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## 8. Always Ask: Resource Use 1982 and Land Ownership Among Pintupi Aborigines of the Australian Western Desert

### Abstract

This chapter addresses the relationship between boundaries, band organization, and territoriality through an individual oriented, processual approach to mobility, land use, and land ownership among Pintupi Aborigines of the Gibson Desert in Australia. Here territorial organization is not the division of people into discrete, mobile, permanent "bands." Rather, "bands" are fluctuating, on-the-ground residential groups that differ from "bands" as land-owning groups. Both kinds of "group" are the outcome of individual choices and negotiations, as well as environmental and demographic pressures. On this analysis, boundaries are seen to be permeable for some resources and not for others. Distinguishing between rights of use and of ownership, the analysis emphasizes the different sorts of cultural logics and choices Pintupi individuals can and do make in voicing claims to "country" and its resources. Finally, the content of "ownership right" is considered: to "own" something is to have the right to be asked for it. The significance of this concept for the understanding of resource management and territoriality is evaluated.

### Introduction

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

In this chapter I discuss the relationship between spatial organization and the use and control of resources among Pintupi-speaking Aborigines of Australia's Western Desert.

The relationship of environment, technology, and social organization among hunter-gatherers has intrigued scholars since Rousseau. Like him, many subsequent commentators have seen in the description of food-collectors important implications for various grand theories of "human nature." Such theorizing has often seemed persuasive because of an implicit idea that foragers are *closer to nature* than other people. Consequently, the problem of hunter-gatherer territoriality has only infrequently been seen as involving "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of people's social lives and cultural constructs. This has severely hampered effective understanding of hunter-gatherers in a number of ways.

Like Radcliffe-Brown, most writers have recognized a spatial component in social organization among hunter-gatherers. This is particularly true for Australian Aborigines, among whom social aggregates ("bands" if you will) are often identified with place names. Yet the fact of this relationship between social group and place, perhaps between "band" and "territory," has given rise to differing interpretations. Essentially, there have been two traditions of understanding territorial organization among hunter-gatherers.

One tradition has identified certain units of social organization, called them "bands," and asked how these units matched to "land." Radcliffe-Brown (1930), for example, described the typical Australian society as made up of patrilineal, patrilocal bands ("hordes"). Having discovered the existence of patrilineal descent groups with a relationship to named places, he argued that these "local groups" owned and defended their territory, living largely within their group boundaries and thus conserving resources for their own use. This view saw the convergence between stable and enduring social groups and tracts of land as being straightforward and one-dimensional. It is now clear that confusion results from simply equating territorial organization with descent group organization and that it is wrong to assume that local groups had constant, impermeable boundaries. In other words, this approach ignores the contexts in which organization takes place and fails to relate cultural concepts to the multiple dimensions of social reality.

A second tradition, reacting to the inadequacy of the first, has argued that permanent organizational units do not exist, and has maintained that analysis of hunter-gatherer territorial organization must start with resources. This approach treats adaptation to resources as the principal structural feature of foraging societies. The culmination of this approach (Lee and DeVore 1968, 1976) emphasizes the

flexibility of actual residential groups, openness of access to resources, and focuses on behavior (land and resource use) rather than the ideology so important to earlier theorists (especially seeing the contrast between residence and patrilineal ideology). While correctly pointing out that people did not live within exclusive, bounded, and defended patrilineal territories, and pointing to the importance of regional systems among foragers (Lee 1976), this model has assumed that territorial organization is to be understood only in relationship to actual on-the-ground aggregates of people. Ignoring ideology as "epiphenomenal," this model fails to attend adequately to what a "band" is (see Peterson n.d.) or to the connected question of how regional systems operate. Using the analyst's criteria for what constitutes a "resource," this approach distorts the nature of groups and the nature of their relationship to land, and thus does not really depict the processes through which adaptation occurs.<sup>1</sup>

While a focus on "adaptation" - examining links between environment, technology, and social institutions - does point out the importance of certain material concerns in the organization of social life, analysis in this tradition tends to incorporate a "functionalism" which does not consider the emergent internal structure of relations in particular hunter-gatherer societies. Anthropologists have been more willing, it seems, to identify the goals and values of society with "caloric survival" when considering hunter-gatherers than for other sorts of societies. The human being as culture-user is largely ignored. With primary analytical attention given only to physical resources, beginning with human-environment interaction, no sufficient place is allowed for the specific cultural notions of resource and value. Thus, the fact that the Pintupi and most Aborigines differ from other hunter-gatherers such as the San in their conception of The Dreaming, "totemic landscape," and male ritual hierarchy, has been reduced, at best, to similarities in maintaining access to land, and the San are now seen as the archetypal hunter-gatherers without all that "cultural clutter."

This too simple dichotomy between ideology and material/practical concerns tends to plague our understanding of hunter-gatherers. While some analysts have been too ready to relate indigenous concepts like the widely-used "one country-man" to our own sociocentric models of territorial organization (emphasizing local groups, "bands," and "hordes"),

<sup>1</sup>Yengoyan (1976:122) has criticized some of the culturally biased assumptions in the models of ecological analysis.

others have been too ready to dispense with the indigenous concepts altogether.

Neither of the traditions I have summarized seems adequate to account for the complex processes of territorial organization among the Pintupi. Consequently, I want to offer a third approach to the problem which maintains that what our informants say and think about their social lives may be of help in devising adequate analyses of the relationship between social organization and resources. One important tradition in anthropology sees the goal of anthropological understanding as effectively "construing" (or translating) other people's central cultural constructs by relating them to action in their social world. We cannot really understand other societies without performing this task; even if we hope to explain a state of affairs by reference to some cross-culturally relevant "objective structure," we must first accurately describe that state of affairs. Thus, I want to show that there are other structures involved in territorial organization than those simply of adaptation to resources and that we can get at these by attending to what our informants say. The necessity of such "think description" is evident among Australian Aborigines for whom land as a sacred estate is a "resource" around which organization occurs. While I cannot demonstrate it here, it is also true that as an objectified token of relationships among persons, this "resource" is considered necessary for the reproduction of society and survival in the Aboriginal world. Attention to "ideology" in both of these ways is essential to understanding long-term adaptation. In the rest of this paper, I focus on one of the prime constructs of the Pintupi social world, investigating the structure of territorial organization as contained in the concept of "country" (*ngurra*) and as used by persons in the process and activities of daily life - in the process of claim, negotiation, and achievement. Finally, I show how the relationship between ownership rights and local organization remains vital to long-term adaptation. (One of the few attempts so far to do this has been Rose 1968.)

#### A Pintupi Life History

Pintupi Aborigines from the Western Desert traditionally occupied an arid region south of Lake Mackay with an average yearly rainfall of five to ten inches, a few permanent and semi-permanent waterholes, and a terrain consisting of sand-hills and plains broken up by some groupings of rocky outcrops. Water constitutes an important constraint on life in the desert. Small marsupials and lizards provided most of the protein in the Pintupi diet, the bulk of which was made

up of vegetable foods and fruits seasonally available. As in the area of Gould's research just to the south (this volume), with the unpredictability of rain, local and seasonal variations in resources were common. Band sizes varied from ten to 25 persons during most parts of the year.

My research with Pintupi people at Yayayi settlement in the Northern Territory in 1973-1975 showed an individual-oriented approach to be the most useful way of conceptualizing Pintupi social life. Pintupi constantly maintain that society, as they see it, is boundary-less potentially, that individual networks and ritual links extend beyond any definable group. No one, it was pointed out, lived entirely in one place, with a single set of people, at one waterhole, as if in "a paddock."

I recorded several life histories of men who had lived as hunter-gatherers relatively uninfluenced by the presence of white Australians. The narratives indicate that Pintupi moved around, changed residential groups, visited, and regularly encountered new persons and places. Consideration of one of these life histories will allow us to relate statements about group life, group membership, relatedness, and living arrangements to the complex and multiple domains of social reality as experienced by Pintupi. The particular life history I am using for this summary was gathered from a 65-year-old man from the Lake Macdonald region in 1974 (see Myers 1976 for details). He had been living at Haasts Bluff and Papunya settlements since 1948, moving to Yayayi in 1973.

The physical details of Shorty Lungkata's account are clear. They indicate that persons travelled widely, not confining themselves to a "band area" in the sense that most sociocentric pictures of band territories imply. Shorty's travels regularly took him through areas which he ascribes to several different named groups of people: Mayutjarra, Walbiri, Pitjantjatjara, the *Yunari* mob, and others. In his and others' life-histories, the composition of coresident groups (on-the-ground groups which I call "camps") was highly variable and fluctuating. We find Shorty living sometimes with various individuals and their families, and at other times with people unrelated to the former. Shorty considered all of these people to be his "one countrymen."

We see the regular exploitation of certain seasonal items: *mungilpa* (a seed bearing plant that grows bountifully in claypans) near Lake Macdonald, the euros at *Turpalnga* in the hills south of the lake, and seasonal water supplies. These are constraints on the movements of individuals and

groups, but it is clear that there is no band as a group of individuals travelling constantly from point A to B to C and so on. Individuals or small aggregates of families move through the landscape for purposes of their own, see evidence of other people nearby, go to visit them, travel with them for a while, and then return to their own, more typical grounds.

In the hot time, from November to February, people gathered at the large permanent waterholes to wait for rain to come and bring water to the smaller and temporarily dry waterholes. Shorty's account indicates a general pattern of spending the hot time at one of the main waters in his "own country" as the latter is most narrowly conceived, the waterholes of *Walukirritjinya*, *Turpalnga*, and *Pirmalnga*. When the rains came, he moved out of these to travel northwards, or southwards, sometimes east with a small group, drinking at the temporary water sources and foraging for small animals, since vegetable foods were not yet ripe. The availability of these small, temporary sources of food and water allowed people to travel freely across the country, and it is during these seasons that Pintupi travelled to distant places to visit affines and other relatives. Shorty often travelled considerable distances before turning back; usually he returned to his own large waters for the summer. Later in his life, when he was married with two wives from the north, he stayed longer there; in some years he did not return to his "own country" at all, residing instead with these northern affines as well as with his elderly and remarried mother. Thus we find him frequently around the Buck Hills (*Tjitururrnga*). That Shorty's children were all conceived in the north indicates that typically he resided there for some time.

Shorty's narratives tell of wide-ranging movement and temporary coresidence with people of various locales. There was neither expectation nor reality to the idea of people hunting and gathering within a single "band area" with occasional visits to other bands. Shorty's commitments and obligations to a variety of individuals who were spatially separated was the pattern common to all the narratives collected. According to Shorty, after a young married couple resided with the woman's parents for a while, these people might say, "Oh, you should go visit your parents; they must be worrying for you." Shorty constantly reiterated that if they saw the smoke of fires in the distance, they went to visit people, since it "was not far" and they were all "related." Others came to look for him, inviting him to visit their country for large gatherings when resources were available -- or for companionship. Similar shifting residence

patterns obtain today, and for the Pintupi even now the local group does not constitute the boundaries of society or kindred.

### Life-Cycle

The course of the life history shows that a processual view is necessary, not only of residential groups and their formation, but also of individuals' life cycles. I can describe this best as an expectation expressed by Pintupi. Young men said that they were "travelling men," that they could not settle down because they were too restless. Several men told me that they were always fighting when they were young men, or that they used to do other dangerous things like stealing from whites: "I was a young fellow then, but I'm married now." The widest range of travel that men described occurred with regularity during their young adult years, when they were too young to marry and when they sought to make connections and acquire ritual knowledge vital for maturity and political success in the society. The approach of marriage usually brings on commitments to future affines. Young men begin to travel with their "affines," providing them with meat and helping them in expectation of receiving a wife. After marriage, they seem to remain with their affines, or to move between their own country and that of affines.

Like their male counterparts, apparently, women at this age are not yet considered responsible. Thus, a young married woman remains with her parents, her mother does much of the cooking and looks after the children, and her kinswomen can help in the birth of children. As she grows into her responsibilities, the couple begin to make a camp more distinctly their own.

Ultimately, as a couple becomes old, the man begins to stay more consistently in his own "country" or the country to which he has become attached. Shorty described a number of such old men and characterized them as being highly localized, residing mainly close to their more important sacred sites. Data from the other life histories support this contrast between the movement of young and old men, indicating a life-cycle pattern. Thus composition of bands reflects various developmental processes in Pintupi social life as well as the constraints of resource availability. (Peterson 1970 and 1972 discusses processes like these.)

### One Countryman

The Pintupi conceptualization of their social reality is expressed in the concepts I gloss as "country" (*ngurra*)

and "one countryman" (*ngurra kutjungurrara*). Proper understanding of this concept brings us close to comprehending the content, quality, and processes of Pintupi social life and local groups. The problematic word is *ngurra*, and its ambiguity is a consequence of its polysemy: it can mean either "camp" or "country" (named place). The concept of "one countryman" does not refer necessarily to people who occupy one bounded territory (or "country") nor to any sociocentrically defined group. If either of these conditions were true, all members of a person's set of "one countrymen" would have the same co-members, but in fact they do not. The concept is individual-centered: each person has his own set of "one countrymen." It refers to those with whom one is likely to "camp," that is, to coreside. Its usage, then, indicates the social reality experienced by individuals who do not always live with the same residential group or even within the same "range" or exploitative area. One man explained that he considered various people to be his "one countrymen" because they "used to travel together," even though their homelands were, he acknowledged, separate.

But people are also organized around *ritual* ties to the land - to *ngurra* as named places or "country" created by mythological ancestors in The Dreaming - that is, to what Stanner (1965) called "estates." The people who share ownership of a "country" as an estate can also call each other "one countryman." Ownership of "named places," as Stanner noted, consists of rights to the ritual, sacred objects, and stories associated with these Dreaming places. What is relevant here is that these "country"-owning groups are overlapping, and individuals are able to affiliate with more than one group, each defined by ownership of a common place. Without the evidence of context and purpose, in talk about "land" and people, the distinction between local groups and ritual groups is often blurred, although they are not coextensive. Pintupi conceptions of local organization are two-tiered, and this complexity is contained in the polysemy of *ngurra* as "named place" and as "camp": the classification of people as "from one *ngurra*" can refer either to ritual groups or to ego-centered social networks.

To understand the concept of "one countryman" as delineating the widely extended set of persons with whom one might reside and cooperate helps us to understand the link between social relationships and space: the flexibility of territorial boundaries and fluidity of groups. While who is a "countryman" is open to negotiation, what seems important is that people "from one country" should help each other and that claims to be "countrymen" open up access to resources and labor. Because people who live together cooperate in the

food quest and share resources, the egocentric concept of "one countryman" defines the set of productive relations necessary and appropriate for the conditions of Pintupi life, where one expects to live temporarily and cooperate with a variety of persons and groups. It combines access to resources and access to labor over a broad "range."

#### Resource Use and Defined Areas

Despite the individual variations in movements and rights of exploitation, there also seem to be definable resource nexuses of the sort once simplistically described as "band territories." The significance of these defined areas - particularly their relationship to social units - requires analysis.

No set of individuals lives entirely, for even a single year, within the boundaries of a single such area. In fact, Pintupi social groups are characterized by considerable flexibility and permeability of boundaries in regard to rights to use the resources of such "ranges." Exploiting camps are bilateral, composition actualized from numerous organizational categories, including kinsmen, affines, and ritual partners. Pintupi individuals have highly variable ranges, depending on their particular social relations, which are not limited to a band or its territory. Rights to land as "range" (i.e., use rights) are multiple and easily gained, limited it seems only by initiative, and acquired through "ownership" or social relations to "owners."

Such openness of access for individuals does not mean that there are not any "objective structures" defining the limits and patterns of association. Sharp, for example, described patterns of land use similar to those of the Pintupi in another part of Australia (western Cape York Peninsula):

People gather and hunt, ordinarily, in whatever country they will. Thus there is practically a standing permission which opens a clan's countries to all. . . (1934:23).

However, at the same place he points out that

. . . this permission may be withdrawl by the clan for those who are *persona non grata*.

Sharp maintains that "owners" (in this case, a patrilineal clan) hold the right to exclude people but says that such a right is exercised only in exceptional cases, "in which there

is an actual or pretended drain on the resources of the land" (1934:23). At bottom, Sharp is trying to accommodate freedom of access to some mechanism for monitoring population/resource relationships.

There are defined resource-areas, sociocentric "ranges," in Pintupi territorial organization; they are defined primarily around the permanent or semi-permanent water holes to which people return during the dry summer. In other seasons, these people may disperse and use small waterholes to visit persons in other ranges in the way I have described above. There, rights to forage are acquired as part of residence, as a "one countryman." In every range, there are known resource points to which people go at times of the year when they know food is available. One example of this is the *mungilpa* seed plant in Shorty's country, a resource said to grow in great quantities in specific places after rain. Repeatedly in telling his life history Shorty described people coming in large numbers from far away to collect *mungilpa* seeds. The Buck Hills offered wild yams; and here, too, people frequently gathered. Clearly, visiting and congregating at periods and places of temporary abundance was common. As many analysts have seen, such periodically abundant resources offer no adaptive advantage for "rationing" by one group, and Pintupi informants insisted that they would never send someone away from their country unless he or she committed some wrong. The value placed on "compassion" (Myers 1979) as well as the opportunity to be reciprocated at some future time, inclines people to share resources. Thus, a person extends rights to use resources in his country to all of his "countrymen" with the expectation of reciprocal privilege. The case also shows the deficiency of approaches which focus on local groups as basic units and on local scarcity as compelling reciprocity. Instead we should attend to the positive qualities (which Aborigines emphasize) of *increasing societal intensity* by taking turns hosting larger groups, and allowing greater overall efficiency of resource use.

Given seasonality and local variation in resources, one could expect that the Aborigines developed a schedule of movements to take advantage of the seasonal appearance of food and water. Some consistency and recurrence in the travel histories of individuals support this assumption, although variation among persons from a single range shows that individual movements were also scheduled to take advantage of other possibilities, such as visiting certain people and seeing particular sacred sites. This, of course, reproduced those significant, regional-systemic relations of

production. It seems sensible, then, to think of hypothetical bands moving through an optimal pattern of resource scheduling, with individuals affiliating themselves to these groups as they move from place to place, travelling with them for a while, and moving on. The size of this abstract band may remain relatively constant while the actual composition may vary greatly. Nonetheless, the important requirement is that individuals must affiliate with the residential group to use the land. The results of this will become apparent.

The state of resources determines where people may be, but not necessarily where they actually are, or precisely who is there; and this is what a model of territorial organization should comprehend. It seems most reasonable, following the Pintupi concept of "one countrymen" as people who share a "camp," to argue that bands are largely the outcome of individual decisions, and the actual composition can be explained only through understanding the processes of individual affiliation.

We must be careful in interpreting assertions - such as the Pintupi make - that a person is from a particular country as referring to "range." (Shorty was from *Walukirritjinya*.) Such statements are largely predictive, reflecting the social reality that people are likely to return to their home area, especially in the summer, the period of greatest strain on localized resources and when movement is most difficult. While return to home waters has the effect of controlling the number of people at any waterhole, of controlling population in an area at a time of year when resource capacity is most diminished, how this occurs is also significant, because it does not come about through "defense."

Because permanent water is scarce, seasonal congregations at sites of an abundant resource are relatively large, and because there are no intermediate waters, individuals do not really have the option of moving away should conflict or dispute arise. That considerable strain occurs in large groups is well documented, and at the end of the period of their occurrence the life histories indicate an increasing desire to move away into different and smaller groups. To be among more distant "kin" in such circumstances has the disadvantage that - while disputes are more frequent - one's support is weaker. Nonetheless, it supports this view of the processes by which adaptation occurs that every individual questioned had spent some summers away from the country with which he was most closely identified. While there is a probability that a person will be "in his own country," it is not unusual for people to be away during the summer.

If, as these descriptions indicate, territorial organization is not simply the division of people into territorially discrete, mobile, but permanent bands, what *is* the content of "band organization"? The content of such organization is not, apparently, a band's exclusion of others from access to resources. In this case, the importance of defined "ranges" has too often been misconstrued. What seems vital to a foraging adaptation is sensitivity to the relationship between population and resources (Peterson 1975:59), knowledge of resources available and location of people. The processes by which this is accomplished are discussed below (also see Goodale, Gould and Hunn this volume); understanding them, again, depends on understanding Pintupi cultural constructs.

#### Always Ask

Since it seems apparent that denial to access of resources is infrequent, how do the Pintupi manage the regulation of population to resources? To understand this we must learn how Pintupi think about resources, for in their view the utility of resources does not constitute a reason to maintain exclusive access to them. Access is freely granted, but people still must know how many persons are exploiting an area and where they are in order to plan strategies of exploitation.

Tindale notes what seems to be the major focus of Western Desert concepts of "ownership" (although he does not develop it analytically) when he writes that a man told him, "My country is the place where I do not have to ask anyone to cut wood for a spear-thrower" - the quotation with which I began the chapter (Tindale 1974:18). What is indicated here is that the content of "ownership" is the right to be asked. What a Pitjantjatjara man once defined as "The first law of Aboriginal morality" - "Always ask!" (Freeman 1974: personal communication) - provides a key to much of the confusion about local organization.

Pintupi are very concerned that they be consulted over matters in which they have rights, and this is particularly true in matters concerning land. When a group of men visited an ochre mine in the Gibson Desert, for example, a few men chipped off some of the material for later use. Subsequently, at a meeting in Docker River, the primary custodian of the place (because he was conceived there) threatened to spear them and made a great show of anger. His rights had been violated because they had not asked him before digging up the ochre. This notion continues in relations with whites. Men grumbled about white people driving out to Pintupi country without asking anyone for permission to go. They never

refused anyone permission as far as I was aware, but they felt that their rights were being violated if they were not asked.

The main point to be drawn from this and other examples is the nature of rights and duties in Pintupi culture, something much overlooked when we talk about "ownership" among peoples with different sociocultural systems (also see Williams this volume). For the Pintupi, to own something is to have the right to be asked about it. The norms of kinship and general reciprocity (or compassion) force one to grant the request, but one should be asked. Given the political economy of Pintupi social life, what do they seek to gain as "value" here, and what do they lose? What they seek is prestige, the chance to be first among equals (Fried 1968), or more properly, I think, to maintain personal autonomy. All of this is satisfied when others recognize one's rights; recognition achieved, what else is to be gained by forbidding access? Consequently, it is important to understand that while use rights to land are freely granted, one must "ask" in order to obtain them.

People acquire rights to use land by joining a residential group which is already exploiting it. As Peterson (1975) points out, the boundaries to such groups are "defended" with rights of entry; people who want to join a group do not simply walk into its camp, no matter how close their relationship. They must announce their presence by lighting a fire at some distance from the camp, waiting there for members of that camp to come, to identify them, and, ultimately, to bring them into the camp. They must "ask", and "one countryman" links make it possible to do so.

This process is an etiquette of "asking" to be admitted to the group and to rights to use the resources. The Pintupi maintained they would not send anyone away, which seems to conform to other data I have. Shorty told me of Pitjantjatjara men traversing his country in order to go west to cut special *mulyati* wood for spears; but the narrative implies that they had established this right with residents beforehand. What makes people angry is unannounced travel, going in a secretive fashion. Consequently, when moving into another's range one should ask or somehow announce one's presence as a form of deference, usually with smoke. Such behavior, as Peterson says (1975), allows foragers to assess how many people are exploiting a territory and what strategies to employ. The content of Pintupi ownership - the right to be asked - accommodates this argument.

The Pintupi are eager for information. Knowledge of resources, of people and their whereabouts is the basis of

their local organization, telling them where they can go next and allowing them to assess the relation between population and resources. Are poor returns on foraging a result of personal inefficiency, chance, or overpopulation (Peterson 1975:59)? Information allows people to decide on travels and to avoid coming upon a string of previously exploited areas; it is also important in assessing the intentions of visitors.

Even now, when people visit Yayayi from other settlements, it is clear that their behavior is somewhat "restrained," that they exhibit "embarrassment" or "deference" (*kunta*, also "shame") at seeming to assume too much. They do not rise to give speeches at public meetings, they do not grab for themselves from local supplies in the same way that long-term residents do. If they do not explicitly ask, they are tentative in announcing intentions, assuming very little: they are always "asking," making sure that it is all right to do as intended.

In this context I think we are better able to interpret Pintupi statements about their travels. Smokes from certain directions were known to be from "that *Yumari* mob," or "that *Walunguru* mob," indicating that they were someplace that a knowledgeable person could figure out, given the time of year and location of the smoke. If they were on good terms with those people and if resources allowed, they might go to visit. Shorty told me that one did not have to ask *formally* because everyone was "family," a term he used for frequent coresidents. For these people there would be a minimum of formality in incorporation into the exploiting group.

If we take this a step further, if we follow Shorty much further from his country, we find him reporting that someone is "guiding him" through their country. This seems a more formal sort of arrangement: someone must be able to vouch for him as he gets further from familiar places, to give information about him, to guarantee his good intentions to residents. Individuals' travels are not unrestricted in extent. At greater distances, travel is less frequent. Because people are less well known, it is more dangerous. Strangers are suspected of evil intentions, of being dangerous because one does not know how to predict their behavior. This suspicion restricts population movement, confining people to some extent.

After travelling in the cool part of the year when movement is possible, people regularly return to their own major waters. The reason for such return seems always to be senti-

mental rather than what I might call jural. As they travelled further and further, Shorty used to say, "We got homesick and turned back to our own country." The narratives usually continue with Shorty describing his movements and then mentioning a place with emotion: "My own country at last!"

#### Ownership

I have stressed, in contradiction to the patrilineal, partilocal model, that Pintupi residential groups are to be understood through the concept of "one countryman" as those who potentially share a camp and cooperate in the food quest. Through actualizing this potential social relation, individuals acquire rights to forage, to use land, in a number of ranges. Therefore, rights to use the resources of a range are relatively permeable to access by others, although there seems to be considerable variation in actual boundedness around different resources (see Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978).<sup>1</sup>

A number of problems remain in understanding the relationship between regulation of resources and local organization, and these also require attention to ideology, to the concept of "countryman" and land ownership. Here we find another puzzle in Pintupi organization: if residence is not patrilineal, neither are the land-owning groups patrilineal. Furthermore, individuals seem to belong to more than one such group. Various means exist by which individuals may make claims of identification with the "country," and these form

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<sup>1</sup>Attention to resources and the process of band formation is instructive in connection with the meaning of territoriality, especially in indicating some variation in permeability of boundaries for different items. Shorty described large congregations, including people from far away (like Walbiri), near Lake Macdonald at seasons when *mungilpa* was available. Growing in large quantities near claypans filled with water, and abundant in August and September, this resource supported large populations often gathered for ceremony. At such times people with relatively distant ties might come to exploit the resource, conforming to Dyson-Hudson and Smith's (1978) model that unpredictable and dense resources are exploited through information sharing and a high degree of nomadism. At other times of year, however, when water is a scarce resource (as in summer) and only a few well known permanent waters are available, the data indicate that people returning to their "own country" are more localized in separate "local groups" in what Dyson-Hudson and Smith describe as a "home-range" form of resource utilization.



the cultural basis for its ownership.<sup>2</sup> Without providing detail here, what I want to emphasize is that there are multiple pathways by which individuals may achieve ownership rights, patrilineality being only one sort of claim, and that individuals have claims to more than one country. It is through political process that *claims* of identification are converted into rights over aspects of a country and knowledge of its esoteric qualities.

Ownership consists primarily in control over the stories, objects, and ritual associated with the mythological ancestors of The Dreaming at a particular place. Access to knowledge of these esoterica and the creative essence they contain is restricted, and one can acquire access only through instruction by those who have previously acquired it. Important ceremonies are conducted at some sacred sites, and other sites have ceremonies associated with them that men (particularly) may perform to instruct others in what happened in that important period in which all things took on their form (i.e., The Dreaming). Because knowledge is highly valued, and vital to social reproduction, men seek to gain such knowledge and to be associated with its display and transmission. It is, in fact, their responsibility to "follow up The Dreaming" (Stanner 1956), to look after these sacred estates by ensuring that the proper rituals are conducted. Men acquire prestige when other men defer to their knowledge in the telling of a story or the performance of a ceremony. They may convert control of knowledge into authority over younger men and women.<sup>3</sup>

Since knowledge and control of country are already in the hands of "owners," converting *claims* to an interest in a named place requires convincing the owners to include one in knowledge and activity. Identification with a country must be actualized and accepted by others through a process of negotiation.

With each significant place, then, a group of individuals can affiliate. The groups may differ for each place considered; the corporations forming around these sacred sites are not "closed." Instead, there are descending kindreds of

<sup>2</sup>Elsewhere I have described in detail Pintupi ideas about the landscape as a culturally constituted environment and argued for the necessity of understanding the *logic* of these claims (Myers 1976).

<sup>3</sup>For an extended analysis see Myers 1980.

persons who have or had *primary* claims to sites. Of all those "identified," only a portion are said to "hold" a country and to control its related rituals. These primary custodians are the ones who must decide whether to teach an individual about it; it is they who decide on the status of claims. Men are rather congenial to teaching "close kin" about their country and to granting them thereby an interest in the place. For claimants who are remote genealogically, or not coresidents, there is less persuasiveness to claims. These processes make it likely that claims of a patrilineal core will be acceptable: it is men who control these rights, and because at the height of his influence a man is likely to live in his own country, it is predictable that he will pass it on to his sons. Rights are also passed on to sisters' sons, who are also frequent coresidents. If such persons or those with other sorts of claims (conception from The Dreaming, a more distant relative from it, and so forth) take up residence in an area and convince the custodians of their sincerity, my data suggest they can become important custodians too. Conversely, failure to maintain some degree of regular association with a place seems to diminish one's claims. This is a process, then, by which one sort of "one countryman" status may be transformed into a more enduring one.

The fact that men seek to gain access to rights for many "countries" leads to extended associations of individuals with places, surrounding a core of those with primary claims. The Pintupi data show numerous individuals with extensive estate-rights. Individuals also have very different personal constellations of such rights (see also Strehlow 1947).

#### Ownership and Long-Term Adaptation

How is "ownership" and the ideology of ownership related to territorial organization and regulation of resources? To approach this, we must attend to the processes which lead to shifting and temporary distortions in the shape of defined areas.

There are two dimensions of this problem:

First, in the long term, the notions of "country" and "country" ownership provide for extended networks of related countries and related people. Gould (1969) and others (Peterson 1969; Strehlow 1965, 1970) have discussed the importance of such links in maintaining reciprocal access to resources in different territories, providing a system of "countryman" relationships overarching those based on simple kinship ties. Since The Dreamtime ancestors travelled widely,

the activities of an ancestor or group of them may link together places on a path of hundreds of miles, all a part of a continuous story. The continuity of stories is used as a way of classifying named places into larger systems, and persons who own a place/part of the story have a claim to be considered for other parts. For some purposes, all those "countries" on a Dreaming path are considered to be "one country," and those who own different segments may be considered "one countrymen." Such systems of stories are in a continual process of being reworked, providing an ever-changing charter of who and what are identified as "one country." Again, "countryman" relations define potential productive ties.

Second, rights to "country" provide a basis for the localization of people in areas. As Peterson (1970) argues, and as my data corroborate, the emotional identification of persons with particular places leads older men to reside around their own primary sacred sites. This ensures that people will return to marginal areas, to exploit the entire region, and makes for increased efficiency in a regional system, potentially supporting a larger population. The Pintupi pattern of claim and negotiation - along with extensive identification with sacred sites - must be related to this process. Given the harshness of conditions, population density was low in the Gibson Desert. This means that the group of men residing "regularly" in a range and looking after the "country" there was small. Given the vagaries of demography, such groups are likely to die out (Peterson n.d.a). My own data indicate that even two generations ago such emptying out occurred and was followed by new people moving into the vacated area, taking over responsibility for the "country."

Thus, the secondary rights to "country" as estate (see Myers 1976; Barker 1976; Peterson, Keen, and Sansom 1977) provide for what was surely a predictable process of replacement of country-holding groups. The present shapes of boundaries of "country" ownership seem to represent a stage in the process by which members of one group have extended their claims and responsibility to nearby "countries," essentially combining them. The fact that they are considered to be part of "one country" reflects their ownership by one group. Peterson (n.d.a) suggests that the processes of claim, extension, and movement are only a stage in the cycle by which the resource nexus of a range will eventually re-establish itself simply from the process of following the scheduling pattern of resources.

#### Not Having to Ask: Spatial Organization and Pintupi Politics

There are, however, other processes and structures to consider in understanding "land ownership" in relation to territorial organization. These can only be understood with reference to Pintupi concepts of "ownership" and Pintupi politics. In discussing the content of ownership rights as the "right to be asked," I maintained that such requests are unlikely to be refused, although I pointed out that permission might be overtly denied, or withdrawn in some cases from *personae non gratae*. Nonetheless, as Tindale's informant indicated, in one's own country, one does not have to ask. In our sociocultural system, we are concerned primarily with the outcome of such a request, since we identify the utility of resources with what we can get for them by turning them into a product. To extend this assumption to the Pintupi (or, I think, to many other hunter-gatherers) is misguided. In terms of Pintupi politics and the prime goal of personal autonomy, one places major value on not having to ask. To live in another person's country means that one must defer to him as the "owner." Visitors are freely extended rights to use resources, but in decisions about where to go, or how to deal with disputes, they are clearly "second class citizens." This is something I failed fully to understand on my first field trip, although it was apparent enough. One need only go out to visit a man's *own* country to see the difference it makes in his bearing, authority, and interest.

A botanist with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization in Central Australia, Peter Latz, described to me his experience trying to discuss ethnobotany with a Pintupi man in the Loritja area in which the latter had been living for 30 years: he found the man rather unenthusiastic, but this changed radically when they went out to Lake Macdonald - his "own country." I have watched Pintupi defer quietly to the traditional owners of their current residential area, seen the limitations of their influence and the insecurity of their tenure. Finally, I have watched the transformations that take place in the demeanor of such men when we have visited their own country, where they know the Dreaming stories best, where they know who died, where what happened, and in which they need not defer to anyone. Here they have what they value: the freedom to do as they please without asking anyone. It is young men who travel most widely and extensively in other people's country precisely because, for them, deference to another, especially to a senior man, implies no decline in personal autonomy.

If we need further confirmation of how important this content of ownership is, let us consider what happens when there is trouble in a Pintupi community. When trouble occurs, outsiders leave. My informants told me in life histories that at the first sign of danger or insecurity, they went back to their "own" country. Ember's recent paper (Ember 1978) about patrilocality and defense, while otherwise almost totally inappropriate for the facts of hunter-gatherer life, has the merit of pointing out the influence of personal and political relations for spatial organization. One of the things she fails to see, however, is that such "danger" conditions are not constant, that boundaries (or patrilocality) may be more marked at some times than at others.

#### Conclusion

I hope it is now clear that to fully understand the regulation of resources among the Pintupi we have to consider the internal structure of relations within the society, a structure which does not merely reify "ecological necessities" but which has taken on its own emergent values. What seems important about the Pintupi is not that they "adapt" but that they create such societal intensity while managing to conform to the ecological constraints of a harsh region. Life here is not simply life in a small band; particular groups are merely temporary manifestations of society.

Understanding Pintupi spatial organization necessitates looking beyond local groups, adopting the Pintupi view of their society as a wider, totalizing, less bounded structure. Furthermore, it necessitates giving attention to the emergent structures and processes by which a regional system maintains itself. What I have tried to show is that the structure of this society as a regional system materializes only over time. Analysts have rarely considered such systems in temporal depth. Pintupi cultural concepts, however, do incorporate a time dimension and consequently orient us more adequately to the significant processes of territorial organization. Finally, this shows that we must attempt to understand something about what the participants in a system think, in part because their models may be more instructive than ours in defining the particular logic of a sociocultural system and also because indigenous ideology is part of the very material processes we hope to understand.

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