort membership</th>
<th>No. in cohort</th>
<th>No. born on ‘family’ country</th>
<th>No. born on ‘other’ country</th>
<th>No. born in Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5: West family second generation

There are many West descendants over at least four further generations. My database shows that 59 Wests live at Warburton (correcting for women who married into the family, as in the other case studies). The family is a dominant one at Warburton in socio-political as well as numerical terms. In the same kind of ‘snow-balling’ effect that was seen operating with the Simms family, the majority of the persons descending from Putjukurnu West identify particularly as Wests, even if their affiliation with the family is on their mother’s side. Unlike in the case of the Laidlaws, but similarly to the case of the Simms family, the ‘leaders’ of this family are the extant senior men, particularly Philip West (b. 1934), eldest son of Putjukurnu, and Livingston West (b. 1951) paternal grandson of Putjukurnu. The descendants have also shown themselves particularly likely (in comparison with the overall statistics pertaining to post-marital residence) to continue living in Warburton after marriage. It is a telling fact that here are almost no Wests living in other Ngaanyatjarra communities – although a few do maintain something of a foothold in Goldfields towns. These features seem to illustrate that desert people of this area value not only membership in socio-centrically defined family groups, but also ‘strength in numbers’ in regard to these groups.
Case 6: GREEN family (country Mulytju, Kunapurul, Katatayin and the surrounding area on the eastern side of the North Warburton Range country): genealogy 8 refers

In about 1882 a third man, Mungalu Green, was born in generally the same area. His birthplace, Mulytju, was slightly to the east of the range country, in the adjacent limestone belt. This is still usually regarded as part of the same parna. Mungalu, who like Kanturna Lawson and Putjukurnu West was a Purungu man, did not have any siblings. Mungalu’s Dreaming was Kinara (the Moon Man), who came through this area and is associated with several sites here. His two wives were from ‘close up’ (30 km and 20 km away respectively). His first son, Billy Green, also had this tjukurrpa. Mungalu had no siblings, but two wives. I have not discovered the country of the first wife, who was deceased prior to Tindale’s visit in 1935, but the second one was from very ‘close up’ (near Piyul). There were six children by the two wives, five of them sons, and all of them in cohort 3. All were born ‘on country’, with apparently four being born in Area E. The Green family has five antecedents anchoring it in its country, straddling two cohorts (cohorts 1 and 3). Again, the descendants all see themselves to be connected to one another genealogically and to the country of Area E.

Second generation of Green family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. in second generation</th>
<th>Cohort membership</th>
<th>No. in cohort</th>
<th>No. born on ‘family’ country</th>
<th>No. born on ‘other’ country</th>
<th>No. born in Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.6: Green family, second generation

With five sons born to Mungalu, the prognosis for consolidation would have looked favourable. Yet as seems to happen so often, there were far fewer sons than expected in the third generation. In fact there were not many daughters either. The only surviving member of the second generation is Noel Green, a quiet man who participates little in political life. As we saw with the Laidlaws and Scotts, there has been a significant Goldfields exposure in the history of the family. While the family is well enough known in Warburton, there are currently only about 16 members living here. Yet they manage to currently occupy a block of
5 houses here, mainly because some immigrants from the Goldfields who do not quite fit in anywhere else have been staying with them.

A Note on Post-Classical Marriage

In the preceding pages I have referred to the subject of marriage patterns as they occurred in classical times. It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with post-classical marriage pattern in any detail, but I will make a few generalisations. From the beginning of the post-classical era in 1940, until about the mid '70s, most of the marriages contracted by Warburton people involved partners who came from the western two-thirds of the southern sector. Roughly, one can say that the ‘zone of endogamy’ encompassed Warburton itself, the Wanam and Tjurkarli areas and Jameson. (Thus Tjurkarli, which had been quite isolated from Warburton in classical times, quickly became less inaccessible.) Less inter-marriage took place between Warburton and Wingellina, Blackstone and Warakurna. Since the mid '70s, as Ngaanyatjarra people acquired their own motor vehicles, and since (with these vehicles) they began to participate in the current large scale man-making ceremonial cycles, more marriages have begun to be contracted in far away areas. But by far the most marriages are still between people of the Lands.

Linkages between the Lawsons, Wests and Greens

All six of the families that I have considered, by virtue of their proximity to Warburton, were among the group that experienced the earliest and greatest impact from the mission. But it should not be thought that they consequently moved rapidly to an entirely settlement-style life. Apart from occasional trips further afield, they regularly spent considerable periods of time camped out in their country. From about the 1940s onwards, a practice developed at the mission whereby most of the non-Aboriginal staff went home on leave at the height of summer, so that the settlement almost closed down. During this ‘stand-down’ period, the mission regulars, most of whom were drawn from the areas nearby, would go back to their country and live in a manner resembling the classical life. Thus the Lawsons, Greens, Wests and others would go hunting and gathering through the North Warburton Range, while the Simms, Laidlaws and Scotts would be out to the east, around Piyul way. The skeleton missionary staff would help as best they could by bringing out some basic supplies that the

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\(^{143}\) See Peterson, 2000.
people had grown accustomed to, such as flour and tea; and because an ‘artificial’ supply of water was necessary now that the people were less highly mobile, they would bring drums of water out on the mission truck. Later, bores were sunk. Bores called Mummine (correct spelling Mamayin), Catatine (Katayin) and Kunapurul became household names at Warburton during these years, and are still seen as focal sites within NWR country. The same applies to sites to the east of Warburton, like Snake Well, ‘Beal’ (Piyul) outstation and Mt Eveline (Wirrkural).

**Genealogical inter-connections**

Similarly to the Laidlaws and the Scotts, with the Lawsons and Wests a superordinate pair of brothers is actually posited as being the fathers respectively of Kantuma and his sisters, and Putjukurnu and his sisters. The names of these brothers are not remembered, though a birthplace (in Area E) is cited for the one who was the father of Kanturna. No other memories appear to remain about them. No superordinate ancestor is cited for Mungalu. For some people and in some contexts, this can mean that the Greens are viewed as more of a separate family from the other two. On the other hand, sometimes people will specifically point out how men such as Kanturna, Putjukurnu and Mungalu would all call each other ‘brother’ – and that therefore all their descendants should be considered equally inter-related.

It is worth noting here that not only can the fusion of families occur (that is, families whose antecedental sets fit together, including having matching section affiliation, and that share a common country connectedness), but at times there can be fission within a family. For example, two different ‘branches’ of the West family (both associated with influential persons) seem often to be more in mutual opposition than unity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>No. of houses occupied in Warburton (Total number of indigenous houses 74)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laidlaw</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6.7: Comparison of 6 Warburton families by number of houses occupied, 2008**
A structurally different case, Case 7: Wintjurta; Purrungu/Tjarruru: genealogy 4 refers

The cases considered thus far have all conformed to the model described in chapter 5, whereby a set of antecedental siblings provided an anchorage for the connection of descendants to a particular area of country. I mentioned that there were around 20 such entities within the 22,000 sq km area that comprises my core southern demographic zone, and that covers the Warburton and Jameson areas. I also mentioned in chapter 5 that among the ten cases not conforming to this model, there were a few cases where an antecedental sibling set was still identified by the people but where it was not united in its connection to a single area: that is, where the siblings were born in and associated with places too dispersed to provide the basis for any subsequent consolidation of a family formation.

The story of Case 7 begins with four siblings, two male and two female, of cohorts 1 and 2, being born over a larger and less well-defined area than in any of the other cases considered so far. One of these siblings was a man born around 1900 called Wintjurta (Charlie Holland). This man’s personal tjukurpa story is related in Appendix 4. His brother Tjinalukurkunu (Norman Holland) was two or three years younger. Charlie was from Rururr and Norman from Mitika. These places, which are about 50 km apart (and to the north of Warburton), are marked on Map 6A, as are other places mentioned in this case study. The other two siblings, both females, were born at distances of around 50 -70 km away from these two men’s birthplaces. The two sisters were Intjiparti/Maud, who was born in the 1890s (she was the eldest, and was of cohort 1) and Tjimpurna, who was about five years younger than Maud. Maud was born at Tjamntumpa, a water hole some 30 km to the east of Warburton, while Tjimpurna was born at Kaarnka (Kennedy Hill), 50 km further to the east.

If a line is drawn connecting the birth places of the four siblings the resulting area would be two or three times the ‘normal’ size of a country in the sense I am using that term in this discussion. Certainly the area concerned is not recognised as in any sense a unity by Ngaanyatjarra people.

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144 Tindale recorded a genealogy for some of the people in this family when he visited Warburton in 1935.
145 In line with these facts, I did not ‘discover’ this sibling group in the course of a mapping exercise, and only learnt of its existence when discussing certain people’s genealogies.
The next chapter in the story is that the two males of these siblings, Charlie and Norman, did not have any children of their own. As young men, both of them functioned as ‘guides’ for some of the whitefellas who came to the Lands from the Goldfields around the time of the arrival of the first missionaries. This resulted in them doing a lot of travelling outside the Lands, and it appears that both of them lived their later lives in the Goldfields and ultimately died there. These circumstances and the lack of progeny of the two brothers cut short whatever chance there might have been of the emergence of a Holland family based in the Mitika-Rururr area (although these two places were in any case too widely spaced for this to occur).  

It is to the two sisters that I now turn. As it happens, Maud and Tjimpurna respectively married a pair of brothers from Warutjarra in the Blackstone area, 160 km to the east of Maud’s birthplace and 100 km to the east of Tjimpurna’s. (I classify these marriages as ‘far-off’ and ‘medium’ respectively.) In Tjimpurna’s case, her husband took her back with him to Blackstone, and her children with him came to be part of a family in that area; but in Maud’s case, her husband, Tjunkarakurnu, did not return with her to his home area as per the usual practice, but remained subsequently based in his wife’s country.

In effect then, after their marriage the couple Maud and Tjunkarakurnu were both without siblings of their own in the area in which they based themselves. This was a fairly unusual residence pattern. Normally male siblings tended to live in the one area, or in cases where a man did not have any brothers, he would tend to live in his wife’s country, especially if she had siblings. The couple’s first child was a female, Yvonne, born in the early 1920s at a site not far south of Kaarnka, the birthplace of Maud’s sister Tjimpurna. Two male children followed, Stewart Davies, born in 1926 at a place called Kalka Kutjarra, close to his mother’s birthplace Tjarntumpa; and then Roger Davies, born in 1931 at Kaarnka. Maud and her husband were among the people who were to become heavily involved with the mission at Warburton from the earliest days of its existence, and in consequence of this their last two children, females, were born close to Warburton. However, the birthplaces of their first three children show that they had been staying in contact with the places that Maud must have been

146 As will be seen from the genealogy, both brothers did adopt children. This happened in the Goldfields context.
familiar with from her earliest memories. Stewart and Roger Davies both later became prominent men at Warburton, over a period of many years.

Stewart, who died in 2009, was an articulate man and one of my main informants. He often used to say that in being born at Kalka Kutjarra, he was born ‘in the wrong place’. He should have been born, he says, in or near his father Tjunkarakurnu’s country, Warutjarra (near Blackstone); but failing this, Warutjarra should at least have comprised the hub for the movements of Tjunkarakurnu and his wife, Stewart's mother Maud. This would have meant that the child Stewart would have had many of his early life experiences in the Warutjarra area and, encouraged by his father, would no doubt have acquired a sense that this was his country, even if he had not been born there. But none of this happened, and Stewart was 'grown up' in his mother’s country, acquiring in the process a strong sense of identification with that country. From the time he was about seven years old the arrival of the missionaries further reinforced this emphasis, as his parents acquired another reason for not venturing further eastwards. Stewart has lived at Warburton for most of his life, while his major interests in country have been played out in his own and his mother's area.147

Behind this picture however, there lies a further intriguing complexity. Stewart contends that not only was he himself born ‘in the wrong place’, but so was his father Tjunkarakurnu. Stewart’s father and mother ‘should have been’ living in Tjunkarakurnu’s country, resulting in Stewart being born there. Similarly, a generation earlier, Tjunkarakurnu’s father’s had been living ‘in the wrong place’ when Tjunkarakurnu was born at Warutjarra. Tjunkarakurnu’s father’s country was at Mt Davies, a further 100km east again, just over the South Australian border, and his child should have been born there. Thus the same kind of ‘mistake’ was made in successive generations.

As it happens, there is an extant family group that traces its descent from a set of antecedents whose country is Warutjarra. Stewart is linked to these people through Tjunkarakurnu and also through Tjunkarakurnu's brother (Timpurna’s husband), who died at Warutjarra. There is

147 These interests, it might be mentioned, have been varied and persistent. In addition to having many dealings with mining companies, Stewart enlisted support over many years for the development of a major art project centred around his birth place Kalka Kutjarra,
also an extant family which traces its descent from collaterals of Stewart's grandfather, and whose country is Mt Davies. We might note then, that unlike the unremembered father of Maud and Wintjurta and their three siblings, who apparently gave little priority to the business of consolidating a family, there actually were consolidated families in the ‘Davies’ patriline. Stewart and his father before him could have been member of these but were distanced from these as a result of the vagaries of life.

At various periods in the past, evidently frustrated by a lack of support in the Warburton area, itself stemming from the weak position he has there in ‘family’ terms, Stewart has activated an interest in both these areas, though he has never made much progress and his efforts have been relatively short lived.\textsuperscript{148}

This case study firstly provides an example of siblings having a relatively far-flung connectedness to country; and shows that such a dispersed connectedness is a poor basis for any continuity to flow through to the next generation. No ‘Holland’ family developed from the initial seeds of Charlie, Norman and the three sisters. Secondly it shows how a desert man may keep track of his patrilineal connectedness to country over two generations or more, even in a situation where this connectedness is basically only theoretical and was never realised substantively. We might observe also how while Stewart has many ‘theoretical’ connections he has not really benefitted from this. While his patrilineally-based connectedness to the two areas to the east are not disputed, he has never been able to gain anything from them. Neither has he derived much from his mother’s side, given the dispersal of his siblings’ birthplaces and the general lack of family consolidation. Despite possessing personal qualities of energy and intelligence, and an ambitious nature, he has remained in a relatively weak situation throughout his life. Warburton as constituted in a social and political sense has not at any point really had a space for a ‘Davies family’, and still does not do so. There is no such entity forming part of the fabric of connectedness to the country of the area that is shared among the ‘consolidated’ families of the type illustrated in my first six case studies. (It was because of this that I did not give a family name to the title of this case study.)

\textsuperscript{148} As a man of considerable energy and knowledge, for decades he played a major care-taking role in regard to a broad area of country around Warburton. This role increased as he got older and other senior men passed away.
Stewart’s connections to the Kalka Kutjarra and Tjarntumpa area are recognised by everyone, but they are essentially his own individual connections. (Similarly there are some individual connections, to various scattered places, that have been recognised in the case of those of his siblings who survived and lived at Warburton.)

Case 8: FORBES family (Blackstone area): Panaka/Karimarra: genealogy 57 refers

This next case is situated in the eastern half of the southern sector, within which the present-day community of Blackstone lies. The country of the Forbes family includes the Blackstone Range (Wirtapiwara) and the country to the north and south of this range, for a distance of perhaps 20 - 30 km in either direction. Area F refers, on Map 5A. Fred Forbes, my main informant for information about family (among many other matters), referred to the family country as ‘Blackstone area’.

A man named Ngarlitjanu was born at Warutjarra in the western part of the Blackstone Range, around 1850 or even earlier – prior even to my cohort 0 (the Forbes family has a long memory). Ngarlitjarnu had two wives. To get his first wife Tjikarli, he went, as a young man, on a marathon journey far to the north, into the centre of the northern sector of the Lands, to the area of the renowned Tingarri site Kulkurta. He brought Tjikarli back to his own area. His second wife Manyatja he got from close at hand, actually from within the area Fred now calls ‘Blackstone area’.

There are two children of Ngarlitjanu who produced descendants. One, a daughter, was a child of the second, local wife Manyatja. This woman had two sons who married women from the east (in South Australia) and who did not return to WA.149 The descendants live in the Pitjantjatjara Lands.

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149 This move needs to be understood as part of the general ‘drift’ to the east during the Cl9th that stemmed from the impact of the building of the railway line north from Adelaide, to Oodnadatta and later to Alice Springs. The ‘drift’ affected the whole of the Pitjantjatjara Lands, and affected some people as far west as Blackstone, like the two brothers just referred to. I have not heard of any people from country to the west of Blackstone being affected.

Chapter 6
The other child who produced descendants was Ngarlitjanu’s first-born. He was a son, Tjikalyikurnu.\(^{150}\) Tjikalyikurnu was born at a waterhole just to the north of the Cavenagh Range, and about 20 km west of the western end of the Blackstone Range. He spent his life in the region and like all his antecedents before him he died while the classical era was still in full swing. He did not venture as far afield as his father had, in search of a wife. Instead, he married a woman Parnata from the east side of Warburton (a ‘medium’ distance away). This was the only wife he had. His father (Ngarlitjanu) died in a spear fight at a major site to the south of Blackstone while Tjikalyikurnu was still young.

Tjikarlikurnu and Parnata had four sons (the last of which died young). The third-born of these was Fred Forbes (1923 - 2008). This man was in the early part of cohort 3, while his two elder brothers, Jacky Forbes and George Forbes, were part of cohort 2. They died many years ago. Fred was born near Jameson at a site that is connected with the Marlu Dreaming, but his actual tjukurpa (from this site) is Emu (Karlaya). The Dreaming story involved an Emu that became involved with the events surrounding the Marlu at that spot. His other brothers were born in or near to Blackstone country.

When Fred was still a baby, his father (Tjikalyikurnu) was killed by a ‘featherfoot’ (tjina karrpilpa).\(^{151}\) Subsequently his mother did not remarry.\(^{152}\) She attached herself, with her three sons, to a group in which the senior man was a (full) brother of hers, Zacchias Holland (a kamuru [MB] of Fred). It seems that another kamuru, this time a classificatory one, also looked after them for a time, probably after the death of Zacchias. At some time in the 1950s (by which time Fred was a man) they settled at Warburton Mission.

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\(^{150}\) Antecedents, particularly men, are often remembered by a name that effectively means ‘son of’ (-kurnu). Thus Tjikalikurnu is the son of the woman Tjikali. The mother is the one usually referenced, unless the mother’s name is not remembered, in which case it can be the father. (This does not mean that the mother is more important as an antecedent. The intent is not to mark importance, but to be as indirect as possible in one’s reference to another person. Referring to a man via his mother’s name is preferable because it avoids mentioning his father’s name also.) The person referred to would have been referred to and addressed by other names during his or her lifetime.

\(^{151}\) ‘Featherfeet’ were surreptitious killers who would come from afar, alone or in pairs, to exact revenge. The other method involved larger ‘revenge parties (warrmarla), that would attack more openly.

\(^{152}\) I have often been told of the difficulties faced by widows with children in finding another husband, because men wanted the children they raised to be their own progeny.
Among the case material that I have about the Forbes family, is an extended description provided to me by Fred,\textsuperscript{153} that illustrates how their group used to often traverse ‘Blackstone country’ – more often than the normal dictates and patterns of the foraging life would dictate, considering that the group ‘leader’ Zacchias and his ‘sister’ Parnata were actually from further west, towards Warburton. Fred believed that the reason they spent so much time in the Blackstone area was because Parnata wanted her three sons to gain familiarity with the country of their (deceased) father. This matter has been referred to in Chapter 4 and is also discussed in Appendix 6. It is remarkable to think that she would hold so strongly to such a concern and be able to make it happen, in the process successfully persuading her brother and the other band members to comply. (As a woman she would normally have been subject to the decisions of the senior man or men as to the movements of the band.) So extraordinary does it seem that I checked the matter with several informants, none of whom expressed the slightest doubt about its likely veracity.

This material gives an insight into some of the less obvious ways in which the ‘idea’ of an area of country (or the feeling for it) can be perpetuated over time and inter-generationally. Whether as a result of her efforts or for other reasons, Fred did indeed acquire a sense of both the existence of a Forbes ‘family area’ and of his own connectedness to it. When I once asked Fred directly (not something one makes a habit of in the desert) about whether he considered himself an ‘owner’ for the Emu site near Jameson where he was born, he replied, after a long pause: ‘Half. Not really my country, but born there.’

On another occasion when we were talking about Blackstone country and the individuals in his family who were born there, he added: ‘My country really Blackstone too. I was born at Ngurtukamparra (the Emu site), but my father and mother were travelling at the time, they weren’t from there.’ The theme of being born in the wrong place, as a result of parents travelling, crops up again and again in various people’s stories.

There is no doubt about the status of the Forbes family at Blackstone. Blackstone as a community was established, in 1975, as primarily a ‘Forbes’ venture, under the auspices of

\textsuperscript{153} This description is set out in Appendix 6.
Fred, who was in his fifties at the time. Currently, there are 27 residents of Blackstone who are members of the Forbes family, out of a total community population of 165.

All of my first six cases were set in the Warburton area, but this case indicates that the same kind of model of ‘family connectedness’ applies in the Blackstone area, towards the eastern end of the southern sector. The case has also contained some specific material that has enabled us to glimpse further dimensions to the way in which a sense of family connectedness may be passed on, and possibly even further developed, over time. By the same token we have also seen that it is not only men who may be the instruments for the ‘consolidation’ of an enduring grouping of people to country. Women may be active players in the process too.

An element that arose in this study was the very distance that one man (Ngarlitjanu) travelled in the classical past to obtain a wife. There was nothing comparable in the other case studies, and indeed I made the point that most marriages of southern sector people in classical times did not involve a vast geographical span. However, the fact that the exception arose in this particular case should not be thought to indicate that there is any contrast between Warburton and say Blackstone in this regard. It is simply that it is a rare occurrence – but it does happen sometimes. As a matter of fact I do not see any significant differences geographically across the landscape of the southern sector, in relation to any of the aspects of the organization of the classical desert way of life that I consider throughout this study. There are many differences in the manifestations of this organization, but there is nothing in the way of a trend across the sector from one type to another.

On a similar point, the fact that I chose six cases from the Warburton area is indicative of nothing other than that it was convenient to be able to draw to some extent on a common setting, to reduce the steady flow of new material; and that it was highly illustrative of some of the underlying structural features to be able to consider two sets of families that were so inter-related with one another. I have just as many detailed cases from all parts of the southern sector that I could have used; and I will complete the review of this sector with another case from an area not far from the Forbes family country, in the eastern region.
Case 9: HOPKINS/PORTER/KUNIYA family (Country Kuniyapirti) Tjarruru/Purungu refer genealogy 48.

This is one of only a handful of cases in the southern sector in which the Dreaming is really highlighted in the identity of a family group and its country. The Dreaming ‘imprint’ in this case is provided by a site complex called Kuniyapirti, which lies 35 km to the north-east of Blackstone in the Murray Range (see Appendices 1 and 3 for references to the site and the Dreaming respectively). Area G refers, on Map 5A. Topographically, the Murray Range is an unusually well delineated hilly area of about 20km by 20km, all of which is known by the ‘locality’ name Kuniyapirti. The range is surrounded on each side by broad areas of flat plain country, and the hills contain some relatively long-lasting springs as well as catchments for rainwater. There is a central valley area, and many small creek run-offs, both into the valley and externally to the range. Fringing the hilly area are mulga plains and to the north, some sand hill country. All the elements are here of the most fertile of desert environments, along the lines described in chapter 5; and there is every indication, by way of artefact scatters and the like, that the area supported a relatively dense population.

The main people associated with Kuniyapirti parna are the descendants of a man named Turlkutjanukurnu, who was of cohort 0 or 1. The origin country of Turlkutjanukurnu’s wife is not remembered. The pair had four children – three males and a female. The first two, Norman Hopkins and Charlie Porter, were born around 1910 and 1915 respectively and hence were of cohort 2. The third and fourth, respectively a man named Joseph Kuniya and a woman named Ngalapuntja, may have been of cohort 3. Joseph’s surname is derived from the Dreaming Carpet Snakes of Kuniyapirti. All four were born at Kuniyapirti, and in fact they and Turlkutjanukurnu himself are represented in distinctive ‘sacred’ stones that are part of the site.

Norman Hopkins had a son and two daughters; Charlie Porter had four sons and two daughters; and Joseph Kuniya had five sons. Seven of these, including five males, were born either at Kuniyapirti or somewhere else ‘on country’ while the family was still living the bush life. It was not until the 1950s, twenty years after the mission was established, that Norman and Charlie went to ‘settle’ in Warburton. Evidently the family experienced some ‘consolidation’, as I have called it, at Kuniyapirti before the forces of change from the outside
became irresistible. In their case there was a substantial set of kin ‘anchored’ to the country not only by birth and siblingship but by their shared participation in the Dreaming identity of the area, which itself featured an unusual degree of integrity. The actual content of the Dreaming story for Kuniyapirti enhances this nexus. As is explained in Appendix 3, in the Dreaming the people of Kuniyapirti refused an invitation (or demand) from another set of people to attend a ceremony a long way to the south. This refusal, which represented a major breech of protocol, is said to have demonstrated the depth of commitment to their own place that these people felt. ‘If they had gone to that far-off place, who knows, they may never have come back!’, as an informant put it. The person in the story who is said to have taken this stand is Turlkutjanukurnu (in other words, and as so often happens, conflating ‘history’ and ‘Dreaming’).

After Norman and Charlie went to Warburton Mission, it appears that Joseph went to Ernabella, the Presbyterian mission that was established at the same time as (but quite separately from) Warburton, in the Pitjantjatjara Lands, about 300 km to the east of Kuniyapirti. After 1968, when the Docker River community was established (just outside the Lands, in the NT) Joseph and his family moved there, where they still remain. The last child of Turlkutjanukurnu, the female Ngalapuntja, married a man from the wellknown Shepherd family at Warakurna, and they continue to live there.

Charlie Porter produced a number of descendants who live mostly at Warburton. The most ‘closely-knit’ set of these descendants has been the children and grandchildren of Charlie’s oldest son, Gerald Porter (b.1946). This man has had a considerable personal profile at Warburton over a period of many years, but even so, his children and grandchildren (comprising at least a dozen persons), all of whom live at Warburton, are identified much more with the family of Gerald’s wife, Julie Laidlaw. This is because, as indicated earlier, the Laidlaw family has a standing in Warburton (based on connection to country in the locality). Because it is not identified with local country, ‘Porter’ is not a name that carries much weight at Warburton in terms of families.

Thus the onset of the post-classical milieu resulted in the descendants of Turlkutjanukurnu becoming quite widely dispersed. The very fact that there are three different surnames for the
three sons of Turlkutjanukurnu is a reflection of this. It was fairly unusual for groups from the Blackstone region to finish up at Ernabella rather than Warburton, for Ernabella was much further away; but it did happen in this case, with the Kuniya group. If Joseph Kuniya had taken his family to Warburton along with Charlie, there would have been a sizeable closely related grouping there. (Norman did not have many descendants, so his presence at Warburton was not much of a factor.) In fact, though such a situation did not happen with this family, the build-up at Warburton in the 1950s and 60s of groups from the hinterlands produced huge tensions, that were only alleviated in the mid 1970s by the establishment, with Commonwealth government funding, of communities at Blackstone, Wingellina and Warakurna, and slightly later at Jameson. After this, the present regime, in which only local families exist in any great numbers, was able to emerge at Warburton.

In the late 1970s, Gerald Porter was one of the main figures in getting an outstation of Blackstone community started at Kuniyapiriti. However the project did not ‘stick’. He maintains a public claim to Kuniyapiriti, and does not claim any other area. He always tries to ensure that he is a part of decision-making meetings that involve the area – though his efforts are constrained by the distance of Kuniyapiriti from his place of residence at Warburton. (It is not an option for him to leave Warburton, with his wife and descendants being part of the powerful local Laidlaw family.) Gerald himself was not actually born at Kuniyapiriti but at a rockhole near the present day Wanarn community, over 100 km away to the west. He explains this discrepancy by saying that his parents were travelling at the time. (He has never made any claim to the Wanarn site.) He makes the highly unusual claim, though, that despite where he was born, his own Dreaming is the Carpet Snake of Kuniyapiriti. In support of this he states that he was told that his grandfather, Turlkutjanukurnu, ‘called’ his, Gerald’s, Aboriginal name for him when he was young, and that it is a name which is connected with the Kuniya tjukurrpa. He also says that he and other (younger generation) members of his family who were also not born at Kuniyapiriti, carry within their bodies what he calls ‘pet’ carpet snakes. These are creatures that dwell within a person and are like a guide or helper to them.154 I do not know of anyone else who ‘bends the rules’ in this kind of way with the tjukurrpa,

154 This notion is similar to other ideas I have heard whereby people in the study area may claim to have various creatures, even including items such as (miniature) helicopters, inside them. Where helicopters or other sorts of vehicle are cited, it is said that the person can covertly travel by these means. Gerald’s idea is a little more grounded in more traditional thinking in that it relates to the Dreaming of his country. He also sees it as applying to the family as a whole, where many people see the ‘pets’ as applying only to individuals.
although to do so can be seen as a logical corollary of the idea of being ‘born in the wrong place’.

**Overview of ‘consolidation’ in the southern sector**

The focus thus far has been on examples of the emergence of relatively enduring ‘countries’ associated with particular groupings of persons, known as ‘families’. These groupings are entities that exist in the collective imagination, and also to some extent in a concrete sense, as genealogically constituted groups intrinsically related to country. In a loose way they are residential groups. This is the model exemplified clearly in Cases 1 to 6. In these cases also, the families that have emerged have had the advantage of being able to remain in close contact with their countries, which happened to be located close to Warburton. Nevertheless there was variation in the outcomes of the six cases, this being largely a matter of the number (and the gender) of subsequent progeny. Case 8 also exemplified the model, and here a family was able to continue to consolidate despite the fact that its country was not close to Warburton, and was not able to be physically re-occupied by the family (until the mid 1970s). A few particularly active and effective senior male members may have made the difference here. In Case 7 the model was not realized, because to start with there was no co-presence in one limited area of a set of ‘anchoring’ siblings. In Case 9, in conformity with the model, a family that seemed ripe for consolidation had emerged in what turned out to be the last few years of the classical period, but it did not survive the intervention of post-classical circumstances. In this, it was no doubt significant that the family split into two parts when it ‘left the bush life’.

For Cases 1 to 6, and 8, it is general knowledge, at the level of the Ngaanyatjarra society as a whole, that a genealogically defined grouping of people exists, no matter if in some instances the numbers of members are depleted and some people are dispersed. The ingredient that holds such a group together in the collective imagination is still *the linkage to a given country*. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, I do not know of any network of persons that is not grounded in a common connection to country that has an existence of a durable kind or that is illustrative of any kind of pattern.
One of the interesting features of my material for the southern sector is that very few ‘family’ cases have a strong Dreaming imprint. Kuniyapirti is an exception. Not only is the ‘country’ here clearly defined as Kuniya Dreaming territory, but the very definition of the country as an entity emerges out of events in the tjukurrpa. On top of this the people associated with the country have their connections specified by a totemic association, concretely represented by rocks in the landscape. But such an integrated picture is lacking in all the other cases. Dreaming connections are woven into some instances, but not in any kind of defining manner. In fact, as I indicated in chapter 2, there are some regions, including around Warburton, where the Dreaming imprint, such as it is, is ‘blurred’ and does not correspond with any clearly defined areas in the landscape. As all this indicates, the Dreaming element is not a prerequisite for the emergence of enduring corporate connectedness to land. In fact, the key ingredients for the development of corporate connectedness appear to be good environmental conditions, good fortune, and determination on the part of a core of male ‘siblings’. On the other hand, whatever Dreaming associations do exist are a great help to the development of a corporate grouping.

**Differences between the north and the south**

Some of the dimensions of difference between the northern and southern sectors are illustrated in the way that the fieldwork that I undertook to ‘map people to country’ was typically organised. In the south, fieldwork participants worked within a relatively delimited range. As explained in chapter 5, country in the south is held by the senior people of a region of around 20,000 sq km in extent. This, then, is the kind of fieldwork area within which a team of senior people having ‘landholder’ status would work, although there would also be individuals who took part more within the confines of their own family areas. Because of gaps in the ranks of knowledgeable senior persons (and bearing in mind, as always, the very low population densities the even the most fertile regions of the desert always had) there is in practice a fair amount of leeway allowed, with people often visiting and providing information about country some way beyond their own range, but there are definite limits on how far afield they are willing to go. In the northern sector, by contrast, one team of landholders was comfortable covering and documenting an area about twice as large. As the work was occurring, the antecedents whose ‘origin’ sites we visited would not only be named but would be referred to by members of the fieldwork team by a term such as kamuru (‘uncle’), mama (‘father’), kurntili (‘aunt’) or tjamu (‘grandfather’). (The same phenomenon
is also illustrated in the account of Charlie Butler’s early travels in Appendix 6.) In many case
the figures concerned were not lineal or ‘biological’ antecedents. In using the kin terms as
they did, my companions were showing that they had links of relatedness to the antecedents
concerned, and through these a connectedness (of sorts) to very broad tracts of country. At the
same time, the ‘collectiveness’ of the entire team, in terms of both relatedness and shared
connection to the whole country, was being affirmed. (There would of course be other
persons, not present, who would also be regarded as sharing in this collectivity.) By the same
token, it was far less the case that a distinct, delimited set of siblings would be associated with
a particular area, as I have described for the south. By contrast, when fieldwork was taking
place in the Warburton area, my fieldwork companions would usually be more restricted in
the application of these kinds of kinship terms, more often limiting them to their own
‘biological’ antecedents.

Other evidence of the contrast between north and south is revealed when we consider the
subject of childless antecedents. During research in the south, I have been told of very few
childless persons among all the persons born prior to 1940; and these rare cases tend to be
remembered only because they were associated with idiosyncratic stories. This situation
contrasts markedly with results from my research undertaken in the north, where I was given
dozens of names of people who were born in the bush (i.e. in classical times), but who lacked
descendants. The big difference here was that the classical period was so much ‘closer’ to the
present – it had only come to an end in the early 1960s. Thus with the northern sector people
the information I was given about classical times was coming from persons who had
themselves grown up in these times. Each informant personally knew the deceased persons
(including the childless ones) whose names they were supplying, or at least their parents had
known them. This personal knowledge was reason enough for an informant to be moved to
mention them, even if they were apparently ‘redundant’ in terms of linking living people to
country. On the other hand, in the northern context, unlike in the south, childless persons
might themselves constitute linkages to country for other persons, the progeny of the larger
social group – and this could sometimes be a reason for them to be remembered.

These sorts of differences, incidentally, should not be equated too rigidly with the sectors as
such, for the actual distribution is more-fine grained than this. On the whole though, the north
tends to exhibit one model of relatedness and connectedness, the south the other.

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In the northern sector, it is a simple fact that the environmental conditions are very unconducive to the emergence of durable groups. Any amount of good fortune, determination and large sets of children (preferably male) are not able to overcome this basic obstacle. I found that no groupings of any lasting kind could be identified in this sector unless there was an integral link to a specific Dreaming that defined the country concerned. Moreover, when conducting a ‘mapping to country’ exercise in the northern sector, I found that while a number of entities across the landscape had come to exist ‘in the collective imagination’ (all of them associated with a Dreaming), there was only one that could be said to exhibit any concrete form in the sense that we have seen for the southern sector. Before examining the single case of the consolidation of a kind of family grouping, I will look at some other cases where some cohesion of an exclusive group has occurred, but without any associated development of a social grouping. I call this ‘incipient’ type of group a ‘conception group’.

**Kutungu Dreaming – Ngatarn and Yaran:**

The first example has already been detailed in chapter 2. It involves the site Ngatarn, part of the Kutungu Dreaming that is discussed in appendix 2, where this female demonic figure features in the table of Major Dreamings. A woman Muwitju *napaltjarri*, born around 1920, was conceived at Ngatarn. I described how on the visit I paid to the site, I at first thought that this story was simply a piece of information that applied to an individual, but how I later realized that other closely related persons had conception sites at the same place, and also at a nearby place, of the same Dreaming.

**Kanaputa Dreaming and conception area – Ngami / Marrapinti**

The next case is a little more complex. It relates to two neighbouring site complexes near Kiwirrkura, known as Ngami and Marapinti. For the purpose of the argument here, I am linking them together. In the Dreaming, these places were visited by the Kanaputa women, who as I indicated in appendix 2 are the ‘female component’ of the Tingarri.

As I have explained, the Tingarri Dreaming is a phenomenon that involves hordes of people travelling across the landscape in a great swathe. In one sense, the ‘Tingarri hordes’ include women as well as men, but in another sense, two separate streams are identified, with the
women (the Kanaputa) travelling along ‘in parallel’ with the men. In the Kiwirrkura locality the two streams are to be found associated with sites that are distinct from one another but only a kilometre or two apart. One of the Kanaputa areas is comprised of Ngami and Marrapinti.

The ‘mapping to country’ exercise that I undertook in the north revealed a large number of conception sites of related persons at these two places. Specifically, it uncovered a large grouping extending over four generations of Pintupi women, most of whose conception sites were in this one place. As mentioned above, I call such a grouping a ‘conception group’. This is not a genealogical grouping, corresponding with a ‘family’ along the lines I have been considering in the previous (southern) case studies. Reflecting a picture of a number of women related to one another by ties of kinship that are both lineal and lateral, it is better understood as an abstraction than as a social reality. The kinship that is involved here is both ‘biological’ and ‘classificatory’. Inter-generationally, only some of the individuals are related to one another as birth mother/daughter; while within a generation, only some of the women share the same birth mother. The following information helps to explain the nature of the grouping:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Conception group members (all female)</th>
<th>No. of members conceived at Ngami/Marrapinti</th>
<th>Subsection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A – cohort 1</td>
<td>1 – personal name unknown: referred to as Napangarti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>napangarti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B – cohorts 2 and 3</td>
<td>6 – Anmanari, Papalya and Narmu (birth daughters of Napangarti) plus 3 others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>nangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C – cohorts 3 and 4</td>
<td>7 – including Pararra, Yakarri, Topsy, Yarti and Yukutji, birth daughters of the three nangala women named above</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>napaltjarri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D – mostly cohort 5</td>
<td>Sylvia Butler, daughter of Yakarri napaltjarri. A question mark surrounds the many other daughters of the generation C women (see discussion below).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>napurrula</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8: Kanaputa female conception grouping

155 I believe that in some regions well to the west of my study area the Kanaputa are considered to be entirely their own set of women, and any connection with the Tingarri travellers is coincidental. There is evidently another variation at Balgo (Poirier 2005; also Watson, 2003.) But in Pintupi country they are an integral part of Tingarri.
In this table there is what might be seen as a ‘core’ of women who are inter-related through one birth line: the original *napangarti*; her three daughters Anmanari, Papalya and Narnu; the five named women of generation C as per the table; and then Sylvia Butler (at least), daughter of Yakarri of generation C. For the sake of brevity I have not named the other women that are part of the conception group (three of them in generation B and two in generation C). They were identified to me as ‘sisters’ of the other women in their respective generation groups, though they are not birth sisters of them. Their mothers were not necessarily from the Ngami/Marrapinti area, but they themselves were conceived in this area.

As the table shows, the apical person was a *napangarti*. She was probably in cohort 1 and her name has been forgotten, but she is remembered to have existed and to have had the *Kanaputa* conception Dreaming.\(^{156}\)

The next generation are the *nangalas*, of whom I am aware of six. The three daughters of the apical *napangarti*, Anmanari (cohort 2) and Papalya and Narnu (cohort 3), were all still living (at Kiwirrkura) at the time I collected this material in the mid 1990s. All were said to have had *Kanaputa* conception Dreaming and to have been from the Ngami/Marrapinti area. The other three *nangala* women identified as their ‘sisters’ and having been conceived in the same area were all deceased.

The third generation is the *napaltjarris*, and I have data on seven of these. Six of them, and they are mostly living women, are explicitly said to have had *Kanaputa* conception Dreaming, but interestingly one, Parrara, has a different Dreaming - *Tjilkamarta* (Echidna). She was actually conceived a long way away (nearly 250 km), in the Clutterbuck Hills. The fact that Parrara had a different Dreaming from a different area is remembered and acknowledged. Given this, it might be questioned whether she should be regarded as a member of a group that I have defined by the notion of ‘conception’. But she is a birth sister of Yakarri, and in all other respects apart from her conception (and birthplace) circumstances she is aligned with Yakarri and the other five *napaltjarri* ‘sisters’. All her life she has lived among these people and other Kiwirrkura people, based around the Kiwirrkura area. The fact she was conceived

\(^{156}\) It will be recalled that in this region the birth site is given little emphasis, which is the reason why I do not mention people’s birth places in this discussion.

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and born in a far away place came about because her mother and father were away 'on a journey' at the time. (The earlier discussion on this point relating to the southern sector may be recalled.)

The way I interpret this is that Parrara was drawn into the identification with Ngami/Marapinti by a kind of gravitational pull that the place had come to possess by virtue of the combined conception events of her grandmother, mother/s and 'sisters'. This is essentially the same as what I have described as happening in the southern sector, when the occasional member of an 'anchoring' sibling set is found who was not himself or herself born in the country of the group. Such an individual is still identified with the group and the area concerned. To be strictly accurate, I should probably not call these northern sector entities 'conception groups' as if conception is the defining criteria for membership, because as with the southern sector family groupings, the group is more accurately seen as developing in the context of a favourable combination of circumstances.

The sort of grouping I am talking about at Ngami/Marrapinti is not an entity that mobilises people and plays a role in the socio-political life of the people in the way that the family groupings of the south can. As I said earlier, it largely exists at an abstract level, holding up a mirror, as it were, to a certain kind of commonality and structure existing among a set of persons, in this case women. In my next example, which is similarly based around a shared conception Dreaming but which involves men rather than women, we will see how a significantly different trajectory comes into play, with the grouping taking on a much fuller shape and role, along the lines of the southern family groups. This is not a trajectory that is possible where the players are women. Yet the entity we see at Ngami/Marrapinti should not be regarded as lacking in interest or in relevance to the social world. For one thing, it is indicative of what we might call a 'relationship field' that can develop among the desert people (in this case women), of a kind that to my knowledge has not previously been documented. Regardless of gender considerations, the existence of such a relationship field is of interest inasmuch as it implies, or is evidence of, a level of cohesion among those who participate in it. But this factor is particularly interesting in the case of women, who because

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157 Incidentally, I was not able to discover a correspondingly large number of men related via conception sites to the Tingari Dreaming of this locality. Whether such an association does not exist for some reason, or whether I simply failed to pick it up, I am not sure. However, what I did find was an association of men with the 'Old Man' Dreaming, which I discuss next.
of the way this society is constituted, generally experienced separation, as they matured to adulthood, from their closest female kin. Adult women who resided together would normally have been co-wives rather than (birth) sisters – unless two sisters had married two brothers. Yet a ‘female-only’ conception group like that associated with Ngami/Marrapinti maintains an image, at the least, of mother-daughter and sister-sister connections, and even enlarges the image to embrace a structure covering several generations and additional lateral kin. How could such a structure come about if there had not been, in defiance of the dominant pattern of desert social life, a considerable amount of co-residence among the women who participate in it? I would like to suggest a scenario that makes this explicable.

The first fact to note is that the Kiwirrkura locality (which includes Ngami/Marrapinti) lies within a markedly fertile zone within the context of the northern sector as a whole. As noted in chapter 5, this fertile region was also quite a large one. Thus in general terms it would have been possible for a relatively large number of people to have spent a considerable amount of time in the zone as a whole.

Secondly, the locality possesses a heavy Dreaming imprint in the form of the Tingarri and the Kanaputa, lying in close conjunction.

Thirdly, in classical times the dictates of the Tingarri Dreaming required young men to spend many months and even years in a state of instruction and semi-seclusion, being shown, and learning to perform, the song lines and ritual sequences. While this would ideally involve travelling along the length of the Dreaming track, the inhospitable nature of much of the country in this sector makes it likely that a disproportionate amount of the instruction would be done at places like the Kiwirrkura zone where conditions were more fertile. With relatively large groupings in occupation on a relatively frequent basis, it would have been possible for women to spend time with their kinswomen, their sisters, mothers and sometimes grandmothers, women who in a post-marriage situation belonged to different conjugal families and would therefore under usual circumstances be dispersed. Such association could have given rise to an emphasis on the Dreaming that they shared (through conception). It would be very interesting to research the extent to which there might be an enhanced
women’s ceremonial life and Kanaputa mythology that could be attributed to the existence of
the conception grouping.

I will now turn to a consideration of generation D, the fourth generation of women in the
Ngami/Marrapinti conception group. In total there are perhaps two dozen of these women,
napurrulas, who are daughters of the women of generation three. It is not surprising that the
numbers are large, since we are coming to more recent times. Yet as far as I have been able to
ascertain, only one of these persons, a woman named Sylvia Butler napurrula, is said to
possess the Kanaputa conception Dreaming. The reason for this big difference is that the
napaltjarris (mothers of the napurrulas) were part of what some people call ‘the Jeremy Long
generation’ – that is, the people whose lot it was to leave the desert for Papunya and other
settlements, in the late 1950s and early 60s. To use the terminology I have employed
throughout this thesis, we have moved here from the classical to the post-classical era. Hence
the localities in which the daughters of the napaltjarris were conceived and born are mostly in
the Northern Territory, and they constitute a record of Pintupi movements during that period
of ‘exile’. Some of them were born (and conceived) in Papunya itself. Then there were those
born while the Pintupi group was camping at Kakalyi Bore. Then there was the Kintore
period, followed by a period spent at Muyun on the Northern Territory border. These were the
places where the Pintupi camped at different periods up until 1980 when the Kiwirrkura
community was established. By the time they did get back to Kiwirrkura, most of the
napaltjarri women were past child-bearing age. It is an open question as to whether after this
hiatus, but in circumstances where constancy of occupation is greater than it ever was before,
the same (or perhaps another) conception group will re-emerge at Ngami/Marrapinti.

There is a further point of interest to make about the conception group as it applies to women.
This is, that the four-element nature of the matri-cycle within the subsection system has
probably played a role in enabling the pattern of female kin to be so clearly discerned over a
four generation period. In the case of men, the subsection system only gives recognition to a
pair of generations, the patri-couple. It becomes very difficult, when dealing with more than a
small number of men, to know how to line up the father-son pairs. Say we have persons A and
B, a tjupurrula/ tjakamarra patri-couple of a certain cohort, should another tjupurrula C of an

158 See Myers 1986 chapter 1 for an account of the outstation developments among the Pintupi in this period.

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earlier but close cohort be considered to be a brother of A, or his grandfather? Because of this, the sub-section system is of very little assistance in configuring a large set of men in a generational format.

Finally, it should be re-emphasised that although female-only conception groupings of this kind imply some sort of basis in residential association with the area concerned, they are different in a critical respect from the ‘family groups’ that have been discussed for the southern sector. Simply because the family as a social phenomenon revolves around men, a conception grouping of the kind found at the Ngami/Marrapinti could never drive the emergence of a ‘family’ type of grouping. The female-only conception grouping is in this respect similar to the occasional instance found in the southern sector of a set of female antecedent siblings located together within a single country area.

The ‘Old Man’ Dreaming: the male conception area of Yarrapalangu

This is the last case to be considered of a grouping that is connected with an area of country. The linkage in this case is with the ‘Old Man’ Dreaming, about which some detail is provided in Appendix 2, in the table of the major Dreamings of the study area. (This Dreaming also features in the account of conception Dreaming stories of Wuta Wuta tjangala and Yumpulurru tjungurrayi set out in Appendix 4.) For present purposes I will refer to the country associated with the Old Man (on the WA side of the border) as Yarrapalangu, although the people themselves rarely designate it by any single name. Yarrapalangu is an important site along the track, and is about 80 km east of Kiwirrkura. There are many other important sites along this Dreaming track as it makes its way from the SA border some 200 km to the final site Kunawiri, just south-west of Kiwirrkura. The area that the track follows, and in some respects defines, is the same fertile zone that was referred to in the case just discussed, of Ngami/Marrapinti. This strip extends from the Pollock Hills (close to Kiwirrkura) east to the NT border, and is about 150 km long by 30 km wide The Old Man track lies about 20 km to the south of the Tingarri and Kanaputa tracks. These Dreamings are travelling eastward, in the opposite direction to the Old Man. Although not very far away from them, the Old Man does not come into contact with the other two Dreamings at any point.
There is an evident unity among the grouping of people that I will discuss, who are associated with this Dreaming and with this relatively fertile zone. The case well illustrates the phenomenon of the grouping together, or clustering, of conception sites that we saw in the female examples above.

I am concerned mainly with six siblings who were among the senior Pintupi people at the time when Jeremy Long made his patrols over the newly formed desert road that runs east-west through the middle of the fertile zone.\textsuperscript{159} This road was constructed by Len Beadell in 1960. The siblings were, in age order, Watjapayi \textit{tjangala}, Minpurru \textit{tjangala}, Nangurri \textit{nangala} (a woman), Tjitjingarri \textit{tjangala}, Yartipayi \textit{tjangala} and finally Wuta Wuta \textit{tjangala}. They were persons of cohorts 1 and 2.

The brothers were all conceived of the Old Man Dreaming, in the Yarrapalangu area. When they attained adulthood, the four older brothers all ventured east for wives, into Warlpiri country, and subsequently returned with spouses to their own country west of the NT border.\textsuperscript{160} Wuta Wuta was the only one of the brothers who obtained his wife from within Pintupi country. The sister, Nangurri, also married a Warlpiri man from the east.

Many of the children of these siblings, including Jimmy Brown, the eldest son of the eldest brother, were also conceived of the Old Man Dreaming. Some of the younger people in this (\textit{tjampitjinpa}) generation were not of this Dreaming, but were conceived at places further to the east, because of the movement of the people out of the country at that time, as happened with the \textit{napurrula} women associated with Kanaputa.

It is interesting to look at some of the circumstances applying to the sister Nangurri \textit{nangala}. She was not conceived of the Old Man Dreaming – indeed all my material about conception affiliations of individuals in the Pintupi area confirms the idea that only men are able to be

\textsuperscript{159} At least one patrol, in which a group of people was taken to Papunya, was undertaken by Walter MacDougall, NPO for the Commonwealth. This was in 1964, and it was quite separate from the patrols of Long, who was employed by the Northern Territory Administration.

\textsuperscript{160} If this happened because of a dearth of suitable wives in Pintupi country, it may indicate that even in the 1920s and 30s the population there had been somewhat depleted. But in the absence of further extensive research it is difficult to draw any conclusions about such matters.
conceived from male Dreaming beings, and women from female ones. (Such a conformity between Dreaming affiliation and personal gender is much less strictly observed in the southern sector, where the fundamental connection is through birth rather than conception.) With so many women of this region being associated with the Kanaputa, including the nangala women of the nearby Ngami/Marrapinti area, it did not surprise me to find that Nangurri was also said to have been conceived of this Dreaming. However because she was in fact a (birth) sister of the five tjangalas of Yarapalangu, she is not thought of as part of the nangala sibling set of Ngami/Marrapinti and classed as their ‘sister’.

Jimmy Brown tjampitjinpa, one of my main informants for this part of my research, says about Nangurri, his kurntili (aunt: FZ), that even though her conception Dreaming was Kanaputa she was ‘really’ from Yarrapalangu. Thus, like so many people of the southern sector, and like the women of the Ngami/Marrrapinti conception group when speaking of Parrara napaltjarri, Jimmy is stressing the integrity of Yarrapalangu and the sibling group, even though her affiliation to Yarrapalangu is at odds with her conception affiliation.

At first sight this case may look like another conception grouping of the sort that we saw with the women. But because it involves men, it possesses the potential to develop into something more like the ‘family groups’ that I have identified for the southern sector. This is revealed by the way in which Nangurri nangala is included in the group. Instead of the unity being purely about something like the co-participation in the one Dreaming substance of those involved, a focus starts to emerge on the unity of the personnel within the group as a social entity.

I should caution – and I made this point also in chapter 5 - that the Yarrapalangu group as such is much less of a distinct, recognised entity than families like the Wests and the Greens at Warburton. No common surname has emerged across the group, although the whole surname adoption process is in any case far less complete as yet in the northern sector than in the south. The present-day members of the group do not all live in the same community, but are spread between Kiwirrkura and Kintore. It is very evident that the shared Dreaming was a sine qua non for the emergence of a Yarrapalangu group at all. No doubt the emergence of a powerful group of brothers was also critical.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have used ethnographic material to demonstrate a variety of phenomena that display forms of durable connectedness among people and between groupings of people and particular places. These phenomena vary from the rather insubstantial conception groupings of the north to the more concrete family groupings that occur predominantly in the south, but my analysis has emphasized that the forces driving the emergence of all of them, and much of the patterning they display, are essentially the same. The same processes have been at work, but have developed further in the situations where family groupings emerge. There are no fundamental differences, as I see it, between the north and the south. There is an impetus towards group formation where, and to the extent that, conditions permit. In chapter 7, I will give some thought to the implications of this developmental process for our understanding of the desert.
Over the last two chapters I have explored the proposition that in the study area, social interconnectedness among people, and between people and country, fundamentally needs to be seen as a response to the material conditions of life in the desert. This basic idea is far from novel. As Ian Keen has noted, ‘a number of scholars have seen the flexibility of Western Desert relations as an adaptation to the uncertainties of resource availability, and descent-based organisation as an adaptation to the relatively more reliable resources of the ranges and the rich resources of the coasts of the tropical north (1997: 65). What I have focussed upon in this study is that even in the desert, the availability and reliability of resources is quite variable across the landscape. Barring the possibility that there is something of an economic nature that creates an unbridgeable gap between the coastal and range situation and that of the desert – which does not appear to be the case - this suggests that there could be some kind of a range in the organisational forms in the desert, along the lines of the contrast Keen pointed to. This is the basic line of thinking that I have followed.

The difficulties of interpretation posed by the Western Desert have been noted by many authors. Annette Hamilton, an acute observer, revealed that in her fieldwork\footnote{Undertaken to the east of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, at Everard Park Station, now Mimili community, in 1970-71.} she often experienced conflicting thoughts about the nature of desert society. At one point in her important paper ‘Descended from father, belonging to country’ she considered the argument that I raised in chapter 1, about the difficulties associated with trying to understand a system as it existed in the past, and whether or not this might account for the fact that ‘writers on the Western Desert culture area have been hard put to offer any coherent ethnographic account of territorial organization... (1982: 94), but comments that ‘other writers have been able to give accounts of local organization in other areas, all of which have been affected by white contact’ (ibid), without these accounts suffering from the same kind of incoherence. Her conclusion is that the difficulties lie not in the ‘inability to make accurate observations on the part of observers’ (ibid: 103), nor in any other external factor, but in the nature of the desert situation itself. From a more recent standpoint, some may say that the root of the problem was
in fact in the observer, and that the apparent problems posed by the desert were actually only subtleties that awaited explication by a sufficiently skilled anthropologist using the right conceptual apparatus. But while Fred Myers has given a brilliant portrayal, I do not think that he can be said to have entirely disposed of the problems that Hamilton has articulated and that so many others also found. I would argue that in his own account, the shadow of the more 'positivistic' side of the equation lingers, and that questions continue to arise that are not answered in full by his 'processual' approach to the desert world.

One of the questions Hamilton admits that she ‘fluctuated’ over (ibid: 96) was the contrasting viewpoint of Berndt on the one hand and Tindale on the other in respect to the issue of ‘tribes’. There are many aspects to this argument, most of which are no longer of much relevance, and I do not propose to go into them here, for the real issue that Hamilton is addressing here is the degree to which there is any ‘socio-centricity’ to the existence of groups of people and to the relationship of groups to land - essentially the same issue that I pursue in this thesis. She says that Berndt’s view (which was rather an equivocal one, but certainly leant towards the ‘flexible’ end of the spectrum) ‘made intuitive sense’ (ibid), but that in everyday contexts she would commonly hear the people at Everard Park making quite specific linkages between particular groups of people and particular places. Similarly, in terms of economic matters, she notes that ‘while the literature frequently mentions the sharing of natural resources by people in one area with people from another, there is also mention [including in relation to the desert] of a rigidly possessive attitude towards one’s own country and the refusal to share resources with non-kin’ (ibid: 89). I have not canvassed these kinds of economic matters in this thesis, but an attitude of ‘possessiveness’ in relation to resources, which I have also noted on occasion, is unlikely to go hand-in-hand with an inclusive (‘lateral’) attitude towards everything else. Hamilton’s comment is that ‘some notion of “ownership” or exclusive possession over certain segments of tribal land by specific persons must be acknowledged’ (ibid: 90). Again, I have not presented any evidence of notions of ‘exclusive possession’ existing anywhere in the study area, and in my experience, they arise very rarely. They are not, however, totally absent.

Hamilton’s conclusion was that ‘in some way both Berndt and Tindale were right’ (ibid: 97); and her resolution to this is the proposition that:
the whole of the Western Desert cultural area was, at the time of the arrival of the Whites (sic), in a state of transition, in which indigenous cultural institutions were undergoing transformations without having achieved any kind of balance. A static model of social organization could not possibly account for the structural features found under these circumstances (ibid: 103).

She then goes on to describe what could be termed the two ‘modes’ she has in mind, that were in competition with one another, as it were. Her modes differ in some respects from the two modes in my account, but the main thrust is the same. While her ‘past’ mode posits a tight integration of groupings of people with particular Dreamings in a way that is quite unrealistic, it is similar to my ‘lateral’ mode (which I equate with Myers’s depiction of the Pintupi) inasmuch as it lacks a concept of human descent. In her ‘future’ mode, the ‘possibility of “patrilineality” has emerged and solidified, and has overcome the possibilities of non-descent, or rather, symbolic ancestor-based descent’ (ibid: 104).

I agree with Hamilton’s feeling that there is a two-sidedness at the heart of the desert ‘system’. The main weakness of her analysis here is that she gives no real reason for why such a state of ‘transition’ should have been occurring just at the time when the settler world was coming into contact with desert society. She does, after all, see the transition as an internal process and not a response to changed conditions traceable to the settlers. She clearly interprets the matter at least in part as a process of men gradually gaining social control at the expense of women (see the argument in the concluding section of the paper, ibid: 106), but why should this have been gathering pace at this particular point in history?

My own account does not posit that a large scale, one-way transition was occurring. Rather, the oscillation between modes in my analysis is of an ‘eternal’ kind. It is built into the variable nature of the material conditions that exist in this desert. New ‘lineal’ groups periodically emerge, as a result of a combination of the sort of favourable circumstances that I have described. However, they can never progress beyond a certain point of consolidation. This is ensured by the fact that there are limits on the bounty that the desert can ever provide, over a period of time. In fact, it may be said that the emergence of such a group contains the seeds of its own inevitable dissolution, because too much consolidation becomes counter-
productive to the aims that inspired it. In Hamilton’s phrase, cited above, the ‘possibilities of non-descent’ come to exceed their opposite, the possibilities of descent.

An objection to my analysis could be made on the grounds that I seem to be postulating the co-existence on a long term basis of some major conflicting or at least contradictory cultural propositions and even social forms. In this respect Hamilton is apparently on safer ground, because her argument is that the situation of conflicting positions is only a temporary one. On the other hand, her scenario still leaves a particular cohort of people, or more likely several cohorts, having to live through the period while the transition is under way. The ‘temporary’ nature of the phenomenon in large scale historical terms does not help these people; and if it is possible for a few successive cohorts to ‘endure’ such a situation, why could it not be endured indefinitely? The underlying question here concerns the degree to which (under a basically stable set of societal conditions as applies in this case) cultural and social forms should comprise a basically seamless whole, of the kind reflected in Ingold’s writing (1996). The study of institutionally more complex societies has shown the on-going existence of great discrepancies within the socio-cultural ‘whole’ to be the norm, but the assumption seems to be that this is not possible for the hunter-gatherer, for there are no apparent niches in their world in which such discrepancies can be separated off from one another.

These are big questions, that I do not pretend to have tackled in this study, but a re-examination of the way in which the various components – including the ‘cultural’, the ‘social’ and the ‘economic’ might fit together in the hunter-gatherer world would be an interesting project. It is my sense that a considerable toleration of difference exists within and between such domains. I will consider one example, relating to a matter that I have addressed at length in these pages.

As I have explained it, at a deep level the Dreaming of the desert contains a vision of a singular identity and place of origin (at the birth place or the conception place) for each individual; and this vision has had its impact, I argue, in terms of the strength with which the people have embraced the notion of a single place of area that is truly their home. This is also

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162 As is suggested by the case study material in chapter 6, even under contemporary conditions, where resources are consistently available, there are limits to the development of lineal forms.
a vision that ‘fits’ with the ‘lateral’ mode of sociality, in that it militates against the development of inter-generational continuity of connection. But in practice, it comes into conflict with some equally profound social forces. A deeply held attachment to a place is not something that arises solely through it being a cultural idea - it also has to be engendered through experience. Yet it would be rare for a child to be brought up solely, or even mostly, around its own birth (or conception) place, if this place was located away from the birth or conception place of its father and mother and other close kin, as the lateral mode suggests would be the norm. Among many other things, the father and mother would likely be wanting to spend what time they could around their own birth or conception places. In other words patterns of life, particularly the patterns associated with the ‘lateral’ mode of sociality, would rarely have seen children undergoing the sorts of experiences necessary to engender a deep sense of attachment with their own culturally-defined origin place.

The ‘lineal’ mode, for its part, is inconsistent at heart with the Dreaming vision, for the same reason that the latter is consistent with the lateral mode. But it can be ‘made’ to work, at least to some extent, and particularly if it has a unilineal (in practice patrilineal) character rather than an ambilineal one. Parents can actively seek to promote ‘lineality’ by such means as trying to ensure that their child is born in the same place as the father. That such ideas and strategies do exist among the desert people has been documented many times in the literature; and the ideas expressed by several of my informants (see the case studies of chapter 6) about people being born ‘in the wrong place’ reflect the same sort of thinking. However, any suggestion that patrilineal entities could actually have been constructed by these strategies has been hotly contested in the kind of ‘anti-descent’ literature that has emerged in recent times, and that I referred to in chapter 1. This is probably largely correct in itself, but some kind of lineal entities have nevertheless emerged, in significant numbers. What I have argued is not that ‘patrilineality’ as a principle has somehow arisen and created social forms in its own image, but that people, predominantly men, but also women, have tried to create real-life stability and continuity for ‘me and mine’. It is not so much a matter of giving substance to a ‘father to son’ line, as of creating a sense, and a reality, of a ‘collectivity’ associated with a place, on an inter-generational basis. Hence the country that the parents of a child spend time in, or try to spend time in, is not necessarily the country of the child’s father, but of a collective entity that embraces the father as well as other close genealogical kin. This is the pattern that was shown in the Forbes family history. It is in this way – through the parents of a
child spending time in the ‘collective’ country of the group – that a sense is engendered in the child of an origin place there. Thus the personal origin place with which the child gains a deep attachment, through his or her own early experiences, is one and the same as the country of the collective. In this scenario, it is no longer the Dreaming that defines the origin place, but the ‘residence’ of the collectivity.

In summary, neither the lateral nor the lineal modes fit neatly in all respects with the culture of the Dreaming, or with certain of the other forces present in desert life. There is no seamless picture to be found, no matter which way one looks at it. But the people muddle along. It certainly does seem surprising that, in this low-population society with its lack of stratification, economic specialisation and ‘niches’ in which to hide, a person who espoused the kind of ‘lateral’ values described by Myers (1986) could live side by side with somebody who is focussed on the protection and promotion of the interest of his own ‘biological’ family, but this is how I have found it to be.

Given my stated focus on issues to do with ‘social modelling’, it may be wondered why I have devoted three chapters to the Dreaming, and even placed these chapters before those dealing with the domain of the social. Partly this is because one simply cannot spend time with the Ngaanyatjarra, particularly the older people who have been my main companions, without being overwhelmed by their sense of the Dreaming - by its beauty, complexities, subtleties and sheer scope. So I had to give an account of it. I then found that once I started talking about the Dreaming, I really had to go on and be quite comprehensive about it, or else I would not be able to reach any conclusions of any kind, for it would appear as though I had simply overlooked critical dimensions of the subject. Then, the more comprehensive my considerations became, the more interested I became in the whole subject. Once I went beyond the more apparent dimensions, such as the *tjukurrpa* framework in its aspect as an ‘endowment’ to the people – though even this came to fascinate me as my assemblage of the material became more detailed – I came to see that there were intriguing gaps in what the Dreaming actually said and in what it covered. For instance, it dealt with the sacred, and with the mysteries of life, but not in any comprehensive or definitive kind of way. This meant that ethnography became not merely a matter of describing or summarizing what was in front of one, but of exploring and speculating as well. In turn, I saw that the portrayal in the Dreaming of connectedness to country was itself far from complete and unequivocal, a matter I alluded
to in the paragraphs above. In short, an examination of the Dreaming became integral to the questions of a more ‘social’ sort that I had been considering from the beginning. I hope, in addition to this, that my account of the Dreaming is worthwhile in its own terms, as an unusually extensive record of this aspect of an Aboriginal group’s life.

There are several specific matters that I have alluded to in the thesis that I would like to follow up - or perhaps others will do so. One that has also been raised by other writers too, concerns the question of what to make of the role played by the section (and in the north, the sub-section) system, in terms of desert social organization. I have indicated that my view is that their influence has generally been a fairly shallow one, in line with the shortness of their presence here. But the matter needs more careful attention than I have been able to give it. A related important matter has to do with analysing with clarity the alternating generation moiety system, which unlike the section system is undoubtedly of a great age in the desert.

In a more ethnographic mode, I think that it would be fruitful to undertake more research into the phenomena in the north that I have called ‘conception groups’. There are also questions that could be asked relating to settler-inspired influences that have come to bear on the system of connectedness to land, especially in the Warburton setting. I am conscious that I have not dealt with such matters here: it has been my position that I am essentially enquiring into ‘classical’ phenomena. But although I do not believe that I have fallen into any traps of ignoring change in terms of the questions that I have addressed, it would strengthen my position to be able to offer an evaluation of the situation in regard to historical impact. Also, it would be a basis from which to move on to a consideration of connectedness specifically in the contemporary context, which stands out clearly as the next big research focus.

Another matter that I have not tackled here concerns the old question of larger group connectedness to country in the desert – the issue that was first formulated in terms of the notion of ‘tribes’, and later as ‘language groups’. Vachon, to his credit, took this up again recently (2006). As he rightly says, although this question has proven a particularly thorny one, it does remain a genuine issue. I am not sure that I am quite convinced about the singularity that he proposes for his study group in the Great Sandy Desert, and I am not sure
that I believe that there is a way an entity of any kind could be found at this large scale level in my own study area, but it is still something that deserves consideration.

As a final comment, there is one matter at least on which I feel in total sympathy with Fred Myers, and it concerns his emphasis on the individual. (Perhaps, though, it is better to avoid the term ‘individual’, which has come to be equated in some recent phenomenological writing with the context of political modernity.) At any rate, in the desert social world it really is each person, one by one, that is in the foreground. I have said how surprising it can be to find that people who have been living together, or in close proximity, all their lives can sometimes have such different perspectives on matters that seem quite fundamental. But I have often also been amazed (and reassured) by the way that the people are often so tentative at gatherings like funerals, not sure where to sit or what to do. And I am speaking here not of funerals held in distant places, but ones taking place in the heart of the Lands. This is a people who are on their own country, from which they have never been displaced, and who remain by far the majority population within it. Most often at funerals there will be no outsiders of any sort, and if there are some they will be very few in number, yet the tentativeness is palpable. It seems against the grain for such a simply-constituted society to be this way – and it certainly seems contra-indicated by the communality that characterizes some sectors of social life - but this is a world in which each person has to spend a lot of time ‘standing on their own two feet’, feeling their way along, and making frequent mistakes, or fearing that they will do so. Viewed in another perspective, though, such characteristics can be seen to be actually quite in keeping for a people who have lived for millennia at such a low level of population density, in such a difficult environment as the Western Desert of Australia.
## Major Sites of the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>English name (if any)</th>
<th>Dreaming Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Any linkages to other major sites in this table?</th>
<th>Part of a major Dream-ing track?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTHERN SECTOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analnga/ Kalayapirti (‘place of many emus’)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kalaya (Emu)</td>
<td>60 km south of Mt Aloysius</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampurarrpirti (‘place of much bush tomato’)</td>
<td>Lupton Hills</td>
<td>Kampurarrpa (Bush Tomato People); and Waiti Punurrpa (Praying Mantis Man)</td>
<td>60 km SSW of Blackstone</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kultunangkutja</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minyma Kurrkari (Goanna Woman)</td>
<td>30 km north of Blackstone</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuniyapirti</td>
<td>Murray Range</td>
<td>Kuniya Kutjarra (Two Pythons)</td>
<td>35 km NNE of Blackstone</td>
<td>Link to Pukara (below)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makurrapirti (‘place of many golden bandicoots’)</td>
<td>Mt Agnes</td>
<td>Makurra (Golden Bandicoot)</td>
<td>85 km due south of Wingellina</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pukara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warnampi Kutjarra (Two Warnampi)</td>
<td>75 km due south of Mt Aloysius</td>
<td>Link to Kuniyapirti (above)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pungkula Yurrkawarni</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marlu (Kangaroo) [eastern]</td>
<td>Close to Jameson</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rururr</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ngirntaka (Perentie Lizard); and Patilpa (Parrot)</td>
<td>60 km NW of Warburton</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanumarrapirti (‘place of many caterpillars’)</td>
<td>Bell Rock Range</td>
<td>Yanumarra (Caterpillar); and Kurrparu (Magpie)</td>
<td>20 km south of Mt Aloysius</td>
<td>Link to Yaku Kulkari (below)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaku Kulkari</td>
<td>Mt Aloysius</td>
<td>Many small bird varieties, esp. Nyii-nyii (Zebra Finch); and Kurrparu (Magpie)</td>
<td>Mid-way between Blackstone and Jameson</td>
<td>Link to Yanumarrapirti (above)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>English name (if any)</th>
<th>Dreaming</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Any linkages to other major sites in this table?</th>
<th>Part of a major Dreaming track?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yapu Paara (1)</td>
<td>Scamp Hill</td>
<td><em>Marlu</em> (kangaroo) [Western]</td>
<td>North Warburton Range</td>
<td>Link to Yapu Paara (2)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yapu Paara (2)</td>
<td>Manton Knob</td>
<td><em>Marlu</em> (kangaroo) [Western]</td>
<td>65 km south of Warburton</td>
<td>Link to Yapu Paara (1)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NORTHERN SECTOR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulkurta</td>
<td>Tingarri</td>
<td></td>
<td>In very inaccessible country 120 km south of Kiwirrkura</td>
<td>Link to Ngunyarrma and to Yarru-Yarru</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngunyarrma</td>
<td>Tingarri</td>
<td></td>
<td>In very inaccessible sandhill country about 50 km due south of Jupiter well.</td>
<td>Link to Yarru-Yarru and to Kulkurta</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putarungkal</td>
<td><em>Wati Kutjarra</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>At the southern end of a broad plain to the west of the Pollock Hills</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarru-Yarru/or Tjuulnga</td>
<td>Tingarri</td>
<td></td>
<td>In Angas Hill area, 40 km east of Kiwirrkura</td>
<td>Link to Ngunyarrma and to Kulkurta</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yumari</td>
<td><em>Wati Yirma or Tjangara</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>60 km east of Kiwirrkura, along the Desert Road</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX 2

Major Travelling Dreamings of the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi Lands

*Karlaya / Emu Dreaming*

Dreaming Emu people came towards the Lands from far distant places, as far away as the western W.A. coast, in many small groups, experiencing many adventures along the way, usually involving them being attacked by creatures hungry for meat. Each group travelled along its own path, hence there were many routes of travel. These could be considered in a sense as constituting different Dreaming ‘tracks’, although the fact that they gradually converge as they approach a common destination reveals that in fact there is a single ‘story’ at work here. The first place at which they all assembled is a major emu site called Yanalnga (or sometimes Kalayapirti), south of Wingellina. From here they went on to the true ‘emu home’ (Kalayapirti) in the north west of S.A. The purpose of this gathering was to participate in the funeral of a foundational Emu man. This Dreaming gives expression to a significant conundrum of the desert life, and (from the Dreaming viewpoint) establishes a ‘law’ to deal with it. To clarify: Because the dispersed nature of desert life made it perennially impossible for many people to be present for the actual burial of a person, which obviously had to be carried out quickly, there was a custom (still followed today) whereby a later gathering took place to ‘finalize business’ in relation to the deceased. This is called the ‘second funeral’. It was in the Emu Dreaming story as outlined above that this custom was first established.

The Emu men on reaching Kalayapirti created and sang (for the first time) a song for the second funeral of the deceased Emu leader. It is this song that was subsequently used by the Ngaanyatjarra people in connection with second funerals; and the accompanying ritual procedures established at Kalayapirti by these ‘foundational beings’ were also subsequently followed. The fact that many of those attending the Kalayapirti rituals came from so far away, and suffered trials on the journey, establishes the injunction, felt as keenly as ever today, that people with a connection with the deceased must attend his or her funeral no matter how far away they may live or what the difficulties might be.

163 The names of Dreamings that in my understanding are of greatest importance are highlighted in bold type.
Apart from its strong link to the institution of the second funeral, *Kalaya* is also closely associated with the subincision ritual that is part of the process of initiating boys into men.

It might be mentioned that emus themselves are not found commonly in the Lands, and may not be seen for years on end. When they do come, it is as a result of population explosions in the more fertile station country far to the west; and in such seasons the Lands may experience a huge influx (from the west) of these birds.

*Kiparra* or *Nganurti / Bush Turkey Dreaming*

As a bird, the bush turkey is a harmless creature whose meat is prized. It is rather easily killed with a rifle from the window of a vehicle, but in pre-vehicle times it was very hard to catch, as it recognises humans as representing danger, and will immediately fly off when it sees a person. A disappointed hunter will see his missed catch fly high into the sky, wings beating powerfully, gradually becoming a tiny speck in the distance. Its characteristic of flying long distances is central to the role it plays in the Dreaming.

*Kiparra* Dreaming is especially connected with boys who are approaching manhood. It also tells the story of the getting of fire. The real life turkey is typically seen standing with his neck stretched looking about (which strikes a chord with the curiosity that is characteristic of young people – a trait that desert people are very ambivalent about, as is demonstrated in the story of *Wati Ngaparla*, bearded dragon man, related in Appendix 3). The Dreaming story begins in this vein, with a young Turkey 'person', not yet mature but on the point of it, standing on a high point of the Blackstone Range at a place called Warutjarra, craning his neck to look this way and that, and feeling the air with his hands. He is trying to detect any sign of warmth in whatever quarter it might lie. It is wintertime and he and his kinsfolk are bitterly cold, for they do not possess fire. So bad is their shivering that they regularly lose control of their bowels, resulting in the distinctive blackness of the rocks in the Warutjarra locale. One day the young fellow feels some warmth coming from the north and flies off to investigate. The rest of the story relates the long journey that he undertakes, during which he learns many things. Eventually he locates the source of the fire at a place near the present day community of Tjukurla, where some people are camped. He follows protocol when approaching them and is accepted by them. He does not reveal that he and his people know
nothing of fire and that this is the first time he has seen it. While staying with them he contrives an opportunity to steal their fire and then flies off with it, pursued by two of the Tjukurla men, who are a type of eagle. Again his journey is a long one. Sometimes he shakes off his pursuers temporarily and is able to stop and rest, but in time they always pick up his trail again. (When looked at on the map, his track crosses those of several other Dreaming travellers, but he does not interact with them. He is not 'on their level', literally and figuratively.) He bypasses his home, for there is nowhere to hide there. He keeps fleeing all the way south, ultimately to Eucla on the Great Australian Bight. On the way, at a place called Murranu near Jameson, he undergoes initiation rites and becomes a man. At Eucla he dives into the water and submerges himself, holding the firestick above the waves. Many further episodes follow, and it is a long time before he eventually returns home.

As well as this issue of the fire, the story is closely bound up with the preliminary stages of the Ngaanyatjarra procedures for the initiation of boys into men. When a boy is old enough (usually in the mid to late teens), he is 'grabbed', triggering a period of seclusion. He has now left his home and his life as a child – and in total he will be absent for a long time. In fact when he does eventually return it will be in the very different role of wati (man). In the first phase he is kept in the bush with some age mates. From then until his circumcision, he is identified with the Turkey in the Dreaming and is called a 'kiparra' or 'nganurti'. He is told the Turkey Dreaming story, or some of it, and has to learn the things that the Kiparra in the story learned. Certain rituals are performed around him, most of which he cannot at this stage see; but there are times when he will be painted up as Turkey and will do the Turkey dance (as demonstrated by an older man). After his circumcision he will no longer be called kiparra, but will still be in a state of transition, and not yet a full man. While he is a turkey, he comes to understand that the transformation that lies ahead of him – becoming a man – will involve a very long journey, both literally and figuratively. He will travel long distances (often going on a long pre-circumcision journey called tjilkatja), and will learn many things and have many experiences. His journey will not be all about rote learning. Like the Turkey in the story who went off in search of fire, he will have to work out ways of solving problems, and as when Turkey stole the fire, he will have to take risks.

As far as behavioural or moral lessons are concerned, it will be noted that the tale of the stealing of the fire contains no hint of an abstract code of behaviour or justice. The story
involves theft, guile - even the abuse of the hospitality of strangers - acts that can be expected to lead to pursuit and revenge by the aggrieved. It is not, however, a story about a ‘bad boy’ who learns a lesson in morality. Young Turkey, in the desert understanding, is a normal, even admirable - if clearly immature - fellow who is motivated by the desire to help his kinsfolk. His approach to the situation when he finds the strangers with the fire is again normal. No one would imagine for a moment that something as important as this would be given freely. This is not like sharing meat. A people who possess fire are in a completely different situation from a people who do not. The resolving of such a difference would not come about by the simple giving of the crucial gift to a visiting young fellow who is not even a man. Thus Young Turkey’s strategy is sound – it is only that he is not quite savvy enough yet to completely pull it off. Whenever I have heard the story told, the whole tone has been upbeat, appreciative, and amused.

Wati Nyiru and Wati Yula, and the Seven Sisters (Kungkarangkalpa or Kurrpulurrpulu)

This group of Dreaming players appear on Berndt's (1959) list of major desert Beings. Yula is a lustful man whose sole and abiding interest is in chasing a group of women, the Seven Sisters, over great areas of country. Sometimes and in some localities Yula is called Nyiru: there does not appear to be any substantive difference between the two. Similarly, the Seven Sisters women are sometimes referred to as Kungkarangkalpa and sometime as Kurrpulurrpulu. The ‘set’ that travels through the Wanam area, midway between Warburton and Warakurna, is most usually referred to as Yula and Kungkarangkalpa. For most purposes, there seems to be in effect one Dreaming involved, with two ‘players’, the man on the one hand, and the group of women on the other. The substance of the story at each site along the way concerns how close he manages to get to the women. On the Ngaanyatjarra men’s side, the story line is very repetitive, with little additional or idiosyncratic content being associated with different sites along the track; and in line with this limited intellectual potential the whole Dreaming plays a relatively minor part in the men’s ritual life, although its subject matter, lust, ensures that it retains considerable interest more generally. In fact, though, it is the women’s side of the equation here that is of far greater import. The Seven Sisters Dreaming stories, apart from relating how the man, Yula or Nyiru, has to be continually evaded – a subject which itself provides fertile fuel for amusement, horror and the like - turn out to comprise a whole field for the conduct and exploration of what is known as ‘women’s business’. That is, issues to do with women’s reproductive, nurturing, sexual and social roles.
are dealt with at length. Living women control and celebrate the Seven Sisters Dreaming and all the ritual associated with it: men only know the outlines of what it is about, and stay away from any discussion or performance related to it. Like the Ngaanyatjarra men, I know too little about the Seven Sisters to discuss it in any depth.

**Minyma Kutungu/ Devil Woman Dreaming**

Some 70km south east of Kiwirrkurra on the edge of the sand hill country to the west of Lake MacDonald there are a number of waterholes associated with the Dreaming woman named *Kutungu*. These waterholes are said to have been dug out by Kutungu, who also had various adventures in the area. (One of the waterholes was Ngatarn, which is discussed in chapter 2 in connection with the conception site of a woman Muwitju Napaltjarri.) Kutungu is a demonic figure or *mamu*. She has grotesque features and behaviour, but is nevertheless capable of feeling human emotion and of having experiences of a human-like kind, and particularly experiences relating to what are regarded as part of the female life-cycle. Kutungu lived and travelled on her own and had no subsection affiliation (indicating that she is outside the domain of the social). She was partial to killing humans in a gruesome manner and then eating them. According to Pintupi men, she would try to illicitly watch men’s ceremonies, often without understanding them. At one site she was pursued by a group of men, *Tjapu Tjalpu* men, who are associated with *Tingarri* Dreaming. These men tried to kill her or have sex with her or otherwise either finish her off or incorporate her back into some kind of place in the social world. There are continual references in the mythology to her *wana* (digging stick) and *wirra* (bowl) and other women’s tools - and also to women’s sexual organs and to gender specific tasks such as winnowing seeds. The way the men described it to me, these objects – her tools and so forth - seem invested with a kind of mystery and heightened power. In the Kutungu myths as I was told them, the *wana* several times goes off on its own chasing food. At one site Tjintjintji, when Kutungu is frightened off by the *Tjalpu Tjalpu* men, she accidentally leaves the *wana* and the *wirra* behind. Later these tools run and catch up with her, to her great relief. In certain contexts in the story the *wana* is not a digging stick at all, but a sacred object. Similarly Kutungu is able at times to replicate a type of sacred object used in men’s ceremonies.
Lungkarta / Blue Tongue Lizard Dreaming

Lungkarta is a cantankerous, scheming fellow who comes from far to the west. Starting at Looma in the region of Fitzroy Crossing, he came towards the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, through an important long-lasting waterhole Kunayunku, north of Warburton. Here, a great feast of kangaroo meat was being held among a large group of people. The meat was the body of the Dreaming Marlu (Western) who was travelling past from the north, and had got himself ‘killed’ by some local people, as described in the entry for the Marlu Dreaming below. Lungkarta was given a share of the meat but he was not pleased, for he only received a piece of the hip, and it was mostly bone. In disgust at this shabby treatment of a visitor he threw the meat down and ‘blocked the rock hole’. A limestone boulder does in fact partially block access to this waterhole. He subsequently went on much further in the Lands, to the east, creating mischief as he went, culminating at Yanumarrapirti, where he caused a local initiate to die by circumcising him improperly (see Appendix 3 for details about the Yanumarra Dreaming). Lungkarta arrived at Yanumarrapirti pretending that he was a legitimate waputju (circumsisor) for a local pre-initiate there. He had the qualification of being from a far-away place, but the locals, the kin of the boy, were a little suspicious of him. They asked him: ‘Have you got a kann (stone flake) to use on the boy?’ He mumbled yes, that he did have one. He made a gesture to his face, but in the late evening light the people could not see him clearly and did not immediately realise that there was any significance to this. In fact he had pointed to one of his teeth as the kanti. Later, when the operation was ready to be performed, he bit the boy’s penis, and the boy subsequently died. Lungkarta then rushed off, going back westwards.

Incensed, the men from Yanumarrapirti passed a message on ahead to the locals who lived in the Milyugal hills at the southern end of the Cavenagh Range, due west of Yanumarrapirti. These were Mitjalan (a type of possum) Women. The message was to kill him. The Women found him when he was asleep, and reaching up his anus with a thin hooked stick, pulled out all his intestines (nyurru). When he awoke he saw his innards lying on his stomach. There is a long narrow hill in the place, which is all that remains of Lungkarta now – his intestines.
Minyma Kutjarra / Two Women Dreaming

As with the Seven Sisters Dreamings discussed above, the Two Women tjukurrpa, wherever it is found (and it is very widespread), is concerned with female pursuits and interests; and what might be called its ‘governance’ is purely in the hands of women. Again, I am unfortunately unable to discuss this tjukurrpa in any depth.

Ngirntaka / Perentie Dreaming

The Ngirntaka is one of the most prominent and celebrated desert Dreaming figures, certainly for the Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi and also for the Pitjantjatjara. The Ngirntaka tjukurrpa focuses more on appearance than any other Dreaming, with the emphasis on the elegance, glamour and visibly taut power of the protagonist. The real life animal, up to two metres in length and with its black and yellow markings, is undeniably impressive. It is a reasonably common species in the desert and contains a considerable amount of meat that is regarded as very good eating. It is fast and aggressive, and is often caught by being chased on foot by several people, at top speed. If cornered, it may turn on and lash out at his pursuers. The exhilaration and sometimes the hilarity of the ngirntaka hunt seems to be reflected in the somewhat comical side of the character attributed to the Dreaming Ngirntaka. He is associated with a very well known Dreaming track of great length that comes from the west. At a site Tjintjira in the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve, Ngirntaka pursues and catches some of the Emu people who are also heading east for a great ‘second funeral’ at Kalayapirti (as described above). From there Ngirntaka continues east, along the Brown Range just south of Warburton (as referred to in chapter 4). In the course of his lengthy travels he interacts with many other Dreaming protagonists, sometimes as the one ‘calling the shots’, and sometimes as the quarry. In stories he tends to succumb to vanity and often winds up looking foolish.\(^{164}\) This ‘figure of fun’ aspect is, however, complemented by a flip side. Like the Wati Kutjarra (‘Two Goanna Men’) Ngirntaka is a ‘maparnjjarra’, with magic powers of destruction. This darker side was suggested in a story, related in chapter 3, about how he might kill an interloper by eating him from the inside out. Ngirntaka is also known to represent one of those powers that a suitably equipped person can call upon in the cause of ‘laying a curse’ upon an enemy – for instance, on a rival for a woman.

\(^{164}\) There are also several other Ngirntaka tracks in this part of the desert, one of them a major one that is mostly located within the Pitjantjatjara Lands of north west SA.
Nirnu (Rabbit-eared Bandicoot, or Bilby)

A place called Watja in low lying lake country some 40 north west of Warburton is home to a group of Dreaming Nirnu. The Warnampi Kutjarra (Two Water Snakes), coming from the west, chase the Nirnu People, causing them to scatter. Some go a short distance north to a place called Nyingka (in the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve) where there is a large swamp. A whole family of four - mother, father and two children - is decimated. The two children are eaten and the father, who is ‘crippled’, staggers off into the nearby scrub, while the mother’s grief impels her to abandon the area, albeit this means going far away on her own. She ends up at a place some 300km to the south.

It is on the basis of this story, involving as it does the 300 km journey of the mother Nirnu, that a ‘Nirnu Dreaming track’ comes to feature in my Table 1:1 of the ‘long distance’ tracks of the Lands. Yet as the story shows, it is actually only one nirnu that undertakes this journey, while others are either killed or remain in situ. Prior to the intervention of the water snakes, the Nirnu family had been envisioned in the story as localised in the Watja area. Thus by many criteria it would have been possible to class the ‘Nirnu Dreaming’ in Table 1:2, while regarding the fate of the mother as a ‘one off’. This illustrates my point about the indeterminacies of the process of categorising the Dreamings in these kinds of ways.

Papa / Dingo Dreaming

As discussed in the earlier sections on Marlu, the Papa as Dreaming beings appear frequently in the story of Western Marlu, where their role is to harass and ultimately to kill this Marlu in dramatic fashion. However, there is also one well-known case of a Dreaming in which the Papa themselves are the principal protagonists. The story of this Dreaming begins with a group of local Papa people living at a locality named Irrunytju, close to the SA border in the eastern part of the Lands. In the Dreaming, Dingo people proliferate in this country, with groups of puppies playing together being a favourite theme. But when the dramatic action starts, the Dingos are back to their staple activity of pursuing kangaroos. Two Dingo people, Nyukarli and his wife Punurrtja, spot a kangaroo to the north of Irrunytju, and head off to hunt it. Their chase takes them to the west, to a place well south of Blackstone. Punurrtja, who is nearing her quarry, has put on a spurt, but the sun is setting ahead of her in the west, and she is momentarily blinded, failing to see a sharp mulga branch (punu) which rears up ahead of
her. Skewered, she suffers an agonising death. (The stem of her name, *Pumu-*, refers to this event.)

Given that the dingo occupies a special place in the life of the Desert people, it is worth making a few further observations about the *Papa* Dreaming here. Classically, people kept pet dingoes while their untamed counterparts also roamed the country. The attitude of the people to their pet animals is extremely indulgent. They are generally referred to by the term *tjarntu*, which may also be applied to ‘relatives’, and connotes ‘insidership’, rather than by the more neutral term *papa*. They are seen as an absolutely basic part of everyday domestic life. One of my main informants, Fred Forbes (b. 1923), once conveyed to me his vision of the elemental forms of human social life, and he described a man, his wife and their dogs sitting by a camp fire. Curiously though, this intimate image does not find its way into the Dreaming repertoire, except insofar as the common Dreaming *Mamu* (devil person, usually a solitary woman) will often have a large pack of dogs with her as her sole, and similarly demonic, companions. Mostly, the Dog appears in the Dreaming in its wild form, and in this regard its signature activity, as indicated above, is the hunting of the kangaroo.

*Nyii-Nyii / Zebra Finch Dreaming*

The tiny scarlet-beaked zebra finches, that ‘flit’ rapidly in dense flocks close to any available water source, while making their constant double high-pitched call (nyii, nyii!), are a very common desert bird. In the *tjukurrpa* it is possible to discern the symbolic exploitation of the several distinctive species characteristics of the bird. It is evident that the close formation of the birds and the uniformity of each participant’s bodily orientation and movement, together with the flashes of scarlet colour displayed, have been seen by the desert people as (a) capturing the type of closeness that is expected to prevail among human beings at certain times, particularly in certain phases of ceremonial activity; and (b) evoking the way in which dancing is typically performed, which again is associated with the ceremonial domain. These factors relate to the role played by this Dreaming as in effect the ‘follow on’ from the *Marlu tjukurrpa* in the progression of young men through their initiation. Thus *Nyii-Nyii* songs, designs and dances are heavily employed in aspects of subincision rituals and in initiatory

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165 Nowadays, the situation is roughly the same, except that most pet dogs are now Canis lupus familiaris (often with some Canis lupus dingo descent as well), whereas the wild ones mostly have the distinctive dingo appearance.

Appendix 2
journeys and activities that follow immediately after these. For the initiates, this represents a phase of life where they are becoming veterans in the endurance of discomfort and pain, and in which close comradeship will have developed with one’s co-initiate peers. The ‘toughness’ aspect is another feature often associated with the zebra finch as a species: as one informant humorously commented to me, ‘They are tough little dudes’. He was referring to their perpetual brisk movement and seeming ‘cheerfulness’, as well as their ability to survive under the harshest conditions, provided even a modicum of water is available.

The Nyii-Nyii Dreaming track comes from far to the west, entering the Lands through the middle of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. However it is only when it reaches the major site Yapu Kulkari (Mt Aloysius), mid way between Blackstone and Wingellina, that this Dreaming becomes a ‘heavyweight’. There is ‘no song’ for the Nyii-Nyii travels prior to this point, but here they participate in mythological initiatory activity, as described in Appendix 3 under the heading Kurparu (Magpie) Dreaming. Huge numbers of Nyii-Nyii are drowned when the Magpie Man vents his anger by creating a flood at the mountain, and their bodies are washed down southwards towards the sea, while many live Finches ‘sweep’ along with them. These events and the associated ritual are very fondly regarded and frequently celebrated by Ngaanyatjarra men.

Tingarri / Tingarri People Dreaming

Tingarri is the dominant Dreaming in the northern sector, and in the northern part of the southern sector. Myers (1986:60-64) discusses it in some detail, indicating its status as the signature Dreaming of the Pintupi. He provides a map showing the configuration of the Tingarri Dreaming imprint within these areas, showing it as comprised basically of 3 major Dreaming tracks; and he relates a part of the Dreaming story that is connected with Yawalyuru (also known as Kulkurta), one of the major sites in the whole desert and part of what he labels ‘Route B’ in his diagram. I concur with what Myers has to say about the Tingarri, including his diagram and the sites and tracks shown on it. I have visited many of these sites myself and followed the tracks. My perspective on the Tingarri Dreaming imprint, gained from my work with bot Pintupi and Ngaanyatjarra, is however a little different from Myers’s. The thing that has always struck me most is the vast scope of this Dreaming, together with the very ‘open’ feel that it has, as the hordes of Tingarri people sweep through
great swathes of country. In these aspects this Dreaming is quite different from any other I
know of. Myers speaks of the participants as if it is primarily a matter of the guiding of
novices through the landscape. In what I have heard the novices are certainly present, but
what is most important is the fact of the sheer numbers of people. The topography through
which the Tingarri travel is typically country in which long, sweeping sand ridges, all with
the same orientation and up to 20 metres high, are interspersed with broad open plains.
Accounts by my informants have always emphasised that the Tingarri beings spread widely
across the landscape in their movements. The ‘stream’ of Tingarri beings may be
conceptualised as several kilometres wide. They devour the landscape, as it were, as they pass
through it. They are described as absorbing all the people, all the small localised groups as
they come across them. This is the ‘feel’, the sensation of the Tingarri Dreaming in this
region - that teeming hordes of the Tingarri who had swept across huge tracts of country
would come and swallow these isolated groups, enveloping them, incorporating them into this
stream of people, life, and movement. Tingarri songs known to the people of the area contain
many verses and have a characteristic tone and metre. They are enjoyed immensely and are
sung in a spirit of gusto. The Tingarri motif, which is used in ceremonial body painting but
has been extensively exploited in ‘dot paintings’ produced for commercial sale, has a
robustness and an almost mathematical quality – essentially consisting of circles
interconnected with lines - that lends itself to endless spatial extension. Aesthetically, both
songs and motif exhibit an expansiveness and fluidity. There are some very sacred and
restricted sites associated with Tingarri, but in general there is an openness about this
Dreaming in the way that a good deal of information about it is accessible to everybody,
women as well as men. Indeed, women have possession of a ‘component’ of Tingarri, a
Dreaming track of female Tingarri beings, known in the Kiwirrkura area as Kanaputa, who
travel in parallel with their male counterparts. The ‘Kanaputa women’ stream across the
landscape in like manner to the men, and the associated songs and designs are held and
actively utilised by the women of the region.166 The country of the Pintupi is probably the
most infertile of the everywhere infertile desert, and the population density was
commensurately even lower than the desert norm. Against this background, it seem that the

166 In a sense the Kanaputa track is a manifestation of an idea of the ‘women’s side’ as well as the ‘men’s side’. Actually the Tingarri track itself and the rituals associated with it are not by any means entirely restricted to
men, so it is not as if the women would have been ‘left out’ if there had been no Kanaputa. To an extent, the men
have an idea that it is important to separately cater for women, thus perhaps in some ways there is a division here
into two categories that actually reflect the men’s perspective.
Pintupi, in the way they envision the character of the beings of their signature Dreaming, are celebrating human triumph over the challenge posed by their environment.

**Tjilkamarta (Wati) / Echidna Man Dreaming**

There is not a great deal that I need to say about the *Tjilkamarta*, which would undoubtedly be placed in the ‘minor’ category of Dreamings were it not for the rather large distances that these Beings travel.

The most well known *Tjilkamarta* Man Dreaming involves a fellow who travels towards, and nearly reaches Warburton, from near Patjarr in the Clutterbuck Hills, some 240 km to the north west. When he enters the North Warburton Range, a locality in which many Dreamings are co-present, he has the misfortune to attract the attention of the *Wati Kutjarra*, who are very active here (see below). Echidna Man has noticed the smoke from a fire ahead of him. Thinking that ceremonial business might be taking place, he has stopped to ponder his next move, for it is fraught with danger for a stranger to wander into the midst of such activity. But because of his long hair, the *Wati Kutjarra*, when they see him (which they are able to do from far off), jump to the conclusion that he is a woman, and then go on to make the assumption that he is standing still in the spot where he is for the purpose of trying to spy on men’s activities. Such impetuous thought processes are typical of the Two Men, as is their next move – which is to grab poor old Echidna Man and pull him to pieces.

**Tjilkamarta (Minyma) / Echidna Woman Dreaming**

In a story that comes into the Lands in an easterly direction, from SA, the *Tjilkamarta* is actually a Woman. She has a ‘husband’ who is a Dreaming Being of a different species – he is a *Ngirntaka* (Perentie Lizard) Man. The two are ‘newly married’ – he has gone east to get her, and they are travelling back towards his country, which is far to the south west of Jameson. However their relationship is not going smoothly. She is a small woman, and she finds him too ‘big’ for her. On the other hand, he continually takes off to hunt game, failing to give her the normal amount of care that a woman can expect from a husband. Their arguments end in violence, with him killing her; and her body is represented in a stone formation to the south west of the Cavanagh Range.
Warnampi Kutjarra / Two Water Snake Dreaming

The Water Snake, or as it is often called in other areas the Rainbow Serpent, is of course a very well known figure in Aboriginal mythology. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands the characteristics of the water snake are essentially the same as in other areas. He is a creature of great power, is unpredictable, provides or causes rain – either life-giving supplies or destructive floods - and is the ‘keeper’ of water holes.

The *warnampi* that are associated with waterholes are usually not personalized (or named) beings and are not part of Dreaming tracks and ‘stories’ as such. They are understood to live within certain types of waterhole, typically the more important springs or other sites where water arises, or appears to arise, from an underground source. Thus they are not associated with mere soakages (*tjurnu*), where the water obtained derives from rain that has previously fallen and become trapped or retained beneath the ground; nor, certainly, with *walu*, a type of waterhole in which rain is retained in rock formations. The belief is that the *warnampi* of a given waterhole produces the water there himself, either storing it in his belly, or lying coiled up within the supply that he has previously disgorged. He will then release it to be used by people who approach the waterhole, if he is so inclined, and if the people follow a protocol (usually involving an act of ‘touching’, *pampulku*) aimed at propitiating him. In modern times when some of these rockholes have dried up it is said that this is because the *warnampi* has left that rockhole for some reason – perhaps because it has died. In some instances white men are said to have shot a particular *warnampi*.

Many people speak about these ‘static’ water snakes with some fear, and in stories for children they are represented as creatures that can kill or harm people. Interestingly some very senior men have told me that this is not how water snakes really need to be seen, and that (in keeping with the way they provide water to people they know or accept) they are friends. One man, Fred Forbes, referred to them as *tjarntu*, a term also applied to family and to other intimate figures such as pet dogs, and even to one’s country. I think that the position of such men is that they have total familiarity with the desert domain, or their quarter of it, and that this familiarity extends to all the habitual presences and elements that it contains, even to phenomena conventionally considered dangerous, such as *warnampi*. In other words, they consider themselves ‘lords of all they survey’ and have no reason to fear anything that they
are likely to find as they live out their lives on their own turf. But other people, particularly younger people, do not have – and it may be said, are not permitted to have - this kind of confidence.

These ‘water hole’ *warnampi* are clearly not Dreaming beings in the same sense as are the other beings discussed in these notes, though they are, as I would put it, products of ‘*tjukurrpa*-thinking’.¹⁶⁷

But in addition to these basically immobile creatures, there are also *Warnampi* who are Dreaming creatures just like the others considered here. Indeed, the Dreaming track of the *Warnampi Kutjarra* (Two *Warnampi*) in the southern sector of the Lands is among the longest and most prominent of all those found in the Ngaanyatjarra region. The basic reason for the presence in this Dreaming of two creatures rather than one is the same as in the cases of the *Minyma Kutjarra* and the *Wati Kutjarra* – that is, it is a signal that we are not dealing with the kind of inherently anti-social being that would be suggested if there was a solitary presence (as with *Minyma Kutungu*). But the duality is also exploited extensively in a detailed story.

This story begins and (much later) ends at a venerated site Pukara, well south of Wingellina, and listed among the ‘Major Sites’ in Appendix 1. It is basically about a boy who is ostracised by his compatriots, the people of the Pukara region, who find his looks repugnant. (He has one large staring central eye). He abandons his country and heads off west, accompanied only by his loyal father, who cannot bear to see him alone and vulnerable to the depredations of the far-off unknown world. In fact, Son is wilful and resentful, and moves around erratically from one area to another around WA, continually behaving badly, although at one stage he manages to create enough social ties to get himself initiated as a man. (This itself being contrary to the customary practice, which is to reinforce the connectedness of a boy to his home country and its people through the carrying out of his initiation in that home place.) Eventually Son turns his steps towards home, now fully grown and very strong, not however with pleasant thoughts but in a spiteful, revengeful mood. Father, as always, is trailing behind him, trying both to appease Son and to smooth over the trouble he continually creates. At a

¹⁶⁷ Vachon (2006) considers the status of this type of water snake at length. He considers that, for the group he is studying, they are of quite different origin and ontological standing to the beings of the Dreaming as such.

Appendix 2
locality some 40 km north west of Warburton, Son frightens a group of *Nirnu* (Bilby) people, eating two of them (see the entry under *Nirnu*, above). Then at Piyul, 40 km south east of Warburton, he shows his power by blasting his way through a massive rock ridge, and from there he has a straight run in to Pukara, where he proceeds to kill and maim the terrified local population. He, along with his father, are still there at Pukara now, after having reached some semblance of a stable state, but the water hole still needs to be approached very carefully if trouble is to be avoided. Pukara is renowned as a rain-making site, and also an increase site for tree honey (*tjurratja*), a desert delicacy that grows particular well after winter and spring rainfall. Recently a group of men custodians visited the site as part of a Land Management Site Maintenance project, and ended up running away in terror when they allegedly saw the malevolent face of Son rising up from the depths of the water hole towards them, having apparently been disturbed by the mechanical sound of a pump that the team was using.

There is a song and dance associated with the Two *Warnampi* story just outlined, and it is performed quite often, because the Dreaming is dramatic and (in parts) amusing, while it is also non-sacred. I have seen contemporary representations where the beings are depicted as the dragons of popular international myth, though in the acrylic dot paintings done by older people they are of plainer snake-like appearance, but still with a distinctly bloated character. They tend to be associated with steam and smoke as well as rain and cloud. They are understood to be able to fly through the air, but mostly they slither along the ground. Their favourite terrain is low-lying, swampy country, through which they carve out water courses.

*Wati Kutjarra/Two (Goanna) Men Dreaming*\(^{168}\)

If *Marlu* is the most important desert Dreaming, it could be said that the *Wati Kutjarra* is the one that seems most dedicated to providing a characterisation of the desert life. It is also the Dreaming that would probably be most easily comprehensible (or ‘digestible’) to the outside observer, because it can be seen to play an obviously functional role in a way that most of the other Dreamings do not. I refer to the function attributed to the Two Men of providing a *wide range* of help to humans. For example the Men are regarded as having given vital information to people about how to bring about an abundance of various desert food items (through

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168 In a report written in 2002 (see Brooks 2002a) I gave a detailed account of the travels of the *Wati Kutjarra* in which I indicated that they are present in the ‘Dreamscape’ of the northern sector as well as the southern. I this thesis I am limiting my discussion of their travels to the south.
‘increase’ ceremonies); and as having performed acts like creating waterholes, rearranging landscape features, watercourses and the like to benefit human habitation. Particular stories often show them destroying *mamu* (spirits) that are dangerous to humans. Actually the stories themselves give no explicit indication that the Men are any more motivated by concern (whether general or specific) for the human beings of the desert than any of the Dreaming world players are. Most of the time, like these other players, they are evidently focussed on their own interests and pre-occupations; and when they do help people, their motives seem at best mixed. In one instance that I have documented where they stopped to teach a local group of people how to do an ‘increase’ dance for the yams that grew thereabouts, their true pleasure seems to have come when they later looked on from a hiding place and laughed at the awkwardness of the learners as they attempted to perform gyrations made too difficult for them by the Men. It would seem almost more accurate to say that people have learnt from the *Wati Kutjarra* (and from other Dreaming Beings) *in spite of* the unconcern for them that these Beings almost uniformly display. To the extent that the Two Men differ from the other beings, the difference lies in the breadth of the scope of their ‘productive’ activities. The *Tjurra* Man may have benefitted humans through the undertaking of acts that, when copied by people, will give rise to an abundance of honey, but this is the extent of his repertoire. Similarly with Emu Man, Yam Man, Bilby Man and many others. But *Wati Kutjarra* have ventured into many quarters and made many different sorts of things happen (largely because of the nature of their powers and personalities, which are explored below). It is this, rather than anything in the narratives of the stories themselves, that suggests the idea of their ‘helpmate’ function – an idea that has come to have currency. The ‘wide-ranging’ characteristic, together with the ‘helpmate’ role, also help to explain why the *Wati Kutjarra* Dreaming has a ‘public’ feel to it, in a way that the other Dreamings do not.

If the Two Men have functioned as a boon to mankind, much of the content of the stories seems more in the light of generic scenarios of the desert life and particularly of the behavioural excesses that, it may be observed, are often indulged in by desert men. They are outrageously arrogant and boastful, and seem to be motivated chiefly by curiosity and self-indulgence. While it may be possible to see their killing of *mamu* as a matter of ridding the world of dangerous presences, the actual events, invariably described in ghoulish detail, reveal a propensity to, and even a delight in, casualty cruelty and excessive violence. The *mamu* concerned is often a woman who lives apart from the rest of society – which of course
puts her beyond the pale and in fact defines her as such – but she may have a child or children of whom she is shown to be fond. The narrative often points out a number of such sympathetic features, making her ‘come to life’ as more than just a one-dimensional evil spirit. (No doubt this is at least partly a narrative device to enhance dramatic interest.) The Men themselves, while demonstrating a degree of strength far outstripping that of any opponent – and the majority of people encountered are opponents – derive this strength not from any internal qualities of either mind or body, but from their possession of massive amounts of maparn. (This is a magic substance found in particular places in the environment, often caves, that are generally said to be located far away from the Lands and even beyond the desert. The maparn may be ingested or absorbed by a person as a result of visiting such a place and going through some sort of initiation-like procedure.) Then in a kind of parody of the process of obtaining maparn, the Men, as they travel to various places in the Lands, frequently seek out and over-indulge in the intoxicant mingkulpa, ‘bush tobacco’, and subsequently stumble around drunkenly, making fools of themselves, a picture incongruously at odds with the dignity and self-control associated with persons who are holders of knowledge at the highest levels of men’s law, as the pair claim to be.

In many ways the key fact about the Wati Kutjarra as they are portrayed in the stories, at least in those known to the general Ngaanyatjarra public, is that they are outsiders. More than this, they are interlopers. They have come from a long way away, and, constantly on the move, they do not bother to make themselves known to the local people whose country they are always trespassing into, unless it be to dole out a punishment or a ‘boon’. They are ‘like tourists’, one informant commented to me. Their often excessive and lamentable behaviour is intimately connected with this. They are ‘big heads’ who regard it as their right to roam at large. They consider that they have nothing to learn from the various desert-dwellers they encounter, nor do areas of country that are new to them hold any secrets that they could benefit from learning about. In these ways, they represent the antithesis of a set of ideas about proper - and strategically effective - behaviour that are held very dear by desert people.

There is another characteristic of the Wati Kutjarra that is of considerable significance – their asexuality. They never pursue women for sexual purposes, as do several other players of the Dreaming World. On occasion the Two Men in effect rescue the Seven Sisters from the lustful advances of Yula (or Nyiru), through engaging the latter men in combat; and they do
the same for other groups of women who are vulnerable to various male pursuers. Pira, the moon man, is inclined to be a womanizer, and there are instances of his intentions being thwarted by the Wati Kutjarra. These deeds normally occur as a result of the Two Men happening to be in the right place at the right time, but in the very important case of Minyma Kurrkarti (Goanna Woman) they turn out to have an on-going role to play as protectors and guides. The existence of this role is hidden from the public, with the Goanna Woman herself being a very secret figure, as I indicated earlier.

The travels of the Wati Kutjarra see them coming on a long journey from the west, through the Lands, and then on to a site a short distance to the east of the Lands, near Docker River. In terms of what is known to the public, there appears to be little that inspires or dictates either their overall trajectory of travel or their detailed movements - for the Two Men are known for the constant deviations that they make - unless it be credited that they move about so extensively specifically to seek out humans for the purpose of granting them 'boons'. Sometimes a specific bit of travel arises out of one of their 'rescue operations' of vulnerable groups of women, those these are really more accurately seen as 'combat operations' with the male pursuers. At other times they deviate to look for something specific, or to torment somebody. But much of the time, their route seems to be determined by casual curiosity and the whim of the moment. At least, this is the conclusion that the average Ngaanyatjarra person would be likely to draw, given the information available to them. The senior men, however, are privy to information that casts quite a different light on these questions. To them, it is apparent that the entire trajectory of the Two Men's travel is in fact highly motivated - by their mission to protect Minyma Kurrkarti, who is also travelling from the far west in an easterly direction. She has a reason for her trajectory, and therefore there is also a reason for the route the two men take. (Most of the time they do not trace her path closely, rather they take frequent detours for other purposes or to follow their whims, but always returning at intervals to check on her. This pattern works also to help conceal the connection that exists between them.) In this case, for once, there is a strong and unambiguous motive for the Two Men's actions: they are shadowing her because she possesses, and represents, something of vital importance. The nature of this 'something' has been discussed above in the entry for Goanna Woman.
As a final aspect to be considered here, the *Wati Kutjarra* are, obviously, a duality. This fact provides the potential for interplay between the two, a potential that is regularly exploited. One will help the other if he gets into a scrape; while at other times much bumbling conflict occurs between the two that is highly amusing to the audiences to these tales. One of the two is the common plain ‘white’ *Tirnka* or *Kurrkarti* (sand goanna) of the desert, while the other is *Mulumaru*, the black-headed goanna with yellow markings. At the site Putarr, on a wide spinifex plain south of Blackstone, sit two large sacred stones, or boulders, a few metres apart. These are the Two Men, for once not doing anything, not dismembering anyone or playing games or even camping, but simply sitting, or representing themselves to the world. One of these boulders is slightly smaller and also darker than the other, and has numerous small etched markings on it, arrows and lines and the like. This is identified as *Mulumaru*, the ‘actor’ and dancer and younger of the two while the other, the larger, older, lighter-coloured, plainer-featured party, is *Tirnka*. Use is at time to time made of the polarity as revealed here between ‘white (or light-coloured), older, responsible, grave, pragmatic’ on the one hand, and on the other ‘black, younger, irresponsible, humorous, decorated and artistic’.

I suggest however, that at a more fundamental level the presence of two men in this Dreaming is actually a side issue, for most of the more important things that the Dreaming has to say seem to be about what it might mean to be a desert man, a kind of generic desert man, just as the *Marlu* story, ostensibly about ‘the kangaroo’, is also about human issues. The dual form now becomes simply a way to indicate that we are *not* in the domain of the fundamentally and nakedly anti-social (as are the *mamu*); for despite their aggressive and egotistical behaviour, and their ‘interloper’ status, the *Wati Kutjarra* are not anti-social. If this *tjukurrpa* is about exploring the possibilities and in particular the limits of what kind of ‘being’ a desert man might be, as I suggest it is, what emerges is a portrait of a being who on the one hand (in the case of *Minyma Kurrkarti*; and possibly in relation to the general human population) is capable of care and even compassion, but on the other is prone to extreme egotism and to the frequent use of violence to achieve his own ends. This being also indulges himself, usually with *mingkulpa* (bush tobacco), without a scrap of restraint, whenever he gets the chance. It should be noted that this picture particularly applies to the desert man while he is young. It is at this stage of life that a man is likely to travel widely, when he is most focussed on himself – though expected to act in the service of others when required - and when behavioural excess is most likely and most condoned.
Apart from Tingarri, the other major Dreaming of the northern sector is known as the ‘Old Man’; he is sometimes called ‘Tjangara’, a giant or fearsome man. This being is very much a singular character. Where the Tingarri is expansive, the old man’s nature is contracted and inward-looking. He travels for a distance of around 300 km in total, and moves generally in a straight line, beginning at the Ehrenberg Range in the Northern Territory, passing near Kintore, and then more or less following the main road westwards out towards Kiwirrkura. He finishes up at a place 30 km or so to the south west of Kiwirrkura. Unlike the Tingarri, Tjangara tends to hide himself as he moves along. He moves through parts of the landscape such as hilly areas and gullies where such concealment is possible. Even when he is not hiding, he is likely to be doing things on his own. The events and episodes of this Dreaming are to do with the activities of an individual, not those of a large group of people, and he certainly does not absorb local groups of people into his party. Correspondingly, there is a much more closed-in or restricted character to the distribution of knowledge about the Old Man Dreaming than is the case with Tingarri. Tingarri does possess its sacred and restricted sites and knowledge, but with the Old Man, almost everything is limited to the men’s domain.

In terms of ecology, the travels of Tjangara on the WA side of the border correspond closely, in fact intriguingly so, with a large relatively fertile zone (see the discussion in chapter 5 of this and other sorts of environmental zones). His track runs either within or in close parallel with this zone from the border to the point where his travels end.
VOLUME 2A: RESTRICTED ACCESS SECTION

(Access to Appendix 2A is restricted for cultural reasons)

Permission is required from author before viewing.
APPENDIX 3

Localised or minor Dreamings of the Lands

Kuniya Kutjarra/ Two Python Dreaming

This Dreaming could almost be classed as ‘long distance’, as it does involve some pythons coming from afar, but their travels as such are unimportant. Most of the action is concentrated at one very important and famous site complex, called Kuniyapirti (literally: home of a large number of pythons). This place is 30 km NNE of the present day community of Blackstone and is geographically close to, though mythologically unconnected with, one of the most sacred site areas in the Lands (a site associated with Minyma Kurrkarti, the Goanna Woman). The main story that pertains to Kuniyapirti may be described as a ‘foundation myth’ for that country. It goes as follows: It is said that the people from Pukara, an important Warnampi Kutjarra (Two Water Snake) site far to the south, sent a messenger on one occasion to Kuniyapirti to ask the local people there to come and attend a ceremony at Pukara. But the Kuniya people refused, saying ‘We don’t feel like participating’. It is said that it is because they made this refusal that there is a ‘country’ as such there - and a Dreaming story for that country. Otherwise they would have moved away, taken part in the ceremony and ‘who knows, they may never have come back’, as an informant put it. They remained at Kuniyapirti and established the place and its Dreaming imprint.

Kurli people Dreaming

This is a group of Dreaming people, of only local importance in themselves, who inhabit a particular area in the north Warburton Range that was relatively densely populated by people as well as by Dreamings. Their main significance lies in their interaction with two sets of very important long distance travellers, the Wati Kutjarra (Two Men) and the Western Marlu (Kangaroo). It is not necessary to recount the details here.

Kurnma / March Fly Dreaming

The Dreaming March Fly lives at a single site in a region west to Warburton that, for ecological reasons, is now and would always have been remote and isolated. It is a place to be
avoided because any misadventure there will unleash the biting insects. I do not know of any other places in the Lands where this Dreaming is found, though there could well be one or two.

**Kurrparu / Magpie Dreaming**

The Magpie is the ‘boss’ of a huge collection of birds that all live at the very important site of *Yapu Kulkari* (Mt. Aloysius), in the central ranges between Blackstone and Wingellina. The birds are of several varieties, including the *nyii-nyii*, zebra finch (which are numerically in the vast majority), *patilpa* (Pt Lincoln parrot) and *kilykilykarri* (budgerigar). These birds are all of small size and live in closely bunched flocks. *Kurrparu* goes from this site to Yanumarrapirti in the Bell Rock Range (a distance of around 20 km), to participate in the subincision ritual for his son. Unfortunately the son dies as a result of the operation. The reason this happens is because he does not follow the strict instructions to remain at rest after the operation, but *Kurrparu*, in his grief, lashes out indiscriminately. He first wreaks havoc in the Yanumarrapirti locality, causing the collapse of a hillside which kills the entire group (most of them local *Yanumarra*, caterpillar people) camped there for the rituals. He then returns to his home at Mt Aloysius where he causes a flood. The water (really his arm blood) flushes out the dense small-bird population, drowning many and carrying corpses as well as live bodies southwards on the crest of a wave, all the way down to Eucla on the Great Australian Bight. (These events are also described under the heading of ‘*Nyii-nyii*’ in Appendix 2.) Thus *Kurrparu* plays a key role at both Mt Aloysius and Yanumarrapirti, but he does not travel far, whereas the *Nyii-nyii* mob, the zebra finches, though under his authority at Mt Aloysius, travel huge distances both before and after they get to this place, and are one of the most important of all Ngaanyatjarra Dreamings.

**Mingkiri /Native Mouse People Dreaming**

The Mouse People have intense and interaction (to do with initiation) with the Western *Marlu* man as the latter passes through the Warburton area. They come into the *Marlu* story briefly and drop out of it once *Marlu* has finished his business in the area and has headed off to the south. They are embodied in the forms of a number of specimens of the *Yaltarr* (*Eucalyptus gamophylla* or twin-leaf mallee) tree, which grow here despite it not being quite their usual
habitat. These trees are a large type for the desert, and resumably associating them with mice is a humorous touch.

**Minyma Mamu / Devil Women Dreaming**

This is more in the nature of a generic category. In any given instance where this Dreaming occurs there may be only one woman or a group of women involved. As the name suggests, they are mischievous, and they are found in regions that are considered remote by the Ngaanyatjarra. They do travel, sometimes a considerable distance, but because of the nature of their habitat they create few links between places of any importance and hence do not merit being classed with the 'great travellers'.

**Nyinnga / Ice People Dreaming**

The Ice People Dreaming is found at several sites, and there is some interaction with other Dreamings. At one spot near the Rawlinson Range, a *Punurrpa* (Praying Mantis) Man leaves his wife in camp briefly while going out to hunt, and when he returns she is gone. He sees by signs left around the camp that an Ice Man has stolen her, and he sets off in pursuit, leading to a confrontation at the major site Kampurarrpirti, south of Blackstone. The Dreaming Ice People characteristically live in hardship and some pain. They are particularly vulnerable to the freezing of their extremities, and they tend to have deep cracks on the heels of their feet, caused by their attempts to chip off the ice with sharp stone flakes. (In the Ngaanyatjarra dictionary, the word *nyinnga* is defined as meaning winter, or frost and ice.)

As distinct from the sites along the Ice People's Dreaming track as such, there is a place some 30 km north west of Jameson with the name Nyinnga. It is a wind-swept, boggy area, bare of trees or any useful items, and it said to be a place to be avoided.

**Patupirri / Bat Dreaming**

The Bats are a clear case of a localised Dreaming that is found in a number of dispersed places. There is no 'track-like' connection between such places. The mythological Bats are always found in cave complexes – where real life bats may also often be present. The main
'story' interest lies in the interaction that they sometimes have with 'big' Dreaming players like the *Wati Kutjarra*.

**Pira or Kirnara / Moon Man Dreaming**

The Moon Man is another that travels fair distances, but is not a major player in the sense of linking important places. I am aware of one Moon man track in the northern sector and one in the south. The main interest in him is in his ‘lover-boy’ characteristics, and in his interaction with other players, again most commonly the *Wati Kutjarra*.

**Tjitji Kutjarra / Two Boys Dreaming**

This Dreaming is found in a number of places and seems always to be basically localised. The boys are cast as innocent but capable of cruelty and killing. They tend to become involved with gruesome and malicious characters that they usually manage to best.

**Tjurratja / (Tree) Honey Man Dreaming; aka 'Lupul'**

The Tree Honey man travels to find places where he can stimulate the production of honey (on trees of the type that produce honey naturally). The stories are concerned with him going to get the honey from such places and taking it back to his home (which in some versions is a considerable distance away, in the Pitjantjatjara Lands). This is a slightly unusual sort of Dreaming – it is more like the story of an activity that a desert man, rather than a Dreaming man, would undertake. While travel is integral to the stories, the Honey man is a peripheral player in the Dreaming world of the Ngaanyatjarra. The main point of the Dreaming seems to be to showcase the desirability of tree honey and the fact that people will travel far to get it.

**Walpatju / Crescent nail-tailed wallaby Dreaming**

Like the Mouse People listed above, this Wallaby man has intense and significant interaction (to do with initiation) with the Western *Marlu* man as he travels through a few different areas in both the northern and southern sectors. He is a kind of companion to Marlu, but only intermittently.
**Warrmala / Revenge Party Dreaming**

The institution of the revenge party is inscribed deeply in the Ngaanyatjarra imagination. Popular belief has it that great numbers of deaths were caused in the past by the actions of these parties, which informants describe as having been ‘like army divisions’. The Dreaming counterparts are depicted as acting in the same manner as the real life parties did. They do travel – in fact travel is integral to the mythology about them, for the stories always tell of them pursuing or being pursued by other (Dreaming) parties. But like others in this list, their travels do not function to connect country in any significant way. In one case, they interact with Tjilkamarta man who is also travelling a long distance.

**Wati Ngaparla / Bearded Dragon Man Dreaming**

This man is a ‘one-off’. Relatively unimportant in himself, he is a curious, impetuous fellow whose *raison detre* is evidently to illustrate the perils associated with venturing into the unknown. For the desert hunter-gatherer, one’s very survival depended on forever widening one’s knowledge of the known world, and for this reason a spirit of adventure is a common trait of the desert personality, together with curiosity about what lies over the next hill and about what the other man might be doing. But these drivers of behaviour are likely to bring one into conflict with another powerful imperative that I have drawn attention to, that concerns the guarding of the portals to the edifice of human knowledge. So great are the concerns in the desert about such issues as the possibility of an intruder seeing or hearing something that is restricted, that anyone who appears on the scene unexpectedly or in defiance of existing rules and protocols risks being dealt with severely (as with the Tjilkamarta Man whose fate was recounted in Appendix 2). To be sure of not transgressing in such ways, a person should behave at all times with caution and with the protocols in mind, especially when moving anywhere outside country where he is strictly at home – yet a cautious stance is not compatible with the spirit of curiosity, the possession of which is also a necessary part of the desert survival kit. This conundrum, which as described in chapter 2, is addressed in the Young Turkey story, is also given expression in the Dreaming story of the Bearded Dragon Man. The story tells how this man, whose home was a sheltered place called Mamutjarra, 40 km SSE of Blackstone, happened to witness part of a major event that was unfolding. This event is related in Appendix 2 under the heading of the Emu Dreaming. Vast numbers of Emus, who are among the greatest Dreaming travellers of the desert, were travelling from the west, towards a place in northwest S.A. to attend a 'second funeral'. Ngaparla Man, however,
had no idea of the reason for the great movement of Emu People that he saw occurring. Consumed by curiosity, he 'hitched a ride' with one of the emus who was passing nearby. Much of the 'amusement content' of the story then ensues, in relation to where he hid on the emu (whose feathers create great opportunities for small creatures to find hiding places), the noises he made, the puzzlement of the unwitting emu host and his reaction, and so forth. But the denouement is not so funny – when the emus all gather together at the sacred place Kalayapirti, some 50 km away, he is spotted and summarily killed for his trespassing.

**Yanumarrra / Caterpillar (Initiates) Dreaming**

This story is inter-twined with that of *Wati Kurparru*, the Magpie (see above). In the same set of Dreaming rituals that were carried out at Yanumarrapirti in the Bell Rock Range south of Wingellina, in which Kurparu's son died from loss of blood after being subincised, a *Yanumarrra* initiate who was being circumcised also died, after having his penis bitten off by the false *waputju* (circumciser), *Wati Lungkarta* (see Appendix 2). *Wati Lungkarta*, the Blue-tongues Lizard Man, brought to reality one of the perennial fears of the desert people, which is that the *waputju*, an outsider, will betray the faith put in him and cause the death of the initiate. Caterpillars have clearly been chosen to portray the story about circumcision (the first and most fundamental of the two penis-cutting rites) because of the symbolism of the transformation of these beings in the natural world. The *Yanumarrra* Dreaming is confined almost exclusively to the Bell Rock Range vicinity. In line with the extremely sensitive nature of the story, the Yanumarrapirti site is in the most severely restricted category.

**Wati Tarrkatjarra / ‘Skeleton Man’ Dreaming**

Another 'one-off', this Dreaming, located between Warburton and Jameson comprises a 'track' perhaps 30 km long, along which there are some eight sites. As he moves from one site to the next, the protagonist sheds and leaves behind various portions of his body, until there is nothing of him left. This is one of the most clear cut examples of a 'local tradition' Dreaming.
APPENDIX 4

Personal Dreaming Connection Stories

The North: Conception site-related stories

During my fieldwork in the north I found a number of cases where the identity of a living or recently deceased person was interwoven in some detail, through his or her 'conception story', with what I refer to in chapter 2 as the 'great tradition' stories of the Dreaming. In each instance the persons concerned were (or had been) prominent players in the Pintupi world, senior men or women whose achievements and standing merited the kind of attention that the elaboration of these stories involves. Persons who did not participate much in the Pintupi public life or who were of a retiring disposition did not tend to have such stories. In the example that follows, there is an added dimension, in that two persons were connected into the larger Dreaming story by means of the one inter-related conception story.

The story involves a site called Takupalangu, which is on the Dreaming track of the Old Man or Tjangara (see Appendix 2) and about 90 km east of Kiwirrkura. It is visible from the main road connecting Kiwirrkura and Kintore. There is a group of three caves half way up the north face of a large rock ridge. Some unusual white smudges on the hillside next to the caves are also visible to passersby. On the flat below the hillside is a claypan, and very close by is a chain of three other small claypans. All these features are part of the site.

Takupalangu was the conception site of Wuta Wuta Tjangala, a renowned Pintupi man who became famous as a painter at Papunya. He died in the early 1990s. As is the case with other senior men of the northern sector, the connection between Wuta Wuta and this place is far more complex than is suggested by the simple notion that his mother conceived him there. Wuta Wuta had an elaborate overall 'conception' story that dealt with the activities of an imagined man – in a sense an 'alter ego' of Wuta Wuta himself – and that embraced various stages of a man's life cycle. The narrative would no doubt have arisen in embryo form when Wuta Wuta was a child, and would then have been added to over the course of his lifetime, with creative contributions being made by a number of persons. (Of course the process is not
seen by the people in this way – from their perspective, ‘new’ elements are not inventions but revelations of truths that are actually eternal and ‘sacred’ but previously concealed.)

The following is part of the full story as I heard it:

Wuta Wuta, who was in his prime at the time, was living with his two wives in the three caves at Takapalangu. His camp was the middle one, the largest, and his two wives camped in the caves either side of him. In the mornings he would get up and go out looking for meat. One morning he saw the Old Man, the old Dreaming Tjangara, coming across the plain from the east and heading towards him. The Old Man was dancing on the claypans below the caves, moving with a characteristic sideways shuffle, and on his head he was carrying a long slender wooden object.

This object carried by Tjangara was what is known in this region as a tarruku, a sacred board (restricted to senior men). Wuta Wuta, looking on, was horrified that this object could be thus displayed in the open with women able to see it, so he rushed over and grabbed it from Tjangara, hurling it away into some thick scrub, just to the west. It is now the adjoining ridge, named Wintalnga, in the range. Wuta Wuta then returned to his cave.

To be as clear as possible about how these matters should be understood, when the Pintupi relate the above account they are not saying that this scenario happened as such in real life. But Wuta Wuta, as well as having been conceived there, spent substantial time in the Takapalangu area and is strongly associated with it. He did have two wives and it is possible that in rainy weather they all sometimes camped in the caves. Maybe a real life incident occurred, perhaps in conjunction with a ceremonial performance, in which a sacred board was in danger of being exposed to some women. It is most likely that the scenario of him ‘rescuing’ the board from the careless or flaunting figure of Tjangara was ‘dreamed’ either by Wuta Wuta himself or by a close associate. It often happens that a senior man will wake in the morning and announce to the people in his camp that some truth of this kind has been revealed to him in a dream. Sometimes a series of such dreams (which in my experience are avidly listened to when related) will occur, perhaps over a few months, and they may be dreamed by one or more people, with the same subject being revisited again and again. In such a way, we might say that a man like Wuta Wuta comes to have a secondary ‘life’, concurrent to his mundane one, which is generated and sustained in the collective imagination that embraces his peers and associates as well as himself. This secondary life is not to be thought of as divorced from the real, corporeal one, rather the two are intertwined.

Appendix 4
This is the kind of interplay that occurs between the Dreaming world and the everyday world, or, as I have put it, between the ‘great tradition’ and the ‘little tradition’ of a Dreaming. The logic of the Wuta Wuta story suggests that Takapalangu as a series of claypans already had its place in the ‘great tradition’ story, but that the three caves, as well as the ridge Wintalnga came to be incorporated into this story through the ‘little tradition’ events generated in the domain of Wuta Wuta and his associates. By means of these processes, a man like Wuta Wuta can be seen not only as a product of the Dreaming (having been ‘conceived’ by it), but also an agent of it. He is part of it, embedded within it, and inasmuch as he has a ‘secondary’ life intertwined with his corporeal one, cannot be fully understood without reference to it. Certainly by the time he was a senior man he had become, in part, a celebrated player on the stage of a major Dreaming, and in this aspect could expect to long endure in the collective memory.

One might ask – and such questions will certainly occur from time to time to his desert fellows – what image of him was projected on this stage? At face value, he was the young hero who tackled the errant giant-man in the cause of cosmic order. But might he not also have been the unwitting straight man, the butt of the teasing, deceptive Tjangara’s joke? Such paradoxes, fears of being the ‘plaything of others’, together with intimations of a mixture of fun, seriousness, respect, self-deprecation, delusions of grandeur and the puncturing of other’s pretensions are signature characteristics of the desert culture and are found again and again in the Dreaming stories of the area - as is revealed in the stories related in Appendices 2 and 3.

To return to the story, there was another man who had been camping at Takapalangu in the same cave with Wuta Wuta. This was his brother-in-law Yumpulurru tjungarrayi, another renowned Pintupi man, who was still alive at the time I collected this information in the mid-90s. As has been well documented in the literature, the relationship between brothers-in-law is informal and friendly in desert society, as elsewhere. The story goes that Yumpulurru was in the cave on the occasion when Wuta Wuta went out to tackle the Tjangara. Yumpulurru was a younger man than Wuta Wuta in this story (and in real life), and as such it was not his place to get involved in such a confrontation. Frightened, he ran away, heading off towards Wangurnu, a very remote site 80kms or more across the sand dunes to the south west. Wangurnu was his ‘conception site’, as is explained in one of the stories (not related here) that are associated with this place.
On the face of it, having conception occur subsequent to a number of other events – especially when in the events concerned, ego is an adult – seems to be a contradiction in terms. I suggest that actually the conception story for Wangurnu arose first, and that the Takapalangu events or stories were ‘discovered’ (or, we might say, ‘dreamed up’) later, and were then interpolated at the beginning. The real-life impetus for all this stemmed from the fact that Takapalangu turned out to be a very important place in Yumpulurru’s (actual) life. Wangurnu is located in very remote and infertile area, the sort of area that people would pass through on their way to somewhere else, but not remain in, and in line with this Yumpulurru was taken to Takapalangu by his parents when young. He grew up circulating around the much more fertile area within which the latter site is located. Later Wuta Wuta married his sister. It was from a spot near Takapalangu that he, along with many of his fellows, made the life-changing move out of the desert to Papunya in 1964. While he was young at Takapalangu, during the years in Papunya and then in the later ‘return to country’ era he spent much time with his ‘mate’ Wuta Wuta. From this long term close association, the ‘double-barrelled’ story developed which linked the two of them together, and to Takupalangu.

In chapter 4 of the main text I raise the issue of the ‘transportability’ of a desert person’s connectedness to country, saying that it was extremely difficult and rare for anything like a seamless change in basic attachment from one place to another to occur. Here, however, is a case where this did in fact happen. Yumpulurru, though conceived at distant Wangurnu, came to be linked primarily with Takupalangu. But it is evident that a number of things all fell into place to facilitate this achievement. The main factors were (a) that ego himself was a prominent figure about whose person a detailed tjukurrpa story could be expected to develop; (b) that there was likewise another prominent person about whom a story did in fact develop, and that it was based around a place in the area with which ego found himself associated after leaving his own ‘origin place’; and (c) that ego spent so much time with this other person that he could ‘tack on’ to the latter’s story.

The South: Birthplace-related personal connection stories

While there are many cases of detailed personal totem stories in the north, such cases have become more rare in the south. The conception mode of connection as present in the north does lend itself to more detailed theorising and attribution about the relationship between
people and the Dreaming beings, but I do not attribute the difference to this. Elaborate stories of the connection of a person to the Dreaming world do occur in the south. The fact that they are more rare is simply a consequence, I believe, of the longer period of exposure that the southerners have had to the ‘outside world’, and in particular the somewhat greater fading that has occurred there of the intimate relationship between Dreaming beings and living persons that was characteristic of the ‘classical’ world.

One instance of a detailed personal connection that I have documented in the southern sector concerns a site named Rururr, which is included on my list of major sites (Appendix 1). In this story, as with Takupalangu, two well known local men are linked together by means of their mutual involvement in the Dreaming events. The information was given to me during two visits I made to the site, in the early 1990s, each time with two elderly informants, Brian Jennings (b. 1925) and Clem Nelson (b.1910). Brian was the major contributor. The two main human actors in the story are people who were long dead at the time of the visit, and both my informants have since died. The events and attributions involved in the story hark back to the 1930s or 40s or possibly a little earlier.

Rururr is a very sacred site some 60 km from Warburton, to its north west. In contemporary times the locality is ‘off the beaten track’ and has a lonely feel about it. The site is just up on the edge of the rirra, the stony plateau country that starts near Warburton on the western side and extends away for many hundreds of kilometres in a westerly direction through Western Australia. This kind of country is not found in the Lands to the east of Warburton.

Rururr is part of the very long Ngirntaka (Perentie Lizard) Dreaming track. Material about the character of Ngirntaka appears in chapter 4 and Appendix 2. It will be recalled that the ngirntaka species is highly valued as meat, and in the part of the Dreaming story that concerns Rururr, some people are trying catch this Ngirntaka for food.

About 10 km to the west of Rururr there is a site Parparla which is the immediately preceding site along the Dreaming track (and of much less importance). At this site, according to the Dreaming story, one member of a certain hunting party managed to hit Ngirntaka with a
hunting stick and injured him, causing some of his nyirti, fat from his stomach, to spill out at that site. The nyirti of the reptile is itself a highly prized food. There are a number of other places (along this and other Ngirntaka Dreaming tracks) where the stomach fat of Ngirntaka has also separated from his body, usually as a result of hunters wounding him. Often the nyirti is associated with white quartz stone (veins of which are geologically common in the Lands) if this should be present in the neighbourhood of the site where such an event happens. In common with its high status as meat, nyirti is also regarded as valuable in other ways, and like the deposits left by some other Dreaming beings, it is often described as ‘gold’ (see also the discussion about these matters in chapter 4).

The hunter who hit Ngirntaka at Parparla and dislodged some of his nyirti was said to be the father of one of my companions, Brian Jennings. His name was Yimpi Jennings, who was born at Rururr. The other man who features in the story is Wintjurta Holland, Yimpi’s classificatory brother. He is referred to in Case Study 7, in chapter 6. These brothers were closely associated men who in real life spent a lot of time together.

After Ngirntaka was hit and injured at Parparla he continued on to Rururr, where there is a large cylindrical rockhole about 2 metres in diameter. At the time of our first visit it was dry and was 2 or 3 metres deep, but would be much deeper when dug out. Brian and I got down into the bottom of the smooth-sided hole. While we sat there he told the story and pointed out some features on the stone walls of the rock hole and in the nearby area that corresponded to elements in the story.

Brian said:

My father [Yimpi] was hoping to finish Ngirntaka off here and eat him. But when he got here he found that his brother [Wintjurta Holland], who also had been chasing Ngirntaka, had beaten him to it and had already jumped in the rockhole after Ngirntaka. He was sitting down here at the bottom – like we are now.

Yimpi called out to Wintjurta ‘All right, get him – and throw him up to me.’ But it was a fat Ngirntaka and old Wintjurta wanted it for himself. There were some small Ngirtkas that were also down here169—in these small passages in the side of the rockhole. Wintjurta started to

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169 As with many Dreaming stories the singular often slides into the plural and vice versa.
pull some of them out and throw them up to Yimpi. Meanwhile Wintjurta was whispering to the big Ngirntaka, saying 'You keep quiet. Don’t let him know you’re here.’ Yimpi, who was suspicious, called down ‘Not the little ones! I want that big one with the hole in his side, the one I hit before’. But Wintjurta continued to pretend that there was no big one there, and finally Yimpi let it go.

Later Yimpi, together with the other men who were in the area, was getting ready to go out on a normal hunting trip as they did most days. Wintjurta climbed out of the rockhole and in order to be excused from joining the hunting party pretended that he was sick, rubbing some ashes on his face to give it a grey, sickly appearance. With the other men out of the way Wintjurta pulled the big Ngirntaka up out of the rockhole and made a great feast out of him. When the others came back they found him sitting there looking very fat and complacent, and realising what he had done they grabbed him and tickled him all over. At this, the big Ngirntaka that he had eaten came out of his mouth in a rush of vomit and the men managed to grab some of it and eat it – but Ngirntaka basically escaped again and went on to the next place where he continued with further adventures. Yimpi and Wintjurta both have the ‘totem’ of Ngirntaka through (or as demonstrated by) these events.¹⁷⁰

I have discussed both the Takupalangu and Rururr stories specifically as accounts of personal connectedness into the Dreaming, but it is apparent that at the same time they are examples, from a slightly different perspective, of the little tradition in action. By means of the agency of Wuta Wuta and Yumpulurru in the one case, and Yimpi and Wintjurta in the other, the themes and central characters of the great traditions of the respective Dreamings (Tjangara and Ngirntaka) are drawn upon to inspire and inform original creative events that occur at the local level; and these events may then feed back into the great tradition. If and when this happens, the events will lose the intrinsic link with particular persons with which they began their life, and become ‘generic’.

¹⁷⁰ It is not actually this Ngirntaka story that makes Rururr such a sacred place. This arises from an event involving Goanna Woman. She was coming from the west through this area, and at this stage was above the ground and seemed set to run straight into Rururr, which would have been catastrophic, for she is not permitted to be revealed to any beings like Ngirntaka. Fortunately the contact was averted at the last moment (through a story device that it is not necessary to relate). Rururr’s prominence is thus based on a negative characteristic, through which the extreme exclusiveness of Goanna Woman was able to be highlighted. There is no doubt that the desert men gain considerable intellectual pleasure from the idea that a place at which nothing of moment happened is so sacred – indeed that it is sacred because ‘nothing’ happened.
APPENDIX 5

Exchange of sacred boards

The importance in the desert of the exchange between different groups of people of ceremonial knowledge and sacra must be emphasised. The process of exchange focuses around the boards, themselves sacred, that were imbued with and ‘instantiated’ a particular Dreaming Being and its stories, songs, designs, and ‘scripts’ for the undertaking of ceremonies. The boards most characteristic of the desert are carved from mulga wood and are up to two metres long, about 15 cm wide, and five mm thick. One side, or sometimes both sides, of a board is carved, usually over its entire length and breadth, in the design associated with a Dreaming Being. Carving used to be done by a skilled man, using the tooth of a possum or some other suitable animal. Nowadays the few people who still have the skills use fine commercially made chisels. The boards are kept supple with regular applications of oil (formerly animal fat) and red ochre is copiously applied. (If this is not kept up they soon deteriorate.) Apart from these spectacularly large boards, which I have heard referred to colloquially as ‘surf boards’, there are many smaller boards of between 30 cm and 60 cm in length (and some that are as small as 20cm). Some of the boards that are in the possession of men of the Lands at any given time may have come from far away, perhaps from the margins of the desert. As described in chapter 5, the boards are not held indefinitely by the individual or local group that made them: indeed the main reason for making them is to put them into circulation. The collection of boards that is in the keeping of a local group of men at any given time will be hidden away during the normal run of events. In classical times the hiding place would usually be at a miirl-miirlpa site away from the everyday living and food gathering areas. If the group moved to another water hole, the men would either take the collection with them – carrying them out of the sight of women and children – or if they thought they would be returning soon, might leave them hidden were they were. A collection (which in classical times would for practical reasons usually be quite small) would at any given time consist of boards made at a number of different places in the desert, and associated with a variety of Dreamings. It was not really the particular identity of the boards that one held that was important, it was the fact that they were important as boards, as items of sacra that had been made by various senior desert peers across a large area and that together represented a cross-section of the mighty desert Dreamings. In this sense the boards evoked that vast ‘stage’ that I mention in chapter 1, upon which the desert watiya (brotherhood of initiated men) enact some of the most significant moments and episodes of their lives.
When the men of a local group receive a particular collection of boards it will allow them, and indeed stimulate them, to perform the rituals associated with the Dreamings as represented in the boards. A group will retain their collection for a time, but will be anxious to eventually pass it on to an adjoining group. The recipients will rarely reciprocate with another set of boards at the same meeting – reciprocity is delayed. A particular set of boards will circulate say in a clockwise direction through a number of different groups and only arrive at its starting point some years later. Meanwhile other sets will be travelling in like manner in different directions. Each group would try to balance out its ‘debts’ and ‘credits’ with its neighbouring groups over time through meeting with these groups and either handing over or receiving boards from them. Sometimes large assemblies would gather, at which a whole series of transfers would take place. If the occasion of a handover was for some reason delayed, pressure would build up, as being seen to hold on to boards for too long could set in motion serious conflict. Thus maintaining the circulation of sacred boards was driven as much by the desire to ‘get free’ of the responsibility of holding the boards that one currently had, as by the desire to get hold of new ones and perform or learn the associated rituals.

In classical times, most boards that circulated through a region like the Ngaanyatjarra Lands would have been part of Dreamings that were well known to the leading men alive at the time, and some at least of the Dreaming protagonists and events in any given case would have represented in the landscape of the region. When something new was injected into the system from outside, as when the Marlu Dreaming apparently underwent a ‘re-invention’ at the hands of the man Wiluntjanu of north west SA, it is probable that a new set of boards with a new design would have been put into circulation as part of the process. In turn, this would have stimulated the working up of corresponding sites and Dreaming tracks in the local area to reflect the changes in the mythological domain.
APPENDIX 6

Accounts of ‘band’ movements in classical times

The following two accounts of ‘band’ movements vary in a number of ways. They are both based on interviews, but the circumstances and intent of the interviews vary, and are explained at the outset in each case. Primarily I am concerned with the substance of the accounts, but I also wish also to draw attention to issues of style in the way that desert people speak about aspects of their lives, as these not only add a richness to the material but can be revealing in their own way.

Account 1: Fred Forbes (southern sector)

Fred Forbes (1923 - 2008) was one of my main informants: I talked and travelled with him extensively over more than ten years. The ‘Forbes family’ is the subject of Case Study 8 earlier in chapter 6, and the material contained there provides useful background for some of the matters that emerge here. One day at Fred’s camp at Blackstone community I asked him to tell me about some of his travels in the bush when he was young – which would give me an account for the period before the Warburton Mission was established in 1933. After some thought, he said he would begin the story from his earliest memory, which was of the people of his group eating quandongs one time when he was a small child, at a waterhole Palkurta, in limestone country west of Jameson. Then, as he continued to turn the matter over in his mind, he became quite animated, and making repeated wide circling movements with his finger, while pointing towards the dusty ground at his feet, he said:

'Tjitji time, palunyatjanu nyiingka time [gesturing round and round], watirringu [round, round], kurritjarraringu [round, round], like that...’

Thus he indicated that after telling of his childhood time, he would go on to the period when he was a pre-initiate, then when he became a man, then when he was married and travelling with his wife, and so on. I mention the gestures he made because they reveal how he saw all these phases of life basically in terms of the travels that occurred in them.
In the event, the extended narrative promised that day never eventuated as such, although much of the information was forthcoming in other ways and at other times. He did however produce the following narrative leading off from the ‘quandong time’ of his first memory. What follows is his own (almost) uninterrupted monologue, which apart from the odd word, was given in the Ngaanyatjarra language (or more accurately, in Ngaatjatjarra, the dialect more specific to the Blackstone area). He spoke slowly and carefully, absorbed in his recollections. My translation follows each sentence. I have placed numbers by the names of the 37 consecutive waterholes that he refers to. These places are shown on Map 6B in chapter 6 of the main text.

‘Quandong ngalkupayi nyinapayi (So we were sitting eating quandongs (at Palkurta))

(1) Palykurtala mapitjapayi latju (Then we left Palkurta)

(2) Parntapilaku marlu rapita ngalkupayi (and walyku) latju puru latju mapitjapayi (We went to Parntapila and ate rabbits, and quandongs again, and then we moved on again)

(3) Tjiwararraku nyinapayi latju marlu latju ngalkupayi, walyku wiyarringkunyangka. Puru latju pakalpayi marluku (At Tjiwararra we sat down and ate kangaroo. The quandong season was finished now.)

(4) Parntapilaku nyinapayi latju puru latju pakalpayi (We sat down at Parntapila again and then got up and moved)

(5) Palkurtaku puru latju pakalpayi (Back at Palkurta, then got up again)

(6) Turpuntatjaku (kapi pirti) nyinapayi latju Kapi (At Turpuntatja waterhole we stopped)

(7) Wangartiku mapitjapayi. Wangarti latju nyinapayi, marlu rapita ngalkupayi. Wangarti languru nyinapayi latju tirtu puru latju pakalpayi. (We went to Wangarti, and were eating kangaroo and rabbit there. We were there a long time, then got up and moved again)

(8) Murrilku, yalatja latju pakalpayi Murriltjalatju nyinapayi, kukalatju ngalkupayi (Went on a journey to Murril, and stopped there, eating meat)

(9) Kalka Kutjarrakutjaku pakalpayi. Kukalatju ngalkupayi marlu rapita mayi latju ngalkupayi karti karti (kampurarrpa). Pakalpayi latju yalatja (Got up and went to Kalka Kutjarra, had kangaroo and rabbit there, and also bush raisins)

Wirrkuralku. Marlaku latju pitjapayi (To Pirilili, where we ate kangaroo, euro and rabbit, then got up and went to Wirrkural (Mt Evelyne), then went back again)

Ngupanku. Nyinapayi latju – rapita, marlu, kanyala again – pakalpayi latju (To Ngupan (Mt Glyde), stopped there also, and had rabbit, kangaroo and euro, then got up)

Kaarnkaku. Kaarnka latju nyinapayi puru latju pakalpayi (Went to Kaarnka, stopped there and again got up)

Mulyarripayiku nyinapayi latju pakalpayi latju (To Mulyarripayi, same again)

Ngalyaputaraku (kapi pirti). Papangku latju kanyala yiritjura (chasing) ngalkupayi. Warungka pawula ngalkupayi (kanyala). Puru latju pakalpayi yalatja (To Ngalyaputara, where our dogs were chasing euro in the hills. We cooked the euro and had a feed. Then went on)

Warutjarraku. Warutjarrala nyinapayi pakalpayi latju (Went to Warutjarra, were there and moved on)

Winpurlku. Winpurlta nyinapayi marlu wakara ngalkupayi (At Winburn Rocks we speared a kangaroo and ate it)

Talala. Talalatatju nyinapayi rawa. Pakalpayi latju (Got to Talala (south of Jameson), and stayed there a long time)

Pilpirinku. Pilpirinta latju tirtu nyinapayi (Went to Pilpirin (Lightning Rock) and stopped)

Yanpanta tjunkupayi (ngurra) nyinapayi (On to Yanpan and made a camp and stayed)

Katangarakulatja pakalpayi katangarala latju nyinapayi. (Then to Cavenagh Range.)

Warutjarraku latju pitjapayi - this one here. Nyinapayi latju. Tirtulatju nyinapayi ngurrarangka latju nyinapayi. Pakalpayi latju parrapitjapayi latju. (Came to the Warutjarra, near here in the western Blackstone Range – a different place from site 16 - and we were all sitting down here for a long time in our own country. Got up and went around)

Wanytjuraku, kapi this side of Warutjarrra. (Came to a waterhole, close to here)

Kurtirarranya (kapi) pitja latju nyinapayi tirtu ngurrara - ngurra tjarntu. Wati pitjapayi latju (At Kurtirarra waterhole we stayed a long time, in our own place. We were going around from here, looking for food while staying at Kurtirarra)
(25) Kurlipirti. Palunya latju wati pitjapayi (At Kurlipirti now, in the Blackstone Range very close to Blackstone, on south side. We were going around here too)

(26) Katapangkanku. Nyinapayi latju marluku latju pitjapayi (Went to Katapangkan, then went back)

(27) Yankalku. Yankalta latju nyinapayi ma pitjapayi (We went to Yankal, just north of Blackstone, and stopped there)

(28) Tjutalpuku. Tjutalpula latju nyinapayi (Then to Tjutal, where we stopped.)

(29) Wirrtjunku nyinapayi latju tirtu pakalpayi latju (Then to Wirrtjun, and got up from there)

(30) Kapilirrangka. Kapilirrala nyinapayi (We were at Kapilirra) [Note: all these places are close to Blackstone]

(31) Tjawuku latju nyinapayi. Pakalpayi latju (To Tjawu, site south of Blackstone)

(32) Purlpalku Kapi pirti purikanya (Purlpalnga). Tirtu nyinapayi latju ngurrara. Kuti pitjapayi latju (At Purlpal, staying a long time in our country)

(33) Walpapukaku nyinapayi kuka kanyala pirni wakara ngalkupayi marlutarrartu. Pakalpayi latju (To Walpapuka (Mt Fanny), where we speared a lot of euros and ate them, and kangaroo too)

(34) Arranku. Kurlata latju ngarrkalya (wattle) [talingkatja] katalpayi (tjawara katalku) Arrantja. Purunungka marangkatja tjawalku. (To Arran, where we cut some spears from the roots of spear trees there. You use a digging stick to dig them out)

Marlaku latju pitjapayi. Kurlatapirmitjarra. Kutipitjapayi. (We came back with a lot of spears)

Same ngurrangka nyinapayi. Arrantanguru mapitjapayi latju. (Back staying in our country, after leaving Arran)

(35) Kultuwaraku (kapi pirti) Ngurra nyinapayi latju. Kultuwara languru pakalpayi (We went to Kultuwara rockhole and camped there.

(36) Kurruwaku Marluku latju kutipitjapayi (Then back to Kurruwa)

(37) Purlpalku (marlaku). Tirtu latju nyinapayi. (Then at Purlpal again, and stayed there for quite a while.)
Forbes travels: group composition

When I asked who was present on these journeys, he said ‘ngunytju (his mother Pamata), and kamuru (his mother’s brother Zacchias Holland\(^{171}\))’. Genealogies 4 and 57 in Appendix 7 refer. His father Tjikalikurnu had died when he was a baby, and his mother Pamata did not remarry but was looked after by her brother. Fred’s two older brothers, Jackie and George, were also in the band. Beyond the members of the Zacchias-Pamata conjugal family, there were also others present too, but it was difficult for him to specify them: apart from anything else, there were frequent changes in these personnel. When I asked him how many people there might be altogether, he thought for a long time, and finally said, in English (for there is no way to say such things in Ngaatjatjarra): ‘Maybe about ten. Sometimes another lot join up.’ He added that he thought there were rarely more than twenty people together when they were travelling, except when a big camp formed, maybe in the summer time, or for a particular purpose. [NB: It was actually quite extraordinary, that he could make the mental leap necessary to answer a question about numbers of people in this way. Very few desert people, including much younger persons, have been able to do this for me.]

It is extremely difficult to be sure about the identities and configuration of people, even the ‘core’ people, who would have been in the band that included Fred during the travels outlined. Fred’s recollection is that Zacchias was the central person of the band, though at this stage he would have been not long married, and as yet childless. It should be noted – and this is the way that such a matter is generally viewed in the southern sector - that Zacchias took on quite a burden here, becoming responsible for a woman not his wife, and her three children. There were probably older persons present whom Fred no longer remembers. Considering that Pamata and her children had become attached to this band after the death of Pamata’s husband, it is likely that these persons included the (aged) parents of Zacchias and Pamata.

Forbes travels: relationship to country of identification

The birth places of both of the siblings Zacchias and Pamata was Kaarnka (site 13 on the journey), and the narrative is basically an account of a journey from this area to the Blackstone Range area, which is the country of Fred’s father Tjikalikurnu (though it was not

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\(^{171}\) Where English names, like this one, appear in accounts such as this, it must be borne in mind that these were of course names that were acquired later, after contact with the Mission.
this man's birthplace), and his father's father. I do not know of any particular connections that anybody who was possibly in the band at the time of the journey would have had to the Blackstone Range, yet the band visits this country and spends a considerable time there. Fred believes that this was done because of the interests in this country of Parnata's children (Fred himself and his two older brothers). In Fred's view (expressed to me on other occasions) the band was doing its best to ensure that these three young boys who had lost their father were nevertheless given the opportunity to become familiar with the country of origin of Tjikalikuru and his father (and other Forbes antecedents), through spending time there from a young age. (Bearing in mind that while they were there, they would have been taught about the country, including being told the names of the places in the landscape, the associations of antecedents, and so forth.) This feature is discussed in the main text in chapter 4.

While any interpretation of the movements of classical Desert bands would give priority to the on-going obtaining of food and essential resources (see chapter 5), there would also always have to be an acknowledgement of the role played by various less immediate, less concrete but ultimately also essential factors. The obtaining of marital partners, the requirements of reciprocity (whether this involved the maintenance of harmonious relationships, or the 'payback' for previous offences), the participation in ceremonial activity and other aspects of the shared intellectual and spiritual life – these and other activities would have at times inspired travel to particular places, and often more distant places, than the requirements purely of hunting and gathering. In chapter 2 I also mentioned also how people, particularly the more senior adults, liked to be able to orient their movements around the places with which they had strong connections, or at worst to pay periodical visits to these. It is probably rarer, however, to find material which indicates that the itineraries of bands may also have been influenced by the desire or obligation felt by adults to provide children with experiences meant to encourage the development of feelings of connectedness, or that may even be seen to be necessary to satisfy the feelings of connectedness that are assumed to inherently exist in them.

**Forbes narrative, general comments:**

The narrative is noticeably elemental, being mostly focussed on the sequence of places (waterholes) visited, together with 'filler' words and phrases to do with the mechanics of
being in these places and getting up each time to move on. Considerable attention is also
given to the food that was obtained and eaten at different places. There is very little explicit
recall of anything else. No persons are named or otherwise identified, no conflicts or other
personal or interpersonal events referred to. This is no reference in the narrative to any
reasons for travel other than that the food trail was being followed, and indeed the nature of
the account, referring as it does to stops at closely spaced places, makes it seemly unlikely
that there were any other purposes pursued or fulfilled in this segment of the life of the people
concerned; although it is quite possible that some ceremonial activity could have occurred
during some of the longer stops. Given that Fred was a child at the time, he would not have
been aware of such matters if they had occurred, but also he did not speculate to me about any
such thing.

The baldness of the account does not stem from a lack of imagination on Fred Forbes’s part,
for he often expounded to me at length on many aspects of the classical life. It may be that he
was deliberately trying to put himself in the mind of the child he was at the time, but the style
of the narrative is actually very typical of accounts by desert people of the classical life. I
think that what happens when he or other older people recall the past in this way is that they
operate with a particular sort of mnemonic or ‘memory marker’. This characteristic mnemonic
involves two linked elements, the name of a place (usually a waterhole) and an event in which
food was obtained. In the case of men, it is usually the obtaining of meat that is preferentially
referred to, hunting being a more memorable activity to men than gathering. This is a very
basic combination in Desert life, and this fact, I suggest, is reflected in the way that memory
works among the people who have lived that life.

It is probable that Fred would find it impossible to recall a much fuller picture than he tells us
here of such long ago events, but even if he could, it is probable that such detail would
interfere with his recollection of the whole temporal sequence, which in itself has a
remarkable scope. (At one or two points in the account, particularly where the people get the
spear wood near the end, the narrative does ‘spring to life’ a little more. Or at least, because
there is a bit more detail, one gets the feeling that the memory might be more vivid in the
mind of the narrator – but this might be misleading, for it could be less a matter of memory
and more a function of the narrator’s desire to tell a more effective story, and to re-establish a
rapport with the listener now and then, by adding the occasional bit of ‘colour’.)

Appendix 6

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However despite the apparent baldness, at a subtle level there is a greater complexity to the account. A careful reading reveals an element of change that occurs in the course of the travel itinerary. I have foreshadowed this aspect above. The first 15 stops that the band make take them (albeit in a circuitous fashion) around the country of his mother and his kamuru, Zacchias. This is in the limestone country and hills to the west of the present-day Jameson community. (Incidentally, it will be noted that when he refers to Kaarnka in his account, Fred does not mention that his mother and kamuru were born there. This however is not surprising, as Kaarnka is an oft-mentioned place and there would have been no reason for him to point out the birth connection, which he knew I was aware of, in this context.)

Stop 17 was Winpurl (or Winburn Rocks as it is known to Europeans), which is the gateway to the more open country, punctuated by intermittent ranges, to the east. From here they are out of Parnata’s and Zacchias’ country as such. They then travel eastwards and in more direct fashion across the sandhill country interspersed with rocky outcrops that lies to the south of Jameson; then to the Cavenagh Range; then to the Blackstone Range. At the first waterhole they encounter at the western end of the Blackstone Range (the important site Warutjarra, stop 22), for the first time, Fred varies the content of his narrative to use the term ‘ngurrara’ (our/my country). What he says translates as ‘we all there sitting down here in our own country.’ In mentioning the next but one waterhole (stop 24) in the sequence, Kutirarra, he uses this term again; and reinforces it with the expression ‘ngurra tjarntu’ (our country). Several waterholes later (stop 32) he uses the term ngurrara again. Then again, two waterholes later (stop 34). The places concerned are all in the Blackstone area.

Part of the significance in what he designates here as ‘own country’ arises from the contrast with the places visited that are not so designated. This is all the country covered in the earlier part of the narrative, and it includes not only Kaarnka, the birth place of his mother (and her brother), but Fred’s own birth place, Ngurtulkampara, which was not visited at all on this journey. (It lies quite a long distance from the route taken, so we cannot draw a definite inference in relation to it – but it does in fact hold a secondary place in Fred’s general reckonings about his connectedness to country.) The situation with his father’s actual birth place is interesting. This site, Alpalparra, is only some 7 or 8 km north of Katangara in the Cavanagh Range (stop 21), but the narrative indicates that it is bypassed by the party. The Cavanagh Range is of great ritual importance and also contains much greater food and water
resources than Alpalparra, so it is not surprising that the party travelled this way. However, they could easily have also visited Alpalparra had it been important to do so. But (as I know from other evidence) although Tjikalikurnu was born here it is not this site that is considered to be his real ‘origin place’, just as Fred does not consider Ngurtulkampara to be his own real origin place, despite it being his birth place.

I believe that the designation of ‘our/my country’ in the narrative was made almost unconsciously by Fred; and that as such, it is ‘evidence’ of a sense of association that is particularly free from the possible influence of any predilections of mine as the researcher. On this basis the narrative provides us with an insight into what part of the landscape this man considers himself to be peculiarly related to. (It needs to be stressed that he is intimately familiar with all the country referred to here, for he not only travelled here on this occasion in his childhood, but he walked it and lived in it throughout the eight decades of his life.)

The difference between the areas to the west and east, respectively, of stop 22 (Warutjarra) obvious involves a kind of familiarity and connectedness that he feels with the latter, but not the former. So what does this difference derive from? To understand this, the discussions about country in chapters 5 and 6 need to be referred to. What has happened (and I know this from much other fieldwork and discussion that I have undertaken) is that in reaching Warutjarra the party has entered the Forbes ‘family country’. This country is centred on the Blackstone Range and the neighbouring area to the north. Within this area a number of persons were born and lived out significant parts of their lives who are antecedents of the Forbes family as it now exists.

**Account 2: Charlie Butler (northern sector):**

I will now consider a narrative related to me by Charlie Butler tjampitjinpa (1925-2003) at Tjukurla community on 5th November 1998. Earlier that day I had explained to him and a group of other people that I wished to hear about people’s early lives in the bush, their movements, connections and so forth. Later he sought me out and spoke to me. I did not have anything like the depth of relationship with him that I had with Fred Forbes, and this is reflected in the way that both my own agenda and the content of his narrative are far less carefully focussed in this case.
I will begin with some background biographical information, collected on other occasions. Charlie was born at Kulkurta, in remote sandhill country way to the north of the Rawlinson Range, and also far to the south of the area around Kiwirrkura. Charlie’s conception site is also there. Kulkurta (a.k.a. Yawalyurrnu) is a Tingarri site of pre-eminent status that is referred to in a number of places in this thesis. Kulkurta was Charlie’s father’s country too. This man, Turtu Tjangala had many younger brothers, but they do not enter the narrative presented here and will not be further mentioned. Charlie was for a long time prior to his death the most senior owner of Kulkurta. His mother, a napanangka, was from Tjukurla. Turtu came here to Tjukurla, married her and took her back that way.

Turtu never saw a whitefella. He died in his own country, Kulkurta, and after that Charlie and his mother moved southwards towards the Rawlinson Range where the Giles Weather Station had recently been built (this happened in 1956). At this time he was already married to his first wife, who was from Patjantja (a site to the northeast of Kulkurta), and his first child Mark Butler had recently been born in the bush, north of the Rawlinsons, at a place Kurrkapitjara on the Marlu Dreaming track. His second child Polly was born at Yulpikarri near the present-day Tjukurla to Docker River road.

In the late 1950s Charlie was living in and around the Giles area, still with his mother and eventually with three wives of his own. Then, ‘because we had no food’, he went to Warburton Mission, taking dingo scalps with him to trade. Eventually they were living in a semi-permanent sense at Warburton. Throughout the following 43 years of his life he continued to live in the Lands, in several different communities, but finally (after the community was established in the late 1980s) at Tjukurla, his mother’s country. While I knew him he always said he would love to live closer to Kulkurta if that ever became possible.

The narrative set out below was completely undirected, apart from the terms of my request earlier in the day. After some introductory statements I present what he said verbatim, although I probably missed a few things because I was writing down what he said, which was entirely in language, rather than recording his words. I have retained the Ngaatatjarra

172 Until about the mid 1980s there were still many very senior men who were connected with Kulkurta and its ownership was hotly contested over a long period of time. See Myers 1986:141-145 for an extended discussion of an instance of this.
transcript but for the sake of space I do not re-produce it here. (Unlike with Fred’s narrative, I am not trying to make a point here that relies on the language used.)

He begins the narrative in country in the general area of his birthplace, Kulkurta. He names a number of waterholes, then mentions a place near the important site of Wangurnu, where his sister died after being bitten by an emu. (This area is 25kms due north of Karrku (the Baron Range), which is itself 30kms north of Kulkurta. All these places are in the middle of a vast sand dune expanse, the most remote part of the already very remote study area.)

I now take up Charlie’s own narrative. In this case I have divided the narrative into ‘blocks’ of speech rather than according to stops at waterholes:

1. From the waterhole Pukaratja [near Kulkurta] we were hunting meat and bringing it to eat. My sister had died here. Goanna and rabbit we were getting. And here the Marlu [Dreaming] was going through (from the north) on its way to Warburton.

2. The Kangaroo [in the Dreaming] went on to the next waterhole Wanarritjarra. Another sister of mine died at a place Nyarrkal, near here. Then to Kawalkawal, where the two [Dreaming] Warnampi (Water Snakes) went through, bringing a ceremonial song. We hunted meat and were living on it there. That’s when my father died [Turtu Tjangala].

3. Then we went south, to the waterhole Yiitjuru, where my grandfather had died. He was an old man when he passed away. The next place was Wiwu, the death place of another Tjangala, another ‘father’. Then we were at Kiti kiti, where the [Dreaming] Kangaroo camped before going on.

4. The Kangaroo went on to Ngakarrin waterhole, and then to Talitjata. (These places we went to as well). [In the Dreaming] there was a Dingo that chased the Kangaroo, and a Walpatju (Small Marsupial) who was with him - and they are part of the stories
for these two waterholes. Here and at the other places we, and other people before us, used to hunt meat and eat it. These were waterholes that were used by people long dead now. Another of my ‘mothers’, Ngarta, died at Talitjata waterhole, the next place south along the Kangaroo [Dreaming] track. From here the Kangaroo continued on to Ngarkalyatjarra, and to a big waterhole Mulytju. We were at all of these places too ... We came then to a place Irrirringki, where nungurrayi, another ‘mother’ of mine had died. She was the grandmother of my son’s wife Nola. (This place is still on the path of the [Dreaming] Kangaroo).

5. And the people used to grind seeds for food, like woollybutt and mulga seeds. Many people now dead used to eat these things, and honey from mulga lerp and honey grevillea plant. And they got honey ants by digging holes in the ground. Also two types of solamun, and seeds from the spear tree. They ate goannas, carpet snakes and other sorts of snake whenever fat ones could be found, the legless lizard which can be heard at night, and the native cat. I am telling you about many foods! Then there were the animals that lived underground, the rabbit and the bilby, which we had to dig for. We also used to make wooden bowls in which women would carry water on their heads. And then there was other food, the kangaroo, the tjakura (skink lizard) and the blue tongue lizard. I used to eat these things and from them I grew big - this was the food I grew up on.

6. At another rockhole west of Mount Destruction, a place where many people used to drink, the [Dreaming] Man Yula camped, before moving on. And the Tingarri men [of the Dreaming] also came here from the west. These men continued their journey from rockhole to rockhole, travelling east towards Tjukurla. At one point they were chased for a while by Dogs [who also chased the mythological kangaroo]. Finally they came to Tjukurla.

Butler narrative: comments

Charlie begins talking about a particular journey, but overall we can surmise that some of the components may combine recollections of travels on different occasions. On factual grounds it can be verified that it could have been a single journey as the waterholes mentioned are...
linked closely enough for the travels to have occurred as described, but even if one did not know this, contiguity is strongly conveyed by the regular references to the Kangaroo Dreaming track. I suggest that what the narrator is doing is to describe a set of places in country that he knew really well, and had been to many times. He also knew that these paths had been followed by his ancestors. Obviously it is not the sequence of travel that is important in this account, nor, really is the account primarily about travel. In the last two blocks he drops any reference to the presumed journey he was describing. In a sense, even the particular participants are not the real focus, for the account is mostly about the kinds of things that used to happen, or that the desert people used to attend to the most.

One of the things that the account indicates that people were very aware of was death places. In this short narrative, eight dead persons are referred to. Although this number is probably quite high for such a narrative, it is characteristic that the deaths of persons, like their births, are frequently referred to when country is under discussion. Three fathers, two sisters, a grandfather and two mothers are mentioned. Everybody here, we note, is a kinsperson. On the basis of this narrative (and other sources are consistent with this) it would seem that affines are unlikely to die in one’s own country. In other words, barring exceptional circumstances, the death of a person in one’s country ipso facto means that they must have been (or become) kin.

It is worthwhile pursuing the subject of death a little further here. In accordance with the discussion in chapter 3, it seems to be the case that the death (or at least the burial) of a person somewhere adds to the spiritual power of that place, initially derived as this from the Dreaming. In referring to death places in his narrative then, Charlie Butler is not so much chronicling life cycle events of family members as attesting to the significance of the places that he mentions. His message is that these are not just waterholes, but places with power (coming from the Dreaming); which power has been augmented through the deaths of the persons referred to.

Although it is unspoken, the account is redolent of the idea of the power of the country, in the references to the Dreaming, the deaths, and also the bounty in the form of food. The references to the Dreaming occur in a completely taken-for-granted manner. In his own
speech in this narrative, Charlie Butler does not once use the term *tjukurrpa*. In block 1, for instance, his words are that the Kangaroo went through to Warburton: he does not explicitly say that it was the Dreaming kangaroo. And in block 6, he speaks of ‘the men’ coming from the west towards Mt Destruction - he does not even say that these are *Tingarri* men, let alone bracket off this information as relating to the domain of the Dreaming. To interpret his words one has to realize what he is talking about, from the context.

The much greater range of material included, in comparison with Fred’s very bare account – particularly the amount of reference to the Dreaming, which was entirely absent in Fred’s case – is indicative of the fact that Charlie, though his age at the time of the events is not specified, was certainly older than Fred. Fred was attempting to relate his earliest memories, and Charlie was talking of a time when he was a little older. Also, Charlie was not concentrating nearly so hard on recalling an exact itinerary as Fred was, and I have drawn attention to the difficulties associated with that.

Both accounts have in common a pre-occupation with food, and this is one feature that is true of all the accounts I have heard of the desert life. There are a number of negative facts shared by both accounts: none of the persons in the band are named or otherwise identified; no conflicts or other personal or interpersonal events referred to; and no references are made to any reasons for travel other than the assumption that the food trail was being followed. These particular absences are also a common feature of ‘narratives’ as such of the desert life – which does not mean that it is impossible to gain information on these topics.
APPENDIX 7

GENEALOGIES
Peter Holland

Tjinalukukumu/Norman Holland (b/No. 312—Talini)
1. x Tjunkayi (Gen:030)
2. x Daisy Chapman (Gen:030)

Beryl Stokes (lakipi) (Gen:004)

Yvonne/Kanytjakurna Davies (b/No. 302)

Intjiparti/Maud Davies (b/Tekempa)

See Genealogy No.: 003

Genealogy No.: 003

Wintjurta Holland & Intjiparti Davies/Kalkakutjarra

Page 2 of 3
007: West/Kumpurl, Kunupural and Katatine

Genealogy 007: West/Kumpurl, Kunupural and Katatine page 5/5
Mungalu/Thomas Green  
(b. 1880, Matpu)  

Tapulu  

Billy Green  

Bevedey Kuntya  
(Ser Gen:034)  

Clarrie Green  

Isaac Green (a.87)  

Ingurana  
(M:Kunupulkuwa ar :522)  

John Greenwood  
(b.361) (Ser Gen:054)  

 mutate  

Mutja  
(Gen:014)  

Jimmy Green  
(b.1961, Matpu)  

Esther Richards  
(b.1940) (Gen:034)  

Rhoda Watson  
(b.357)  

(Gen:025)
048: Kuniya Hopkins Porter (Kuniyapiti)

Nyampitjin / Liza Porter

Melva Davies = Roger Davies (Gen:001)

Wilbur Porter = Diane Ward (Gen:002)

Teddy Porter = Brenda Duncan

Brenda Duncan = Cyril Duncan

Sonny Porter

Lincoln Porter: 
- Unknown (doc'd)
- Lawrence/Eric Davies
- Clayton/Claude Davies
- Waylon Davies
- Quentin Davies

Joshua Porter

Sonny Porter

Delson Duncan
- Sonia Edwards (Gen:058)
- Jane Duncan
- Robert Neck (Gen:058)
- Kathryn/Catherine Duncan

m. Delson
- Tamara
- Leroy

Raelene Porter

Sonny Porter
057: FORBES (WIRTAPIWARRA)
057: FORBES (WIRTAPIWARRA)


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