

**CONTEMPORARY RITUAL PRACTICE IN AN
ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENT:**

THE WARLPIRI *KURDIJI* CEREMONY

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WARNING: The names of people who have recently died have been included in this thesis. This has been done solely so their contribution to the research can be recognised in the future. Please do not continue reading if any offence may be taken.

Ngajuku kapirdiki.

This thesis is dedicated to Jeannie Nungarrayi Egan. She worked so hard to help me understand the songs and ceremonies discussed in this thesis. It could not possibly have been written without her.

This thesis is comprised of only my original work except where indicated and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used.

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork undertaken in Yuendumu, Central Australia from 2005 to 2008, this thesis is an ethnography of the place of singing and ceremony in the contemporary Warlpiri world. Core to religious life, 'traditional' ceremonies and their associated songlines have always been an important aspect of Warlpiri identity as they link people to their kin, country and Dreamings. Over the last few decades there has been a decline in the learning contexts and opportunities for the performance of many of these ceremonies, such that today most ceremonies do not hold the same relevance. This consideration is set against the backdrop of recent historical and demographic changes consequent on living in large settlements, dependent on welfare payments and store bought food.

The features of Warlpiri songs and ceremonies are outlined as well as the contemporary contexts for the different genres of singing. It is shown how these songs and ceremonies reproduce people's associations with kin, country and Dreamings through their organisation and performance. The *Kurdiji* ceremony, in which both men and women are involved throughout, is presented as a central case study. It is held several times each summer for the purposes of male initiation and is particularly interesting as it is still of vital importance for all generations of Warlpiri people. While the numbers of people who attend individual performances and the scale of these ceremonies is increasing, it is in a vulnerable situation as the central songline that is core to its performance, and which guides the sequence of events for the entire night of its duration, is only known by a small group of older men. Once a domain in which people learned

religious knowledge central to survival, *Kurdiyi* as one of the few ceremonies still held, is now more vital than ever, as through its performance core aspects of Warlpiri identity are maintained, particularly for younger generations.

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Glossary

All spelling, English glosses and translations presented in this thesis accord, where possible, with those in *The Warlpiri –English Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (Laughren et al. 2007). Alternate spellings used in the literature are only used for direct quotes. Special words used only in the songs are not given in this glossary as details of their meanings are discussed in the text and in Appendix 1.

<i>jaja</i>	maternal grandmother (MM) or granduncle (MMB)
<i>Jakamarra</i>	male subsection name
<i>Jampijinpa</i>	male subsection name
<i>Jangala</i>	male subsection name
<i>Japanangka</i>	male subsection name
<i>Japangardi</i>	male subsection name
<i>Japaljarri</i>	male subsection name
<i>Jardiwanpa</i>	name of a conflict resolution ceremony (see Chapter 3 for further details)
<i>jarnamiljarnpa</i>	generation moiety of speaker's parents or children
<i>jarrardili</i>	elder brothers of an initiand, Northern Warlpiri word for <i>rdiliwarnu</i>

<i>jarrawarnu</i>	Australian Magpie-lark, Mudlark; *name for elder brothers of an initiand or the elder siblings of a deceased person
<i>jilkaja</i>	initiation travel, initiation travellers, ‘business mob’
<i>jinpurrrmanu</i>	the undulated sound made by mothers, father’s sisters and mothers-in-law whilst they dance during a <i>Kurdiji</i> ceremony
<i>juka</i>	ritual guardian, initiates brother-in-law (ZH)
<i>jukana</i>	(female) cross cousin (FZD, MBD)
<i>Jukurrpa</i>	Dreaming, dream (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed analysis of the meaning of this word)
<i>Jupurrurla</i>	male subsection term
<i>jujurdu</i>	powerful incantation, evil spell, murderer’s song
<i>Jungarrayi</i>	male subsection term
<i>Kajirri</i>	a ceremony associated with initiation in northern Warlpiri regions (see Chapter 3 for more detail)
<i>kana</i>	digging stick, yam stick
<i>kaninjarra</i>	inside, down, underneath, downwards, way down in
<i>kankarlu</i>	high, up, upper, top, outer

<i>Kankarlu</i>	religious festivals in the past held as part of initiatory rites (see Chapter 3 for more detail)
<i>kardiya</i>	non-Aboriginal, European, white person
<i>karnta</i>	woman
<i>karntakurlangu</i>	belonging to women
<i>karntamipa</i>	exclusively for women
<i>kirda</i>	father, paternal uncle, father's brother, father's sister, paternal aunt (*used in this thesis mainly to refer to the people who have inherited ownership of Dreamings, country and ceremonies from their father's side)
<i>Kirrirdikirrawarnu</i>	initiation ceremony, in the past held on the second night after <i>Kurdiji</i> (see chapter 3 and 4 for further details)
<i>kumunjayi</i>	no-name, taboo, name used for those whose name is the same or similar to that of someone who has recently deceased
<i>Kunapipi</i>	ceremonial name for an initiatory rite held in Arnhem Land (described by Berndt 1951)
<i>Kurakurra</i>	name of a conflict resolution ceremony (see chapter 3 for further details)
<i>Kurdiji</i>	ceremonial name for initiatory rites

<i>kurdungurlu</i>	maternal kin, *used in the thesis mainly to refer to the people who inherit managerial rites to Dreamings, country and ceremonies
<i>kurlarda</i>	spear
<i>kuyukirda</i>	Dreaming of father's mother and their patriline
<i>kuyuwapirra</i>	Dreaming of father's father and their patriline
<i>kuyuwurruru</i>	Dreaming of mother's mother and their patriline
<i>kuyuyarriki</i>	Dreaming of mother's father and their patriline
<i>lampanilyka</i>	maternal uncle, maternal nephew
<i>larr-pakarni</i>	men's chanting for <i>Jardiwanpa</i>
<i>Malamala</i>	sorry business, sorry meeting, bereavement ceremony, mourning rite
<i>Marnakurrawarnu</i>	part of initiation ground, ceremonial name
<i>marrkarilyka</i>	part of initiation ground
<i>milarlpa</i>	sprites, spirit people
<i>Nakamarra</i>	female subsection term

<i>Nangala</i>	female subsection term
<i>Nampijinpa</i>	female subsection term
<i>Napaljarri</i>	female subsection term
<i>Napanangka</i>	female subsection term
<i>Napangardi</i>	female subsection term
<i>Napurrurla</i>	female subsection term
<i>Ngaliya</i>	Southern Warlpiri
<i>Ngajakula</i>	conflict resolution ceremony (see Chapter 3 for further details)
<i>Ngapa Jukurrpa</i>	Rain Dreaming
<i>Ngarlu Jukurrpa</i>	Honey/ Sugarbag Dreaming
<i>ngarnarntarrka</i>	own generation moiety
<i>ngarrmarilyka</i>	cross cousin
<i>ngarmirni</i>	cross cousin (directed at a specific circumstance)
<i>ngunjungunju</i>	white ochre

<i>ngurlu</i>	seeds, grain
<i>Nungarrayi</i>	female subsection term
<i>nyurnukurlangu</i>	a type of <i>yawulyu</i> sung for healing (see Chapter 3 for further details)
<i>pardinjalpa</i>	plant species used to make a strong scented tea which heals colds
<i>parmpa</i>	increase ceremony, men's corroboree, Dreaming rituals
<i>pukurdi</i>	pointed head dress
<i>Purluwanti</i>	name of conflict resolution ceremony, Barn owl (see Chapter 3 for further details)
<i>purlapa</i>	corroboree, dance, ritual performance, song, singing
<i>purrrpu-pakarni</i>	clap (at crotch), beat time on lap, beat rhythm on lap
<i>puru-nyungu</i>	hidden away, concealed, used to refer to initiands when they are secluded in the bush
<i>rdiliwarnu</i>	senior brother, senior sister
<i>wajamirnilyka</i>	uncle-in-law (WMB), great-grandfather (MMF), great-grandchild (ZDDS)
<i>wampana</i>	Spectacled hare wallaby

<i>wapirralyka</i>	Spectacled Hare wallaby
<i>Warawata</i> initiates	ceremony held directly prior to the circumcision of the
<i>Warlukurlangu</i>	Fire Dreaming (literally: fire+belonging)
<i>Warnayaka</i>	Northern Warlpiri
<i>warringiyi</i>	paternal grandfather, paternal grand aunt, father's father, father's father's brother, father's father's sister, grandchild (man's son's child), grandnephew (brother's son's son), grandniece (brother's son's daughter)
<i>warungka</i>	deaf, hard of hearing *senile, *mad, crazy, *ignorant
<i>watikirlangu</i>	belonging to men
<i>watimipa</i>	exclusively for men
<i>wati-rirri-rirri</i>	person in authority, person able to commence ceremonies, ceremonial boss, respected person, leader, boss, knowledgeable (especially for ceremonies) person
<i>wirikirlangu</i>	belonging to business people
<i>wirntimi</i>	dance, hover
<i>Yalpari</i>	particular group of Warlpiri people
<i>yankirri</i>	emu

<i>yarlpurru</i>	co-initiates, age mates, people of same age
<i>yarlpurru-kurlangu</i>	belonging to initiates
<i>yarripiri</i>	python species
<i>yawulyu</i>	women's ritual, women's ceremonies, women's songs, women's ritual performances, women's ritual designs, women's dancing
<i>yilpinji</i>	love songs, love charms, love magic
<i>yinjakurrku</i>	firestick, burning torch
<i>yulpurru</i>	parents and great-grandparents of the initiates
<i>yunparni</i>	sing
<i>yurlpa</i>	red ochre
<i>yurrampi</i>	honey ant

Code to Linguistic Glossing

1SGsubj. = First person singular subject (suffixed to the subject), ‘I’

Erg. = Ergative case (suffixed to the subject of a transitive sentence), added to the subject of a transitive sentence

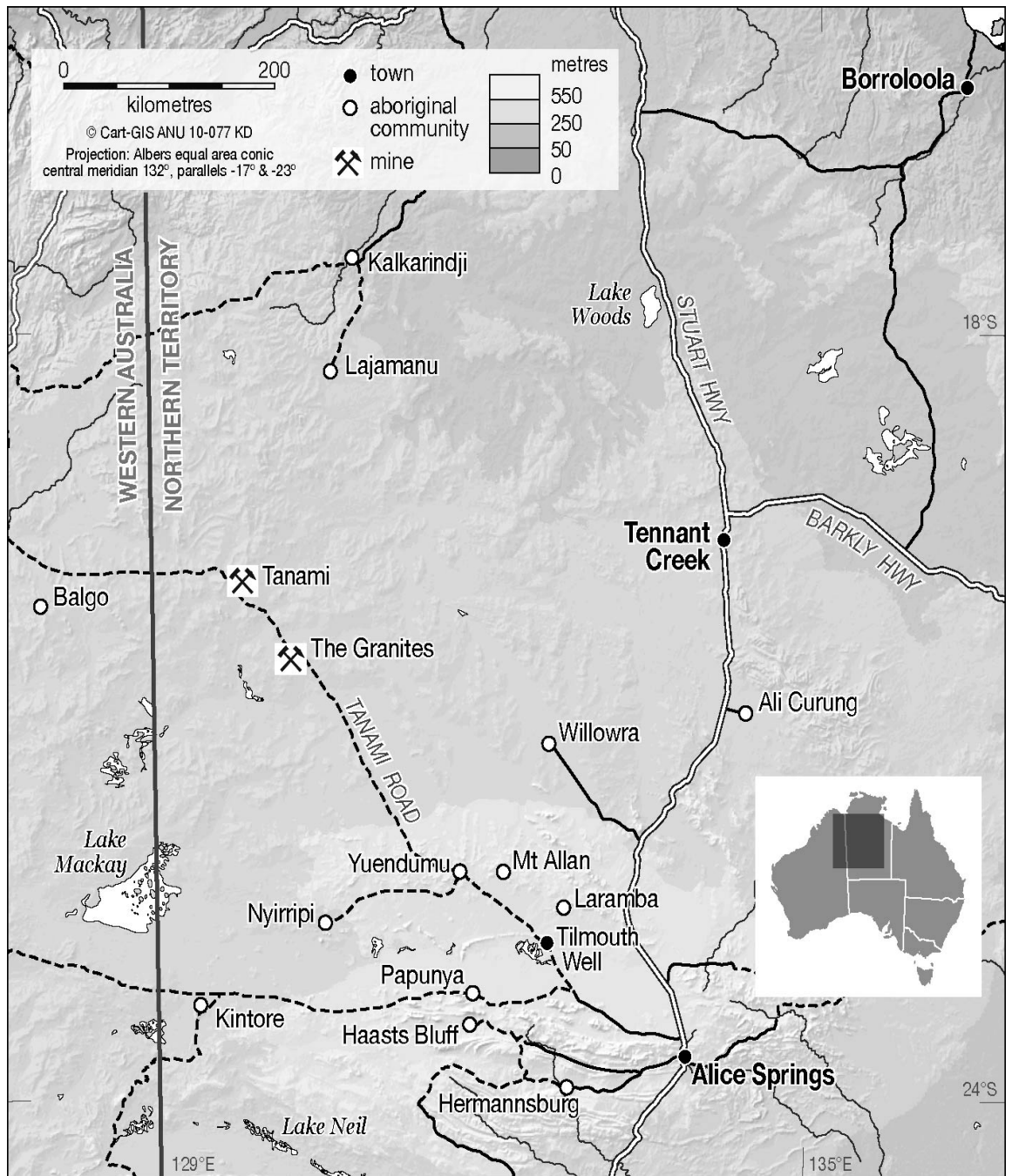
Loc. = Locative case suffix (suffixed to a noun, often a place name in the song texts), at, on, with, in

PAST = past tense (suffixed on a verb)

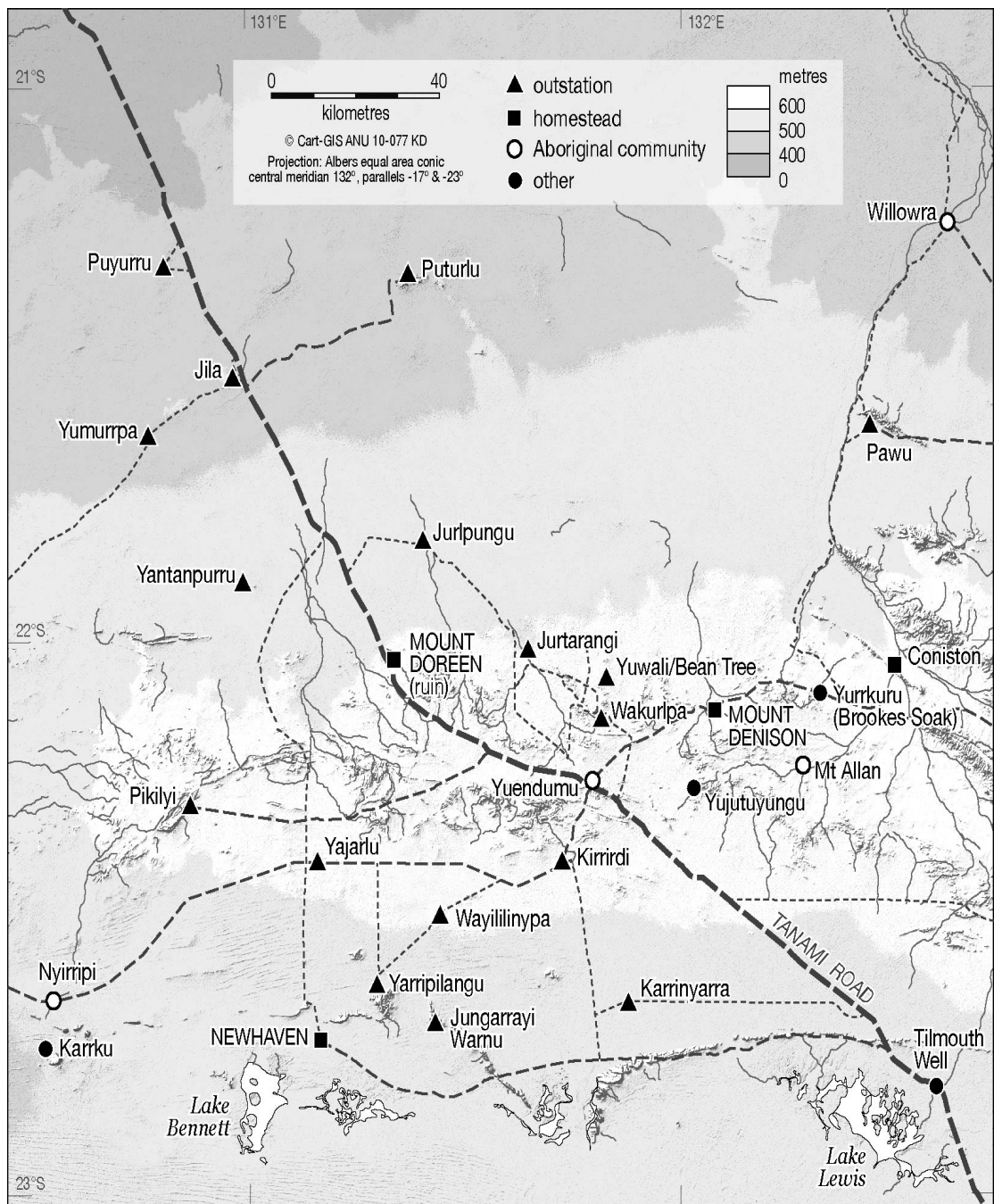
Pres. = Presentative form ‘Here it is’

redup. = reduplication, used when a word is repeated for emphasis¹

¹ Words are also reduplicated to make them a plural. When this is the case I have glossed the reduplication with a plural marker instead.



Map 1. Central Australia



Map 2. Yuendumu and surrounds