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# Travelling ancestral women: connecting Warlpiri people and places through songs

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## 1. Introduction

Beckett & Hercus (2009) present several ‘versions’ of a *mura* track narrative as told by five different senior Aboriginal people from the ‘Corner Country’ area where New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland come together. *Mura* track narratives, as Beckett & Hercus (2009: 2) explain, detail: ‘the travelling of ancestral beings also called *mura* – occasionally human but more often anthropomorphic animal – who form the country and name it as they go’, a concept similar to the Central Australian concept of the Dreaming (*tjukurrpa* in the Western Desert language). They show that the storytellers present individualised but nonetheless connected versions of these narratives that together produce a broader understanding of the story and demonstrate clear interconnections between the different but associated groups of people and their country. Beckett & Hercus (2009: 6) show that:

The *mura* stories and the long lines of song were linked to particular sites, but they also spanned a number of territories and created strong ritual links between groups sometimes quite a distance apart.

This chapter will expand our understanding of these matters through an analysis of songs sung by Warlpiri people in the Tanami Desert region of Central Australia. The *Karntakarnta* (‘travelling women’) song series that is sung for the *Kurdiji* initiation ceremonies in Warlpiri communities follows the journeys of several groups of ancestral women through a series of named places across a broad section of Warlpiri country. These lengthy song series detail the itineraries of these travelling ancestral women and reveal some of the complex interconnections among these different groups of Warlpiri people and other neighbouring Aboriginal groups. When these songs are sung in a ceremonial context they similarly forge relationships among Aboriginal people from geographically diverse regions of central Australia.

## *Kurdiji* ceremonies in Central Australia

*Kurdiji* ceremonies are held in various communities across central Australia every summer and are an essential part of the social maturation of boys as they grow into adult men. These ceremonies and surrounding rites are also key to important social transitions for many other family members including the mothers, fathers and siblings of the initiation candidate, as well as providing opportunities for these boys to form new kinds of relationships with their brother-in-laws and the senior men who are responsible for their circumcision and education in ritual matters during this period.

Unlike many other Warlpiri ceremonies (*yawulyu*, *parnpa*, *purlapa*, *jardiwanpa* amongst others) which are no longer held with the same vigour or frequency as they were in the past, some components of Warlpiri initiatory rites have significantly expanded in recent decades. For example, Peterson (2000) has shown that there has been a marked increase in distances travelled for the *jilikaja* rites in which boys and an accompanying party travel to distant communities to participate in *Kurdiji* ceremonies, this resulting in the formation of relationships with Aboriginal people across a much broader geographic region. Other senior men and the brother-in-law of the initiation candidate, who acts as his guardian during this time, also travel in this party, as do many women who escort their family members and provide food for them throughout the journey. There has also recently been a significant increase in the numbers of initiation candidates who go through this ceremony together, with nowadays up to twenty boys being initiated in one night; in the 1970s three or four was more common (Curran 2011:7)<sup>1</sup>. These changes mean that *Kurdiji* ceremonies are often large-scale affairs incorporating hundreds of people, and involve weeks of travel over very long distances. *Kurdiji* ceremonies and their surrounding rites may have always centrally focused on establishing interconnections and new relationships among Aboriginal people but these contemporary changes mean that they are now established over a much broader section of Central Australia.

### 1.2 Overview

Section 2 provides an overview of the sequence of ritualised events that are held for the *Kurdiji* ceremony. Section 3 discusses the content of the *Karntakarnta* song series central to its performance, showing the interconnections between several groups of travelling ancestral women across Warlpiri country. Section 4 analyses how this song series is sung in ceremonial contexts, providing examples from *Kurdiji* ceremonies held in the communities of Mt Allan and Yuendumu in 2006 and 2007. Section 5 presents some conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson has pointed out that this may be due to demographic changes including an increased birth rate and a drop in infant mortality rates, which have both contributed to a greater number of boys in the age range needing to be initiated each year (see Peterson 2008).

## 2. *Kurdiji* ceremonies: the sequence of ritual events

Meggitt (1966: 281-283) and Wild (1975: 89-103) have both described *Kurdiji* ceremonies as they were held in the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu in the 1950s and 1960s. They give detailed but generalised accounts of the complex sequence of events and the roles of kin in these ceremonies. They also outline the ritual events surrounding *Kankarlu*, an extended initiatory rite which is no longer held in contemporary Warlpiri communities, although there are still a number of senior men alive who have been through all of these rites and can remember them. Moyle (1997: 57-76) has given an account of initiatory rites in the Kukatja community of Balgo, to the north-west of Yuendumu noting that Balgo people 'may choose between two types of initiation, one having connections with Warlbiri ritual and the other being similar to ritual among more southern dialectal groups' (Moyle 1997: 57). He describes in detail both forms of the ritual events, his outline of the Warlpiri '*Kurtitji* way' having many similarities to the ways in which *Kurdiji* is held in Warlpiri communities today. In a more recent and specific account of a *Kurdiji* ceremony held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2007 in Yuendumu, I demonstrate that there have been some contemporary adaptations in the form of this ceremony, despite a relatively high level of conservatism (Curran 2010). Myers (1986) has given an account of the Pintupi versions of these rites, which while not directly similar, demonstrate that there have been aspects of the current *Kurdiji* ceremonies held in Yuendumu which have been borrowed from these southern neighbours. The following brief and generalised description of the *Kurdiji* ceremony outlines the ways in which *Kurdiji* is currently held in various Central Australian communities including Yuendumu, Mt Allan, Lajamanu, Napperby and Papunya.

*Kurdiji* begins when senior men decide that particular boys are sufficiently mature to go through the rites, generally around the age of fourteen or fifteen. These boys are then taken in to the bush for a period where they are cared for by their senior male relatives while preparations are made for the upcoming ceremonial events.

On the day the ceremony begins, men and women gather at a designated ceremonial ground, often having travelled long distances and having set up camps nearby. In the late afternoon, for the beginning of the *Marnakurrawanu* section of the ceremony, women gather on the western side of the ceremonial ground where they sing *yawulyu* songs and paint their chests with designs associated with the Dreamings and country to which the initiation candidate identifies (see Figure 1). His senior female relatives generally lead this singing and take a key role as painters, as well as being painted themselves. The designs that they paint most often are those associated with the woman's husband who has passed down rights to these designs to his son and paternal grandson. Meanwhile the boys' male relatives gather on the eastern side of the ceremonial ground where they sing and dance *parnpa* rites, again connected to the boys' identity, and paint shields with the designs which are associated with their identity. This daytime section of *Marnakurrawanu* is a period of instruction for the fathers of the initiation candidates and is often one of the main ways that they learn how to sing, dance and paint designs associated with the Dreamings to which they have paternally inherited rights.



*Figure 1: Warlpiri women, Peggy Nampijinpa Brown and Ruth Oldfield, painting up and singing yawulyu before a Kurdiji ceremony in 2007. The designs are a section of the Budgerigar Dreaming, which are important to the identity of Peggy's grandson (son's son) who will be initiated during the night. Photo: Georgia Curran.*



*Figure 2: During the late afternoon before the Kurdiji ceremony. The fathers of the initiation candidates paint shields with the Dreaming designs for which their sons have inherited ownership. These shields are later used in the ceremony. Photo: Georgia Curran.*

Prior to sunset, the groups of men and women move to a separate area of the ceremonial ground, the men facing towards the east and the women lying a short distance to their western side pretending to be asleep, such that they hear but do not see the song singing. Once the sun sets, the women are told to 'wake up' and may from there witness the men singing. From sunset to sunrise the next morning, during the all-night phase of *Marnakurrawarnu*, the men sing the *Karntakarnta* song series following the travels of a group of ancestral women from a location in the far west of Warlpiri country towards the east. While the men sing, the women dance in a long north-south line. When the sun rises in the morning, the ceremony finishes abruptly, and the boys emerge through the group of women who then run swiftly back to their camps while the men take the boys into the bush for a period of seclusion.

A day or so later, again before sunset, a smaller ceremony called *Warawata* is held on a ceremonial ground in a more western location. This has in recent decades replaced a more 'traditional' Warlpiri ceremony called *Kirradikirrawarnu* which is no longer frequently held.<sup>2</sup> *Warawata* is based on a ceremony which Warlpiri people participate in when they travel to hold *Kurdiji* with their southern Pintupi and Luritja neighbours. During this ceremony a senior man recounts the important social events of the all-night section of the *Marnakurrawanu* ceremony. Many symbolic changes to Warlpiri relationships have occurred through these ritualised acts. Following this, the men again sing songs from the *Karntakarnta* song series and the women dance, competing with their opposite-generation moiety. The boys then appear for the last time before they are to be circumcised and are then taken to the bush. This is an emotional moment as it is the last time that the mothers see their sons before they are adults. All participating women must run away abruptly back to the centralised community area following this event.

### 3. The travelling ancestral women, *Karntakarnta* song line

During the all-night part of the *Marnakurrawarnu* ceremony a song series is sung which follows the sequence of the travels of a group of ancestral women beginning in the west and heading towards the east. As the ancestral women travelled, they too sang and danced these exact songs in the same way that contemporary Warlpiri people do for *Kurdiji* ceremonies. In ceremony however, this song series is sung by a small group of senior Warlpiri men while women dance over a nine to ten hour period beginning at sunset and finishing the next morning at sunrise.

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<sup>2</sup> *Kirradikirrawanu* is sometimes held when senior men can be present who know the song series required but this is infrequent as it is time-consuming and tiring for this small group of men who have many responsibilities during the ceremonial season.

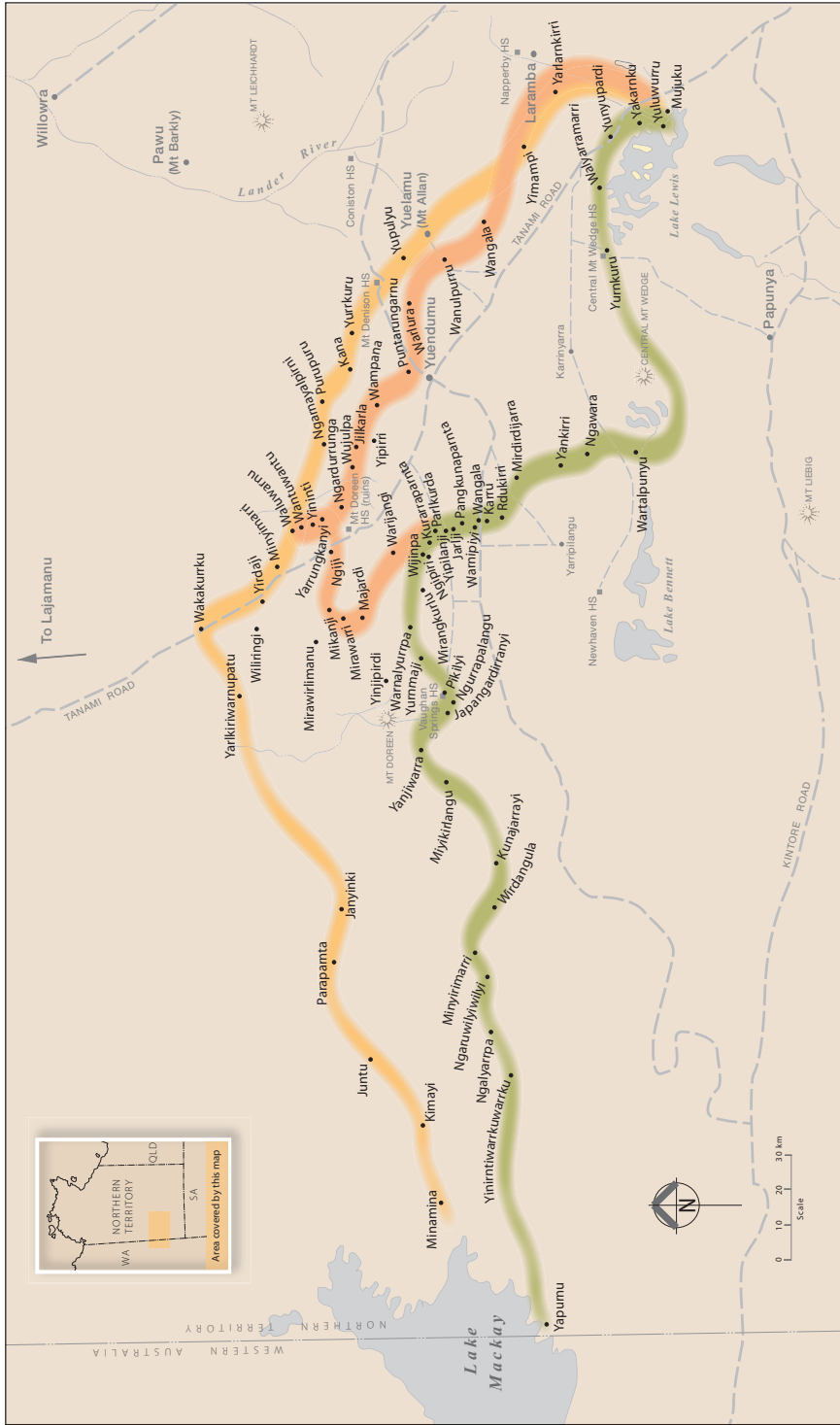
### 3.1 Recording with Thomas Jangala Rice

In June 2006, Thomas Jangala Rice sang the *Karntakarnta* song series for an elicited recording. In this recording session, Rice was focused on singing the songs in the order in which the ancestral women travelled across Warlpiri country. Following this, Rice, his wife Jeannie Nungarrayi Egan (now deceased) and I worked on mapping this sequence of places, transcribing the song words and documenting the associated stories and knowledge. As noted with the individual *mura* storytellers that Hercus recorded in the 1960s (Beckett & Hercus 2009: 14), Rice did not have to adhere to the conventions of singing this song series in a group, e.g., he did not have to negotiate with any other singers around the sequence of songs as he would have to in a *Kurdiji* ceremony within which the order of the songs is continually negotiated and influenced by the ownership rights of the particular senior men who are singing, as well as their collective, rather than individual, memories. Rice was clear in this recording session that this was the version of the *Karntakarnta* song series that is sung for *Kurdiji* ceremonies when they are held in Yuendumu, and that songs associated with the journeys of different groups of ancestral women were sung for the same ceremonies when they were held in other Warlpiri communities.

### 3.2 The eastward journey across Warlpiri country

The journey of the group of ancestral women from the far west to the far east of Warlpiri country is in many ways symbolic of the journey of the initiands as they move from being children who spend their days with their mothers in the world of Warlpiri women, to people who are beginning to mix more often with adult men. The symbolism of the west being associated with women and east associated with men is evident in many aspects of Warlpiri lives (see, e.g., Musharbash 2008).

The journey begins at a large salt lake named *Yapurnu* where the group of travelling women emerge out of the ground to begin their travels through the sandhill country of the central-western part of the Northern Territory. The more southern line on the map (opposite) marks the itinerary of places along this journey.



Two groups of ancestral women travel eastwards across Warlpiri country branching off on different but interlinking journeys. Cartographer: Brenda Thornley.

Many Central Australian songs series are ordered by a sequence of associated named places. Knowledgeable senior Warlpiri people can identify the places for each song as they are evoked in the song text and rhythm.

Example (1) demonstrates how place names are directly referred to in a song text. The use of a locative case suffix on the place name *Yapurnu* would clearly indicate that this was a place name to a Warlpiri speaker.

- (1) *Yapurnu-rla juturu nyina*  
 place-LOC still sit  
 Sitting still at Yapurnu

*Walya-ngka juturu nyina*  
 ground-LOC still sit  
 Sitting still on the ground

In some songs, places are not referred to in this direct way but an account of the Dreaming events that occurred there instead evokes the place. Example (2) describes a swarm of witchetty grubs moving around on the soft grass near a large rock. For a knowledgeable Warlpiri person, this evokes an image of the place *Kunajarrayi* through which the ancestral women travelled.

- (2) *Kalpalpirla rarra-wapa*  
 native.lemon.grass-LOC swarm  
 Swarming in the soft grass

*Yati-ngka-na rarra-wapa*  
 tree.root-LOC-NA<sup>3</sup> swarm  
 Swarming in the tree roots

Yet another way in which places are evoked in song, is through the description of features of the landscape that were formed as the ancestral women travelled. Example (3) describes how a groups of snakes (who have transitioned from their form as witchetty grubs, as is seen in example (2)) move around over and over again in a circle forming the hole in the rock at *Kunajarrayi*.

- (3) *Warnampa warna pirrirdi-japa*  
 snake snake moving around in circles  
 The snakes are moving around in a circle

*Warnampa warna jarrirdi-japa*  
 snake snake turning into  
 The snakes are transforming

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<sup>3</sup> The additional of the semantically empty -NA suffix ensures the song has the correct number of syllables for its rhythm constraints

Places with a specific landscape are also depicted in songs. Example (4) depicts a large claypan at a place named *Miyikirlangu* [literally, food-belonging]. As the ancestral women travelled, this place was overflowing with fresh water, forming a reflection of the sky. It was subsequently abundant with bush foods which can be seen in the cracks in the ground indicating that there are lots of yams growing beneath the surface.

(4) *Yalkiri-ra*      *pawala*      *pawala*  
 sky                  cracked ground cracked ground  
 The sky is only the cracked ground

*Yalkiri-ja*      *wirri*      *jawala*<sup>4</sup>  
 sky                  running water cracked ground  
 The sky is only the running water.

Rice also pointed out that some of the songs in this series were ‘travelling songs’ (see Curran 2013) in that they do not denote a particular place but rather the tract of country that the ancestral women travelled through on their journey. Example (5) is sung as the ancestral women travel through country dense with mulga trees and is repeated at other points further into the song series when they travel through similar country with this vegetation.

(5) *Lardiji*    *lanja*                      *kuruku*      *kurrku*  
 mulga    thickly.grouped    in one place    heaped together  
 A thick group of mulga trees together

*Rdalyaranga*    *larra-nya*<sup>5</sup>  
 dry.firewood    broken-PRESENT.  
 There are the broken up bits of dry firewood

Other ‘travelling songs’, evoke the ‘travelling’ dance style of the ancestral women, which is performed by Warlpiri women in *Kurdiji* ceremonies. Example (6) denotes the way the women dance, shuffling forward with flattened feet to create a deep track with raised mounds on either side.

(6) *Jurnpu-rla*                      *rulawama*  
 mound.of.dirt-LOC      shuffling.dance.style  
 Dancing, on the mounds of dirt.

*Parlanji*      *wirriwirri*  
 mound      deep.track  
 Mounds of soil deep tracks

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<sup>4</sup> *Jawala* is likely a play on *pawala*, both referring to the cracked ground.

<sup>5</sup> The *-nya* presentative suffix, ‘there/here it is’, is commonly used in many genres of Warlpiri songs.

As this group of ancestral women travelled they also encountered other Dreaming ancestors who were making their own independent journeys. Some of these ancestors join the women for a section of their journey, such as the two kangaroos in example (7) when they meet up with the women at the rockhole at *Yanjiwarra*.

- (7) *Yanjiwarrarra rdaku*  
 flat.rock            hole  
 There is a hole (in the flat rock) at *Yanjiwarra*
- Yanjata            patarrpala*  
 kangaroo           stretch.stiff.limbs  
 The kangaroos are stretching their limbs.

Other Dreaming ancestors are simply sung about as they pass by, as are the Major Mitchell cockatoos in song 8.

- (8) *Wujuju            wangka-ja*  
 complaining      call.out-PAST  
 Called out, complaining
- Yati-nganakarrarra*  
 Hole in tree-nest

### 3.3 Interconnections to songlines from northern Warlpiri

Rice's recording of the *Karntakarnta* song series is a sequenced version of the journey of the travelling ancestral women from *Yapurnu* in the far west of Warlpiri country. The discussion above shows how the places were created along this journey, forming the itinerary that is followed in the ceremonial song. By integrating the travels of other ancestral beings, this journey is connected to that of other Dreamings and countries that are significant for Warlpiri people. Rice emphasised that it was this journey that was followed for the songs that were sung for *Kurdiji* when it is held in Yuendumu, whereas in the Lajamanu community a different song series is sung which begins at *Minamina*, in the northern part of Lake Mackay (see the more northern line on the map on p409). While the *Kurdiji* ceremony is held in Lajamanu with the same ritualised sequence of events (as described in Section 2), the senior men sing a different song series during the all-night section of *Marnakurrawanu*<sup>6</sup>.

The southern *Karntakarnta* song series sung for *Kurdiji* ceremonies in Yuendumu is owned by the Japaljarri/Jungarrayi semi-moiety, whereas the *Minamina* song series is owned by the opposing Japangardi/Japanangka semi-moiety. These two

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<sup>6</sup> Counterparts have also been shown to exist with another group of Warlpiri ceremonies, *Jardiwanpa*, *Ngajakula*, *Puluwanti* and *Kurakurra* all being performed identically but centred on different Dreamings which are owned by different family groups. Hence the song series sung for these ceremonies are quite different (see Dussart 2000; Gallagher et al. 2014; Peterson 1970).

song series are associated with land in a way that adheres to traditional divisions of territory for Warlpiri people (see Dussart 2000 for a discussion of how the houses in the community of Yuendumu were set out with similar patterns in the 1980s). The community-based patterns in which these song series are sung for *Kurdiji* ceremonies are also linked to these pre-settlement geographical divisions.

The ancestral women from *Minamina* begin a different journey across a more northern part of Warlpiri country, but similarly move through a series of named places which are evoked using the same linguistic and musical techniques outlined above. At *Waluwarnu*, along the *Minamina* song series, a separate line of travelling women branch off from the original group to travel down through the country surrounding the Mt Theo area, and eventually meet up with the group of women travelling from *Yapurnu* with whom they continue travelling eastwards. The unification of these different groups of ancestral women reveals some of the interconnections among Warlpiri people as evidenced in these songs.

### 3.4 Joining together with Anmatyerr country and people

Most Warlpiri song series do not finish at a particular place but are passed on to another group (see, e.g., Gallagher et al. 2014). The *Karntakarnta* and *Minamina* song series similarly are passed on to their Anmatyerr eastern neighbours. In example (9) the songs depict a distinctly Anmatyerr dance style in which the women interlink their fingers as they dance.

- (9) *Walarrakuraku wirnpirila*  
 soft.sand low.shaking.dance  
 Shaking down low (dance) in the soft sand  
*Wakumintirrirla wirnpirila*  
 fingers.interlinked low.shaking.dance  
 Shaking down low (dance) with fingers interlinked.

Some songs are said by the singers to be ‘versions’ of the same song, just sung in an Anmatyerr way. At the end of the *Kurdiji* ceremony, as the sun rises marking the conclusion of an exhausting night of singing, two different versions are sung of a song which ‘makes the sun rise’ and hence assists in drawing the ceremony to a finish. For both examples (10) and (11), the women dance clicking their fingers towards the eastern sky where the sun will rise. The Warlpiri version in example (10) uses very literal language to express this desire.

- (10) *Wurrumpu pantirni-nya*  
 hidden poke-PRES  
 There it is hidden and poking up  
*Ngarnampu pantirninya*  
 desired.one poke-PRES  
 There it is, (that which is) desired and poking up.

The Anmatyerr version of this song, given in example (11) (using Warlpiri spelling conventions) is however, quite figurative in its language, using the image of a kingfisher bird coming out of its burrow and revealing its bright yellow feathers, in a similar way to the sun revealing itself as it becomes bright over the horizon.

- (11) *Mangakijakiji-rla*      *larnpirripirri*  
 burrow-LOC                  kingfisher  
 The kingfisher in the burrow  
*Ma-ngapantipanti-rla*  
 ? – burrowing-LOC  
 Burrowing, shooting up

## 4. Ceremonial contexts

The discussion above emphasises that the different song series that are sung for *Kurdiji* ceremonies are determined by the location of the host community rather than by other factors such as the identities of particular initiation candidates or singers who are present for the ceremony. The songs sung within the smaller *parnpa* and *yawulyu* ceremonies that are held in the late afternoon as part of the *Marnakurrawanu* ceremony, differ in that they are directly linked with the particular paternally-inherited Dreamings of the initiation candidates.

The contingencies of people's daily lives and political issues have a large effect on the community from which the initiation candidates are taken. Hence, vital new relationships between Warlpiri families and places are continually being forged. Boys from Yuendumu often are taken to Lajamanu to go through the *Kurdiji* rites, and are thereby initiated in a ceremony which links them to more northerly Warlpiri groups. Similarly, in the southern section of Warlpiri country, boys often travel to the nearby community of Mt Allan to be initiated, creating further relationships to Anmatyerr families. The social contingencies of individual lives and community events have an important impact on how and when *Kurdiji* ceremonies are held, where boys are sent for these ceremonies, and the kinds of relationships established as a result of them.

### 4.1 Social context

When I first began my research in late 2005, *Kurdiji* had not been held in Yuendumu for several years. This was mostly due to an intense feud between two of the main families which made it impossible to hold an intercommunity ceremony. When boys were of the age where they needed to go through these rites, they were being sent to other communities so that this could peacefully occur. Their families would follow, moving to the host community for several weeks. Senior men, who sing the songs, would also travel to these communities to assist with the singing and facilitate the different parts of the *Kurdiji* ceremony.

During the summer of 2006, boys from Yuendumu had travelled to Lajamanu, Papunya, Napperby, Willowra and Mt Allan among other Central Australia communities, to go through *Kurdiji* ceremonies and surrounding rites.

## 4.2 Mt Allan, January 2006

In January 2006, *Kurdiji* was held three times at Mt Allan community (2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> January). On each occasion up to twenty boys were initiated, so they were large scale affairs involving hundreds of people as their families had also travelled to participate. As *Kurdiji* had not been held in Yuendumu for several years there was a backlog of boys of this age group, many of whom were travelling to Mt Allan to be initiated alongside the local boys. Three ceremonies were held in quick succession, only a few days apart, with just enough time between each to ‘catch’ the boys for the next ceremony, undergo preparations in the bush and complete the *Marnakurrawanu* and *Warawata* ceremonies. Most of the families who had travelled to attend these ceremonies stayed in Mt Allan for the duration, camping near the ceremony ground in a large group. As these three ceremonies occurred in such close succession, a group of boys from all of them went for a period of education in the bush and returned together later in the following month. Senior Warlpiri and Anmatyerr men accompanied them during this period.

The songs sung during the all-night part of these ceremonies followed a section of the *Karntakarnta* song line. As Mt Allan is a predominantly Anmatyerr community, the beginning point on each occasion was a song associated with the salt lake, *Yuluwurru*, which is located in the far east of Warlpiri country (see map p409). Rice explained that this song line became Anmatyerr, rather than Warlpiri, in its identification at this place. A large group of Warlpiri boys was therefore initiated with Anmatyerr songs and formed important social connections to the Anmatyerr boys who were also being initiated that night. During this ceremony, marriage alliances between Anmatyerr and Warlpiri families were formed, which, despite not eventuating often in today’s world, still provide ceremonial links between the two groups.

## 4.3 Mt Allan, January 2007

In early January 2007, a group of nineteen boys was caught and a *Kurdiji* ceremony was held in Mt Allan, again in a large scale affair with hundreds of family members in attendance. Despite the near resolution of the family feud that had plagued Yuendumu in preceding years, the senior men of Mt Allan were becoming impatient with the lack of organisation for a *Kurdiji* ceremony to be held in Yuendumu. Five or six boys were, as a result, ‘caught’ and taken to Mt Allan to be initiated in the Anmatyerr version of the ceremony similar to that held the year before. This suggests that there is a shared responsibility among senior men across the Central Desert to ensure that all boys are appropriately initiated, regardless of community affiliation or family ties.

## 4.4 Yuendumu, January and February 2007

The ceremony in Mt Allan did, however, prompt the senior men of Yuendumu to quickly organise a *Kurdiji* ceremony to be held in their home community in the coming days. Over the preceding year, the *Warlpiri Songlines* project (2005-2007) had led to many recordings of different song genres by people in Yuendumu. Recording cultural heritage was on many people's minds and hence it was seen as a priority that this ceremony be recorded from beginning to end, especially the Yuendumu specific version of it. Due to changes in traditional means of knowledge transmission, many songs are no longer being learned by younger generations. Recordings were thus being seen as an important way of preserving this knowledge and potentially reviving it in some way. As this was the first *Kurdiji* ceremony that had been held in Yuendumu for many years, there was also a marked sense of nostalgia. Similar to the ceremonies in Mt Allan, and due to the backlog of boys needing to be initiated, this was again a very large ceremony with twenty boys being initiated at once.

A week later, another much smaller *Kurdiji* ceremony was held in Yuendumu. Senior men had wanted to 'catch' a particular boy for the January ceremony but his mother had been unable to attend as she required kidney dialysis which was only available in Alice Springs at the time. She had finally managed to make her way to Yuendumu for a couple of days so the senior men had quickly organised for another all-night ceremony to be held while she was there. As it would have been inappropriate for him to be initiated on his own, they 'caught' two more boys to go through this ceremony with him. Personal contingencies such as these have an enormous effect of the social relationships forged during this ceremony. Rather than being included in the large scale ceremony in January, in which relationships and family alliances would have formed with twenty other families, in this much smaller ceremony alliances were only made between three families.

The songs recorded at these two ceremonies closely matched the elicited recording that Rice had made earlier in the year, with a few crucial differences. The sequence of places was followed quite meticulously, being identical to the sequence followed by Rice in June 2006. However, the songs were sung at much greater length to fill the all-night period of singing. The main way in which the time was extended was by singing the 'travelling' songs outlined in 3.2 for extended periods, interspersed with discussion among the singers concerning the overall sequence. The first three hours of these ceremonies involved the men singing the entire sequence from *Yapurnu* in the far west up until *Yuluwurru* in the far east. The remaining six hours consisted of songs which encircled *Yuluwurru* over and over again, including songs linked to the Anmatyerr neighbours to the east.

## 5. Conclusions

Whatever the situation was in pre-settlement days, it is clearly evident that over the past few decades, the location of the host community has come to determine the 'section' of the *Karntakarnta* song series that is sung for a particular *Kurdiji* ceremony. Warlpiri people travel widely across Central Australia during this ceremonial season and often take their own boys afar for initiation. For these reasons they often participate in *Kurdiji* ceremonies in which they sing songs connected to different geographical locations. In this way, alliances are formed with other Warlpiri groups, such as the Lajamanu Warlpiri in the north, and other Aboriginal groups such as the eastern Anmatyerr. The accounts of *Kurdiji* ceremonies above as they were held in 2006 and 2007 in Yuendumu and Mt Allan communities demonstrate that ceremonies involved many groups of Aboriginal people from various communities and, through this joint participation, important social connections are formed and upheld. Beckett & Hercus (2009:6) explain with respect to the links amongst various *mura* track narratives that:

Perhaps this mixing was a response to depopulation, but it may always have been this way – with different 'mobs' participating in one another's ceremonies, and sometimes initiating one another's boys according to their own distinctive rites. Singing the *mura* was quintessentially an inter-tribal activity, which at least notionally linked peoples over considerable distances.

In the Tanami Desert region of Central Australia, where *Kurdiji* ceremonies are still held frequently, the intermixing of different Aboriginal groups and the resulting relationships that are formed, appear to be a crucial aspect for the continuation and expansion of these ceremonies in the contemporary world.

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