The Sentimental Community: A Site of Belonging
A Case Study from Central Australia

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The concept of ‘community’ has a deep genealogy, extending from the classical social science literature of the nineteenth century to its wide and confused employment in policy contexts and textual analyses discourses. This paper will focus on one aspect of community whose lineage extends theoretically from the communal concept of a ‘consciousness of kind’. In the desert community of Mt Liebig, known locally as Amunturrngu, the sentimentalised elements of this shared consciousness have evolved from principles of land tenure that have adapted to the newly settled environment. These sentimental signifiers are drawn from the country on which this community developed and the constructions of place that settlement has actively encouraged. To this end the concepts of reterritorialisation and religious egalitarianism will be explored, principally through the medium of *inma kwarritja* (new ritual) in order to analyse how people affiliate with and embody a reterritorialised identity through the traditional imagination. How does this embodiment of country affect the settlement process, whereby a community is constructed?

**Problematising the sentimental community**

In this paper I use the concept community to problematise and denote a specific kind of place that holds within it some of the classical meaning of this construct, while the term settlement is utilised to specifically denote a geographic locality that does not assume this prior meaning. A community can be theoretically perceived as constructed around a ‘consciousness of kind’, a term first coined by Franklin Giddings (1922). This term evoked the explicit recognition of common and exclusive interests that rest on communal foundations. This ‘consciousness of kind’ then acts to develop a self-consciousness which takes the form of a distinguishing group label, a ‘symbol of community’, which is an ‘essential part of the development of communal affinity’ (Gusfield 1975: 34). Related to this notion of communal affinity is ‘social closure’. By ‘social closure’ Weber means the process by which social collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles’ (in Parkin 1982: 175). Exclusion through boundedness is then another defining feature of a community; how the community as a collectivity reproduces itself in relation to other communities and more simply ‘others’ as outsiders (such as, for example, state officials). This politicised inter-
cultural aspect of community, however, will not be elaborated upon here. I have examined this community as ironic and reactive elsewhere, in terms acknowledging that ‘state policies have always helped create and nurture the political forces with which the state has then to contend’ (Piven and Cloward 1985: 184-5, in Beckett 1988). In doing so the community was problematised as a policy construct.¹

I am aware that delineating between the sentimental and the political is, in a sense, arbitrary. Much has been written on the pervasiveness of politics throughout Indigenous cultural process in this region of Australia (cf. Myers 1980, 1982, Dussart 2000). Furthermore, as Leach (1965) pointed out ‘myth and ritual is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony’ (in Appadurai 1981: 202). Relations to land and associated ritual are highly politicised, as will be examined. Nevertheless, gaining impetus from Appadurai’s paper ‘The Past as a Scarce Resource’ (1981) the focus here will remain on how interpretations are sanctioned through the manipulation of the local cosmology as knowledge resource. To do this I will consider how Indigenous symbols of place are manipulated, in order to locate and structure a contemporary communal identity.

The concept of sentiment is employed as per the Oxford dictionary definition (1995: 1262). This is in terms of ‘sentimental value’—being the value of a thing to a particular person or persons because of its association. It is the creation of feelings of belonging to the place of Amunturrngu through mutual association that strikes the chord here. Likewise, elements of Tonnies definition of Gemeinschaft also merge with this notion of sentiment as stemming from those ‘kinds of social co-existence that are familiar, comfortable and exclusive’ and as ‘a living organism in its own right’ (2001: 18-19, reprinted from 1887). This living organism breathes life into locality as a ‘structure of feeling’ (per Appadurai 1995). In developing this argument I will be taking a lead from the anthropological tradition in Australia where, as Peterson noted, ‘numerous authors have commented on the strong emotional attachment of Aborigines to their estates’ (1972: 24). My analysis builds upon that of these numerous authors as I am not talking about the feelings that are attached to pre-determined or inherited ‘estates’, but rather, those that become relocated with settlement.

Cohen has analysed the symbolic properties of the community in terms of its employment as a relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities. The idea of community serves as a symbolic boundary marker. For Cohen, ‘symbols do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to make meaning’ (1985: 15) and so he argues that the term community has a range of meanings. As a symbolic social category it ‘is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members’ unique orientations to it. In the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through the manipulation of its symbols’ (1985: 15). Amunturrngu’s active manipulation of traditional symbols is a key to understanding the processes involved in creating the particularities of locality and the ‘emplacement’ of community members, whereby emotional attachment is not so much transferred as reconfigured. This reconfiguration could be imagined as a process of tethering; that is, establishing a hold onto the landscape of symbols, which themselves give form to place. I am not suggesting here that by becoming a community member, individuals negate or disregard their relationship to their inherited country. Stanner’s perspicacious analysis of the Murinbata movement toward settlement assists my argument here. He pragmatically states that ‘I have seen a man, revisiting his homeland after an absence, fall on the ground, dig his fingers in the soil, and say: ‘O, my country’. But he had been away, voluntarily; and he was soon to go away again voluntarily. Country is a
high interest with a high value; rich sentiments cluster around it; but there are other
interests; all relative, and any can be displaced’ (1979: 49, italics in original). What cannot
be displaced are the operations of the traditional imagination. But before examining these
traditional symbols I must first define who is enabled to manipulate them, who has the
right to tether themselves to them—who is a community member?

Process of membership

‘When we look for the sources of communal affiliations, our concern is that of process and
situation. When do people define themselves as having important characteristics in
common, and when do these become bases for communal identity and action?’ (Gusfield
1975: 30).

The Amunturrngu community is constitutive not only of a peopled geographic location,
but also of a socio-political ideology. This should not be considered in terms of the
community as a whole, but rather in terms of what defines community membership as an
active category. It is the Indigenous internal structure of membership that in turn
constructs the definition of this community. The structure of membership pervades all
aspects of community life, in terms of the Council, the store, the mundane community
goings on and in inter-community relations. It is implicit and often voiced in terms of
actions, not words, so that no-one would say to other residents ‘Ah, you are not a
community member’. It is in the often subtle negotiations of power and privilege that
definitions of membership can be found, so that the daily discourse is a constant process of
negotiating, not rights to be in the community but rather rights to be ‘active’ within the
community.2

In the present context, the development of Amunturrngu community as an Indigenous
construct is also related to the fact that migration to this particular place was voluntary. It
was not established as a mission, so there are no specifically ‘Whitefella’ domains
(Trigger 1986), and nor is it like neighbouring Papunya, which was established as a
‘training institution’ (Davis et al 1977: 9). Amunturrngu developed from an Aboriginal
stock camp that was operating out of Haasts Bluff in the 1940s. The situation of
Amunturrngu as ‘settled’ offers an interesting comparison to Docker River (cf. Tod-
Woenne 1977), and Kintore.3 It became an official outstation service in 1982 and an
Aboriginal Corporation in 1988 that effectively labelled it as a ‘community’ in policy
terms (Smith 1989, Wolfe 1989). Today, there are approximately 270 people at Mt
Liebig.4 This community, as this particular group of people has a continuity over time.
This is clearly apparent through both the process of becoming a community member and
the accrual of local knowledge that this membership entails. The community of
Amunturrngu is a relatively stable configuration of people who regard the settlement as
home, as a relatively safe place and as a focus of landed spiritual responsibilities.

Almost without exception the pattern of movement for the majority of middle aged
and elderly community members today has been from Haasts Bluff (in the 1940s) to Papunya
(in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and finally to Amunturrngu (in the 1980s) and
surrounding outstations. Thus, this history of moving in from the desert to the early ration
depot of Haasts Bluff is shared. The country that these Pintupi, Ngaliya Warlpiri,
Ngaanyatjarra, Annmatyerre and Pitjantjatjarra people came to live on was apparently
vacated, as the earlier inhabitants—the Mayutjarra and the Kukatja—had themselves
moved east toward Alice Springs in the late nineteenth century (Strehlow 1932: 60; Long
Many had also died through first contact influenza (Tindale 1974: 138). This coalescence of different Aboriginal groups from different countries onto apparently vacant country at one principal place had two major impacts. One of which was the formation of the new language of Pintupi Luritja, (I will henceforth just use the term Luritja, like its speakers do)\(^5\) and the other was the reterritorialisation of these immigrants onto the country of their new home.

This new Indigenous language developed as a lingua franca for communication on the new settlement of Haasts Bluff, spreading to the neighbouring communities of Papunya and Amunturrngu, and associated outstations, as they became established. Luritja—known as a communillect (Heffernan 1984)—developed from the interaction of all of these languages on the settlement.\(^6\) So, although the pattern of migration that led to the establishment of the place is reflective of an expansive desert genealogy, the active community members share histories. These individuals re-constructed their relations to the country and to each other, developing this shared language along the way. The Luritja language presents a public sense of homogeneity, although many of its speakers are still polyglots they choose to speak this language. Luritja is a socio-political construction incorporating not only the successors, but the few remaining original inhabitants and those who are descended from country elsewhere. The language acts then to include rather than exclude, operating on the basis of settlement history.\(^7\) The conceptualisation of the contemporary community country is based on both sentimental and political processes. It is clear that these two processes are tied to the concept of reterritorialisation, which draws on the non-competitive and inclusive aspects of this settlement process. Yet, certain elements of this reterritorialisation may appear more politically overt than other elements as they involve processes of succession alluded to earlier. The strategy of claiming pre-contact credentials to affiliation with the Amunturrngu area is only practiced actively by one individual, Nampitjinpa, with the support of a significant number of elderly community members.\(^8\) Instead, the predominant practice of affiliation derives from post-contact historical association with the area of what is now the community, from the time when it was a stock camp in the 1940s and 1950s. Processes of succession were adopted by the northern, neighbouring, Ngaliya Warlpiri. This process was possible through the ‘extension and elaboration of their own primary Dreaming associations on the basis of existing mythological ‘Law lines’ in the area’ (Stanton 1983: 160). Stanton observed this pattern of succession for the Western Australia desert community of Mount Margaret. As a result of this commensurate system of affiliation, land relations appear relatively immutable as the Ngaliya Warlpiri have become the primary successors to the community country, via the company relationship concept.\(^9\) Nonetheless, the focus here is on elaborating those core features of association that all community members have in common, the shared aspects of community living that sustain the community as a whole through the principles of religious egalitarianism, which will be clarified further below.

The definition of Amunturrngu community membership derives from a number of key attributes or composite of characteristics. The fostering of these attributes enables community members a right of access to both material and spiritual resources, or at least a right to negotiate over these resources. Furthermore, the settled nature of the community’s environment has encouraged the elaboration and reconfiguration of ties that bind community members. These ties also extend heavily to the reliance on classificatory kin.

Community members, then, tend to have the following set of criteria in common. They include: history, through parents of long-term residence and continued chosen residence; conception and/or birth of children on the community or neighbouring outstations;
death/burial of parents in the area or neighbouring communities of Mt Liebig, Haasts Bluff and Papunya; active knowledge of Tjukurrpa relevant to the land on which the community lies and willingness to maintain this knowledge; consistently representing the community in regional ceremony (women’s law and culture meetings) and sports (at carnivals); and maintaining actively that Luritja is the community language and speaking that language. Thus, the meanings of the notion of ‘community country’ and how it operates to effectively incorporate members to ‘look after’ their country of chosen residence is manifested in a set of relational experiences and practices.

This process of identification with the land on which the community resides, highlights the fact that the community is embodied in both place and people. It is the very specific interaction of the people with the place and with each other that culturally constructs Amunturrngu as a terrain of familiarity and collective belonging (per Fortier 1999).

This issue of an individual’s interaction with land raises the question of ‘where does the identification with country begin?’ How is this richly suggestive Aboriginal English term of ‘country’ arrived at? Here I will sketch the space within which the land is culturalised. Like Myers, I also maintain that the Aboriginal ‘process of identification with country is situated in personal experience’ (1986: 137).

Community country

I suggest that, because identification with country is derived from personal experience, this is interpreted through and situated within the cultural syntax of analogy. Jackson points out that, if there is any mode of thought common to all people, in all societies, at all periods of history, it is analogy (1989: 171). In considering the sentiment attached to the land it seems that ‘there must be visible marks for the invisible analogies’ (Foucault 1970: 26). In Luritja cosmology there is no blank landscape waiting to be culturally brought into existence, there is no Beginning. The landscape is a text on which to inscribe meaning, but, this meaning is itself emergent through ‘natural’ signs and omens. This allows room for re-interpretation, and for culturally knowledgable elucidation of these signs. People recognise themselves in the landscape, yet these recognitions are pre-existing in the contours and textures of the topography.

I am interested here in attempting to decode or translate certain of the structures—founded upon the Tjukurrpa (Dreaming)—that sustain and guide this imaginative process of experiencing the land. To do this I will first consider Casey’s pertinent essay ‘How To Get From Space To Place...’ (1996). Casey critiques Myers’ (1986), and Weiner’s (1991) interpretations of the culturalising of space. He points out that they have both assumed that the environment is originally blank,

… that to begin with there is some empty and innocent spatial thread, waiting as it were, for cultural configurations to render it placeful. But when does this ‘to begin with’ exist? And where is it located? (1996: 14).

Casey observes that Myers’ theoretical project is partly concerned with the process by which space becomes ‘country’. Building on Myers, he asserts that ‘country is the system of significant places as specified by the Dreaming, which represent “a projection into symbolic space of various social processes” ’ (Myers 1991: 47, in Casey 1996: 15). He then states that, ‘for the anthropologist, Space comes first; for the native, Place; and the difference is by no means trivial.’ (1996: 15). However, Casey also notes that Myers states that ‘to the Pintupi, ...a place itself with its multiple features is logically prior or central’
(1991: 59), … [this being] part of the Pintupi habit of mind which looks behind objects to events and sees in objects a sign of something else’ (Myers 1991: 67). Casey then goes on to note that ‘ironically [in the Indigenous view] flatness and, more generally “featurelessness” belong to place to begin with’ (1996: 16). It is upon this featureless world that the Dreaming projected form and, as Myers indicated above, social process.

Thus, although I agree with Casey’s observation that place is prior to space for the Pintupi (and Luritja), this appears to me to be ultimately a somewhat semantic argument. The purpose in considering this complex theoretical debate is rather, to remind us of the dialogical relationship between space and place, as Myers is keenly aware. Place may not be a purely intellectual construct for the Pintupi and Luritja, but the value of a place becomes intensified because of lived experience within it. This lived experience is clearly the most intense at the place where one resides.

It is clear that it is from the landscape, its already formed structures, that the Luritja gain the impetus to imagine it culturally, to make it alive with Tjukurrpa as part of the process of elaborating how and why the topography developed as it did. The land is not a neutral object which can metaphorically be moved aside to reveal ‘something else’ (cf Myers 1986: 67)—namely the Tjukurrpa. Rather, constructing ‘country’ is a configuration requiring the meeting of land as it is and the Luritja imagination as it has structured the land, and continues to, into cultural symbols. If we take this straightforward argument as our central logic we realise that ‘country’ is not only derived from experience but also constructive of place. The place where one resides, in this case, is also the place where Tjukurrpa is immanent. This process can be seen most clearly in the construction of inma kuwarritja (new ritual), to which I will turn too shortly. As the Tjukurrpa is expressed through song, or language, this is the medium that links the land with the Tjukurrpa, through the performer. As Munn states “…the ancestors’ spatiocorporeal or action fields turn into enduring ‘bases’ for the future transient action fields of others’ (1996: 455).

Tjukurrpa, however, as knowledge is not disassociated from other bush knowledge as they become experiences. It can be difficult to demarcate the lived experience of the individual from the Tjukurrpa; which is real and which is myth? The line between the telling of memories of lived events in the bush and events in the Tjukurrpa is often blurred in terms of their ontological status. Furthermore, the repetitious form of story telling, which always links events to places, acts to mythologise—Tjukurrparise—a lived situation.

Activities such as hunting and camping enliven the country, imbuing it with the memories of details of events, minor and significant, that developed a place. By being consumed and used the country becomes embodied. It is as if the country then comes into existence; it is reinvented as it is ‘discovered’ in terms of its resources. A place will become known for what it has offered, for what it has given up. The Tjukurrpa fits into this schema of both using and creating or reinventing the land. This knowing is, in fact, more about consuming or enveloping the land, which makes it become a component of a person’s total self—they are as they experience.

This phenomenon is co-extensive with the creation of inma kuwarritja. An ongoing association with an area of land means that an individual or individuals have a right to imbue it as they have been imbued. The ‘getting’ or creation of inma kuwarritja through dreams operates as a form of reciprocity with the land. As it has given life, life is returned through the actions of ritual. ‘Country’ becomes invested with shared experiences and memories, an issue to which I shall return.
It is this production of the ‘local subject’ through the spatial production of locality (cf. Appadurai 1995) that provides the essence of immutability. The multiple meanings inherent in the word ‘Tjukurrpa’ allows for this apparently changeless structure. These meanings refer to Ancestral beings as well as narrative, song, ritual and nocturnal dreams (see also Dussart 2000). However, before engaging further with this issue of innovation in ritual, the raw material that inspires this local production of meaning will be overviewed through a consideration of the imaginative production of ‘locality’ in concert with the constraints placed upon it.

**The community label**

A ‘symbol of community’ is an ‘essential part of the development of communal affinity’ (Gusfield 1975: 34).

The focus of the local cultural imagination in Amunturrngu is the Amunturrngu Range, which has a cluster of symbolic properties. These properties embody the Tjukurrpa of Watiyawarnu, Tjintitjinturrpa, Warlukurlangu, Mungamunga and Wanampi Pilkati. These Tjukurrpa constitute powerful symbols of locality. The clearest and most evocative symbol of place is the name ‘Amunturrngu’ as it incorporates all of these. Like the term Luritja, the community name suggests the landed nature of the community and its members, as do the names of several community institutions. The community is called Amunturrngu (Mount Liebig) because of its proximity to the geographical feature of the same name. The Council is known by the name of the major Tjukurrpa Watiyawarnu (mulga seed man). Hence, the community is known in administrative terms as the Watiyawarnu Community Government Council. The Women’s Centre (officially known as the Aged Care Centre) is incorporated under the name Animpirrimpi Yututju, which is a conflation of two Tjukurrpa identified primarily as women’s Tjukurrpa and associated with the area of the community. The school is generally called the Tjintitjinturrpa school, this name being again from a major local Tjukurrpa, the willy wagtail bird. Nevertheless, I have consistently found that women tend to conflate the Watiyawarnu and Tjintitjinturrpa Tjukurrpa, giving the entire community a logo, a symbol under the rubric of ‘Amunturrngu Tjukurrpa’.

This sense of the community as signifier of identity becomes manifest, particularly, within inter-community relations, in circumstances where the community competes in events against other communities, such as the annual sports carnivals and ‘women’s law and culture meetings’. In such regional contexts Amunturrngu is ethnocentric. ‘Amunturrngu winnerringu’ (Mount Liebig is the winner) is an often heard enthusiastic statement in many inter-community contexts, particularly during sports carnivals. It is a proclamation that fosters exclusivity and community pride. During the large scale women’s ‘Law and Culture’ meetings, which are held up to three times a year, the sense of provincialism is at its highest, as women actively compete as separate communities. As will be discussed, the tendency is to focus on performing Tjukurrpa that are associated with the country of the community. The sense of competition is overtly fostered by the use of football terminology. Amunturrngu women define themselves as an ‘inma team’ and their practice as ‘training’, while their uniforms are styled on the football uniforms in terms of colour and pattern. ‘Inma competitions’ are also often held at the sports carnivals, occurring alongside the football, softball and spear throwing. Dussart also discusses the ‘yawulyu [women’s ceremony] competitions’ held in Yuendemu as part of the sports
carnival. She indicates that the ‘winners’ were to receive prize money (1988: 152, see also 2000: 91), as also occurred during recent Amunturrngu sports carnivals.

A major yearly event is men’s initiation (continuing for several months) known in this region as ‘Business’. This significant regional event comprises an enormously complex ritual program layered with individual responsibilities and alliances that will be forged and/or maintained with people from other settlements. Yet, even with the major stress of this forum being regional pan-Aboriginal alliances in spiritual and political terms (made more so because of access to vehicles, see Peterson 2000), there is still an emphasis on the community as a political ‘group’. As Myers noted for the Pintupi, who established the new outstation of Yayayi west of Papunya in 1973, they ‘assert[ed] their autonomy with respect to Papunya by organising their own initiation and assembling their own football team’, because through such activity ‘local leaders gain prestige by sustaining a ‘mob’ at their location’ (1986: 165). During this event today, a similar pattern of local leadership prestige has emerged. However, it has done so in relation to settlements that are less contingent (Yayiyai lasted only a few years) and leadership more formal. During the 1995/96 period of Business, the first stage of which was held in Papunya, although there were several communities participating Amunturrngu community members camped together, as they travelled together. When they first arrived and had set up camp on the north western outskirts of the community, a meeting was called by Tjampitjinpa (Store President and Council Vice-President) proclaiming everyone as the ‘Amunturrngu mob!’ before asking them to listen to what he had to say. His identification with the land of Amunturrngu stems principally from patrilateral affiliation with a major Tjukurrpa that created aspects of the Amunturrngu range.

This sense of the community as both situating and labelling an individual or group, depending on the context, has also played an important role in the regional macro-construction of Aboriginality. Although individuals have plural identities that are often context-specific, an enduring identity that has relevance in most contexts is the community name. With the dramatic expansion of Aboriginal social contacts throughout the desert, to be from a community, or settlement, is also to be from a language group (ideologically at least), which dominates and identifies that community, to be from a country (as broad as it may appear), and to be associated with a certain set of historical experiences. The community has emerged as a convenient device for locating self and others.

Community country—community place

The primacy of Aboriginal identification with locality has been an essential component of Australian ethnographic analysis. Much of this analysis has focused on the various and immutable forms of affiliation to land in lineal terms—patrilineal, matrilineal and cognatic. This focus has also thus extended to the individual’s immutable history, which includes, for example, place of birth and/or conception. Inherited, albeit negotiable, pathways to landed affiliation have remained the classical statement of Aboriginal territoriality. Thus locality—defined here as an Indigenous embodiment of place—and territoriality have tended to be conflated.

The notion of reterritorialisation is appropriate here. However, I am not using this term in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), although their employment of this term (and its opposite) has clear implications in geo-political terms. I had initially considered that an aspect of territoriality could be redrawn by inviting a re-reading of affiliations to lived locality in light of the concept that ‘territorialising marks simultaneously develop
into motifs and counterpoints, and reorganise functions and regroup forces’ (1987: 322). However, although I like the resonance that this phrase suggests with my own material Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis is so heavily textual that it flattens the rich contours of ethnography. Rather, I use the term to evoke the processes of succession (‘tenurial migration’; cf. Sutton 1997) as well as the imaginative processes that are involved in long term post-migration residence as including alignment toward the locality of the community. Thus the term, ‘reterritorialisation’, offers a more generous and less hierarchical perspective when considering community member attachment to the community country. As Schieffelin recognised for the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea:

The identity of each longhouse community is not primarily associated with the clan membership of the people who inhabit the [longhouse]. Rather, over a period of time the community becomes bound up with the area it moves about in and comes to be referred to by the name of the locality. Thus for example, lineages of Gasumisi and Wabisi whose communities’ successive longhouses have been located in the vicinity of Bagolo Ridge are called Bagolo people (in Feld 1996: 102).

Amunturrngu community members are likewise recognised as ‘Amunturrngu langurru’ (from Amunturrngu). Because of this association a dual discourse operates for many within this community in terms of land affiliation. This applies for those who hold, or practice responsibility for, loosely, two countries. These countries could be defined as the community country of Amunturrngu and a neighbouring or distant country (or countries) by descent. The majority of my Amunturrngu informants have indicated that their parents’ country is elsewhere or, as they often said, ngayuku ngurra wanna (‘my country [is] far away’). Different levels of responsibility and ontological awareness operate within this dualism. There are broadly two types of responsibility for the area of the community which could be referred to as broadly ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ affiliations (after Peterson et al.1977). However, it is because of the hierarchy that is advocated by the use of these terms that the active processes involved in the secondary forms of affiliation tend to have been accorded less priority.¹⁸

This process of reterritorialisation is evident in the local organisation of the community—in the landed and corporate nature of community membership in relation to the country on which the community is situated. Community members share responsibility for maintaining the body of knowledge and ritual that focuses on the constellation of sites that constitute the Amunturrngu Range as it physically dominates the community. This Range embodies several Tjukurrpa which travel from other neighbouring areas which are today associated with other settlements. Three major Tjukurrpa (although there are numerous others that surround the community) link Amunturrngu with three other settlements particularly; Kintore, Papunya and Yuendumu. For Amunturrngu members there is a core of common ritual associated with these Tjukurrpa that is regularly practiced. Those who practice this ritual have a right, in fact an obligation, to do so, as community members. They, thus, have a legitimate right and responsibility as members of the community group to act as custodians for the community Tjukurrpa. The practice of these ritual responsibilities will be discussed in terms that explore the construction of ‘local subjects’ through the inscription of locality onto bodies (cf. Appadurai 1995).
Religious egalitarianism and the imagination in social life

It is because, as Peterson argued, Dreamings ‘are attached to localities, not to persons or determined groups’ (1972: 13) that localities are constitutive of place and the motivations urging belonging. The cultural bones of the landscape are fleshed out as the social imagination is allowed to act upon it. The void is filled as reterritorialisation is about remembering and repossessing. It is about reinvigorating history, not questioning its given-ness but expanding its possibilities. A key element that enables this process is ritual activity. The ritual responsibilities I will examine here are newly created, and, thus, the general practice of these responsibilities is not dependent on notions of primary and secondary rights. Nevertheless, as will be discussed, they are legitimised through their association with the ‘old’ or original Tjukurrpa. The new ritual (inma kuwarritja) emphasises equality of participation on the basis of community membership, rather than specific pre-existing rights.

As discussed, the history of descent of community members represents a diversity of country affiliations. Some community members have stronger affiliations with the area of the community than others and, as a result, these disparate and hierarchical landed affiliations have the potential to threaten the community, to undermine its unity, consociation and shared ritual responsibilities for the community country. Jackson’s analysis of the (African) Kuranko sheds light on this issue:

Clearly, the meaning of totemic affiliations and myths was not determined by historical events or by the logical demands of any totalising system, but by the exigencies of locality, co-residence, and hospitality. People who settled together in the same place tended to sink their differences and place the past in abeyance, foregrounding common, contemporary interests (1996: 25).

The ‘common contemporary’ interests that are fore-grounded for this community are the shared histories and the shared responsibility toward maintaining the country of the community. A primary means by which landed, religious, commonalities are fore-grounded is in the creation and performance of inma kuwarritja. This form of ritual operates as a discourse on both the autonomy of the community and the rights, and obligations, of community members to maintain the land of the community. The new songs, discovered through dreams, are specific to this land, whereas the yirrititja (old or ‘immutable’) ritual, based on the Watiyawarnu Tjukurrpa for instance, links settlements and therefore reiterates common/shared religious ties between settlements, as well as the continuity of ‘tradition’ that the community is maintaining. The new ritual distinguishes this community from all others, in terms of kudos received from this active traditional form of creativity. The structure of this new ritual is egalitarian allowing equality of access to the spiritual realm of creativity. Potentially competing Indigenous historical narratives (such as personal histories and inherited affiliations to land) are backgrounded, to enable the foregrounding of contemporary narratives that act as community relators. Inma kuwarritja, as new ritual based on ‘traditional’ forms, binds people (women in particular) from disparate countries together, to the country of Amunturrngu.

The new ritual also has internal political implications, as it seeks to transcend pre-ordained structures of land-based inherited patrilineal rights. Ultimately this new ritual may aid second and third generation migrants in succeeding to the land of the community. The migrants’ responsibility to the Tjukurrpa that established the land of the community could be understood as a quasi responsibility. The majority of migrants as community
members do not conform to the land-based moiety system of ownership, and their country through descent is elsewhere.20 This new ritual is inward looking, focusing on the land of long-term residential association, so that the disparate landed associations through genealogical histories do not compete; they are effectively backgrounded. In creating and performing this new ritual the human body, as both the Tjukurrpa receptor and as performer, is situated unambiguously as local. This locality of ‘culture’ also operates as the site of authenticity; the site where ‘tradition’ is made. Tradition is thus located within the community.

The inspiration for this transplanted tradition emerging through the new ritual is the local Tjukurrpa and those desert wanderers—the MungaMunga (elusive ‘mythical’ bush women). In short inma kuwarritja has emerged as a series of signifiers for the traditional imagination. It operates to incorporate those who ‘get it’ directly into the country where they have settled, because as they dream about country (and thereby create songs) they are also dreaming for it and knowing it (see also Wild 1987, Poirier 1992).

The question of how this ritual is legitimised and what qualities the individuals have who access this sphere of imagination has been examined recently at length by Dussart (2000). She analyses ‘how the nocturnal sense of the word [Dream] can be folded into the religious one and to what end’.21 However, Dussart focuses on Dreams that, as she says, fold into the existing ritual and Dreaming repertoire by Warlpiri who do not necessarily have particular skills, although ritually active women tend to dream more than most (2000: 143). The situation in Amunturrngu is different on both counts. In the first instance, ngankari (‘bush doctors’ in Aboriginal English) tended to be the recipients of new ritual—or inma kuwarritja—in Dreams. In fact, one male ngankari in particular, was acknowledged as bearing certain qualities in ‘getting’ (mantjinu) the majority of inma kuwarritja through Dreams.22 Secondly, although in both Yuendemu and Amunturrngu the dreams manifest themselves through Mungmunga, in Yuendemu Dussart indicates that the dream becomes aligned with a particular Dreaming (the major example given is the Emu Dreaming) that is owned—or inherited through the patri-line—by the Dreamer. It thereby becomes aligned with a country and thus with the owners of that country. So, within Yuendemu, it is highly politicised, competitive and hierarchical, being relatively exclusive to the owners and managers of the particular Dreaming. and associated to land which is geographically removed from the place of current residence. As discussed above, a key feature of new ritual in Amunturrngu is its lack of defined association with Tjukurrpa from elsewhere. It is explicitly associated with local land and thus local Tjukurrpa, even though the dreamers do not have inherited rights to their land of residence.

For instance, Tjukurrpa that are celebrated in the inma categorised as ‘yirrititja’ (old) are understood to have created the geographical site of Amunturrngu (Mount Liebig). As discussed previously, these Tjukurra form a cluster of symbolic markers. It is this creation of topographical features that offers a basis for distinguishing between the inma that are categorised as yirrititja and those that are kuwarritja. Inma yirrititja celebrate creational events. Inma kuwarritja celebrate events where other—new—figures interact with the creators. In the case of several verses of the Mungamunga kuwarritja that were ‘gotten’23 two Mungamunga women interact with the Watityawarnu Tjangala (Mulga-seed man). The two women are travelling south towards the women’s museum (storehouse for ritual objects) on the outskirts of the community when they encounter the lone Tjangala. He teaches them part of the Watityawarnu song cycle before continuing on his way toward the range. This interaction of the ‘new’ with the ‘old’ is crucial in both reconfiguring and
consolidating new networks of residents, that are non-kin, and confirming the ritual activity as locally situated and authentic.

Shortly after the first series of inma kuwarritja that I heard was ‘gotten’, the outstation families who were most active in this process moved into the community. They graded an area ‘clean’ and set up camp on the north side of the community. The inma was practiced daily for over a week, from mid afternoon to the early evening, after which community members, both men and women, were invited over to witness the ritual. The women asked me, interestingly enough, to extend the invitation to the President and Vice President of the community, two Tjampitjinpa kirta (owners of the major community Tjukurrpa), along with their elderly Nungurrayi mother. The invitations were also extended to other community members and residents, including the non-Aboriginal community nurse. It appeared that those who attended, particularly the community President and Vice President, thereby sanctioned the new ritual forms.

**Inma kuwarritja as a narrative of forgetting:**

A ‘community of women’

*‘The moment the future becomes the present it is already sinking into the past’* (Dilthey in Bruner 1986: 9).

It has been widely noted, particularly in relation to women’s evidence in land claims, that knowledgable women claimants prefer to define their connections to country through the medium of song and performance, rather than verbally (cf. Payne 1984; Bell 1984-85; Rowell 1983). This fact was strikingly apparent during my research in Amunturrngu as senior women chose to sing, rather than speak, when asked to talk of their history and their Tjukurrpa, which, for the majority of women, relates them to land elsewhere—the land of their descent. Women actively chose to authorise themselves through the local Tjukurrpa, rather than addressing my interests, which often involved queries about their individual histories. So, rather than having my questions answered I was, effectively, sung at. Many of the women were quite explicitly constructing themselves, in terms of their relationship to each other and to me, through the phenomenon of inma kuwarritja. Wild attests to the centrality of the song by observing that ‘there may be songs without myths but not myths without songs’ (Wild 1975: 65, in Dussart 2000: 146). Singing is a practice that actively signifies local authenticity. No doubt—like many anthropologists before me—I was interested in histories of pre-settlement life, and to some degree reconstructing traditional patterns of social organisation. I implicitly focused on narrative, particularly by those who were considered knowledgable and of course elderly. However, it now seems to me that, by focusing on such narratives, one may be at risk of sponsoring the past to the exclusion of the present. I was compelled to listen to the insistence of the song. The song expresses the peoples’ definition of the unit of investigation (cf. Bruner 1986: 9).

The song as meta-narrative looks to the future and is highly representative of the present. This is also a practice that renders anonymous personal history as the collective present is sponsored to the exclusion of the diasporic past. Likewise, the agent of change—as the ‘getter’ of the ritual—is also soon forgotten as the new ritual merges with the old. Within fourteen months the status of the inma that I had recorded as kuwarritja had become yirritjtja. Through the process of ‘forgetting’, or making anonymous, both the originator and the circumstances of origin of the new ritual, change merges with structure to create ‘immutability’ or fact.
The concept of a ‘community of women’ is a logical next step to explore in terms of how this new ritual facilitates the construction of attachment to locality and to each other. My argument draws inspiration from Payne’s assertion that women’s residence influences profoundly their rights to ritual (1984). This is because there is a dialectical relation between performing ritual for sites that one is near to, can see and ‘feel’, and the efficacy of the rite (in both spiritual and political terms). However, my concern here, unlike Payne’s, is not with how a geographically remote set of rights by descent are maintained because of this land/rite equation, but, rather with the associations that are actively fostered between women and their country of residence, as this country is also the country of their relocation. So, rather than concern myself here with women’s relations to disparate ‘countries’ by descent, birth, and so on, I will focus on the country as it is lived upon, and, explore further the reasons why this community country entails ritual responsibilities.

Excluding the wulkumanu (elderly women), all of the ritually active women on the community are immigrants. Payne asserts that residence in the Ernabella region of South Australia today is usually virilocal, that ‘residentially speaking a married woman is usually a relocated one’ (1984: 277). It could be said, in the present case, that the majority of ritually active community members, including men, are immigrants. Women moved to the community at the same time as their husbands. This raises the question of whether women’s ritual rights on this community are gained through the same means as men’s. Is ritual responsibility gendered?

The emphasis of several major ethnographic studies of desert Aboriginal women (eg. Bell 1983, Hamilton 1982 and Dussart 2000) has been on the equivalent means of women’s and men’s affiliation to land; rights are inherited and transmissible from upper generations. Women and men may both inherit rights in land from parents and grandparents. However, an individual will tend to identify primarily with one area, that which is most actively known. It is this activity, the maintenance of ritual responsibility, which can be more difficult for women than men to sustain when the sites of responsibility are far from the place of residence. In many communities in Central Australia, including Amunturrngu, men monopolise vehicles, as they tend to be the ones with the licenses, and their interests set the agenda for vehicle use. It would, also, not necessarily be appropriate for men to drive women to distant sites so they can stage what are usually same sex ceremonies.

Women, therefore, have less opportunity than men to maintain these remote ancestral sites. The annual period of initiation is the key event through which men are able to transmit and therefore maintain inherited, and, for many, non-local, rights. Although, since the early 1990s, women have also been attending large regional ceremonial (‘Law and Culture’) meetings that are of a comparable scale to initiation, the agenda and outcome of these women’s meetings tend toward exclusion rather than inclusion. For example, in relation to ‘men’s business’ Myers emphasises the extensive regional inter-relatedness that is fostered between men at these annual events, the dynamics of which thus tend toward inclusivity (1986: 252). However, these women’s meetings tend to encourage exclusive groups of women through their association with particular settlements. In the region of my knowledge (the communities within the Haasts Bluff Land Trust) women attending are inclined to perform the ceremonies related to the country of their residence, the country of the community. As Tonkinson has noted (1988), this identity in inter-settlement ritual contexts can signal a political identity, although it is never a singular identity. In these contexts politics and culture are deeply entwined, as the community of women
authenticate themselves relationally, based on strength of ‘culture’: their knowledge and performance of the rites that are tangibly embodied at their doorstep.

For instance, as the women from Amunturrngu were preparing for the women’s ‘Law and Culture’ meeting that was to be held at Docker River, Napaltjarri commented that they would have to focus on singing inma kuwarritja because ‘too much Watiyawarnu used by Dolly [Nampitjinpa] mob, Yuendemu mob’. The Tjukurpa of Watiyawarnu travels south to Amunturrngu from the Yuendemu area. Thus, at the previous women’s Law meeting (held in Tennant Creek), both communities joined in singing the Tjukurpa song series together. However, Napaltjarri was alluding to the fact that the ‘hand-over’ point of the verses was not as clearly demarcated as it should have been. In fact, on this earlier occasion, Yuendemu sang the song series all the way to Amunturrngu, thereby usurping the community of Amunturrngu’s right to sing for their own community country. Although it seems that being able to complete long song series may be a desirable technical achievement in its own right, this isn’t the only way it is perceived. Protocol often has to be negotiated to take into account the sensitive politics of competition, otherwise the participating communities could be accused of usurping each others ‘culture’. As Napaltjarri stated, in hindsight, about Yuendumu’s action at the Tennant Creek meeting, ‘They use our culture’27 (see also Merlan 1989, for an analysis of the objectification of ‘culture’).

The emphasis on inma kuwarritja, in the context of such inter-community events, raises the issue of its unique nature. It is distinctive and peculiar to the community who ‘got’ it. Its specific localisation in the community country means that community members are the only authorities on it. By choosing to reveal it to other communities, the community stands alone in the credit received for the creative efforts of its members. Inma kuwarritja operates in a contemporary sense to sanction inter-community rivalry and to authenticate the strength of community ‘tradition’. As Gusfield notes ‘communities might almost be defined as people who see themselves as having a common history and destiny different from others’ (1975: 35).

The classical ethnographic view that men and women are affiliated with land along similar mythological and inheritable pathways does not tell us the methods by which relations to land are gendered. Myers’ definition of ‘one countrymen’ excludes women. He notes that ‘little is known about how Pintupi women ‘hold’ country. But as far as I have been able to determine, the relations of ‘holding’ country that I am describing here are largely matters of concern to initiated men’ (1986: 146). Myers argues that men travel regularly to care for sacred sites and that it is this contact with sites that ‘allows for the regulation of relations among men’ (1986: 147). This point is important, because women have the same need as men to regulate their relations with other women through sites. Yet, as women tend to be more sedentary than men (not necessarily by choice, of course), these political and spiritual relations manifest themselves through the tangible, through what is near and known.

Thus, as the majority of male community members continue with their ritual duties toward sites that are some distance away from their residence, female community members are focusing on the local sites, sites for which they do not need vehicular access—and sites which need to be maintained, nonetheless. They are aided in this maintenance process by the fact that their ritual objects do not convey ownership rights in the same way as do men’s, which pertain to specific sites (Hamilton 1979, Payne 1984). That is to say, women’s objects are more likely to relate to specific sections of a Tjukurpa track, an area, rather than a site. Amunturrngu has been described ritually as ngurra
kutjungka (one country/area). This one area incorporates all of the Tjukurrpa that are manifested by the presence of the Range. As a result, the area is bounded only in name—Amunturrngu—thereby allowing the women the flexibility to extend membership. Likewise, the ritual objects associated by the women with Amunturrngu are not held or kept by any one woman,²⁸ but are housed in the women’s museum on the community.

In fact, the Watiyawarnu Tjukurrpa is kept alive by the community of women.²⁹ I have heard say that there is a men’s version, or ‘inside story’, associated with this Tjukurrpa, although I have never listened to it. Nor, however, have I heard the men singing the open version. It is the women who keep the profile of the Tjukurrpa high locally and in inter-community contexts. Dussart also notes that female ritual leaders of Yuendumu also sustain much of the ritual life on that settlement in terms of regularity of performance, particularly in public inter-cultural contexts (2000: 226). However, this observation is in terms of ritual activity generally, rather than specific locally-sited ritual. The community of ritually active women in Amunturrngu is constructed on the basis of locally inclusive, yet cosmologically expansive, religious opportunities.

Nevertheless, within this forum of relatively equal access to yirrititja (‘old’) Amunturrngu ritual, there can be internal contestation over leadership, over rights of direction and stage management. This is because, as Payne notes, ‘rights gained through residence and knowledge of country may not accord the women the same status as those gained through birth and handed down through the matri- or patri-line’ (1984: 277). So, although all of the ritually active women in the community are immigrants, two women in particular claim greater rights than those accorded other residents. These two women are also community or outstation political leaders.²⁹

This ritual increases the status of the community of women because it is so regularly performed and respected, and because it situates them and others who participate actively within the ontological landscape of the community. The rituals celebrate, primarily, the local Mungamunga Tjukurrpa, an expansive gregarious Tjukurrpa which allows boundless (re)interpretations. This cosmological re-configuring of Tjukurrpa is a profound form of communicating a shared identity: a community of inma women. The inma kuwarritja is so popular that it can’t only be interpreted as a form of ritual expression. An elaboration of its sentiment has to consider it in terms of the construction of a contemporary identity that is transformative through a realignment and subsequent negotiation with situated locality. As Bruner reminds us ‘it is in performance that a society is most articulate and powerful in giving expression to its key cultural symbols, paradigms and narratives’ (1993: 321).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted an exploration of some of the processes whereby Indigenous settlement dwellers construct a sentimental community that is unambiguously local. This engagement with the emotional ties that develop toward residential locality is an attempt to redress the anthropological focus on attachment to inherited, albeit negotiable, affiliations to land. I have argued that the Aboriginal power of imagination (per Stanner 1966: 52) transfers itself to the locality of daily experience and is most clearly articulated and channelled through ritual creativity. By defining an element of community membership—as those who have the right and the obligation to perform ritual related to the land of the community—the issue of ownership and hierarchy was decentred. Thus, allowing a more generous understanding of the means by which immigrants are enabled to affiliate themselves with and embody their locality. A key element to this embodiment and the
construction of local person-hood was examined via the creation *inma kuwarritja* (new ritual). The efficacy of this new ritual derives from its interaction with old or ‘immutable’ ritual, thus situating itself as authentic. The power of the song allows potentially competing historical narratives to be backgrounded and contemporary spiritual and quotidian interaction to be foregrounded.

As participants share in the creative moment, the social construction of memory is renegotiated through a consensual communal forgetting of diasporic countries. As Jackson suggests ‘better to avoid mention of the way allegiances shift. Better to forget defunct identities...or discrepancies between the place you hail from and the place you make home’ (1995: 35). In this way lived experience confounds historical exigencies and identity is reterritorialised as it is relocated within the living landscape.

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**Notes**

2. This activity often focuses on negotiating control of resources, such as housing and vehicles.
3. These two places were settled primarily on the basis of pre-settlement affiliations to the country in the area of the settlement—that is, associations that were established pre-contact, either directly or indirectly, through key figures. Tod-Woenne argues that in the establishment of Docker River ‘re-peopling the land ... involve[d] the substantiation of relatedness of a number of kinds, by virtue of having gained, or the possibility of having claimed, pre-settlement credentials in the vicinity’ (1977: 61).
4. This figure also includes the neighbouring outstations (small family homelands) that are serviced from the community (Warchiker and Mitchell 2002).
5. The term Pintupi Luritja tends only to be used by linguists, rather than speakers of the language. It is so-called because the Pintupi language is the strongest influence in the development of Luritja. The single language term Pintupi (a different Western Desert dialect) is spoken by people to the west of Luritja.
6. This language was originally referred to by linguists as Papunya Luritja—denoting something of its origins (Hansen 1992, Heffernan 1984).
7. See Holcombe (*Oceania* in print) ‘The Politico-Historical Construction of the Luritja and the Concept of Tribe’ for a social analysis of this language.
8. This woman is widely respected as knowledgeable and has an outstation at Amunturrngu spring. However, although a spokesperson on public issues in the community, she tends not to be as pro-active in areas of ritual as other women from outstations. Since the recent death of her spouse she has moved to the neighbouring community of Papunya.
9. Myers offers a useful definition of this Warlpiri concept, comparing it to Pintupi land tenure. ‘Warlpiri describe different groups of the same dreaming-track as having a ‘company
relationship’. Such groups are seen as substitutable, or parallel, groups that can assume each other's responsibilities. Instead of this substitutability of discrete groups, Pintupi stress that individuals of the same Dreaming-track or living nearby—no matter what their sub-sections—have rights because they are all ‘one country’. The Warlpiri link two groups that are at first differentiated, while the Pintupi simply extend ties in one place to a wider social sphere’ (1986 154-155). The Pintupi Luritja system of land tenure has elements of both Warlpiri—hence this adoption of the company relationship practice—and Pintupi forms. The negotiability of rights to land as a feature of Pintupi land tenure is also active in Pintupi Luritja land tenure. Hence, the Pintupi Luritja forms of affiliation to land are derivative of both neighbours.

10. Jackson draws on Foucault’s notion of ‘similitude’, of which analogy is an aspect (1970). Foucault examines the classical analogy between the human animal and ‘the earth it inhabits: his flesh is a glebe, his bones are rocks, his veins great rivers, his bladder is the sea, and his seven principle organs are the metals hidden in the shafts of mines’ (1970: 22). The microcosm corresponds to the macrocosm. Foucault identifies four main forms of similitude, analogy being one of them. These similitudes tell us ‘how the world must fold in upon itself, duplicate itself, reflect itself, or form a chain with itself so that things can resemble one another’ (1970: 25). This early form of knowledge was central to Western culture up to the end of the sixteenth century. ‘It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organised the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them’ (Foucault 1970: 17).

11. The Dreaming is a theory of knowledge. It is the Law (in Aboriginal English) that established the foundations for relations with country, the cosmos and people. Dussart has recently examined this complex epistemology in terms of ‘at least five distinct, albeit interrelated, meanings—meanings that the Warlpiri use in different contexts to evoke distinguishable components of their cosmology’ (2000: 17). Briefly, these can be defined as: the Ancestral Present (the current physical and spiritual shape of the Warlpiri world), as a collective noun for the Ancestral Beings and their essence or powers, the Tjukurrpa as narrative, Tjukurrpa as geo-specific segments forming ritual currency and finally Tjukurrpa as creative nocturnal dream (2000: 17-21).

12. After all, Casey constructed the fullness of his argument on the basis of accessing the ‘Pintupi habit of mind’ through Myers’ ethnography.

13. Tjukurrpa—(The Dreaming) in this sense referring to foundational narratives— are never said to be created by humans. Dreamings were there ‘before’. Yet, they are interactive through their ritualisation and it is this quality of them that is harnessed by inma kuwarritja.

14. On a hunting trip, after we had finished our meal of rumiya (‘sand goanna’), we heard the call of a panpanpalala bird (a species of bell bird). This call is distinctive (its name is onomatopoeic), and the bird is known to be either shy or to ‘hide’. Those who believe the bird hides understand its call as a signal of threat; the bird is a spy, and it is calling to tell the man or kutitji (murderous spirit men, or real men) that there are women nearby. The announcement of this threat alerts me to the realisation that the movement and intent of humans are just some among many, all of them active. The past events and movements of humans across the landscape are not so much conflated with, as potentially mirrored in, Tjukurrpa. The telling of the man/kutitji threat was such that, the first time I heard this response to the bird call, I understood it as a Tjukurrpa. But, the potential threat of kutatja or a man is as much a fact as is Tjukurrpa and, like our trip, will be remembered in years to come.

15. It seems to be a generally joked about rule among non-Aboriginal people that the community who hosts the sports carnival wins the football trophy. This was, in fact, true for three of the four carnivals I attended in 1995/96.

16. I have discussed this elsewhere in more detail (1993, 1997)
This commonly used term is somewhat misleading. Women also participate in some significant elements of the ritual and young women are encouraged to learn their ritual roles and associated Tjukurrpa song cycles.

The process of succession leading to primary rights within this community country will only be complete when the generation of adults who have secondary rights to this country are succeeded by their children. These children only ‘know’ this community country. I have elaborated on these dual responsibilities for country elsewhere (1998). The important point to establish here is that the community country is first and foremost a locality and secondarily a territoriality. It is this fact that has opened up the possibility of reterritorialisation.

Stanner also referred to the ‘Aboriginal power of imagination’ (1966: 52).

This land-based system of ownership operates on the basis of two moieties that are in turn divided into an eight sub-section system; or four in each moiety. Each moiety is in turn categorised as ‘owner’ or ‘manager’ of a place via the sub-section system. Each individual inherits a sub-section as they cycle in pairs from father to son or daughter.

Dussart loosely categorises four distinctions among Dreams. These are premonitional dreams, admonitional dreams or visitations, conceptional and innovative Dreams. These final two can become part of the Law and are of concern here.

Nevertheless, although a skilled man gained access to this ritual realm, this is not a hierarchical process. Rather, he shared the new ritual repertoire with women, and without the women performers and the proactive work of this ‘ritual getters’ wife the new ritual would not have become a core component of local ritual. Dussart also examines the exchange of ceremonial material between Warlpiri women and men. Like myself, she concludes that the notion of a gender dichotomy can not be sustained (2000).

These lyrics were ‘gotten’ in a dream during a period of field research in 1996.

Biological mother in the case of the former, and classificatory mother in the case of the latter. The term kirta refers to a patrilineal relationship, either classificatory or inherited, to country. These Ngaliya Warlpiri men succeeded to particular Amunturrngu Tjukurrpa, the then President to Watiyawarnu and the then Vive-President to Warlukurlangu.

However, on the other hand, Tonkinson emphasises that in these regional contexts ‘the ‘Jigalong mob’ label carried an important message of identity...it also signalled a political identity, defined by residence and a single cache of secret-sacred objects on which certain major rituals were based” (1988: 6).

The communities in this Land Trust include Kintore, Papunya, Haasts Bluff and Amunturrngu.

At the Docker River meeting a particular focus of all concerned was Amunturrngu’s inma kuwarritja, as had been planned and anticipated by the community women. They had been singing it throughout the ten hour car journey to the meeting site. Tjapaltjarri’s (the ngankari) new song series was introduced as the first performance by Amunturrngu, the then President to Watiyawarnu and the then Vive-President to Warlukurlangu.

Later again that evening the women performed it more formally. The following morning Napanangka, from Papunya, visited our camp, stating that she had come as a ‘policeman’ (Aboriginal English for kurtungulu or manager). She chastised Amunturrngu for neglecting the Watiyawarnu Tjukurrpa, stating, nyurrangarriwantingu Watiyawarnu, kuunyi (‘you lot have left behind [your] Tjukurrpa Watiyawarnu, poor thing). With some sense of shame they responded by singing Watiyawarnu there and then, which appeared to be an obligation. Yet, after Napanangka returned to her camp, on the other side of the ceremonial ground, they resumed singing the Mungamunga inma kuwarritja.

This is the case with two of the major Tjukurrpa—Watiyawarnu and Tjintitjinturrpa. However, not necessarily with the new inma where women may make and keep particular ritual items.

While examining the ritual leadership cycle of Warlpiri woman Judy Nampitjinpa, Dussart observes that there is no parallel material of similar scope for the ritual cycle of the male
leader. She suggests that ‘the making of cross-gender parallels of a substantive nature must be granted to future researchers working more extensively with men’ (2000:114). This issue of unequal access to the gendered specifics of ritual strikes at the core of the gender debate in the ritual context. Why is it that such a revelatory text as Dussart’s has been published about women’s ritual, but not about men’s ritual? The same question could have been asked about Bell’s text from 20 years ago. Why is there such an imbalance? There has been no shortage of male anthropologists and ethno-musicologists working with men in this Warlpiri region. In this early period Meggitt (1962) published an account of what would likely be regarded today as ‘closed’ aspects of men’s ritual—specifically initiation—in his now classic text Desert People. Peterson (1969, 1970) and Wild (1984, 1987) published accounts of public male rituals, while Myers (1986) discussed principally political aspects of ritual within his text Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self. There has, thus, not been a singular text devoted to this topic of male ritual in this region.

30. One of these women, Nampitjinpa, was discussed earlier as claiming an inherited affiliation to Amunturrngu. The other woman (recently deceased) Nungurrayi claimed affiliation on the basis of long term residential association from the days of Amunturrngu as stock camp and through marriage to a Ngaliya Warlpiri Tjangala who had succeeded to the Wattiyawarnu Tjukurrpa.

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