2001

Mapping the Land: Spatial, Social and Sacred Relationships of Australian Indigenous People to Land

Marianne Best
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons

Part of the Australian Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/875
Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
MAPPING THE LAND:

Spatial, social and sacred relationships of Australian Indigenous people to land
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Warning

This thesis contains the names of Aboriginal people who are deceased.
MAPPING THE LAND:
Spatial, social and sacred relationships of Australian Indigenous people to land

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree
Bachelor of Arts Honours (Sociology and Anthropology)

Edith Cowan University
School of
International Cultural and Community Studies
Faculty of
International Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

Marianne Best, DipEd, DipCart
Student ID: 4460197
Kallaroo, Western Australia
Jan 2001
ABSTRACT

The people who claimed the great southern continent came from Britain, which was experiencing the industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, a new sense of nationalism and a drive to colonise. Australia was regarded as an uninhabited land. Colonisation brought with it a European form of ownership of land and a way of mapping the landscape on paper with finite borders for administrative purposes. Meanwhile Indigenous people had lived on the Australian continent for over 55 000 years. These Indigenous Australians had a way of life, which was completely different from the Western colonisers. They were very successful hunter-gatherers with complex beliefs and skills. Different groups sustained connections with, and lived in, an extremely wide variety of climates and habitats. Non-Indigenous researchers, including anthropologists, made observations and interpretations of Aboriginal culture. These observers used their own non-Indigenous backgrounds and perceptions, as well as consultation with Indigenous groups to map Indigenous countries. They encountered contradictory evidence and debated about the existence of both linear and amorphous boundaries between groups. How Australia’s Indigenous people belong with the land is encapsulated in the Dreaming laws and is demonstrated through many aspects of Aboriginal social and spiritual life. These connections to land of the Yolngu from North-East Arnhem Land are compared with how groups from Central Australia connect to land. This investigation, using mainly ethnographic literature, will show how Aboriginal groups were interrelated with land and how social and spiritual aspects of life affected connections to land.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

9 May 2001
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the support given to me in the writing of this thesis. There is not the space, nor would it be appropriate, to mention by name all those who assisted and inspired me. Nevertheless, some people need to be mentioned. Foremost my supervisor, Dr Pat Baines, who gave her time, knowledge and inspiration generously. Janice Bryant, administrative staff and the wonderful people on the Edith Cowan telephone switch board were invaluable, for their ability to be organised and facilitate communication. Other staff at Edith Cowan University provided encouragement and inspiration, as did the staff at the University of Western Australia when I studied applied anthropology.

My friends are much appreciated for their good advice and encouragement. My colleagues in re-evaluation counselling were invaluable for the time and encouragement they gave me. This involvement of other people throughout this project have made it more meaningful. To my family, parents, children and grandchildren, I extend many thanks for your loving presence.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map: Location of Indigenous Groups</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 European and Indigenous Australian World Views</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Method and Introduction of Groups</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Dreaming the Land</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Groups, Languages, Areas and Boundaries</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Designs as Maps and Titles for Land</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Conclusion</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The overlaying of European cultural understandings over the Indigenous population of Australia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The sacred tracks and sites of three groups, how they inter-related and how degrees of influence from ancestors relating to sites and tracks diminished with distance</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A simplified map of Yolngu clans upon the land in relation to each other, the rivers and ocean</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A simplified representation of Dreaming tracks over clan lands</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Tjingari</em> cycles: Journeys and special places on the land</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Influence of ancestors and sites. Fewer dots represent less influence of sacred ancestor for the traveller.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LOCATIONS OF INDIGENOUS GROUPS
using non-Indigenous mapping

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- Warlpiri
- Kaytej
- Central Western Desert
  - Yuendumu
  - Anmatyerre
  - Papunya
- Alice Springs
- Arrente
- Uluru
- Hermannsburg
- Luritja
- Pintupi
- Ngatatjara
- Pitjantjatjara
- Yolngu

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
The map on the previous page was drawn using Caruana (Ed.) (1989:182) for the coast outline and state boundaries.

Positioning of Indigenous land areas follows Williams (1986), Morphy (1999), Bell (1993), Myers (1986) and Horton (1994b). Spellings of Indigenous group names shown on the map and throughout the thesis have been taken from Horton (1994b).

Technical assistance and advice for the production of this map was given by Rivka Neisten and Murray Jones.

The technical work and configuration and compilation of the map was done by the author of this thesis, Marianne Best.
Chapter 1

European and Indigenous Australian World Views

Human territorial behaviour is a cognitive and behaviourally flexible system which aims at optimising the individual's and hence often also a group's access to temporarily or permanently localised resources ... (Casimir 1992:20)

Introduction

Land borders are political and often contentious constructions in Western society. We use them to demarcate areas for many reasons. The most familiar borders are those on world maps, which divide one country from its neighbours. People identify themselves with a country and live within its spatial boundaries. In Australia some people, such as Aboriginal and migrant groups, may not be living within their country of identification. It is also possible for individuals and groups to have allegiances to more than one country.

Many Aboriginal people had, and still have, a strong identification with their land. The continent now known as Australia, as suggested by ethnographic research, was probably divided into many Aboriginal countries before the arrival of Europeans. Each group identified strongly with a particular area of the land and called that land home. The division of an Indigenous country from that belonging to neighbours was not necessarily a line which could be drawn on the ground, or which could be clearly identified on a map drawn by the colonising people. This thesis will look at how traditional Aboriginal perceptions of country and borders are constructed. Ethnographic research, traditional Aboriginal art, video films and Western maps of Australian Aboriginal countries will be used to construct an account of how Australian Aboriginal people determined and expressed their relationship to land.

This theoretical chapter will provide some comments on the impact of Western culture on well-established ways in which hunter-gatherer people related the land. Definitions of territoriality and the relationships of the spatial and social means of establishing territory, particularly in hunter-gatherer societies are examined. Western ways of establishing and drawing
boundaries or maps, and historical influences, are part of this complexity of European and Indigenous Australian world views.

**Contrastive World Views**

For most of the time that people have existed on the earth they lived in groups of hunters and gatherers. They hunted animals, caught fish and found edible plants for bodily sustenance. According to Giddens (1989:43) these people had fixed territories and moved around in a seasonal migratory pattern. Giddens wrote that small parts of Australia were, in comparatively recent times, some of the last places where the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was still practised. They have lived here, as Flood (1995:30,82-85) illustrated, in a sustainable balance with the environment for thousands of years. Archaeological research in the Northern Territory suggests a history as far back as 55 000 to 60 000 BP. This is testament to the capabilities and success of the Australian Indigenous peoples.

Aboriginal views of their place in the world, at the time of colonisation had not been affected by the world views of the European colonisers. Instead, these peoples had a world view based on spiritual practices now known as the Dreaming.

The following figure (Figure 1) shows how the situation of Indigenous Australians can be overlayed with the phenomena of Western culture.

---

1 There were different Indigenous cultures in Australia - hence peoples.
In Europe the centralised, or modern, state and nationalism was developing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Özkirimli 2000:12; Anderson 1996:1). Colonisation became the objective and pursuit of nations such as Britain, France and the Netherlands. These nations were experiencing the effects of the beginnings of the industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, a new sense of nationalism and the drive to colonise.

As a further overlay, and as a useful tool for nationalism and colonisation, cartography was developing. Sacred Muslim sites, such as Cairo and Mecca, as well as places like Moscow, Paris, and Caracas, were being shown with a linear scale on charts. The chronometer (clock) made it possible to place an accurate grid of latitudes and longitudes over the earth's surface (Anderson 1991:170, 171, 173). Using the Mercator projection on the world map meant that sailors now had the ability and instruments to plot accurate courses for their journeys and to make more detailed, accurate maps. Printed copies of a world map with a Mercator projection were used by European colonisers.

Coupled with mapping, census of populations - a decidedly political activity - was taking place. This activity added to the development of nationalistic ideals, and enabled maps to be made with population distributions. Furthermore, the practice began of assigning colours on these maps to
represent the different nations and their colonies (Anderson 1991:173,174,175).

Meanwhile, Indigenous Australians, the first successful inhabitants of Australia, were in culture groups with their own dynamic world views, which included culturally specific ways of defining and using their land or territory. Obviously these dynamic world views would grapple with the ideas brought by the invader-colonisers and with the institutions they put in place.

**Theories of Territoriality and Boundaries**

Early assumptions by European scholars were that animals, including *Homo sapiens*, were either territorial or non-territorial species. This rigid classification was challenged by later researchers, who pointed out that a species might be territorial or non-territorial according to the environmental and social circumstances. Furthermore Thomas and Bischof (cited by Casimir 1992:1,3) explained that an animal’s role is to defend itself, not its territory.

Furthermore, we should not look at people as if they have fixed, inherent patterns of territorial behaviour. Actions of animals and people vary widely in different situations, and behaviour may depend on the familiarity of their spatial situation. A set of roles individuals and groups acquire are a set of territorial behaviours to compete for resources. The term “needs” can be used to describe these resources.

Theorists such as Dilenski, Mallman and Marcus (cited by Casimir 1992:8) have argued that needs are something we must have to remain well. These are basic physical needs and higher social needs, such as access to places of religious interest. Cultural constructions can therefore be made and used to satisfy physical and social needs.

The question we need to look at is whether physical and social needs can be treated separately. It was once thought by those such as Maine and Morgan in the mid and late 1800s that theorists could separate social practices from territorial considerations. It is now clear, as Seymour-Smith (1986:277) asserts, that there is an “intersection and interaction between the principles of territory and kinship.” Generally it was seen that spatial boundaries were
constructed for the basic necessities of life such as food, water and shelter when these were easy to obtain, while social boundaries protected resources when they were scarce (Casimir 1992:13). These patterns may have included visiting patterns based on scarcity and abundance of resources in particular areas.

The deconstruction of the separate elements of territoriality were bought back together by those such as Wilmsen (cited by Casimir 1992:13) who, after working with animals, argued in 1973 that different strategies of controlling access are linked through "social, demographic, and environmental factors." This accords with the conclusions of Stanner (1965:1-2), who looked closely at Australian Aboriginal territorial practices. He asserted that the relationships a group had with country were socially, ritually, and ecologically based.

Casimir’s (1992:20) definition pays regard to cultural differences in the perception of territory, and is offered to cover all aspects of observable reality:

Human territorial behaviour is a cognitive and behaviourally flexible system which aims at optimising the individual’s and hence often also a group’s access to temporarily or permanently localised resources, which satisfy either basic and universal or culture-specific needs and wants, or both, while simultaneously minimising the probability of conflicts over them.

This definition is the most appropriate for hunter-gatherer societies and is favoured for this thesis.

Sack’s (1986:19) definition of territoriality as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” can be compared to Casimir’s. Casimir, an anthropologist, takes an egalitarian stance by naming territorial behaviour as cognitive and behaviourally flexible, while Sack, a geographer, takes a more authoritarian approach by using the idea of people controlling and delimiting areas.

Sack’s definition fits into the paradigm of colonisation and government policies of more recent times, whilst Casimir’s is one which can be better utilised by anthropologists and other researchers to formulate the ways in which Indigenous Australians utilise country and behave in relation to it.
Along the same lines as Sack, Jary & Jary (1995:683) define territory as “the geopolitical area under formal jurisdiction or control of a recognised political authority.” In the case of Australia’s Indigenous people, the geopolitical area is the area which people call their own country. This is the country where, Myers (1987:104-106) explains, Pintupi owners in the Western Desert do not need to ask permission to use resources. The formal jurisdiction is present in the form of the Dreaming laws and the management of these laws. Various members of a group had a type of authority or jurisdiction over different aspects of their environment, society and the Dreaming laws. The recognised political authority was, and is, a multiplicity of authorities. Casimir covers these contingencies more accurately in his assertion the groups satisfied needs and minimised conflict in their territorial behaviour.

Also in accord with Casimir’s definition, and as Myers (1987:102-110) observed for Pintupi groups of the Western Desert, territoriality is changeable and permeable. It is changeable through social organisation and responsibility to the sacredness of areas and sites.

In contrast, Westerners, Bohannan (1963:103) points out, own a piece of the map. This piece of the map is a record that carries reasonable assurance of a relationship to a part of the earths surface. My personal experience as a cartographer and citizen verifies that, when we get a title to our land, it contains a map of that piece of land. That map explains the shape and position of the land in relation to adjoining titles, as does the text contained in the document.

When he explained mapping in relation to hunter-gatherer people, Bohannan (1963:104) stated:

People have a representational ‘map’ of the country in which they live;... have a set of concepts for speaking about and dealing with their relationship between themselves and things, that the spatial aspect of their social organisation has... expression in word or deed.

This statement does not cover access to resources and the minimising of conflict as in Casimir’s definition above. Casimir’s definition is more appropriate for use with this research of Australia’s Indigenous peoples and their organisation of resources.
As we have seen above, the use of resources in traditional societies depended on their scarcity and abundance. This means seasonal changes and extreme climatic events affected movement of people. In these circumstances groups might have entered into territory that was not their own. This in turn affected who people met and how social interaction and structure was determined. Permeability of boundaries depends on resource availability and changing patterns of social organisation. The mapping of linear boundaries was the way of the European colonisers. Linear boundaries suggest conformity within the confines of the boundary and differences outside the lines.

Giddens (cited in Jary & Jary 1995:683) writes about "borders" being ill-defined "frontiers" in pre-industrial times, to emphasise the much greater control governments now have over time and place. Aboriginal people in Australia today seem to be faced with proving an Indigenous system of territorial ownership within a much more controlled system of territory and time, imposed by Australia's British system of government. Borders are one of the means used to divide one area of land from another. Cohen (1994:63) describes borders as "situationally specific", which along with frontiers are "matters of fact". In our Western society they are usually finite lines between points. In Australia since British settlement Australia's borders have been shown as finite lines on Western-style maps. This thesis will give examples of borders which are less finite. Borders can be zones of shared ownership or avoidance. They are also changeable due to the many dynamics of, and influences on, cultures. Cohen (1994:63) observes that the word "boundaries" has been used in a wide variety of applications for anthropology. Boundaries can be a referent to borders but also refers to social and psychological limits.

The anthropologist Stanner (1965), wrote a seminal article about the areas occupied by Australia's Indigenous people. He used three terms "domain", "estate" and "range". "Range" is the area foraged over, whereas "estate" is the land for which a group have spiritual responsibility. Estate is synonymous with "country". "Domain" is the estate and range together and is usually the same as the range. These terms emphasise the kinds of active relationships a local group have with a specific area of country. What changes is the kind of actions which individuals and groups perform. Meggitt (1962: 69-
like Stanner after him, named the area of a group's responsibilities “country”. He also refers to the word “country” to name Dreaming tracks and sites with special affiliations to groups within the larger language group.

This thesis uses Stanner and others to further the knowledge of traditional ties Aboriginal language groups had, and have, to their land, whilst recognising that these types of territorial groupings are dynamic, with changeable and permeable borders. These dynamics are influenced by many factors, which include the pressures and impact of colonisation. I am also aware of how important these issues are in relationship to land claims, which is one of the catalysts for the current debate on land tenure.

Previous studies have looked at many aspects of Yolngu culture and the cultures of groups living in desert areas of Australia. The focus of this thesis is on how land borders and terrain are represented through the social and spiritual aspects of these cultures. The intensity of focus on the Aboriginal relationship to the land has increased over the years, which means that questions about the significance of land are important for the twenty-first century.

The effectiveness of Aboriginal activity to regain control of their countries has accelerated in the last few decades. At the start of the twenty-first century many groups are going to court in an attempt to gain Native Title to their lands. This means that there is a focus on the extent of country each group can claim as their own. These Native Title debates are taking place in the British-style courts of Australia. Land is being shown with Western-style borders which can be understood and recognised by the court. Aboriginal claims of shared areas, flexible borders or boundary zones are a problem for the processes of Native Title courts at present.

This thesis aims to add to the understanding of how Aboriginal territorial organisation was, and is, constructed, maintained and modified to connect to the land. The central question posed for this thesis is: How did and do Aboriginal people express their relationship to specific areas of land through their spiritual and social organisation?

The following are other questions arising from this central question: What differences are there in the way the Yolngu and Central Western Desert
area groups express their connections to country? How did these Aboriginal groups connect to country using creative expressions from the Dreaming? How are boundaries and the extent of areas perceived by the Yolngu and Central Australian Aboriginal groups? Are land boundaries linear or amorphous? How is the perception of Aboriginal people about land reconciled in the present-day Western culture of Australia? This last question could be the subject of much more extensive writing than this project can provide, and is answered very briefly. The next chapter will look at the geography and history of the peoples researched for this document. It will also review the literature and other resources, such as maps and videos, used for this research.
Chapter 2

Method and Introduction of Groups

White man got no dreaming.
Him go 'nother way
White man, him go different,
Him got road belong himself.

Significance of Study

Western culture started making inroads into Aboriginal Australia late in the eighteenth century. The white man, as stated in the quote above, had a different way of organising society from the ways shown in the Dreaming law. This thesis is written from within an educational system, developed from Western set of constructs, from the Enlightenment, which was not the way of the earliest Indigenous Australians. As discussed in the previous chapter the paradigms underlying the industrial revolution, the Enlightenment, and a new sense of nationalism were influences on the drive of British settlers to colonise. Meanwhile, Indigenous Australians had established a very different way of life.

This thesis will bring together the information available for Australian Aboriginal groups from two different geographical areas in Australia, and produce an account of how people expressed ownership of land through their social and spiritual organisation. The focal group for this study is the Yolngu of North-East Arnhem land. Groups from the Central Western Desert, which do not have a single group as well studied as the Yolngu, have been compared and contrasted with the Yolngu. The map on page six gives an indication of the position of these groups within Australia. I have chosen to name the area in the centre of Australia the Central Western Desert, which best describes their position within Australia. The alphabetically correct way of ordering Central and Western is a cartographic convention. The main groups used for comparisons in this area are the Warlpiri and the Pintupi.

North-East Arnhem Land and the Central Western Desert regions have been chosen because they have very different ecological settings. Comparing and contrasting elements of connection to country has built a more
comprehensive picture of ways to create meaning, and maintain connection with country. Published ethnographic research and some creative works relating to social and sacred relationships to land have been used as sources for achieving this picture. This information about groups in the areas I have selected offers new perspectives and considerations about Aboriginal conceptions of areas of land and borders. Although these groups have been well researched, a study which compares and contrasts these two groups and uses mapping and art as part of the theme has not been done. However, Peter Sutton (1998b) has written a chapter for the encyclopaedia The History of Cartography about how topography is represented through Aboriginal designs and artefacts. This thesis will contribute to the understanding of Aboriginal land ownership and the traditional ways of expressing differentiation of areas.

Method

A synthesis of the major ethnographies, Western maps and Aboriginal art directly related to this topic was used to compare and contrast the Yolngu with groups from the Central Western Desert. Many aspects of grounded theory and some verification using different sources were utilised to form a comprehensive discussion. This discussion used a theoretical framework, as outlined in the previous chapter, based on theories of territoriality and Indigenous peoples' attachment to land. Ethnographic data was examined to gain a better understanding of how territoriality was managed by Aboriginal societies, and how territoriality was and is an integrated part of Aboriginal social constructions and spirituality.

To give me a more comprehensive background to the current anthropological debate about the issues discussed in this thesis, I attended the Australian Anthropological Society's Native Title workshop and conference, both held in Perth during 2000. I have also visited galleries showing traditional Aboriginal art work and participated in discussion group meetings for reconciliation. This study is primarily a literature research project and did not involve direct contact with the Yolngu or Central Western Desert groups.

This thesis, whilst retaining an objective stance as much as possible, will have many elements of subjectivity. This is because interpretations are largely
from the basis of Western concepts of land and borders with Aboriginal input channelled and filtered through work published by anthropologists, art commentators and other academics. These texts by their very structure and purpose are a central focus of an academic culture that came from Europe. I am also a European, one who came from the Netherlands as a small child in the early 1950s, writing in English with a British-based educational background. Nevertheless anthropologists generally had good empathy with their Aboriginal groups and became welcomed participant observers when they were doing their field work.

The differences found in Australian Indigenous languages and English contains some major cultural contrasts. Some Aboriginal words are used in this thesis with explanations for their meaning and are shown in italics throughout, with some exceptions. People's names and place names, which are Aboriginal words, are in standard text.

Ethics

The topic of Australia's Indigenous land ownership is politically sensitive. However, because this thesis did not involve new ethnographic field work it does not determine specific land boundaries pertaining to Aboriginal groups or individuals. All references to, and interpretations of, boundaries are from those produced on maps and other published academic work. I have kept in sight the possibility of harm being done to these groups through my analysis and interpretations of the literature. I have avoided the use of unpublished literature and not used Native Title transcripts.

This thesis has avoided naming any deceased, or maybe deceased, Aboriginal individual who did not have a public identity. Names of artists and leaders who have become well known in the general community in recognition of their work have been used with respect to their integrity. A warning about the naming of deceased people has been placed at the beginning of this document.

In summary, I have endeavoured to produce a clear account of the topic, keeping in mind not to harm anyone through my writing.
Review of Literature and other Resources

The following sections will review the literature and other resources used to research this work. Literature and audio-visual resources can be roughly divided into three categories. Firstly there is literature used to construct the theoretical framework. Secondly the anthropological, geographical and art literature, which forms the bulk of the resources used, is reviewed. Here I have also included some video films. The third category of resources are a small collection of maps, showing Aboriginal land divisions throughout Australia.

Literature for Theory of Territoriality

The sociologist Giddens (1989:43-45) described hunter-gatherer society as the most successful type of society the world has known, because people have lived this way for longer than any other. In Australia this type of society has survived in many extremes of climate and habitat. These societies had to consider material and social needs when with their use of the spatial environment. Casimir (1992) used needs and the spatial aspects of social structures to give a global account of hunter-gatherer territoriality. He also provided definitions and discussion about territorial theory and its relationship to social structures.

Casimir's (1992:20) definition, quoted in the previous chapter, has a theoretical base which comprehensively covers the reality of territorial behaviours for traditional Indigenous groups in this thesis. Sack's (1986:19) geographically based definition and that of the sociologists Jary & Jary (1995:683), whilst being suitable for a society under Western authority, do not adequately cover territorial features of hunter-gatherer peoples.

The important definitions of “range”, and “country” or “estate” given by Stanner's (1965) and his explanations of the use of territory by Australia’s hunter-gatherer societies have become an important basis for further anthropological discussion. Stanner provides the Australian connection for the theory of this thesis.

Anthropological and Art Literature

Anthropologists' texts are based on ethnographic research, gathered on field trips using participant observation. Key early and recent anthropological
texts such as Kaberry (1939/1970), Berndt & Berndt (1964/1988), (Stanner 1965), Tindale (1974a), Edwards (1987), Williams (1986), Morphy (1991), Bell (1993), Keen (1994) and Sutton (1995a), have information about spatial, spiritual and artistic connections with land for groups in many parts of the Australian continent. Kaberry and Bell as women ethnographers interested in women's issues provided some balance, because male ethnographers generally associate with the male members of a group they naturally speak from a men's perspective. Anthropologist have demonstrated many ways Indigenous Australians are connected to country.

For example in Katherine, Merlan (1998:43-44) noticed that different language groups were orientated to reflect their traditional land tenure patterns. Bell (1993:8) found a similar pattern at a Central Desert settlement, as did Sansom (1980:17-19) in his study of the Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin.

Anthropological interest in the existence and maintenance of boundaries was the subject of a symposium held in 1973. From this, Nicolas Peterson (1976) edited Tribes and Boundaries in Australia. Peterson's introduction gives an account of how the debate over Aboriginal borders has many intertwining theories. He asserted that the Berndts, using their knowledge of Western Desert people disagreed with the declaration made by Birdsell and Tindale that the "tribe is a clearly bounded unit" (Peterson 1976:1). Ronald Berndt (1976:136-137) wrote that sites influence boundaries and where influences from sites meet melding of one with the other occurs.

The Yolngu have been studied by many anthropologists including Warner (1937/1964), Williams (1986), Morphy (1991), and Keen (1994). Attachment to land was not discussed as thoroughly by Warner (1937/1964) as by the later writers.

Williams (1986) looked closely at the Yolngu's tenure over their land and used her intimate knowledge of the Yirrkala land case to comment on the legal side of land ownership. She (1986:18) explained that the religious, economic and historic life of the Yolngu were closely interrelated and formed a basis of meaning for the relationship they had with the land.
Morphy (1991) and Williams (1986) had a keen interest in the symbology of the visual art work and gave a clear assessment of how paintings represent the land. Morphy has also made films about the Yolngu, in association with the film-maker Ian Dunlop. His film *My Country Djarrakpi* (1980) was particularly significant. In it, his informant and teacher, the artist Narritjin Maymuru, told of his love for his land and how different areas have different purpose with rights of access restricted for some people. Maymuru also shows how he represents the terrain in his paintings whilst telling the Dreaming stories of the land he loves.

Indigenous Australians originally had an oral culture. Therefore audio tapes, video tapes, radio and television are now “message stick” technology for many present-day Aboriginal people. *Magarrpa Funeral at Gurka’wuy* (1978) and *My Country Djarrakpi* (1980) gave insights into how the Yolngu use traditional knowledge to conduct their lives. A more general film *River of Dreams* (1999) showed Aboriginal people’s conflict with land development alongside environmental issues. Maps were seen by Indigenous Australians in this film as European constructs over the land.

Keen (1994) told the Dreaming stories of the Yolngu with an emphasis on how spirituality connected, and connects, the land with people. Keen (1995) fuels the debate about allocating Western style boundaries to Yolngu lands. He asserts that misunderstanding of the subtleties of the Yolngu language has meant that the interrelationship of groups and land boundaries has been misinterpreted.

For comparisons with Yolngu territorial interpretations, Meggitt (1962), Myers (1986, 1987) and Bell (1993) added to the understanding of territorial patterns in the Central Desert area, particularly of the Warlpiri and Pintupi.

Anthropological interpretations of Indigenous creativity have been enhanced by contributions from commentators of Australia’s Indigenous art. Wally Caruana (1989; 1993), and Judith Ryan (1989) curators of Aboriginal art have contributed comprehensive accounts of Aboriginal art history, artists, political power, country and travel. Ryan also wrote about the work of Geoffrey Bardon.
Bardon, an art teacher, facilitated Indigenous painting at Papunya in the 1970s (Bardon 1979, 1991). His book *Papunya Tula* is a wonderful collection of Papunya art with its distinctive style of dot patterns, as well as *Tjungari* cycles. The connection of designs to country and love for country was apparent to Bardon, and can be seen in many of the examples illustrated in his books. Information and understanding of Aboriginal designs have been drawn from Sutton’s (1995b) book *Dreamings*, which was written to accompany an exhibition.

The anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose uses Indigenous creativity and voices of her Indigenous informants in *Nourishing Terrains* (1996) to show how important connection to country is for the well-being of Aboriginal people. A less academic text by an Indigenous Australian, *Burnum Burnum’s Aboriginal Australia: A Traveller’s Guide* (Burnum 1988), takes the reader through Australia including the areas of interest for this thesis. It is interesting to note that the visual aspect of country was chosen here for the reader to connect to Indigenous perceptions of land.

*Western Mapping of Aboriginal Groups*

Official maps of the estimated Aboriginal population in 1788, including one using Radcliffe-Brown, show Aboriginal population density and distribution. There is a greater density of population shown near the coast, and there are no tribal or language group divisions. However state boundaries, Western constructs, have been included (Davidson 1938:654,655).

Tindale (1974b), and after him Davis (1993) and Horton (1994), attempted to capture Aboriginal territorial boundaries for all of Australia in their respective maps.

Tindale with his colleague Birdsell used studies of genetics, linguistics and field work to form a theory that traditional Aboriginal groups were bounded socially and spatially (Peterson 1976:1). In the 1920s Tindale (1974a:3) conceived the idea of tribal units having boundaries when an Arnhem Land man told him about the danger of travelling beyond certain limits. Tindale’s first tribal map was published in 1940 (Peterson 1976:1). This map suggested that Australia’s Indigenous people had countries, which they could call their own.
Tindale (1974a:31,56-60) described environmental factors such as discontinuities in terrain, vegetation, strong relief and microclimatic factors as determinates of boundaries. This assertion is not reinforced in his maps (Tindale 1974b), with their geometrical shapes. A further complication was discussed by Peterson (1976) citing Dixon's findings that linguistic and tribal borders are not always the same. This raises many questions about border areas.

Many anthropologists objected to Tindale's theory of spatially bounded units, with Ronald Berndt criticising the idea in detail through his research in the Western Desert (cited by Peterson 1976:1). Keen (1995:502:505) has asserted that anthropological understanding of the Yolngu language has led to misinterpretation of how people perceive their country. He asserts that land ownership is determined outwards from focal points.

Stephen Davis (1993), a geographer, compiled a map with borders showing more alignment with geographical features than do those of Tindale's map (1974b). Davis shows three basic categories of borders. One is a definite finite boundary shown with a full line. A broken line is used to show indefinite borders and a series of arrows pointing in alternate directions show borders named frontiers. Frontiers have been variously described by geographers such as Anderson, Coakley and Prescott (cited in Cohen 1994:62-63) as zones, more diffuse than borders and lines of demarcation.

Peter Sutton (1995a) wrote a critical analysis of both Davis's map (1993) and its accompanying book, which Davis co-authored with the geographer Prescott (1992). Although some of Sutton's criticisms are petty, it is fair to say that Davis did not consult some of the more important anthropological literature to reach his conclusions. Davis's representation of the extent of Aboriginal countries is also in question because he shares the copyright of his map with Resource Managers Pty Ltd and the Australian Mining Industry Council. As some sectors of the mining industry are protagonists against Aboriginal groups in the Native Title arena, this raises questions about a conflict of interest.

Horton's (1994) map is a colourful poster presentation of Aboriginal Australia published with the Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia. Borders are
shown with a hazy zone between all of them, by merging the colours. It has a disclaimer that states it is not for use in Native Title and other land claims. This again makes it clear that borders to Australia's Indigenous lands are politically contentious.

All of these maps have the problem of being produced in the way of the Westerner, with the historical background of colonisation and mathematical, chronological grids. Bender's (1999:42) research of Indigenous and non-Indigenous maps led her to conclude that, non Western and Western maps are "'indexed' on people's sense of their own history, their own social relationships." She found that Western maps are the visual rhetoric of European attitudes, and in Foucaultian terms as Harley stated the map, is "a spatial panopticon". Bender found that Indigenous groups mapped their territory using means that were often unrecognisable to Westerners. For example German colonials in Malangan settlements in Papua New Guinea failed to recognise funerary sculptures as three dimensional maps (Bender 1999:32,37).

The delineation of Australian Aboriginal boundaries is an issue affected by Indigenous and non-Indigenous politics, emphasised at present in the Native Title debate. We have arguments like those in Sutton's (1995a) book which dispute the accuracy of Davis's research, the map he produced, and the ethics of his sponsorship by a resource company. These criticisms were made at a very recent stage of politics in regard to land rights. Land rights have been on the Australian political agenda in one form or other since settlement, with the Mabo decision of 1992 leading to the Native Title Act. Nowadays, Aboriginal claims of ownership are being made in many parts of Australia for Aboriginal people to gain tenure of land.

Before the main discussion of Indigenous cultural practices regarding social, spatial and spiritual connections to land I will briefly outline the history and geography of the Yolngu and groups of the Central Western Desert region.

The Yolngu - People and Country

"Yolngu" referred, and refers, to a group of intermarrying clans. Each clan spoke, and probably still speaks, a dialect, or version, of the same language. This language was and is closely related to other languages. This
A group of clans had, and has, a system of social and spiritual organisation which was, and is, different from neighbouring systems (Morphy 1991:40). Yolngu\(^2\) is the word the Yolngu people use for all those who are Indigenous to North-East Arnhem Land (Williams 1986:xv; Morphy 1991:39).

Warner (1937/1964:3) used the name Murngin for the people of this region and Ronald Berndt in 1951 (cited by Williams 1986:20) knew them as the Wulumba cultural bloc. These names were chosen for convenience because the group did not have a name to apply to the people of the entire area. The word Yolngu was chosen by the linguists O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin for these people. It means "human being" in all the dialects of the people in that area who can understand each other's language.

It is believed that the Yolngu were visited by the Macassans, who came from the place we now know as Sulawesi (Keen 1994:23). Their visits, which probably began in the sixteenth century, were to collect and process *trepang* (sea cucumber). British attempts to settle North-East Arnhem Land in 1824 and 1827 failed. The overland telegraph line erected in the early 1870s prompted a gold-mining activity and further attempts to establish pastoralism. These failures were due to the distance from markets, problems with the terrain and opposition from the Yolngu (Bauer, Powell, Berndt and Cole cited by Keen 1994:24).

The size and structure of Yolngu clans varied with the seasons. Before the establishment of missions they lived in groups of thirty to forty (Peterson cited by Morphy 1991:40). Most of these groups lived near the coast with routes to inland areas and other coastal areas. When Morphy (1991:xiii) did his study between 1974 and 1976 there were three settlements "Milingimbi (founded in 1922), Yirrkala (founded in 1935) and Echo Island (founded in 1942)." Missionaries who established these settlements, were seen as agents of the state and they bought with them a police presence (Keen 1994:25). The Second World War gave the Yolngu experience of military powers in two ways (Keen 1994:28-29). Firstly they became employees of the army. Japanese bombing of Milingimbi was the other experience some Yolngu had of the power

\(^2\) Yolngu shown in italics here because I am using it as a word in the language.
behind conflict over land and a way of life. In 1969 the Aboriginal community was occupied with an appeal to the Supreme Court in Darwin in an attempt to stop bauxite mining on their land (Williams 1986:xii). In 1970 the town of Nhulunbuy was established to facilitate the bauxite mining (Namitjin at Djarrakpi Part 1 1980). Assertions of land ownership, made by the Yolngu in the legal arena, were an important part of Australia's land rights history, which will be briefly covered at the end of this thesis.

The Yolngu live in a lush tropical environment and benefit from the ocean as part of their land care and ownership of country. In contrast Central Western Desert groups lived in a sparsely vegetated desert region, where they could hunt and gather enough to sustain them provided they moved over a large area. Nowadays people from both these regions are not fully sustained by the terrain, largely because of the effects of colonisation. The areas shown on maps drawn by Tindale (1974b), Davis (1993) and Horton (1994b) of Aboriginal countries in the north of Australia were much smaller than countries of groups in the Central Western Desert areas of Australia. These differences mean that the way in which borders and therefore territoriality were conceptualised had the potential to be very different.

**Western Central Desert - People and Country**

Meggitt, in 1962, wrote that the Warlpiri's "association with Europeans was comparatively limited". This was because difficulties with transport, communication, lack of water and poor soils made exploration and settlement in desert regions a difficult undertaking (Meggitt 1962:16). It is believed that the explorer J. M. Stuart and his men may have been the first white people to have seen Aboriginal groups in Central Australia. His encounters with the Indigenous inhabitants in this part of Australia were made with consideration to avoid conflict (Meggitt 1962:17-18). Early in the 1870s the overland telegraph line was constructed from Adelaide to Darwin. Alice Springs was settled in 1871 as a station for the telegraph line (Myers 1986:30). Also during the 1870s, the explorer Giles encountered physical resistance, against the whites, from the Pitjantjatjara in the southern part of the Central Desert region. Later, in the 1890s and 1900s drovers moved herds through Warlpiri country, which helped establish subsequent cattle stations in adjacent areas. Later still miners
came in search of gold after the Halls Creek goldfield was depleted in about 1907.

Severe droughts, particularly from 1924 to 1929, prompted Indigenous desert dwellers to seek food and water from the new white inhabitants in the Central Desert region. This led to conflict between the Aboriginal and European people, who were also struggling to survive. Between 1936 and 1940 the mining and cattle industries made inroads into this area and employed up to 25 per cent of the Warlpiri tribe (Meggitt 1962:27). In 1941 the Haast's Bluff Aboriginal reserve was proclaimed by the Native Affairs Branch, and subsequently a settlement run by Protestant missionaries was established at Phillip Creek. The Native Affairs Branch took over the running of this settlement in 1951 following a sexual scandal. By 1955 two-thirds of the Warlpiri lived on settlements under the jurisdiction of the Native Affairs Branch. Nearly all of the rest of the Warlpiri lived on cattle stations with regular visits from patrol officers. Due to problems with the water supply at Phillip Creek, a new settlement was established at Warrabri in 1956. This was where, subsequently, Diane Bell (1993) researched the Warlpiri and other groups.

Pintupi country is located south-west of Warlpiri country. The earliest known contact between Europeans and Pintupi people were with the explorers, Warburton in 1873 and Giles during the 1870s (Myers 1986:30). Pintupi people moved into the Kalgoorlie area during the gold rush in the 1890s. As large areas were taken over by cattle stations, many dispossessed Pintupi moved to work on them while others went into missions. The mission at Hermannsburg started drawing surrounding Aboriginal groups to it in 1877. Elkin (cited by Myers 1986:30) wrote that goods brought in by the white people and the settlements themselves were positive attractions. They moved to missions, government settlements, cattle stations and towns between the 1920s and 1966. In 1966 the last Pintupi families left the Western Desert (Myers 1986:28). Pintupi perceptions of these occurrences includes that there was an equal exchange of food with Hermannsburg missionaries (Lohe, Albrect, and Leske cited in Myers 1986:31). Since first contacts with European culture the Pintupi have moved to and between settlements and missions, such as Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Kintore, Balgo Hills Mission, Warburton Range Mission,

Overview

The previous chapter gave an overview of the world views of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and how these came together in 1788. The theories surrounding these views and the theories of territoriality were outlined. These theories led to the central question, which is; “How did Australian Aboriginal people determine and express their relationship to specific areas of land through their spiritual and social organisation?” This chapter has outlined roughly how this question will be answered. The main resources, including the most relevant literature have been discussed with some details of their significance to the topic. Ethical issues were seriously considered and the main considerations that relate to this final document have been outlined. Geographical and historical details of both the Yolngu and people from the Central Western Desert area have set the scene for this debate.

The next chapter, chapter three, will look at how the Dreaming related to the land and the social relationships Aboriginal people have to the Dreaming and the land. Chapter four, further develops social relationships to the Dreaming and looks at how groups are organised in tribes, clans and other groupings. The relationship of these groupings to land areas is significant for the understanding of Indigenous territoriality. Details about how borders are changeable and permeable, and are perhaps not borders with finite lines as we know them at all are debated.

Chapter five also looks at how boundaries may be amorphous instead of linear, and shows how sacred objects and paintings have been used as titles to land. The designs on these objects and paintings have been described as maps. The assertion of ownership through these objects and paintings leads to a brief overview of land rights issues, including the Native Title debate.
Chapter 3

Dreaming the Land

One way to establish tribal boundaries is to examine the local mythology, for various beings are said to have created most of the physiographic features, which in many cases have become totemic sacred sites. (Berndt & Berndt 1964/1988:33)

Giddens wrote in 1989 that some small parts of Australia are among the few places where the hunter-gatherer lifestyle is still practised. He asserted that they had fixed territories and moved around in a seasonal migratory pattern (Giddens 1989:43). Hunter-gatherer groups, such as the Yolngu, displaced from land through British colonisation, are returning to available land to re-establish their lives using traditional laws.

The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (cited by Giddens 1989:44) named hunters and gatherers the “original affluent societies” because they spent fewer hours working to meet their needs than the average worker in Western society today. This assertion is debatable, but it does suggest that there was free time available to do work connected to spiritual law and ritual.

According to archaeological discoveries, Indigenous groups have inhabited the Australian continent for at least 50,000 years (Flood 1995:85-87). Some scientists believe it may be longer and as high as 110,000 years. The world view of Australia’s Indigenous cultures is that, in respect of time as we know it, they have always been here. Using any criterion the hunting and gathering mode of existence lasted for a considerable length of time and was therefore very successful.

Indigenous occupancy of the land was not a consideration for the early settlers of Australia. The land was claimed for Britain by Captain Phillip in 1788 as if it were unoccupied (terra nullius). This was the era that marked the beginning of the industrial revolution in Europe, which affected the way Australia was rapidly colonised. In these early days of settlement the British considered themselves the owners of Australia and the Indigenous people were mostly considered to be unworthy inhabitants without claim to land because
they were not sedentary and did not build permanent dwellings. Because the hunter-gatherer lifestyles did not fit the paradigm of how land should be owned and used, Aboriginal claims to land were ignored for many decades (Caruana 1989:13).

The Indigenous explanation of how people came to Australia and the foundation for moral order has been given various names such as the Dream Time, the Dreaming and the Eternal Dreaming (Williams 1986:25). Explanations using frameworks from cosmology, cosmogony, ontology, religion and philosophy have been used. In more recent times the Dreaming is often discussed using the word “spirituality”.

Stanner (1987:225) describes the Dreaming as something that:

Conjures up the notion of a sacred, heroic time of the indefinitely remote past, such a time is also, in a sense, still part of the present. One cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in time: it was and is, everywhere.

The Dreamtime or Dreaming was, and is, the common but not the only way of referring to the creation of all things including land and people. The Dreaming connects ancestral spirits and real people, and in doing this connects the there and then with the here and now (Stanner cited by Williams 1986:25). This way of believing creates a continuum between all things. Things are connected through the past to the present and the laws of the future and things are connected to each other within this framework of time. The land is the worldly framework that holds many keys for connecting people to places, fauna, flora and each other. The stories of the Dreaming kept, and keep, these connections in place.

Elkin (1938/1974:80) observed that discussions about policy relating to Australia's Indigenous people, the relationship between “tribal territory” and “religious belief”, was involved and entangled in a way which was difficult, if not impossible, to unravel. This means that to gain an understanding of land divisions by Indigenous groups we need a comprehensive understanding of their culture.

A Yolngu creation story, featuring two sisters, is the main source of ancestral meaning. Keen (1994:118) found that the main events of this story
are retold, and that details of parts of the story other than the main narrative were elaborated by using items such as trees and parts of waterways. These were incorporated while people moved over the land and used the elements within it to sustain their lives physically and spiritually. These religious stories could also be told on parts of the land away from the locations in the narrative.

Names of places formed a link with the Dreaming and life in the here and now.

Possession flows from the Dreaming stories of the land in question. Possession of small areas may be granted to a man of another group in recognition that his spirit came from that place (Williams 1986:103). In the next chapter we will look at how access through another's territory is given and maintained.

Some places have more significance than others in terms of meaning and observed ownership. The Dreaming events through stories created special places on the land, usually known as sites or sacred sites. Bell (1993:14) observed, in Central Australia, that women's sacred sites were positioned in relation to the particular aspect of an ancestral story which related to that site.

Sacred sites previously known as "spirit centres" by Elkin (1938/1974:81-82) were, and are, associated with the great ancestors. When these ancestral beings travelled through the land they left human spirits at different locations on their journey. These were left using spiritual means, including special ritual. These places bind together the people and the country which is home.

The actions performed by the great ancestors at sacred sites are recorded in the stories of language groups. The pathway the ancestors used to get to sacred sites on their journey is the same pathway used to visit these sites (Elkin 1938/1974:176-177). These pathways are discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Writing about the Central Desert area Meggitt (1962:60) stated that sites on a Dreaming track can be shared by different communities. Williams (1986:41) found that the Yolngu groups of North-East Arnhem Land shared major ancestral stories. This indicated shared affiliation with the land and the sites of these myths and thereby probably meant a shared interest in land and its sites.
Berndt and Berndt (1964/1988:37) reported that people moving across the Western Desert only feared retaliation from owning groups if they interfered with sacred sites. Another factor related to the influence of home territory. Myers' informant had more fear as he moved away from the influence of the ancestors of his own country (Myers 1987:106).

Elkin (1938/1974:176-177) found that ancestral pathways were part of Australian Aboriginal culture throughout the Northern Territory, including Arnhem Land and the Central Australian regions. The song cycles which are an integral part of these pathways tell of the "experiences and actions heroes, ancestors, founders, explorers and even 'goddesses'" (Elkin 1938/1974:303). It is interesting to note Elkin did not use the word "gods" for the male entities and was surprised to find "goddesses." Ronald and Catherine Berndt (1964/1988:243-244) found Dreaming tracks here and further afield. They concluded that "hundreds of such tracks criss-crossed one another right through the continent, representing, at least potentially, a network of intercommunications." Elkin also writes that one of the primary totems of a person from the regions of Central Australia, which includes areas in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, was decided from the ancestral path where that person was born. One of these sites may also be the place of conception for a member of a group. As we will see this site may not be in that group's land. The powers of the ancestors from that place go into the mother and into the very being of the new person (Munn 1973:29). These paths were, and possibly still are for some, the key for what constitutes a person's country.

Elkin theorised that the scarcity of resources such as water in these regions made these paths very important. Meggitt (1962:60-61), who researched clans from the Central Desert areas of Australia, found that rain tracks are important to all of these communities. We can then conclude that the importance of tracks is a reflection of the way of life in that particular terrain. This means, as Elkin stated, that the land in between these sacred pathways was of less importance and not necessarily seen as country containing a border. The lesser significance of the areas around Dreaming tracks does not mean that they were special areas of avoidance. Nor can we assume that this
in-between land was of no significance. The point I am making is that the main foci of attention for thinking about and interacting with the land were the tracks and sites. These tracks and sites were given with their meaning in the Dreaming law had this meaning was perpetuated through Dreaming stories.

Munn (1970:148), in her research of the Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara from a region near central Australia, found that these people had networks of ancestral paths and travelling paths for hunting and gathering. She describes the sacred sites on these paths as:

Defined topographical features...owned by different patrilineal groups and in this sense geographical space is socially segmented. This world...laid down by ancestral beings, mediates relationship between the untrammeled creativity of ancestors and living human beings who care for ancestral products. (Munn 1970:148)

The marks of the ancestors who sang and travelled along the Dreaming path are placed at various sites. Munn (1970:147) tells us how a particular group sung their way from place to place and claimed them. The group thereby explain these places with personal identification first imprinted by the ancestors. Where Dreaming tracks belonging to different clans cross at a particular feature, that site will be important to more than one clan (Elkin 1938/1974:179). Some very long tracks can change subsection and patrimoiety affiliations at certain points. (Meggitt 1962:65).

Williams (1986:37-38) found that the Yolngu spirit journeys extended into the ocean. These were created by walking or paddling a canoe through the ocean. Yolngu spirit being journeys have a definite start and finish. Paths for this spirit journey may continue. As Berndt & Berndt (1964/1988:243-244) pointed out, knowing the next or previous part of the journey depended upon meeting and sharing rituals with adjacent clans. The places where different parts of the ancestor's story met possibly marked the limits of responsibility for countries and therefore the borders of countries. Williams (1986:41) explained how links with outside groups can be made through a sign or a natural feature, which may have a ritual object to represent it.

Elkin (1938/1974:177) described how paths belonging to one group could also continue on through another group's territory. This made it possible for people to travel through country which was not theirs, because that path
belonged to a journey of the ancestral story affiliated with the owning group. As shown by Elkin (1938/1974:178), Williams (1986:37-41) and, Berndt and Berndt (1964/1988:243-244), knowledge of the full details of a group's ancestral story could involve travel through land of other groups.

Williams (1986:41) showed that, for the purposes of ritual according to the Dreaming law, sacred sites and Dreaming tracks were important to the Yolngu. These places could be part of rituals conducted at another place.

Yolngu songs for an ancestral spirit journey can be sung in a different location. The video film *Magarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy* (1978) shows us how ceremonies for other places on a Dreaming path can be sung and performed at a particular place to bring a person's spirit to the place where it belongs. In the film a baby had died, and a series of songs were sung to take it to the place where its spirit belonged, after taking it through these songs to significant places on the Dreaming path. Physical travel on the Dreaming path of the songs was not undertaken. Eventually its spirit was sung to the place it belonged and the body was buried in a place not far from his place of death.

Each clan in Central Australia also had a Dreaming which was of primary importance. Meggitt (1962:60-61) explained that rain tracks are of great significance to all communities. As he researched clans from the Central Desert areas of Australia, it could be concluded that the importance of rain tracks is a reflection of the way of life in that particular terrain. Dreaming paths have various levels of significance. Meggitt (1962:65) described how some tracks are of such great significance to clans of both moieties that those tracks are referred to as "father".

The features of the land were created through the Dreaming, and these features have become sacred sites. As stated by Berndt and Berndt (1964/1988:33), the laws of the Dreaming decided who should look after sites and perform the songs and rites connected to them. These Indigenous Australians could, with encouragement from the Berndts, make drawings setting out each detail of their land.

The influences of sites and tracks as outlined so far is represented diagrammatically as follows in.
Figure 2: The sacred tracks and sites of three groups, how they inter-related and how degrees of influence from ancestors relating to sites and tracks diminished with distance.

A tribe had Dreaming tracks and trading links connecting a series of language groups. We need to remember that people often spoke several languages. The group in between two countries were mediators and agents of trade for those in non-adjoining countries (Meggitt 1962:35). See Figure 2 above. For example the Gurindji group, located geographically between the Warlpiri and southern groups, acted as agent between groups. (Meggitt 1962:55).

So far I have stressed the way that Dreaming tracks are the foci of Indigenous attention when thinking about land. The next chapter will continue to look at the relationship Indigenous people had, and in some places still have, with their land. It will also look at what constitutes a border for Indigenous Australians, and the various types of borders and attributes of border land in relation to social organisation.
Chapter 4

Groups, Languages, Areas and Boundaries

But for Yolngu, boundaries do not exist primarily for the purpose of excluding non owners. Rather, Yolngu use boundaries to express varying categories of interest, both of owners and of users. (Williams 1986:231)

This section will look at geographical space in relation to the systems of group division and identification within the Yolngu groups and compare these, as much as possible, to the Indigenous groups of the Western Central Desert region. The way these social group systems are organised is an important aspect of Yolngu land tenure. How land tenure is organised and divided is conversely a reflection of social groupings. The interrelationships of various ways of grouping people and the various ways groups live out their attachment to their territory gives land complex layers of meaning. As Warner (1937/1964:8) explained, the Mumgin (Yolngu) lived within “geographical space”, which was “the territorial extension given the clan.” These clans were given their geographical space through the Dreaming Laws contained in the Dreaming stories.

In traditional settings Australia’s Indigenous people had about four intertwined layers for grouping and categorising living people. Before I set out some of the significant details about these groupings and how they relate to social and spatial boundedness, I will provide an overview of what I have found about groups. These methods, processes or bases for grouping people have been described in the past tense, although I believe they are still being used, or reclaimed for use, in various parts of Australia. Particularly because this thesis does not involve field work, it is not possible to comment on which practices are being used at present.

Most of this thesis is written in the past tense. Where I am fairly certain information and practices apply in the present, I have used present tense or a combination of present and past tense. Time is an important aspect of social and spatial dynamics within cultures.
Social and spatial meanings were intertwined within an enmeshed set of layers, which can be described as multi-valent. One basis of social meaning was the allocation of a totem, which a person acquired individually. These were related to elements of the land and were usually an animal or plant. Individuals could have more than one of these. Another basis of personal belonging in the group was the membership within the moiety or subsection, which was ascribed through kinship relationship, usually through patrilineality.

The language or dialect of these groups and their ability to communicate with their neighbours on a social and language level determined movement and use of land. These groupings were then interrelated, so that each individual had varying amounts and types of rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities were also related to age and gender, but this is too vast an area to cover in a thesis of this size. Each individual had roles as part of their group affiliations and their own individual perception and knowledge of their place within the social structure.

People were also spatially categorised according to their locality of residence in relation to other groups. For those such as the Yolngu, this related spatially to geographic features such as proximity to the ocean. For Central Western Desert groups, and possibly the Yolngu as well, it was described also in relation to the direction of other groups' land from the group's own land.

Within these complex networks of belonging were many individuals who moved within and across these social groupings and the landscape, which connected them to the earth. Furthermore these social categories were also spiritual categories of the Dreaming. The Dreaming law connected, and connects, all with all. Thereby each connection had a special connection to land.

As mentioned in the overview above one of the ways each person was connected to the land was through a totem given at birth or after birth. Taboos and responsibilities flowed from totemic identification.

Hiatt, reviewing the literature and drawing on his own field work, was led to state in 1962 that male members of totemic groups did not live on tracts of totemic land allocated only to one totem (cited by Williams 1996:215).
membership must have been mixed in any particular group. It would not make sense for a group to contain only people with responsibility to one or more natural plant or animal element in an area. For an area to be properly maintained it needs the care of all significant aspects including the flora and fauna to be considered.

Totemic affiliation with animals and plants is not a significant system for establishing control of land by a group, but is a way for rights and responsibilities to be established in the same way rights and responsibilities are maintained over sites. This totemic basis of ownership is then a layer, or basis for belonging, that we can differentiate from belonging in a language group, moiety or clan. Nevertheless there must be an exchange between these different social and land affiliated groupings. Language grouping and groups within language groups have a stronger basis for belonging. Meggitt (1962:64) in his illustration shows how totems are a layer of meaning over clan or moiety groupings.

Ties to the land of mother and father were given through the laws of the Dreaming. For the continuity of the Dreaming, groups needed to be ordered in relation to the land. Reproduction and sex were a factor for continuity to naturally occur. Williams (1986:47) explained that, while individuals held joint title to their father’s land, ties to mother’s land were also crucial across Australia. She cites Radcliffe-Brown, who made a generalisation for all Australia that matrilineal and patrilineal systems existed together. Bell (1993:260) found that women in the Central desert provided a strong connection to land and were not subordinate to men in their connections to land.

Bell (1993:8) described areas set out in the camp at Warrabri which were exclusive to some and thereby avoidance areas for others. The women and the men each had their own areas to do the business of preparing materials for ceremonies and rituals. These areas were also used for women to meet away from their men folk. Generally ceremonies were not held as segregated events. Only elements of ceremonies were gender specific. The
duality of meaning seen in gender organisation was also found in the pairing of Yolngu groups.

There were two types of Yolngu clans, the Dhuwa and the Yirritja. Pairing of groups in this way is known by anthropologists as a moiety system (Morphy 1991:43-45). Each semi-moiety, had a name of its own, and could be known as a section. Marriage patterns were decided by membership of a section within the moiety system. There were subsections, called clans (Keen 1994:104). These I believe were like moieties within moieties. This was because a section was often the whole, or moiety, of two further subsections. These types of groupings were prevalent in many parts of Australia, and each linguistic group had its own names for these groups. Bell (1993:260-272) reported the same type of system in the Central Desert. The membership of these groups was through patrilateral descent. Patrilateral succession identified the main landholders of Yolngu land (Williams 1986:62). According to Indigenous people this system was in place from the beginning; that is it was laid down in the Dreaming by the ancestral beings.

Matha means dialect or language and refers to a group, with individuals who claim joint ownership to major areas of land. Williams described a business-like method of looking at joint ownership:

Yolngu use matha to indicate the maximum potential membership of groups whose corporateness is defined by joint ownership of land. The fact that Yolngu agree upon the distinctiveness of each matha underscores the importance they attach to being able to designate precisely the relationship of the largest definable corporate group to the largest definable estate (that is, to all the discontinuous parcels that together form a single estate) in terms of ownership. (Williams 1986:63)

Therefore if we think of succession, matha and corporateness it becomes clearer that, traditionally, successors could claim title to specific areas of land along with others who speak the same language. However, Keen (1995:520) disagreed with the classification of groups as corporate or social. He claimed that there is a complex web of meaning and association which can be modified through the sacred realm.
Nancy Williams, through her research, found moiety divisions determined the ownership of areas within the language group's country. A Yolngu man drew a checkerboard-like pattern for her to explain how alternate areas held the same semi-moiety. He emphasised that this was not a true map because the linear grid was only a means to show how moieties alternated on the land (Williams 1986:76,77). Another man showed how clans were spatially alternated and how this related to rivers. This alternation is reflected in the exogamous kinship system of marrying into the opposite side of the moiety (Keen 1994:67). My schematic diagram, Figure 3, shows how the information from these two men can be put together using symbols. Spread over, and as part of this, we can also imagine Dreaming tracks which were part of each group's connections to land. See Figure 4 is a schematic representation of this idea, although it has not been scaled to overlay Figure 3.

Ian Keen (1994:111) found that there were variations in the way Yolngu people expressed their identity and how they possessed country. However, Keen (1994:104) and Morphy (1984:25-26) found Yolngu people mostly agreed that their groups were divided into subgroups, and each group held a country and that country's name.

The Dreaming and stories provided instruction and guidance for dealing with contemporary issues. For instance "the first men symbolise concepts of patrilineal succession. They also symbolise the potential existence of localised
subgroups. The land identified as those of local sub groups may or may not be contiguous" (Williams 1986:63). These subgroup areas were usually separate, with an area at the coast and an inland area. This gave clans access to a wider range of resources. It seems to me that this type of geographical distribution made groups such as the Yolngu more self-sufficient than others that had access to an area in only one locality, as was the case in Central Australia. This one locality was not as likely to contain such a variety of resources. Those with fewer resources are more likely to travel further from their home countries for sustenance and trade with others to provide materials for ceremonies and sacred items.

With regard to the desert areas, Meggitt (1962:51,52) explained that consanguineous (biological) and affinal (through marriage) relationships had an affect on social and spatial mobility. Bonds of ritual friendship, obligation and temperament also affected these interrelated forms of mobility. This in turn was influenced by the conditions of this desert region in relation to scarcity and availability of food due to seasonal variation. Meggitt also found that these people could not be classified according to simple patrilineal descent lines. Bell (1993:260) came to similar conclusions, by finding that both patrilineal and matrilineal connections were important. Kaytej women, Bell (1993:102,215) observed, were part of the decision-making processes alongside their men, and used their powers through rituals to stake a claim to their area. Indeed, Bell (1993:81,3) found that both men and women of the Kaytej tribe at the Warrabri settlement between 1976 an 1982 had a self-affirmed connection to the country at the settlement. This connection was proved through their fulfilment of ritual obligations as well as by their evident fertility and economic well being. Important connections were also made through the use of language.

Meanings in names did refer, and where languages are still well understood, can refer, to land, people and the sacred. The meanings in names ensure knowledge transmission about who has responsibilities for land and who will have rights and responsibilities in the future (Williams 1986:72-73). Names were, and probably still are, the means to ensure the expected continuity of association with the land and all that is in it. Morphy (1984:26) found that place names were owned and were part of the domain of the Dreaming. They were
not always used publicly. Because these names had a connection with spirit
beings of the land they were, according to Williams, a means for arguing about
interests including conflicts of interest in the land. Names were gifted at times,
in reciprocal transactions, from one group to another. This is certain to be one
of the reasons for Keen’s (1994:149) finding that people of different clans had
an interest in each other’s land. Names for geographical features and objects
in the landscape were given to people as their personal names. There were
names which were open for general discussion and others which had sacred
taboo s for certain people. Later, in 1995 (502, 505), Keen asserted that
anthropological constructs did not properly reflect the figures of speech and
rhetoric used by the Yolngu to describe groups and their relationships with land.
The idea of boundedness embedded in constructs of connecting groups to land
is not, according to Keen, the way Yolngu identify groups and places cutward
from centres or foci.

However, the Yolngu were a group of clans with a social organisation,
culture and linguistic practices that were different in many ways from those of
neighbouring groups (Morphy 1991:40). The Yolngu lived, and still live, in an
area located in North-East Arnhem Land, with an environment that had the
same range of variation throughout. All groups understood each other’s
language (Williams 1986:22). This ability to understand other languages may
have originated in the initial development of these languages. The language
could have formed from a single group or from groups sharing an environment
which needed to be spoken about at gatherings. This group of clans is referred
to as a language group, although each clan also had distinct differences in
language, which can be called dialects. Linguistic means were used to include
and exclude social groups (Williams 1986:42).

Myers (1987:100) wrote about young Pintupi men travelling into desert
areas away from their home camps to establish affiliations with other groups.
This illustrates that people in the desert areas also learned each other’s
languages. It is important to note that the intertwining systems of grouping
people within the total population does not necessarily stop at the edge of each
language group’s country.
Languages were said to have come from the ancestors. Names which bestowed land to the people were given by the ancestors to the Yolngu (Williams 1986). The use of these names was an important aspect of how title to land was perceived. Some names were unique to land-holding groups, and were an indication that these groups had title to specific parts of land. Where there were common names in geographically separate areas, these indicated links from the same story of bestowal. Certain words in languages were a means for groups of people to identify themselves and others. These words are similar to, or the same as, words which identify geographic features. Words in the Yolngu language were used to indicate geographic areas, which have particular features and resources. This naming could, as Williams (1986:60) stated, “refer to the location of primary estate, principal locus of residence, or both.” Identification of people with particular areas and geographical features is another way of describing individuals and groups.

Williams (1986:59-60) identified three regions in the Yolngu-speaking area. They were: (1) Miyalkuwuy, which was the northernmost region and includes Port Bradshaw, Bremer Island, Melville Bay, Wessel Island and Cape Wilberforce; (2) Miyarrkawuy, which was an area west of Miyalkuwuy, and (3) Laynappuy, which was the area from Caledon Bay to Cape Shield.

Using the suffix -ngu with place names gave a name for people of each area (Williams 1986:60). This suffix was used within regions for people to refer to each other by words which were dependent on geographical features. These were: Runupuyngu, who had their estates on and near islands. Ngunupuyngu people had their estates on peninsulas, with residence patterns dependent on the size of the peninsula. Manipuyngu people had estates related to the river and its nearby resources. Makayindipuyngu were mainlanders. This term could have been used, for example, by island people, Runupuyngu, to refer to those with estates on the mainland. This suffix -ngu is one of the most important aspects of this language because it is available to associate people with aspects of the surface of the land and locate them spatially within the wider Yolngu landscape. It is also the suffix of the word Yolngu, which is the most common word used now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, for these
of North-East Arnhem Land. Morphy (1991:39-40) explains that Yolngu is the word used to refer to the people and the language of the area we are looking at. It is used by the people of this area for their area of North-East Arnhem Land and to refer to themselves. However, more often they use another word to refer to their particular group and dialect.

The Dhuwa and Yirritja moiety each had a word to describe another category of names, which are links to a secret, sacred vocabulary. The Dhuwa used the word likan and the Yirritja moiety used the word bundurr to signify elbow or connection. These words were used to connect meanings between sets of knowledge in different domains. Therefore a bundurr or likan word had dual meanings, with implications embedded in this connection between the generally knowable and the secret, sacred domain.

These words can, for example, indicated a site and the ancestral bequeathing that happened at that site. This elbow name, or word which linked different relations, also referred to the most sacred element at that site. Where these meanings met was often a place in the language where the keeping of knowledge changed. The more secret or inside knowledge was only transmitted to those who had the right to know these things (Williams 1986:44-45). These names linked the secret and the more generally known. Initiated men were those with a right to know many of the more sacred meanings, and not all initiated men had full meanings of all there was to know. Their selected kin received and passed on knowledge, designs and stories. A man's father or uncle passed information on about stories and designs to a man when he was deemed to be ready. This generally meant the older men had more of the acquired knowledge and ownership of aspects of the culture which gave them access to ownership of designs and ceremonies to demonstrate and maintain ownership of land.

Wanga, a name not unlike the word for totemic ancestor, meant place and country. It also meant the place where people sit and sleep. This, as Keen (1994:102-103) pointed out, is an indication that there was no well marked-difference between camp and the wider countryside. Here we can see that to

3 Yolngu shown in italics here because I am using it as a word in the language.
translate relationships to land in terms of city, town and country, as we do in our Western framework, cannot work well for groups who do not have the same cultural perception of these differences.

Morphy (1984:26-27) writes that place names were based on identification of focal sites. Sites with a wide focus might have smaller sites within the area of their focus. Keen (1994:104) extrapolated that this meant the Yolngu did not have finite boundaries to mark areas. Areas were centred spatial concepts. Ronald Berndt (1976:136-137) in his research of the Western Desert found that:

The actual site name is expanded to blur with the next, so that the country immediately surrounding any one site becomes identified with it. No clear cut boundaries are recognised... it is the significant areas within a particular stretch of territory that define the territorial range of a dialectical unit, rather than its overall composition.

This statement, and Morphy's and Keen's assertions, point to the idea that boundaries were amorphous areas rather than linear constructions. Having boundaries embedded in the significance of sites and tracks, which are part of the sacred realm, firmly connects social practices and territorial considerations.

The fact that many names had secret sacred connections or were secret makes it very difficult to produce a full account of how people are connected to their ownership of the land. However the Yolngu, who are arguably the most studied language group in Australia have given many details of their land tenure systems to the dominant culture in Australia. They have been instrumental, as we will see in the next chapter, in directing the ways of the Australian legal system towards a better understanding of Aboriginal land tenure.

Practical principles of land tenure related to having the right to use land and its produce of flora and fauna without permission from anyone else. Permission was granted to outside groups in various ways. (Berndt & Berndt 1964/1988:96-97) showed that, not only were Yolngu clans connected with each other, they were connected with the important Dreaming stories and sites of the area. These connections meant traditionally recognised rights to resources such as water from these sites.
The quote at the beginning of this chapter is “Yolngu boundaries do not exist primarily for the purpose of excluding non owners. Rather, Yolngu use boundaries to express varying categories of interest, both of owners and of users.” (Williams 1986:231). For the Yolngu at Yirrkala, sanctioning others to use their land did not mean they lost title to that land. When others asked for the right to use land, even on a long-term basis, title was being acknowledged by those asking. Proper framing of requests to share put an onus on owners to grant permission. This was because sharing was interwoven with Yolngu rights and responsibilities. Taking up argument about territoriality we could say that the Yolngu maintained their connections to a particular area of country by controlling access to that country. We are talking then about social territoriality.

Permission to enter was granted directly or indirectly by the person in authority within the land-owning group (Williams 1986:84-85). Presents of resources gained on forays into another’s territory were at times part of the transaction of getting permission. Permission to use the land did not generally include access to sacred areas. When someone had a parcel of land surrounded by another group’s country, right of access did not have to be renegotiated each time the spatially inner area was accessed.

Permission to cross into the country which another group exercised the control of entry and to use resources was an integral part of Yolngu cultural practices. Yolngu people avoided making requests that might be refused (Williams 1986:85). Gifts are given in exchange for the use of another’s land. Meat from hunting on that land was one of the types of gifts that could be used for this reciprocation. These reciprocal payments could be negotiated in advance or alternatively given in advance.

In the Central Desert, people also had to ask permission to use land and its resources. Meggitt (1962:46) wrote that Warlpiri people needed to have an understanding or permission from owners of land to travel onto the land cared for by another group. The only people who did not need permission were “ceremonial messengers”. Myers (1986: 96) also wrote that sharing resources with those from another county, through access to land, was a system of social reciprocity and an important part of life for the Pintupi of the Western Desert.
During a good season in the Central Desert, particularly at the end of the wet weather, people visited relatives and friends in other countries. They arrived unannounced but were usually expected (Meggitt 1962:52).

Tindale (1974:18) reports a Western Desert man saying that "my country is the place where I can cut a spear or make a spear-thrower without asking anyone." (Myers 1986:99). Derek Freeman, in personal communication with Myers (1987:105), reported a Western Desert man's words as "the first law of Aboriginal morality: Always ask!" While Pintupi people, also from the Western Desert, had tacit agreements with people from neighbouring lands who were considered friends, resource availability was an important consideration (Myers 1986:98). It seems to me that the consideration of scarcity and abundance must have been of more importance in desert regions because seasonal variation, such as rainfall patterns, was less reliable there. Travel to places where the necessities of life were available would have been more difficult, and taken longer, than in the areas inhabited by the Yolngu groups.

In North-East Arnhem Land areas of land which could be called estates were owned by patrilineal groups. The success of these groups in relation to their land ownership depended on numbers relative to resources and the political and leadership abilities of the groups' leaders (Williams 1986:98). Sacred objects, and their use, were the tangible political proof of title to land (Williams 1986:98). Furthermore these sacred objects related to stories which provided guidance about kin relations and marriage laws from the Dreaming (Keen 1994:110). People with the same sacred objects and similar relationships to kin associated with particular land had disputes over succession to land (Keen 1994:127). Definitions of country and disagreement about these definitions further complicated political wrangling for land. Responsibility for land could be carried out by giving authority to others, who then subsequently could make claims for Yolngu land.

Hunter-gatherers did not have wars fought by specially trained men as Western nations have today (Giddens 1989:46). Elkin, cited by Nancy Williams (Williams 1986:37), believed that, because Australian Aboriginal groups held interests in particular tracts of land, there were fights both within language
groups and between language groups. This could be Elkin’s projections of Western understandings. However, Warner (1937/1964:144-179) also described what he called “warfare”. Warner did not relate warfare to ownership of land. Fights were within the Yolngu language group, usually in competition over women. This meant that fights were usually between those of the same moiety. Warner (1937/1964:147) claims that the kinship marriage system, which allowed polygamy, needed this warfare to survive. Warfare was not conducted between tribes with those groups on the borders of tribal lands sometimes claiming to be part of both tribes. People generally spoke many languages, which would have allowed interactions between many groups. People from different tribes gathered for ceremonies. Warfare is a direct opposition to ceremonies. If fights happened when a ceremony was in progress the ceremony was stopped (Warner 1937/1964:35, 145). These ceremonies affirmed solidarity between groups and affirmed sacred-spatial connections to land.

Writing about the Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara people, Munn (1970:151) stated “Violation of the country is a violation of the very essence of the ‘law of the dead’.” Sacred stones, sacred boards and the land are the essence of the ancestral law. Aboriginal informants told Nancy Munn: “The country and the sacred boards and stones are ... the law of the dead; the ancestor became country.” This explains the reluctance of people to take over the property occupied by the Dreaming of another group. Theoretically if a group lost all its initiated men, and women and children were taken by a surviving group, the land of the deceased would only over time be absorbed into the Dreaming of the survivors. Only after a time span of several generations would this land be fully owned by the survivors. Land could not be taken from another through warfare, because it is vested in people through the Dreaming. Warner (1937/1964:18-19) found that the Yolngu also respected connection to country as a law of the Dreaming, and therefore country could not be taken through force.

In North-East Arnhem Land, where the patrilineal descent line died out, areas became the property of new occupiers after memory of the previous owners was lost through several generations. New traditions were established.
for this land to become the domain of the new owners (Warner 1937/1964:17). Morphy (1991:37) added that people and areas of land kept their affiliation with the same moiety. This means land from which a clan has gone, for whatever reason, must become the land of a clan from the same moiety. Alternatively a group must change their moiety. Morphy found examples of individuals and clans changing moieties, which led to problems regarding the inter-marriage rules, and must have meant complications in land succession unless we assume flexibility in the structure of meaning and authority for land-owning groups.

As we saw previously in this chapter, land through its sacredness could not become the property of other groups through warfare. Writing about Australia's Indigenous peoples, the Berndts (1964/1988:37) showed that people did leave their land and move to other regions before the "culture clash" that came about with colonisation. They found, however, that, although there were fights both within and between tribes, particularly in "the northern coastal area", regions were not conquered. Instead people moved onto land from which the original owners had moved away or which they no longer used.

Keen (1994:102, citing Beckett 1987 and Peterson 1972) deduced that before the Yolngu were affected by "welfare colonialism" in the form of missions, the patrilineal system was one of growth and division, with the availability of land and food regulating adjustments.

Keen (1994:127) believed conflicts occurred because it is possible for a number of people to have claims to a deceased person's country and to hold sacred knowledge allied with that land. A number of people can have claims based on kinship and Dreaming connections. Individuals with diverse Dreaming connections and group varied affiliations made succession to available country a complicated matter.

The observation of rules of access to particular areas of country by individuals are likely to be changeable. Boundaries, particularly those written about in the Central Western Desert, were individually centred. Meggitt's (1962:48) informants, particularly the older Warlpiri men, were able to define the limits of their own countries fairly precisely, and were less sure of
boundaries of other countries. Myers' (1986:60) Pintupi informants described their individually centred boundaries and he found that, although some were similar, there was a range of overlapping interests, and interests unique to each person. As shown by Keen (1995:502,512), each individual had a different way of interpreting the various interconnecting ways of belonging with land and kin. Furthermore, Keen found the relationships expressed in words, which can be translated to 'group' and 'clan' were different to the way we perceive these words. The emphasis a particular person put on his or her relationship to an aspect of his or her being or belonging can therefore be extremely variable, and change over time.

Meggitt (1962:54) asserted that "the Warlpiri tend to structure their socio-geographical environment into regions of greater or less space or personal mobility, which can also be distinguished in terms of the degree of embarrassment, shame, or actual fear attendant on entering them." This way of interacting with the environment and social grouping must lead to an extremely variable set of behaviours and use of geographical space. Embarrassment, shame and fear are all feelings that have the potential for people to avoid what they see as the source of that embarrassment, fear or shame and therefore refrain from moving into other groups' country.

Meggitt (1962:52-54) found examples of how areas were used by Warlpiri living at a desert camp. He described areas or tracts near the camp which were exclusively reserved for men or women. These areas were made exclusive for the conducting of ceremonies and to ensure correct sexual conduct in keeping with kinship laws. Bell (1993:81-83) found women's and men's areas spatially delineated and maintained in a similar way to that described by Meggitt in a more traditional camp. These included clearly defined avoidance areas. These avoidance areas related to the gender and social positioning of individual people, families and groups.

An example of an individually centred avoidance area was experienced by Bell (1993:15) when she was travelling back to camp with some women, and was told that there was no room for entry in the direction she was travelling. This direction took them through a place where someone was camped who had
to be avoided by the women in Bell’s vehicle. This exclusion zone was temporary, which further illustrates how changeable and closely related territorial and social space can be.

Individual expressions of centredness in relation to the group and to land, can be extended to feelings between groups as well as individuals. For example the boundaries between Warlpiri and their northern neighbours, the Gurindji and Mudburra groups, were expressed to Meggitt (1962:35) in terms of opinions about each other in regard to upholding the laws relating to social interactions.

Keen (1994:102) alleged that ethnographies of North-East Arnhem Land show that estates and groups were more clearly defined than those of Central Australia. He argued that this was not the case and that interpretations of country were subject to a Yolngu person’s interests and loyalties. People competed for control of country through arguing the importance of their own perspective. Political expertise of individuals within this complex set of connection must have been a factor when decisions were made about who had rights to available land.

Williams (1986: 59) also asserted Yolngu borders were not specific and are relative to the location of the individual speaker. It might be true to say that people have or had intimate knowledge of their terrain and collective knowledge, which was gathered over time. A comprehensive detailed record of this knowledge would give clarity on ownership and the fluidity of ownership patterns. However ritual secrecy, the inability of researchers to talk to everyone, and the changing dynamics of culture, as well as our inability to travel back in time, make this an impossible project. Mapping individual connections to land would require at least one map for each person at each stage of his or her life.

Accepting the potential fluidity of each individual’s association with areas of country, we do know that people had an extremely detailed knowledge of their country in both practical and religious fields. Bell (1993:23) wrote about Central Desert women who knew each small area of the country well and never got lost.
Williams (1986:82) asserted that land borders were "only" marked by natural features. In this part of her book, she was probably comparing European conventions of finite lines on paper maps. These features, Williams maintained, were very subtle. Changes in altitude and gradient showed the exact location of borders where cliffs, mountains and hills were markers for those borders. Meggitt (1962:48-49), Berndt and Berndt (1964/1988:33), Davis's (1993) map and Tindale's (1974) writing agree about this feature of boundaries. The archaeologist, Josephine Flood (1976:47) also claimed natural features of and in the landscape determined boundaries of land. Williams (1986:83-84) asserted that, although the locations and details of these borders were known, various factors prevented people from disclosing specific information about their whereabouts. One of these factors may have been the tension between groups on either side of the perceived border. Defining boundaries precisely might have undermined an harmonious boundary relationship.

An example of a land feature boundary is the common border of the Yanmadjara and the Warlpiri in the Central Desert, which passed between two mountains. In terms of the Dreaming, these mountains represented two Indigenous groups looking at each other. Each group belonged to descent lines which exchanged women in marriage (Meggitt 1962:40). Although Meggitt found that inter-marriage was infrequent between these groups, he saw their relationship as one of exchange in the way of trade through totemic ceremonies, stories and tracks. The ecology of areas is given meaning through the knowledge behind the eyes of the viewer.

As we saw above, groups could have land in more than one area. Ideally a clan had an area on the coast of Yolngu country and an area inland (Williams 1986:63). A person may be part of a group which owns land as a group and also have ownership rights to a part of another group's country. This right might have been acquired through a conception Dreaming; in other words it was the place where the ancestral spirit of that person entered her or his mother. A person may also have rights and responsibilities to places linked to their close kin, such as their mother and grandparents. We need to keep this in mind when we look at ownership interests in different areas, because
individuals may have an interest in parts of a country owned by another group. Areas can therefore, as in the case of the Yolngu, be multiply owned by a group or owned on an individual-centred level.

Whilst rituals and ceremonies involved people from different groups, all that was sacred was not revealed to everyone. The meanings embedded in objects and paintings were multi-layered, or more accurately they had multi-meanings which were connected in a web-like fashion. We could say the meaning and symbols were multi-valent (enmeshed layers). This meant knowledge was built in intertwined layers of meaning, just as we saw above connections to country are complex and multi-valent.

The complexity of connections to country contributes to the changing associations with, and of, ownership of land as discussed above. Ecological changes brought about by seasonal variations and, particularly for the desert regions, times of droughts and flooding, must have caused, and still cause, changes in resource availability. These droughts may have forced a change of locality for people subsisting from the produce of the land. In relatively recent times the availability of resources from white settlers attracted Indigenous desert dwellers to seek refuge. Previously a prolonged drought in a desert region may have resulted in relatively permanent changes to land use and habitation.

In summary we can see that there were many factors which influenced the spatial use of Indigenous lands. Areas were avoided, and thereby made exclusive to others, on the basis of language, gender and to some extent age. Land was entwined into the kinship patterns, which dictated social behaviour. This was particularly evident when we looked at the moiety divisions of the Yolngu. People were able to have interests and responsibilities in other groups' land through various means in this complex three-dimensional web of connections. People had interests in more than one area through affiliations with different kin and the circumstances of their births and lives.

Responsibility for areas of land, features upon the land, flora and fauna were particularly demonstrated through totemic connections and individually centred ways of looking at localities from the position of an individual person or
particular group. Rights and responsibilities were tied to the religious beliefs of these Indigenous groups. The language of the Yolngu contained meaning that was sacred and secret to some people. I suspect that groups from the Central Western Desert regions also had a part of their language which was sacred and unknown to other members of their group. Language also attached people to their land through its descriptions of certain types of areas. These descriptive words related to the ecology and the usage patterns of the inhabitants. The sacredness in the language and law which was, and is, the Dreaming connects people to special sites and tracks. These sites and tracks could be seen as pathways on the land connecting focal parts of the multi-valent three-dimensional web which connected people to the land.

Furthermore the changes brought by the colonisation by missionaries, pastoralists, mining interests and government agencies in both the Central Western Desert region and the region occupied by the Yolngu have brought about changes to social and land use patterns. The many dimensional way Indigenous people have of looking at their land and the influence of non-Indigenous settlement and politics are issues that are not usually addressed when assertions are made about maps and potential maps of these areas.

The next chapter will look at the multi-dimensional meanings of sacred objects and paintings, which are explanation of title and in some cases title deeds to land. These mapped meanings will be contrasted with the constructed meaning of Western maps of Aboriginal lands.
Chapter 5

Designs as Maps and Titles for Land

If I don't paint this story some white fella might come along and steal my country. (Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi cited by Ryan (1989:31))

In chapter three we saw how the sacredness of the land was interwoven with the way belonging to the land was perceived. Meggitt (1962:48-49) and the Berndts (1964/1988:33) saw how the borders of country were related to the ownership and performance of rituals, designs and stories. They each stated that there was an element of permanency about these borders, when they discussed mapping of the land. Meggitt's assertion was:

The positions of the boundaries are fixed, validated and remembered through the agency of religious myth. These stories not only plot the totemic tracks and centres but also specify the points at which the custody of the songs, rituals and decorations associated with them should change hands as the tracks pass from one country to another. An investigator able to spend long enough in the field could produce from such data a detailed map of the borders of the four countries. (Meggitt 1962:48-49).

We can see using the previous chapter, chapter four, that this was not always the case, if in fact borders were part of Aboriginal cultural practices. Meggitt (1962:48-49) stated that ownership of songs, rituals and designs changed where a track went from one group's country to another. This ownership of knowledge which translated into particular attachment to areas of country could be expressed as linear boundaries, although they are likely to be blurred in many places, where the significance of one site or track meets the significance of the next. Ronald Berndt (1976:136-137) contradicted assertions about finite boundaries when he gave an examples from a Western Desert area about boundaries being blurred where the significance of one site meets the significance of the next site.

Meggitt and the Berndts believed that, if a researcher could spend long enough in the field, detailed maps could be compiled of Indigenous groups' connections to country. These authors, through their intensive field work, were pointing out how much meaning there was in people's attachment to the land.
Ethnographic maps with ecological themes could be constructed using land features and flora and fauna habitats. Mapping these meanings would be a means to assist non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, not privileged with this meaning, to understand how attachment with the land is so complex and real. Maps and drawings of this nature were collected and made by Tindale (Sutton 1998a) and the Berndts (personal conversations Baines, Morphy, Stanton). Tindale’s collection is held at the South Australian Museum and the Berndts’ collection is in the Anthropology Museum at the University of Western Australia. The freezing in time of land association, which these maps will invariably show, and the work involved in interpreting them, would make them a limited tool. Maps become suspended in the time of their compilation and thereby are an overlay of perceived reality at the time of their construction. Maps are the Western way of defining the edges of land, and categorising that land. Indigenous groups had other ways to give the areas of their land meaning and to decide on how it was bounded.

For Australia’s Indigenous people paintings could be used as maps and tools for articulation of land ownership. Jan Turner presented contemporary paintings done by a man and a woman from the Central Western Desert at the Australian Anthropology Society conference held in September 2000. The male artist was from Ngaanyatjarra, an area west of Ngatatjarra. His painting showed a road and his country from an aerial perspective, with symbols for copper-mining tenements. These were shown in places where they had been in the past, and places where he believed the next leases should be located. This was a map-like painting. The Indigenous woman, had executed one painting with a lot of detail and vibrancy which was her representation, for herself, of country and the groups within the country. She had made a less vibrant, larger, simplified version for a white-dominated organisation, which she believed would not understand her own, more detailed and vibrant, painting.

The woman’s own painting showed symbols such as foot-prints and tracks as well as dot patterns. The one she painted for the non-Indigenous organisation, had more muted colours. She did not use pure black or pure white in this larger piece, nor did she use such fine detailed symbols. Both paintings showed circles of people meeting the main difference being that the
people were shown as brown in the larger work and black in the painting this
woman had done for herself. Both showed symbols which represented white
and Aboriginal people meeting, their own kind and each other. We were able to
understand some of the symbology in these paintings with the help of the
presenting anthropologist. They seemed to have a spiritual significance related
to the Dreaming, graphics relating to social organisation and spatial elements
relating to land. Jan Turner's (2000:103) abstract of her talk includes the
statement:

These paintings have become a means by which desert people can
articulate their history, personal and collective: their own geographic
perceptions; and their authority within customary traditions to speak for
country. They have potential for the researcher not only to solicit
information but as importantly to discuss, disseminate and receive
feedback on research findings from non-literate people for whom
English is perhaps a third language.

Albert Namatjira and his people painted scenes of country that was
theirs and some put their own symbols onto these paintings, which were done
in the tradition of European landscape (Strehlow 1956:17). Namatjira was the
first Aboriginal artist to gain prominence in the non-Indigenous art culture of
Australia, and as a result was caught in a compromised political space between
two cultures. While Albert Namatjira painted landscapes which were pleasing
to the Western eye, he was also maintaining spiritual, social and spatial
connections to his country (Corbally Stourton 1996:2). He only painted the
country to which he belonged. Traditional Aboriginal paintings were not
executed using representations of country as seen through the eye. Before we
look at more details about painting from the localities discussed in this thesis,
we will take a brief look at the significance of boards and sacred objects, which
relate to connection with the land.

_Tjuringa_ is a word from the Arrente language which refers to sacred
objects and practices (Horton 1994a:1080). These sacred objects were,
amongst other items, sacred boards and stored. They had designs, patterns
and anthropomorphic figures incised into or painted on them. They were so
sacred that they needed to be stored in such a way that unauthorised people
could not possibly find them and look at them.
Strehlow quotes the warning given to a young initiated male who was being shown by his elders the sacred *tjuringa* objects with their sacred totemic designs:

Look at this object! This is yours when we die. You must never place on objects the markings of other totemic centres. Should you do so, you will become liable to be killed. These markings alone are to be yours at all times; and these alone you may engrave, should you be fashioning any sacred objects. (Strehlow 1956:17-18)

This quote illustrates that boards and other sacred objects such as special stones were, and no doubt still are, of an extremely secret sacred nature. They are also particular to sites. I will discuss them only in general terms for as a woman I am not at liberty to delve too deeply into these matters. Myers (1986:146) writes about Pintupi people "carrying the law" and "holding a country". Boards were the material means of stating this possession. The boards, with their designs, were made and looked after by the men, and were said to be given during the Dreaming.

The designs on the boards as well as representing the particular dreamings, are also 'maps' of the dreaming-countries or dreaming tracks, so that the boards form part of a community's title deeds to its territory. (Meggitt 1962:288)

The traditional way for people of the Central Western Desert regions to be connected to their country was through sacred means such as painting bodies, singing, dancing and holding sacred items including sacred boards (Bell 1993:187). Each item and means for sacred connections seems to be linked to the others and thereby connects and entwines the land and the people. The many links are the Dreaming laws.

At the Australian Anthropology Workshop, *Crossing Boundaries: Anthropology, Linguistics, History and Law in Native Title* held in Perth in September, 2000, a question was asked of a presenter which went something like this: "Have the paintings Aboriginal groups are doing these days replaced the sacred boards as titles to land?" The answer was given in the affirmative. The sacred boards of the desert regions have been replaced with pictorial map-like representations of country in the form of paintings. In order to look at some aspects of Australian Indigenous art, we will first take a cautious, and respectful, look at the *Tjngari* cycle and some of its meanings. This cycle, like the sacred board, has restricted knowledge embedded within it. This cycle and
its connections to places and tracks are a feature of some Central Western Desert art.

For the people of the desert region the Dreaming Law was encapsulated in the Tjngari Dreaming cycle and is, as Bardon (1979:23) writes, "shared by all skin groups". Specifically it is the teaching of the old men about the creation of the world. The Tjngari were a group of male and female ancestral beings who travelled through Australia when creation took place (Bardon 1979:13). Social introduction into this cycle started through ceremonies in the early teen years. Before this, children had freedom from the responsibilities of later life. Tjngari ceremonies were usually secret-sacred, and consequently very few details can be given.

Bardon (1979:23) writes that Tjngari Dreaming cycles are part of the practices of many Aboriginal groups in Central Australia. They were journeys across the land, which frequently crossed each other. Bardon found they often went in east-west directions. For example Mick Numieri painted a "Tjngari Cycle Dreaming Journey for Bush Tucker", which is about a long journey and includes lessons about finding bush food. Straight lines in these Tjngari paintings represented the travelling and the concentric circles represented special resting or food-gathering places.

![Figure 5: Tjngari cycles: Journeys and special places on the land](image)

Ryan (1989:29) asserts that the visual language of these Tjngari paintings is restricted in the same way as the inside or sacred meanings. Many examples of painting from these desert groups illustrated in Bardon's and
Ryan's publications have *Tjingari* patterns in them. Corbally Stourton (1996:43) also wrote about how the composition of these paintings unified and restricted the stories. Although we can understand the coding for travel and special places, it is not possible to tell where these places are without further knowledge. It seems to me that it would only be possible to connect the designs to the land through intimate personal knowledge of the land.

Figure 5 above shows an example of *Tjingari* pattern. I have shown the journeys with two or three lines to show how travel routes can intersect. Some travel lines go beyond the special places to show that the journey can go further. This figure also shows how journeys were, and no doubt still are, intersecting and cyclic.

Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi told Ryan (1989:31) “If I don't paint this story some white fella might come along and steal my country.” Statements like these are an indication of how important links between visual symbols, designs and land ownership are. The ownership of designs and the right to use them is of great significance. We need to remember that Indigenous Australians did not have a written language as we know it. For example the background of this written page can be seen as the coming together of my literary learning which began when I first heard language, read books, went to school and eventually university. Coupled with that there is the education system of which, in scholarly circles of the Western world, universities are the pinnacle. While the Western world developed these scholarly ideals, the Indigenous people of what was to be named Australia developed languages, education and social practices of their own. Coupled with these languages were creative practices and the religious laws of the Dreaming. The Indigenous, many valent, three-dimensional web of meaning produced designs with a totally different type of visual language.

As Sutton (1995:62, 134) explained, criticising art on aesthetic grounds is an activity constructed by Western culture, and when we criticise the Dreaming we are judging the very being of the artist and all that is important to him or her. Bardon has (1991:8) pointed out that, “Rather than being separate aesthetic creations, Aboriginal paintings are part of the Dreaming ceremonies.” They
were, and are, maps and stories about seasons, events and the bounty of the land. Often the Pintupi paintings, were about corroborees, which enacted the important journeys of the ancestors. Some of these were painted using Tjingari designs. These painted maps with information about the artists’ country could be used to teach others where to travel and find food. The paintings map specific elements of the country and their foci are sites and tracks rather than boundaries.

Shorty Lungkata Tjungarrayi was a Pintupi informant for the anthropologist Fred Myers, who travelled extensively in the desert regions. He told Myers (1987:106) how, when he travelled, the influence of his ancestors decreased as he journeyed further from his own country.

Lungkata's comments about the influence of his ancestors' spirits is an indication that the significance of land in relation to the individual, and thereby most probably the group, decreases with distance from the land to which they belong.

Figure 6: Influence of ancestors and sites. Fewer dots represent less influence of sacred ancestors for the traveller and possible blurring of boundaries.

Figure 6 shows a diagrammatic representation of how influence of the ancestors diminishes and increases. Shorty Lungkata made Tjingari and dot paintings of historic journeys. Ryan (1989:36,29). These painted networks make a representation of land, featuring sites and travel.
Geoffrey Bardon (1991) provided the materials and support, which led to the start of an Indigenous painting movement, while he was at Papunya from 1971 to 1972. The main language groups encountered by Bardon (1979:7) were the Anmatyerre, Arrentte, Warlpiri, Luritja and Pintupi. The largest group was the Pintupi (Ryan 1989:6). Please refer to the map in the front of this thesis to see how these groups are situated. The Pintupi were also the people Myers (1986;1987) researched.

As an art teacher Bardon discovered that the men at this Aboriginal settlement were motivated by his acceptance of them as well as his teaching abilities. He gave them the resources to demonstrate their knowledge and skills with art materials. Subsequently they produced many paintings and Bardon, with much difficulty and opposition from white authorities, brought them to the wider world.

There were political problems among the Aboriginal men, because at first designs that were sacred were being shown to uninitiated people (Ryan 1989:28). Bardon (1979:18) asserted that the quality of design was not lost when paintings suitable for the uninitiated were painted instead. My feeling about this is that the paintings probably looked very similar, but the layer of meaning that was secret-sacred had not been incorporated during the process of making the painting.

The work Bardon did at Papunya was a major instrumental factor in bringing Australian Aboriginal art into acceptance in the Western art world. Furthermore Bardon's (1991:25) rapport with the Pintupi men meant they shared the meanings of the painted designs with him. This included giving him information to connect places shown in the paintings with real places in the landscape. Bardon (1979:21) described paintings as Dreaming maps, which were inherited from "old time people, ancestors within the tribal skin system". The paintings, and the activity of painting, manifested a sense of belonging to a place. Some Papunya Paintings depict large stretches of country but include only country to which the painter has ownership of designs.

As the Papunya artists developed confidence and expertise with Western materials, larger canvases with "schematic maps of the artists' country
viewed from above” were made (Ryan 1989:28,29). Brothers Tim Leurah and Clifford Possum in 1980, 1981 and 1983 painted “individual Dreamings or ancestral trails in topographic relationship to each other”. Ryan, an art curator, asserted that paintings of this size have not been painted since because they tied up too much capital in the way of materials and took a great deal of time for small financial reward for the artists. These paintings have an extraordinary amount of detail, much of which can be interpreted as topography and Indigenous symbology. To use these as maps in the way we use Western maps would require some education about the location and experience with the terrain. These are paintings with many traditional elements and qualities, which have been painted within the framework of Western, non-Indigenous culture.

Traditional paintings and drawings in the sand of this nature no doubt have been, and could still be, an excellent way for people to be taught the stories of the landscape as well as some of the lessons needed for survival. This is also true of Yolngu art.

Traditionally Yolngu paintings were spiritually powerful ancestral designs. Each clan had its own set of designs, which contained information about Dreaming events and places (Morphy 1991:102,103,114). Morphy called these sets or clumps of designs “chunks”. Each chunk is a set of information with many levels, each interrelated and connected to the Dreaming and the land.

In relatively recent times, painting has been done not only to further political and cultural standing in Yolngu culture but also to promote interest in wider Australian European culture. The need for money has also been a factor in the production of these designs (Morphy 1991:21; Sutton 1995:61).

Traditionally designs were created for events such as singing and dancing ceremonies (Sutton 1995:61). Songs and series of songs were sung while designs were painted. The songs may only have been sung while the painting was in progress and then not sung during the actual ceremony (Morphy 1999:123). These paintings were layered with meanings and had relationships to different locations. They were not kept in the way we keep pictures for aesthetic purposes and future reference. They were destroyed during and after ceremonies (Morphy 1999:21).
Yolngu people told Morphy (1999:125n4) that meanings and designs did not change over time. He found evidence however, that meaning did change and that there was evidence that other cultures such as the Macassans had had an influence on designs.

Morphy (1991:49) found that members of a Yolngu clan produced bark paintings associated with the secret sacred law and a particular part of their clan's territory. Other members of the same clan produced designs from a different part of the law and a different part of their territory. Williams preferred to see each clan as a corporate group holding land, which in a sense conflicts with Morphy's assertions of ownership, but is a way for Yolngu ownership to be understood in land rights debates.

Clans can come together and become one; as Morphy (1991:50-51) was informed, three clans did in 1960. In 1974 he saw these clans using each other's designs. For the Gove land rights case, in the late 1960s, senior men made the decision that it was better to decide to act as one group rather than make three separate claims over the same ground. Morphy (1991:51) observed that, later, the situation of separate rights to land and sacred law was re-established.

Designs on Yolngu paintings tell the viewer which clan the designs belong to and the land which the designs relate to (Morphy 1991:136). Ownership of secret sacred knowledge can be used in various political ways, including as we saw in chapter four to establish land ownership. Morphy (1991:137) asserts that knowledge was deliberately withheld to achieve power or it was withheld while decisions were made about when and to whom to pass it. This power is embedded in the way paintings are structured and used.

The basic structure of paintings was organised in feature blocks, which are related, but not the same as the chunks of meaning discussed above (Morphy 1991:101,150). These irregular shaped blocks had different background patterns and figurative content. They represented different areas of land and each contained different events from the Dreaming stories. Paintings were clan designs with understandable sets of meaning (Morphy 1991:193). Features related to one another and had both inside and outside
meanings. Thompson cited by Morphy (1991:21,194), explained how smudging of designs and the cross-hatching of patterns obscured meaning and took away some of the ancestral power. This removes the danger of ancestral powers for the uninitiated.

The template used in Yolngu paintings was a grid, which showed:

Mythological events occurred at some places or positions and left others largely (though never entirely) unlouched. The positions of the places on the template correspond to the relative position of places in the landscape (Morphy 1991:235).

Scaled maps of the land, which these templates represented, would not have looked the same (Morphy 1991:237). The grid of the template was an interaction with and interpretation of the landscape. In effect we can say the sketches of country are the basis for thematic maps. Templates were a type of grid, comparable with grids on Western maps which, as (Morphy 1991:240) stated, made these paintings maps. The template was a "model for" and a "model of" the outside or open meaning. This was the first set of meanings taught. We can then see that these templates, which were like maps, then gave the novice learner an understanding of the relevant country through orientating known features on the ground to the painting. In other words the map-like paintings mediated practical knowledge of the land with an abstract understanding of the land's configuration. With this, we can assume, came some understanding of the symbols on the paintings.

In effect these almost checkerboard, map-like paintings can be seen as the Yolngu version of maps showing many details. In the previous chapter we saw how a Yolngu man showed Williams (1986:76) that the moiety system could be arranged in a checkerboard configuration. The meanings of these details are only apparent as a visual language, through education from people with the authority to transfer the knowledge. Similarly, as we have seen above, groups in the Central Western Desert region used the visual language of dot paintings and Tjingari designs to convey sacred, social and spatial knowledge. In both cultural areas the designs Indigenous people used were focused on the sacred meanings of country and could not be used to identify borders.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

Areas can not be liberated - only people can. (Amos Oz cited by Casimir 1992:3)

The argument of this thesis has been that Indigenous Australians have cultural ways of relating to land which allow them to know the country to which they are personally related, without necessarily having to demarcate the land with fixed linear boundaries. Indeed, I have shown from the literature that Indigenous Australian association with the land is track and site focused and that significance flows outwards from focal parts of a country rather than being held by a marked boundary.

However in hunter-gatherer societies creating lines on the ground in the form of fences and walls was neither practical nor necessary. The significance of the owning and meaning of land was encapsulated in the Dreaming and reflected in social organisation. Dreaming stories, songs and designs, which gave meaning to land features, flora habitat and fauna distribution, and most importantly other Aboriginal people, were prime considerations. Map-like creations, and other objects, of cultural significance were made and used as teaching tools and to establish ownership of meaning. Owning meaning meant responsibility and rights in connection to the land.

In contrast, we, the colonising nation, have a need to put boundaries on maps in order to sustain the current political and economic way of Europeanised Australia. Boundaries are political constructions which mark difference. Capitalist nations have a need to impose boundaries because they have constructed a social reality with an in-built reliance on ownership.

The way Western culture related to land from the time of early colonisation was through surveys and hence maps. These maps had finite lines and legal designations for areas of land. However borders and finite lines that can be translated to points on the ground were not a part of expressing and determining belonging to land from an Indigenous perspective.
Non-Indigenous people have attempted to map Indigenous groups' countries, and naturally needed to make some sort of categorisation to do this. Language and language group locations were the most obvious ways to impose order and delineate boundaries. After all, one of the main differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were their languages. Looking at social groupings was another way to understand these people. Initially it was an interest for a few, and a means to an end for others, such as missionaries and government officials, until anthropologists researched Australia's Indigenous peoples more comprehensively.

It was subsequently discovered that groups such as the Yolngu had a moiety system, which divided groups into two main groupings. Moieties were also organised into sections and subsections. Australian Indigenous groups were alike in employing the idiom of kinship. Overlaying and related to this were gender and age related groupings. As in Western culture, people did different things at different times in their life. There was some flexibility in which individuals or groups belonged to areas of country across time. Group membership and access to meaning was determined through conception, birth, affinity with kin from several generations and personal decisions about who could look after stories, songs, designs, and thereby land. For Aboriginal groups these categories of being were attached to their reliance on the land for physical support and the Dreaming for its explanation of how to connect with the land.

A personalised attachment was apparent through the totemic system of applying names, rights and responsibilities to individual people which related directly to behaviours to do with particular animals and plants. This totemic attachment also related to the land, for totems often belonged to specific places or sites on the land and other aspects of it. This was a system which related to both social and land-use aspects of life, which did not translate neatly across to an individuals membership of a language group or moiety. Totemic affiliation was a component in the multi dimensional web of meaning which connected the people and the land.
People could have attachment and affiliation to different areas of land and perhaps acknowledge ownership in areas which were not contiguous, that is not adjoining. This leads to mapping of multiple areas for this individual and thereby some or all of his or her immediate group. It is perhaps possible, though complicated, to draw individual Aboriginal boundaries on a Western piece of paper and make them sensible for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous map reader. Each person in traditional Aboriginal culture will have different affiliations to land through his or her birth, kinship relations, allocation of names, and totems, and access to knowledge. Most of these criteria will change during the life of an individual. Individually centred spatial documentation is therefore definitely a dynamic activity and not very practical for the person doing the documenting, nor I suspect for the individual. Expressions of the Dreaming in song and dance and Indigenous ways of documentation in designs were perhaps the only way to demonstrate these boundaries and affiliations with land.

The Dreaming also provided laws about avoidance. Socially some people are obliged to avoid others; similarly there are land areas which need to be avoided. We can map relevant areas, but how do we decide what is irrelevant, and whose perspective do we use? These multiple ways of connecting to land formed a complex three dimensional web of meaning intertwining the people and the land.

Ethnographers looking at connections to country such as Tindale, Williams, Berndt and Berndt, and Davis discovered in the field, that ecological features played a part in division of land. A river is an obvious divide for people who inhabit earth-covered land. When I have walked in bush areas it is very noticeable through smell, feel underfoot and visual differences that areas can change dramatically through differences in vegetation. Both dramatic and subtle changes occur in all regions, with elevations, rocks, gorges and water features as well as changes in soil, insect and plant life. These factors are all significant for those who live on the land and need to know it in order to sustain life. These variations must have been of some importance for the allocation and use of space. However these features of the landscape were given
through Dreaming Law and this law is law. The significance of the features is encapsulated by this law.

The sacred sites and Dreaming tracks are the features of most significance for Aboriginal people following a traditional way of life. The events, as told in the Dreaming stories, songs and designs, that took place at those places, and became part of those places were significant, for social and spiritual life. The significance of each feature is thereby determined through the Dreaming and naturally significance and influence of features decreases with distance.

As a person travelled away from these places the significance became less. Influence of the potency from these sites and tracks diminished with distance and through time away from them. This in effect set up boundaries where meaning changed in relation to the focal sites and tracks. These were zones or amorphous areas marking a change. In other words Aboriginal Dreaming boundaries were blurred areas between significant sites and tracks. Whether these boundaries are finite lines or blurred zones, they are boundaries which signify the edges of attachments to country.

Knowledge of other people’s areas of country existed, and exists, but boundaries were of secondary importance to sites and tracks. Aboriginal peoples acknowledged the country to which they did not belong but access to this country was not necessarily restricted. Australia’s Indigenous people did not have fences, walls or lines on pieces of paper. Crossing boundaries was governed by sacred, social laws. These laws took into account that people needed to hunt and gather food, and marry to produce subsequent generations. Reciprocal arrangements were in place in order to make secure relationships for continuing group and individual survival. These arrangements meant that boundaries and borders were permeable. These reciprocal arrangements lend further weight to the idea that boundaries were where significance from sites and tracks merged.

Boundaries and social arrangements in relation to land are not easily discerned in the Indigenous paintings produced for a Western art market. *Tjingari* cycle designs had sacred and secret meaning for people in desert
region communities. These designs and their representation in the form of paintings have also been described as the title or proof of land ownership. Similarly the templates and blocks of knowledge in Yolngu art explained and proved connections to aspects of country and thereby ownership of land. Painted boards were also used in ceremonies, particularly by groups of the desert region, to show connection to land. Objects with sacred and secret meanings were part of social and sacred taboos, which also gave meaning to land ownership. Designs were put onto some of these objects to clarify these meanings and deepen their significance. The mapping component of this art has not been used to compile Western-style Aboriginal maps as far as I know.

Having knowledge of sites and tracks connected people to the most powerful parts of the land. These sites and tracks were the foci of significance. Meaning and thereby ownership radiated outwards from sites and tracks. Westerners identify an area of land by describing the boundaries at the extremities of the land. In contrast Australia’s Indigenous peoples describe the land according to the changes of meaning derived from significant centres. These central sites and tracks can be seen as the heart and spirit of the land as shown through the Dreaming.

It is clear that areas, sites and tracks had great significance spiritually, socially and spatially. Borders or boundaries could be extrapolated from this significance, but were not as important or relevant as the centre from which they were derived. This means boundaries in many areas were most probably blurred areas where the significance of one site or track merged with the significance of another site or track. Australia’s Indigenous boundaries were fixed in the past, present and future through the laws of the Dreaming. This contrasts with Western mapping, with its preoccupation about preciseness and with its technological refinement over time, which fixes area in moments in time. At present in the arena of Native Title Indigenous groups are required to describe their land in terms of linear boundaries in order to comply with a Western understanding of land ownership.

However, making a decision one way or the other about whether countries were bounded through finite lines or other systems outlined in the
Dreaming laws, and expressed in creative pursuits, is not the primary concern about Australia's Indigenous lands. It is more significant to acknowledge that the people and the land belong with each other.

Indigenous and Western people both have a focus where connection to land is important. For Australians to live in harmony with the diversity of cultures, understanding the cultural perceptions within this diversity is important. Indigenous Australian have a dynamic relationship to land and a way of expressing this relationship which has stood the test of many thousands of years. We can learn from this and broaden the way we perceive the world and our place in it. We can use our knowledge of Indigenous and Western culture to ensure that Australia's Indigenous people attain equity alongside their brothers and sisters from other cultural groups in Australian society and on Australian land.
References


