

‘Waiting for Jardiwampa’: The history and politics of Warlpiri fire ceremonies for over one hundred years¹

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ABSTRACT

Warlpiri fire ceremonies, including Jardiwampa, have been documented in various ethnographies and films for over one hundred years. Focused on the documented history of these rituals in Yuendumu, and through ethnographic observations from recent decades, I analyse the place of these rituals in contemporary Warlpiri lives. I demonstrate that there have been post-settlement shifts in ritual purpose that have come about due to sedentarisation and the increased connections that Warlpiri people have to a broader world. Many films have been made of these ceremonies, resulting in fixed representations of otherwise emergent practices. This has impacted the ways in which these rituals can be held today. I show how Warlpiri people have had to creatively re-negotiate a space for Jardiwampa and similar fire ceremonies.

Key words: Warlpiri fire ceremonies, Indigenous ritual, Aboriginal media, continuity and change, modernity

'*Jardiwanpa*'s going to be on soon' was the response I was most often greeted with when I first arrived in Yuendumu in late 2005 to begin a research project on Warlpiri songs and ceremonies. So often was it mentioned that I began to anticipate this spectacular ceremony with excitement having read about it in various Central Australian ethnographies and having seen some of its glory captured in several films. Over the next year, however, the intensity of social life in Yuendumu continually interrupted plans to hold this ceremony. Daily affairs left little room for ceremonial business with necessary participation of the settlement's residents in the many institutions on which Yuendumu is nowadays centred, these revolving around a westernised work day and the comings and goings of the non-Warlpiri co-ordinators. On top of this there were constant requirements to travel for funeral ceremonies (referred to from here as 'Sorry') and for pan-Aboriginal church meetings in far-flung places. Most of all the contingencies of daily life interrupted efforts to bring everyone together and prepare for this grand-scale ceremony.

In this article, I address the history of documentation of the *Jardiwanpa* ceremony over a period of just over a hundred years— a spectacular ceremony which has come through its many media representations to represent and showcase Warlpiri ritual life to a broader world. Filmed many times from both 'insider' and 'outside' perspectives and the subject of much ethnographic writing, *Jardiwanpa* is held in high esteem by Warlpiri residents of settlements like Yuendumu, the locational centre of this article. The ceremony, has not been performed since the 1990s, despite strong communal desires to do so and regular enthusiastic discussion and preparation. Despite this, Warlpiri people have developed many creative ways to continue the reproduction of some aspects of

this ceremonial knowledge in the contemporary world. In discussing rituals held in the 1990s, Françoise Dussart (2004: 254) has shown that:

The public ceremonies currently performed at Yuendumu resemble, at least on a superficial level... [those] conducted before sedentarisation in the 1940s.... but the rationale for these performances has undergone significant change – change that serves to highlight indigenous response to non-indigenous domination.

Following from this observation, and with consideration to the ethnographic literature, I suggest that the purpose for holding *Jardiwanpa* has shifted in response to the various changes to Warlpiri lives that have occurred in the post-settlement era. Against the significant ethnographic and media attention that *Jardiwanpa* and counterpart ceremonies have received, and my own ethnographic observations, I explore shifts in ceremonial purpose and the impact of the extensive history of media representations.

To begin, I provide a historical overview of ethnographic documentation of Central Australian conflict resolution ceremonies, including several films made in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. I then outline the preparations for and an eventual attempt to hold *Jardiwanpa* in Yuendumu in 2006. From this I draw out an analysis which initially examines more generally the post-settlement changes to Warlpiri ceremonies. Since the establishment of the settlement, but especially since the 1970s, Yuendumu has increasingly become a world dominated by the institutionalised structure of Warlpiri owned, but *kardiya* run organisations². Within this context, I show that the ethnographic documentation and the filmed versions of the *Jardiwanpa* ceremony have resulted in a reified version of Warlpiri-ness that is imagined through this ‘traditional’ ceremony.

HISTORY OF DOCUMENTATION OF WARLPIRI FIRE CEREMONIES

In *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904), Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen describe a Warumungu ceremony, *Ngathaguru* held in the region near to present day Tennant Creek. With evident similarities to the Warlpiri *Jardiwanpa* and identically performed counterpart ceremony *Ngajakula*, it has been posited that these are similar, if not the same ceremony, that has dispersed across a broad area of Central Australia (Peterson 1970; Langton 1993: 76)³. Dussart also draws on this noting that *Jardiwanpa*'s ownership "...has its roots in an exchange event between Warlpiri, Warrumungu, and Mudbura, one which significantly predates settlement" (Dussart 2000: 32). She goes on to emphasise that:

Although the Warlpiri already had Dreamings and ceremonies associated with the lands implicated in the *Jardiwanpa*, that specific ceremony had not been part of the Warlpiri ritual repertoire until it was performed by the Mudbura. When it was exchanged, ownership of the ceremony was bestowed both on the Warlpiri participants in that exchange and on all the Warlpiri already linked by pre-existing ties to Dreaming tracks implicated in the *Jardiwanpa* (for example, the Ancestral Emu track or the Ancestral Snake track) (Dussart 2000: 32)

Perhaps due to these north-eastern origins, this ceremonial complex differs from other Warlpiri ceremonies in involving as the central content of their songs, the journeys of several Dreaming ancestors (*yarripiri* 'Inland Taipan', *wampana* 'spectacled hare wallaby', *ngurlu* 'edible seed' and *yankirri* 'emu'). Whilst encounters with other Dreaming ancestors are common in other Warlpiri song series, all others are focused centrally on the journey of one particular ancestral group. Due to this difference in ceremonial ownership, and the emphasis on the patricouple groups with ownership rights across several different Dreaming

itineraries, more people are implicated in these conflict resolution ceremonies than in other site-specific Warlpiri ceremonies.

Spencer and Gillen (1904) observed that these ceremonies involved men from opposite patrilineal moieties and appeared to resolve these conflicts such that afterwards the two groups were on good terms again. In Nicolas Peterson's description of the *Buluwanti* (ie. Ngajakula)⁴ ceremony he also notes that "...it's object was to finally settle up old quarrels and to make the men friendly disposed to one another" (Peterson 1970: 200). The requirement for large-scale participation of people from distant places contributes to *Jardiwanpa*'s usefulness in the resolution of conflicts. Dussart has shown that there is an obligatory reversal and exchange of roles in performance between the *Jardiwanpa* and *Ngajakula* ceremonies and associated ceremonies *Puluwanti* and *Kurakurra* (Dussart 2000: 79). Peterson enhances this description demonstrating that there are complex interrelationships amongst these ceremonies, emphasising that *Ngajakula* relates to the patrimoiety incorporating patricouples of firstly J/Napanangka and J/Napangardi, and secondly J/Nungarrayi and J/Napaljarri subsections. *Jardiwanpa* relates to the opposing patrimoiety incorporating patricouples of firstly J/Nakamarra and J/Napurrurla and secondly J/Nampijinpa and J/Nangala subsections. Within these patrimoieties, the patricouples relate more directly to particular places along the ancestral itineraries.

Senior Warlpiri elder, Harry Jakamarra Nelson (2006: pers. comm.) emphasises that a primary reason for holding *Jardiwanpa* was to open up the restrictions on remarriage for widows of deceased men who were associated with the *Jardiwanpa* Dreaming ancestors. As marriage relationships are formed between a man and a woman from opposing patrimoieties, this is again a way of

creating friendly alliances between the two groups so that new marriages can go ahead. A component of the final nights of *Jardiwanpa* involves widows dancing in lines with firesticks symbolising their transition out of widowhood. Mary Laughren (2009: pers.comm.) has pointed out that some women strategically choose to avoid participation in *Jardiwanpa* ceremonies to avoid pressure to re-marry.

Peterson (1970) emphasises that the term ‘fire ceremony’ is more “descriptive, referring to self-inflicted burns and the use of flaming torches” (1970: 200) rather than its association with any Fire Dreaming⁵. As illustrated by John Morton (2011) demonstrates however that despite no totemic connection, the use of fire in this ceremony has symbolic significance for the resolution of conflict. The *Jardiwanpa* Dreaming follows the journey of a python, *Yarripiri* who begins his travels at Wirnparrku, a hill near to the settlement of Haasts Bluff. As he travels northwards, he is joined and at points morphs in to the *yankirri* ‘Emu’, *wampana* ‘Spectacled hare wallaby’ and *ngurlu* ‘edible seed’ Dreamings⁶. Senior Warlpiri man, Thomas Jangala Rice explains that the *Jardiwanpa* song series which are sung by men for this ceremony are all linked to Dreaming stories which involve an initial fight amongst ancestors from different places, this being resolved through their joint participation in a ceremony (Rice 2007: pers.comm). The requirements for the participation of multiple groups to hold *Jardiwanpa* entails significant cooperation and organisation so that all the necessary people can travel from distant places. Similarly, *Ngajakula*, owned by the opposite patrimoiety, revolves around the journey of *mala* ‘rufuous hare-wallaby’ from another Dreaming place, *Mawurrungu*. Intimately linked is the journey of *Puluwanti* (owl) which is

associated with the country surrounding the more north-western settlement of Willowra. Laughren (2009: pers.comm) and Peterson (2009: pers.comm) have both independently reflected that in the 1970s when they lived in Yuendumu, *Ngajakula* was held more often than *Jardiwanpa* as the eastern Warlpiri from Willowra were dominant in ceremonial activity. Over the last three decades however, *Jardiwanpa* has come to dominate with many Warlpiri people today using the term *Jardiwanpa* as a general gloss for the identically performed complex of conflict resolution ceremonies despite their links to different Dreamings, country and songs⁷.

These ceremonies generally take about two weeks to complete, culminating in a spectacular final two nights (these have been described in Spencer and Gillen (1904) as well as presented in more recent audio-visual documentation (Sandhall 1977 and Lander & Perkins 1993). Prior to this formal beginning, there is a period of waiting for vital people to gather and prepare associated ritual paraphernalia. The participants then move their camps close to the ceremonial ground, on the edge of the settlement's main residential area and gather together each night to sing the songs and dances associated with the journey of the *Jardiwanpa* ancestors. In this initial part men sing songs from different sections of the ancestral journey in the early afternoon, whilst women dance with their hands raised besides their shoulders, hopping forward singing out 'uh, uh, uh, uuuuuuh' and then moving to a stationary shake-a-leg style dance incorporating a hand movement which mimetically associates with the act of winnowing seeds in a coolamon (this being linked to the *ngurlu* 'seed' component of the ancestral itinerary). The women's dance style changes, but is

similarly mimetic when the men are singing songs associated with other components of the ancestral journey⁸.

Both Spencer and Gillen (1904) and Peterson (1970) have emphasised that this ceremony entails ritualised assaults and support that bring the two moieties together. This is reflected in the layout in which people dance. The final night involves the burning of long poles wrapped with eucalyptus leaves. The owners for the ceremony are locked in a round humpy made of branches and certain managers of the ceremony shake the burning poles over the owners showering them in sparks in a kind of ritualised assault. The other group of managers is responsible for protecting them from getting overly burnt during this assault. Peterson explains the ritualised interactions between the two patrimoieties, pointing out the ritualised assaults on the owners of this ceremony by certain managers and the ritualised ‘protection’ from these assaults by other managers (in Sandhall 1967).

Peterson, contributed his analytical commentary to the ethnographic film *A Warlpiri Fire Ceremony – Ngajakula*, made in the more northern Warlpiri community of Lajamanu by Roger Sandhall (1967) for the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies. This film sits alongside similar films in this institute’s Film Archive, all made in an era where this kind of ‘salvage’ documentation was considered important as Aboriginal rituals and ceremonies and associated with distinctive religious expressions were considered highly endangered. Described by Faye Ginsberg as ‘the voice of God’ (2006), these films featured white experts, such as Peterson, as the authorities in preserving this specialist knowledge and do not include Indigenous voices. In the 1980s era of self-

determination, Eric Michaels was employed by the AIAS to undertake research on the introduction of television to remote Australia and based himself in Yuendumu. During this period, amidst a significant movement for more Warlpiri-owned film-making and the development of a specifically Warlpiri camera style, Andrew Japaljarri Spencer, alongside Michaels, made a new film version of the Ngajakula ceremony for the Warlpiri Media Association. In Michaels's words, "There was a discourse on power here, signalled and enforced by the politics of positioning of people either as before or behind the camera" (1986: 13). Additionally, amidst these representational politics, it must be comparatively noted that the film made by Sandhall centred on the opportunistic filming of a *Ngajakula* ceremony which centred on resolving a conflict, whereas the ceremony at the centre of Spencer's film was staged specifically for the camera.

Following these two films of *Ngajakula*, the residents of Yuendumu with the support of the Warlpiri Media Association, approached two Indigenous film makers, Ned Lander and Rachel Perkins, with a proposal for a production of *Jardiwanpa*, this time representing the fire ceremony of the opposite patrimoiety. Langton (1993: 75) writes that Michaels' "...involvement in the 1980s video production of [this] Warlpiri fire ceremony (restricted from showing for a period) made it possible for Lander and Perkins to negotiate a co-production of the Jardiwanpa Fire Ceremony in 1992" (Langton 1993: 75). *Jardiwanpa – A Warlpiri Fire Ceremony* (1992) is a bigger and brighter production which documents the clear story of the Jardiwanpa ancestors and provides the perspectives of key ceremonial leaders, whilst portraying the detailed

negotiations that must take place for the ceremony to be held. Langton (who was asked to write the script for this production) describes that:

The ensuing negotiations led to interesting contractual, investment and copyright arrangements. The issues of finance and copyright were complicated, but an agreement was reached which was satisfactory to all parties: the men and women of Yuendumu with the ritual authority for the ceremony; the producers; and the main funding bodies, the Warlpiri Artists Association, Warlukurlangu, and the Australian Film Finance Corporation (Langton 1993: 79).

She describes that following these negotiations Warlpiri people were empowered to have culturally appropriate supervisory, consultation, editing and reviewing roles, meaning that "... the traditional subject/object relations in film production, as exemplified in much ethnographic filmmaking, were avoided" (Langton 1993: 80). Being part of a four-part SBS series, *Blood Brothers* this film was widely viewed by non-Aboriginal audiences across Australia. Ginsberg (2006: 48) makes the important point, following interviews with Rachel Perkins, that producers were pressured to exclude aspects of their scripts which would not appeal to the intended broader Australian, mostly non-Indigenous audience. In this way, the film of *Jardiwanpa* differs significantly to that produced by Spencer in the 1980s for Warlpiri Media Association, which was intended specifically for Warlpiri purposes and viewing.

This history provides background to the discussions about holding *Jardiwanpa* which were flying around with a fervour when I arrived in Yuendumu in late 2005. Over the next year, in collaboration with many Warlpiri individuals, I recorded outside of ceremonial context, elicited versions of both the men's and women's song series associated with *Jardiwanpa* (and to a much lesser degree *Ngajakula*). I also transcribed these song texts and wrote down in

detail the stories surrounding these Dreaming ancestors as well as visiting associated sites across Warlpiri country and beyond with owners and managers of the *Jardiwanpa* series⁹. I also participated in many events at the Yuendumu School in which recordings were made and Warlpiri women painted body designs associated with these songs on pieces of paper for the children to hang up in their classroom and facilitated dancing events at the school with both men and women as teachers of this ceremony to the students. In these school contexts, men sang the *Jardiwanpa* songs against the beat of their boomerangs, whilst the women showed the younger girls how to dance. *Jardiwanpa*, although only one of many Warlpiri ceremonies centred on Dreamings and relationships to country, had become a kind of overarching gloss, representing Warlpiri ceremonial life as a whole, not only to an outside audience but to younger generations of Warlpiri people.

Towards the middle of 2006, serious discussions began to build about holding *Jardiwanpa* in the coming months. I learned of a loosely structured calendar for the ceremonial events in Yuendumu. *Kurdiiji* in which young boys are initiated into men, are a preoccupation over the summer months from December to February. *Jardiwanpa*, I was told was typically held in the 'cold time' following the annual Sports Weekend in the first week of August. Shortly after Sports Weekend in 2006, a dearly loved older lady passed away following which there was a large sorry meeting in the east camp of Yuendumu. As many relatives had to travel to Yuendumu from distant places to mourn, several weeks passed. Whilst *Jardiwanpa* was postponed during this period, it was not far from Warlpiri peoples' minds. I was asked during this time to come up to the sorry camp as several men had travelled from Lajamanu and, whilst there as a group,

wanted to make more recordings of the *Jardiwanpa* songs. Although these elderly men informed me that they had plans to ‘start *Jardiwanpa* soon’, they too disappeared back to Lajamanu in response to other demands once the final sorry meeting was finished.

A few weeks later, many of the senior women who lived in Yuendumu gathered at the eastern business ground for an evening of women’s *yawulyu* dancing to ‘open up’ *Jardiwanpa* following the death of an important senior man associated with this Dreaming ¹⁰. At this *yawulyu* ceremony the widows of the deceased men mourned one last time as they danced, and were dusted over their heads, stomachs and pubic areas with yellow ochre, acknowledging the death of their husbands and his connections to Dreamings and country. When these ‘finishing up’ *yawulyu* were complete the senior women were ready to hold the larger *Jardiwanpa* ceremony. Now, all they had to do was wait for the men to decide that *Jardiwanpa* was going to be on and for all the necessary people to arrive in Yuendumu.

JARDIWANPA, OCTOBER 2006

Late one afternoon, Nakamarra, a senior female owner for *Jardiwanpa* told me excitedly to come to the ceremonial ground at the east of Yuendumu. She raised her hands up beside her shoulders, pushing them slightly forwards as she cried out “Uh, uh, uh, uh, uhhhh” – depicting the way that women danced for *Jardiwanpa*. We waited all afternoon in the shade of the bushes near the east camp ceremony ground watching a small group of senior men further to our north, including Nakamarra’s younger brother Jakamarra who was also an owner for *Jardiwanpa* and, another much more senior man who had interests in taking

over the rights to hold *Jardiwanpa*. They were chatting quietly amongst themselves figuring out how and when they would start singing the *Jardiwanpa* songs.

Just after the sun had set they moved into the central cleared area and sat facing northwards in a curved line. They started to sing the songs associated with Wirnparaku, the home of the *Yarripiri*, the python snake central to the *Jardiwanpa* Dreaming (see Mountford 1968 for a detailed account of this story¹¹). This is where he emerged for the first time and hence the appropriate place to begin the singing. In the weeks that followed each evening, in the comforting light of a setting sun, this would be repeated, the men singing further along the places of this ancestral journey. This would continue, I was told, until everyone was there who was needed to hold this ceremony. *Jardiwanpa* was finally starting! Older people were clearly nostalgic— singing and dancing for hours each evening. As more and more people arrived from different places it became a larger affair, implicating more people and resulting in complex negotiations.

The coordinator for the Yuendumu Women's Centre, attended *Jardiwanpa* most nights and became heavily involved in the negotiations surrounding how and when this ceremony would be held. This was encouraged as in her role, she helped to practically support 'business' in many ways. Seeing *Jardiwanpa* as an important event in the women's cultural lives she permitted the use of Women's Centre Toyota for *Jardiwanpa* purposes such as trips to get ochre and other materials needed in the ceremony. She also budgeted to include the purchase of food and drinks which would be consumed as a part of this

ceremony. Previously referenced anthropologist, Dussart, who was also in Yuendumu at the time and had been involved in a past *Jardiwanpa* ceremony, also attended the singing and dancing most evenings. She returned to the United States after several weeks but it was clear that Warlpiri people were pleased that she was there due to her detailed understanding of this ceremony from past participation. I too attended the singing and dancing each evening, and it was expected that I would due to my interest in recordings the songs over the previous year. Now was my chance to truly understand what *Jardiwanpa* was all about by participating in the ceremonial events. Being of Nungarrayi subsection affiliation, my role as a member of the *kurdungurlu* ‘manager’ group was emphasised at all times – a role appropriate for recording and supporting this event.

Visitors to the settlement were invited to attend these evenings of singing and dancing. A large group of about twenty young men who had come to the Yuendumu school to teach sporting skills, were invited to attend one night. They sat amongst the group of men singing in the east of the group, some of them facing inappropriate directions and causing a lot of laughter amongst the women. Despite this teasing, Warlpiri people were clearly pleased that *kardiya* were attending this ceremony and did everything to encourage this by continually inviting their *kardiya* friends who lived in Yuendumu and who visited from elsewhere each night. Younger Warlpiri people, however, seemed to withdraw from this ceremony despite an emphasis by older people on their important roles. Some women in the 40s would sit a long way to the back of the group of dancing women and were shamed when they were called up to dance and looked down at the ground for most of the time they were sitting there. Other younger people in

the 20s and 30s simply did not come. One day as I was driving past the ceremony ground with a group of teenagers I asked them if they wanted to come over to *Jardiwanpa* with me. They all snickered and said to drop them at home before I went up there as “*Jardiwanpa* was boring” and they wanted to go to dance at the disco instead.

These long nights of singing continued for several months, building in excitement when various people arrived in the settlement and waning as they disappeared off to attend to other duties. In late October there was an Assembly of God Convention held in Yuendumu. Whilst there are only a small number of Yuendumu residents who were involved with this charismatic Christian religious movement, it was a point of fascination for many. Each night as the *Jardiwanpa* songs began at the eastern business ground, the Assembly of God convention participants would set up their amplifiers at the basketball court in the centre of the settlement, turn their speakers up loudly as they would sing, preach and talk in tongues, telling people that it was wrong to live in their traditional ways, to participate in ceremonial business or adhere to other culturally defined modes of living. After several nights of fighting to be heard over this, the group who had gathered for *Jardiwanpa* decided they would wait until this was over and then resume the ceremony. Many of them, I saw in the following days entranced by the events of the AOG convention¹². Once the convention was finished and the visitors to the settlement had moved on, *Jardiwanpa* started up again. Each evening the men would gather in the east and the women would dance, resuming the routine of the previous months.

In the midst of all this I had become heavily entangled in the negotiations surrounding *Jardiwanpa*. My research was part of a project which involved recording Warlpiri songs for which there were delegated funds to pay Warlpiri singers and language consultants as research collaborators. After several weeks I began to realise that there was a strong expectation that I would be making arrangements for financial support for *Jardiwanpa*. As a PhD student, I had way to access the kind of funds that would be required to pay hundreds of people to hold a large scale ceremony over several weeks nor to fund travel from far flung settlements, on top of the blankets and food required for the ceremonial exchanges. I also did not have the ability, equipment or access to a professional film crew required to capture this ceremony in its glory. In 1992, when Lander and Perkins, had filmed *Jardiwanpa* they had had such resources and now there was an expectation amongst the participants of this ceremony that once enough momentum began to surround this ceremony, that some *kardiya* would step in to assist in funding and filming this ceremony in a similar kind of way. I realised that through my enthusiasm and regular participation for *Jardiwanpa* I had become deeply implicated in this situation. Fortunately, Nakamarra explained to her brothers that I was unable to provide this kind of support. Nungarrayi, a senior woman who had been involved in the 1992 film also told me not to worry, as she was going to be contacting Jampijinpa (Ned Lander's Warlpiri subsection term) who now lived in Sydney to see if he could come up to Yuendumu to film *Jardiwanpa* again. She did not seem to foresee that there would be an issue with getting funded to film the same ceremony again.

After a long day in the bush making dancing sticks ready for the finale of *Jaridwanpa*, Nakamarra called me up to the bushes behind the business ground

to inform me that some important older men had arrived from Lajamanu and therefore the ceremony would be coming to a head in the next few days. Some older women were preparing to 'paint up' for the ceremony that night. The Yuendumu Women's Centre co-ordinator and Dussart were also asked to come and have their chests painted with yellow, black and white ochre, paired up with Warlpiri 'skin sisters' who shared our subsection affiliations. *Yawulyu* songs were sung as associated designs were painted on our chests. Throughout this painting up all the women in attendance pressed us to take lots of photos and to make sure we sent them to our families. I was also told to ensure I sent a photo to Peterson, who was at the time my PhD supervisor, and who the women knew well. Significantly Peterson had also filmed a Warlpiri fire ceremony in the late 1960s (Sandhall 1977). We were being painted up for this ceremony to ensure our continued obligation and participation in the ritual events, the attention and emphasis on us as *kardiya* being paramount.

For many few weeks the Warlpiri women had been informing the co-ordinator of the Yuendumu Women's Centre that they would need lots of blankets for *Jardiwanpa*. Like many Warlpiri ceremonies, blankets, money and other items that are prized by Warlpiri (clothes, drums of flour, etc.) are publicly given at a certain part of the ritual proceedings (more usually following the final night) as gifts for the managers of the ceremony who work to oversee that it is held in the correct way. As the manager role is an arduous and demanding task with much responsibility, the owners present these 'gifts' to show appreciation and confirm the manager's commitments. The Women's Centre (which runs a small op-shop) ordered in blanket supplies and there was a rush to buy them as the other shops in Yuendumu had sold out of blankets many weeks ago. To

control the situation, the co-ordinator emphasised that she had set these blankets aside for *Jardiwanpa* and would bring them out when the ceremony was about to begin. That evening she piled these blankets into the Women's Centre Toyota and drove them up to the business ground at East Camp. Instead of the nightly singing and dancing of the previous months, men instead were dancing in a kind of side-ways leap with their hand over their heads. Following this there was an exchange of ritual items which had been brought to Yuendumu the day before by a man who lived in Lajamanu. These were placed near a central ritual pole after they had been used (this aspect of *Jardiwanpa* is closely followed in Lander's 1993 film). Following this people began to solemnly walk over and place items for payment on the ground beside them: predominantly blankets, cash in envelopes and large drums of flour. There was a frantic scramble amongst the women to grab the blankets from the back of the Women's Centre vehicle. Unable to control the chaos, the blankets were placed in a large central pile near the ritual pole. As the women then all returned to their camp, Nungarrayi whispered to me "*Jardiwanpa* truly belongs to the Women's Centre now". The co-ordinator explained the next day that she had decided to make the blankets a donation to *Jardiwanpa* from the Women's Centre as there had been no way she could keep control of who needed to pay for them. The sheer quantity of blankets supplied by the Women's Centre had however firmly given them a large say in the proceedings for this ceremony from now on. The Yuendumu Women's Centre had in effect 'bought *Jardiwanpa*' – this 'gift' (in the Maussian sense) implicating the organisation deeply in to the systems of ceremonial exchange.

Following this, I was told that *Jardiwanpa* would be finished in the next two nights. From this point, however, the exuberance surrounding *Jardiwanpa*

was never the same. A few nights of sunset singing were held, becoming further and further apart. The time of year was approaching in which the residents of Yuendumu would hold *Kurdiji* ceremonies in which boys would go through an initiation to become young men. A meeting was held about this and it was eventually decided that *Jardiwanpa* would be postponed until after these other ceremonies were finished. The owners of *Jardiwanpa* had not been happy about this. Jakamarra, who was also an important ritual boss for the *Kurdiji* ceremonies, had even threatened not to attend if *Jardiwanpa* was not finished properly but in the end he too succumbed. This was clearly contentious though as reflected a long rant from Nakamarra during that year's *Kurdiji* ceremonies in which she loudly criticised the other people in attendance for not finishing *Jardiwanpa* the proper way.

POST-SETTLEMENT SHIFTS IN CEREMONIAL PURPOSE

Originally with the settlement of Warlpiri people in Yuendumu, from the mid-1940s on there was an increase in some aspects of ritual life due to the enhanced social networks that resulted from more people sharing residential ties, and the removal of the logistical restraints surrounding travel to bring the participants together in one place and to feed them. More recently from 1969, as Warlpiri people, like other Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory, have gained independent access to money and cars there has been a broader range of factors which make holding ceremonies like *Jardiwanpa* more difficult. As described above, the requirements to attend mortuary rituals, difficulties finding money for transport for the numerous kin required for this ceremony (who now live across a much broader region), sweeping infiltrations of Christian religious dominations,

and the need to structure ceremonial activity to fit in with work and school schedules, all contribute to the practical difficulties of holding largescale ceremonies such as *Jardiwanpa*. An understanding of the historical background of Warlpiri people who today live in Yuendumu helps to contextualise the contemporary politics surrounding this ceremony. I do not wish to draw a harsh distinction between pre-contact and post-contact times but to show the process of change over the last 100 years, particularly condensed in the last 60-70 years of settlement. The significant changes that have taken place over this short time period have overall lead to a decline in the ceremonial life which was once so essential to Warlpiri life, although the geographical scope and numbers of people implicated in some ceremonies, such as *Kurdji* have expanded significantly as a consequence of these changes (see Peterson 2000 and Curran 2011).

Dussart has pointed out that Warlpiri people are the most populous group in the Northern Territory and:

Coupled with their residency on the actual traditional lands associated with Warlpiri patrimony, [that] accounts in measure for the vigour of Warlpiri ritual life as it is undertaken at Yuendumu, compared to that of other groups and other settlements (Dussart 2000: 40).

Initially beginning with the routine surrounding cattle station work, the times of the year in which ceremonies were held became organised around a western calendar. A significant break at Christmas time meant that this was when ceremonial activity intensified. Dussart (2000: 40) also notes that in the early days of the settlement, the missionaries frowned upon ceremonial life such that Warlpiri people had to hold ceremonies at times when they were not under their scrutinising eye. Nowadays in Yuendumu, the times in which certain ceremonies are held still revolve around this westernised calendar, perhaps in an even more

rigid way. As was noted above in 2006, it was commonly accepted amongst Warlpiri people that the *Jardiwanpa* ceremony would be held in the ‘cold time’. Over the last few decades this has been after the Yuendumu Sports Weekend in the first week of August – a pattern which is viewed to be desirable by Warlpiri people and is now an established seasonal tradition.

The settlement of many different family groups in one place brought on a significant intensification of Warlpiri social life. Whilst this initially caused feuds to flare up, the close residential associations that these families have with each other also had a marked impact on ceremonial organisation and involvement. With the intensification of social life came an increase in activity as well as an increase in the numbers of people involved. Dussart describes this in saying that “...the pool was enlarged to include individuals who had ties based on residential proximity but who often came from different patrilineal descent groups” (2000: 33). In reflecting on Warlpiri ceremonies held in Lajamanu, Wild (1987) also notes that there was an increase in large-scale ceremonies with the establishment of settlements which incorporated many groups living together and thus meant that new ceremonies from other tribes were being adopted by whole settlement populations.

The ceremonies held by contemporary Warlpiri people reflect this history of intensification that has occurred in their residential patterns. In the last few decades there has been a tendency for sweeping cult-like ceremonies (see Laughren 1981, Wild 1981 and Young 1981) or large-scale ceremonies like *Kurdi* that incorporate many people (see Peterson 2000 and Curran 2010) and are held more often and with greater participation than the site-specific

ceremonies which require detailed knowledge of places and songs. Today, these site-specific ceremonies tend to be incorporated into the larger ceremonies rather than held on their own (see also Kolig 1981) and there is a continued trend for inclusiveness rather than this kind of exclusiveness. Peterson (2000) has discussed the reasons for the intensification of these ceremonies, with particular reference to the expansion of *jilkaja* journeys through which participants from different places are gathered together to be initiated. Mortuary rituals have also expanded in their scale (as well as their frequency due to an increase in deaths), as well as in the long distances that people travel to attend them. This dramatic increase in numbers of people who attend ceremonies in the last few decades, is likely a result of the increased social networks (and avenues for increased communication) that people have over larger distances.

Recent decades there has been a decline in ceremonial activity in which specific knowledge of Dreamings and country is required. Being settled in one place has had a marked impact on Warlpiri people's knowledge of their country. Whilst Warlpiri people still go on bush trips and visit parts of their country relatively often, this by no means gives them the same knowledge as the older people who lived on this country when they were younger and depended on an intimate knowledge of this land and its resources for their livelihood. Song sets used in ceremonies often depict aspects of esoteric knowledge evoking many emotive responses to this country. Though younger people actively participate in many of the larger-scale inclusive ceremonies mentioned above, these detachments from country mean that they have little interest either in the site-based ceremonies or in learning the accompanying detailed knowledge. This was certainly the case in the *Jardiwanpa* held in 2006 with the younger participants

rarely attending and when they did looking down with embarrassment, as they knew little of what was expected of them in this ritual context. With the move into settlements, greater mobility and with more people owning cars, Warlpiri social networks have increased significantly. The increasingly high number of deaths in Central Australia means that everyday life is often dominated by the requirements to attend these mortuary rituals (see Musharbash 2008). These factors make holding ceremonies like *Jardiwanpa* difficult in the contemporary world as they necessarily require large-scale participation by particular groups of people.¹³

In Margaret Clunies Ross's (1986: 33), description of the *Rom* ceremony held in Canberra in 1982, by Anbarra visitors from Arnhem land she notes that, "... the changes in location, in the type of audience and in the time span allowed for the performance caused the Anbarra to make various adaptations to their ritual". Warlpiri people have many creative responses to which incorporate aspects of ceremonial life such that they can be adapted for incorporation in to contemporary circumstances. A notable example of this in a Warlpiri context, is Wanta Patrick's vision for the Milpirri festival, now held biannually in more northern Warlpiri settlement of Lajamanu and including the participation of many people from Yuendumu. Each time Milpirri is held it centres on a particular ceremony, the very first one in 2005 focusing on *Jardiwanpa*, in conjunction with hip-hop, break-dance and spectacular theatrical design. This festival is explicitly aimed at "giving people a sense of belonging in times of rapid change" (tracksdance.com.au). Biddle has explained that "Milpirri (re)activates enviro-somatic vitalities in new trajectories of traditional futurity" (2018). Today, Warlpiri men, and even more so women, also have immense

interest in travelling to attend festivals or to perform their traditional modes of song and dance in distant places out of their on-country context. In asserting their own agency to do this, they are creatively managing these valued aspects of traditional culture to ensure that they have a place in contemporary contexts and continue to be performed in a modern world.

MEDIA, FILMING AND REPRESENTATION

During recent decades, Warlpiri people have become increasingly in contact with organisational forms of non-Indigenous domination¹⁴. Whilst non-Indigenous infiltration in to Yuendumu, initially with missionaries and government superintendents, followed by school teachers and other service providers who have come and gone from Yuendumu since its foundations, it has only been since the 1970s that the organisations in Yuendumu have come to dominate the ways in which Warlpiri daily lives are structured (see Michaels 1991). At a similar time, in broader Australia a rise in Aboriginal self-determination and involvement in self-representations began in response to prior colonial dominance. Dussart (2004) has observed a clear shift in ritual purpose over the last few decades, noting that the rise of Aboriginal rights in broader Australia meant that Warlpiri people were needing to represent themselves and define their Aboriginality to a broader audience. She emphasises that there was a period directly associated with the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, in which Warlpiri people began to use ritual in different ways, particularly since 1976, as part of the land claim process. These were less tied up with traditional modes of exchange and notably, involved *kardiya* audiences¹⁵. She also notes a period of frustration with the lack of understanding of this audience and another

shift to an emphasis on pan-Aboriginal audiences in the early 1990s. Morton (2011) has also emphasised that the film of the *Ngajakula* ceremony made by Sandall and Peterson became entangled in the debate surrounding Warlpiri representation and self-determination, this being further complicated by the next major filming in the 1990s, when Warlpiri Media Association approached Perkins and Ned Lander (importantly both non-Warlpiri Aboriginal people) to make a film of the *Jardiwanpa* ceremony. As was noted earlier, the filming of this ceremony was large in scale and involved the payment of the participants, further complicating the systems of exchange which are intrinsic to this ceremony and contributing to the significant shift in purpose for holding *Jardiwanpa* which had taken place by the mid-1990s. The intricacies of the Dreaming were no longer central (although still known and discussed by older participants) nor were the original purposes of conflict resolution and the opening up of marriage restrictions¹⁶. The system of exchange core to the ritual negotiations between owners and managers began to emphasise the *kardiya* participants, whose roles and responsibilities were being drawn from those prescribed by their Warlpiri subsection terms, and affiliations that they had to organisations in Yuendumu.

A side result of the co-production of *Jardiwanpa – A Warlpiri Fire Ceremony* (Lander & Perkins 1992), and its incorporation in to the larger SBS series *Blood Brothers* was for this ceremony to become a representation of Warlpiri culture to a world ‘outside’ of Yuendumu, and also quite importantly to the *kardiya* who lived there and had close ties to Warlpiri people. The making of both the 1980s (Spencer) and 1993 (Lander and Perkins) films also saw a marked shift in ceremonial purpose, as they saw the staging *Ngajakula* and *Jardiwanpa*

respectively for the camera. The 1977 film (Sandhall) on the other hand was of a ceremony that was being held primarily to resolve conflicts and was opportunistically and secondarily filmed on the side, and from afar (this is not to downplay the significant impact that the camera and lights would have had on the ceremony). This difference saw a shift in emphasis as for the 1992 film particular people were involved for the filming who were paid and worked in collaboration with a film crew to capture a representation of this ceremony which would be seen by non-Warpiri people in a broader context (Ginsberg 2006).

Against this history, in which *Jardiwanpa* and related ceremonies had become entrenched in the politics of filming and its spin-off associations with representation to ‘outsiders’ and the acquisition of resources, it is important to note anthropologist, Melinda Hinkson’s report that a *Jardiwanpa* ceremony was again held in 1995, three years following the ceremony featured on the Lander and Perkins film. She particularly notes that:

... a strong and controversial theme of the 1995 ceremony was a critique of the involvement of whitefellas rather than active soliciting of our involvement and resources (Hinkson 2013: pers.comm).

This 1995 *Jardiwanpa* was also not filmed. It appears that this may have been a response by Warpiri people who were acutely aware of the impact that filming had had on their deeply valued ceremony and an effort to bring it forward in a way which did not focus so much on the emphases of the 1993 film. Interestingly during my own fieldwork at a much later date (2005 – 2008) this particular ceremony was also not spoken of by Warpiri residents of Yuendumu in 2006 suggesting a collective shift in emphasis in which these ceremonial events gained additional status from being filmed¹⁷.

The 1993 production of *Jardiwarnpa: A Warlpiri Fire Ceremony* (1993) contributed significantly to debates around a ‘discourse on power’, described by Michaels as “... signalled and enforced by the politics of positioning of people as either before or behind the camera” (Michaels 1986: 13), this history of films made in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s has had significant consequence on the motivation and reasons that Warlpiri people hold ceremonies like *Jardiwanpa*. Unlike with the filming of a scripted movie or pre-organised documentary, Warlpiri ceremonies, like rituals elsewhere, are emergent in that they are largely shaped by the surrounding circumstances and contingencies of the particular moment. The 1993 film brings this out quite clearly, focusing on discussions of in-the-moment ritual negotiations. However, capturing this ceremony on film, has resulted in a reified version which is held up to be seen by younger Warlpiri generations, *kardiya*, and viewers from further afield. In addressing this issue in her fieldwork in Arnhem land, Jennifer Deger asks:

...what kinds of reifications are at work as culture becomes Culture? What kinds of exclusions and transformations take place as song, dance, art and other “traditional” practices are turned into objectified, cross-culturally recognisable signifiers of tradition, authenticity and difference? (Deger 2006: 3)

In discussing the screening of Warlpiri ceremonies on a television network, Michaels too highlights that much of Aboriginal knowledge transmission is negotiated in the moment, something which cannot be done once a film is made. He emphasises that:

In face-to-face transmission, information access can distinguish differences between rights to *know* something, to *hear* something, and the right to *speak* of it. Aboriginal society regulates these differences for oral information as well as for design and dance. Rights to know (own) information, to hear (see) information and to speak (perform or paint) it are differentiated and each right is highly regulated (Michaels 1989:4).

He goes on to say that:

Mass media are logically and practically the inverse of the personal Aboriginal information exchange system. Broadcast television and radio make information equally accessible to audiences everywhere, instantaneously, and at no apparent cost... (Michaels 1989:5)

The most recent PAW Media and Communications (formerly Warlpiri Media Association) production, *Yarripiri's Journey* (2018), with Warlpiri director, Simon Japangardi Fisher Junior, is in many ways a community response to this history of representation¹⁸. Whilst discussions of holding a *Jardiwanpa* ceremony for this production did occur, it was eventually decided that the film should focus instead on documenting the travels of *yarripiri*, the Inland Taipan snake central to the ancestral *Jardiwanpa* journey through Warlpiri country. The film production involved visiting these places and filming Warlpiri elders as they told the associated stories. Archival footage from the Lander and Perkins (1992) film has been incorporated as backdrop scenes alongside country. As film producer, Anna Cadden commented, during the production process there was tension amongst Warlpiri elders who were focused on emplacing this story on to sites on country, and the creative directors, who sought to tell a narrative story which could be appreciated by a wider audience. This recent context, illustrates, that the core Warlpiri elders, in creating another 'fixed' representation of *Jardiwanpa* have sought to emphasise the essential stable component: sites on Warlpiri country. The ceremonial manifestations of this Dreaming, require more openness and need to be considered as emergent in contemporary contexts which encompass the effects of rapid and dramatic social changes and the histories of media representation.

CONCLUSION

To begin this paper, I emphasised that amongst Warlpiri people living in Yuendumu today, the *Jardiwanpa* ceremony is regarded as being an important, and sometimes generic, representation of what constitutes Warlpiri ceremonial life. Despite clear differences to other Warlpiri rituals, it is *Jardiwanpa* that is held high as an example of Warlpiri ‘tradition’. Against a backdrop of the early ethnographic accounts of *Jardiwanpa* ceremonies, I argue that *Jardiwanpa* has an important place in the post-settlement world of 1960s and 70s where it flourished as a ritual which incorporated large numbers of people and nurtured traditional modes of exchange and the consequent relationships that were formed. The films which were made in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, have significantly impacted the place of *Jardiwanpa* and related ceremonies through their fixed mode of representation. These films which capture a single ceremony have come to be a depiction of Warlpiri ‘tradition’ to an broader world which includes younger Warlpiri people, the *kardiya* that live in Yuendumu, and non-Warlpiri Aboriginal people and broader mainstream Australia. A consequence of this has been that this ritual no longer has its same emergent nature and consequently Warlpiri people need to be creative in negotiating its place in a modern world.

It is likely that someday there will be further negotiations surrounding holding a *Jardiwanpa* ceremony. The form that these will take, I argue must respond to the politics of the history of this ceremony and the impact of filmed representations of Warlpiriness to broader Australia, both in mainstream and pan-Aboriginal worlds. For many years, *Jardiwanpa* was the subject of a long running joke between Nakamarra and I. Whenever I left Yuendumu, she would farewell me in saying, “When you come back we’ll finish *Jardiwanpa*”. At first

we would both enthusiastically nod about this prospect but as time passed she began to instead giggle and sigh, acutely aware of the many factors at play after such a long time waiting for *Jardiwanpa*.

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NOTES

¹ With acknowledgements to the film production ‘Waiting for Harry’, directed by Kim McKenzie (1980). This title was chosen to similarly draw out emphasis on continual negotiations, responses to contingencies and necessity for ritual, though emergent, to be held in the ‘right’ way.

² This has been further enhanced since the announcement of the Northern Territory Intervention, widely known as ‘The Emergency Response’ in 2007, with many more non-indigenous government employees visiting Yuendumu.

³ This may merely be a difference in orthography with no pronunciation difference at all.

⁴ Peterson (2012: pers.comm) later realised that he had taken this name from what was a section of the larger Ngajakula ceremony.

⁵ Eric Michaels (ref) mistakenly related these ceremonies to the *Warlukurlangu* Dreaming which is separate though interrelated, as in its travels it crosses paths with the ancestral python snake central to *Jardiwanpa* (see Gallagher et al. 2014: 38).

⁶ For further details of the journey of *Jardiwanpa* ancestors see Mountford (1968) and Gallagher et al. (2014).

⁷ Many younger Warlpiri people during my fieldwork from 2005-2008 did not even know about the *Ngajakula* ceremony belonging to the other moiety, referring to them all generically as *Jardiwanpa*.

⁸ This contrasts to the women’s dancing which accompanies other ceremonies lead by men’s singing in which dancing is non-mimetic (see Curran 2010 for a description of *Kurdij*).

⁹ This documentary work has since been made in to an audio-book ‘Jardiwanpa yawulyu: Warlpiri women’s songs from Yuendumu (published by Batchelor Press in 2014).

¹¹ In 19... Mountford travelled the path of *Yarripiri* with a group of Warlpiri men, photographing and documenting the stories of this journey. This is published in *Wirnparraku and the Myth of Yarripiri* (...).

¹² Dussart (2012) has noted that it is common for Warlpiri people to belong to a number of religious affiliations which have seemingly contradictory moral codes, choosing where to focus their attention depending on the current circumstances.

¹³ A notable exception to this trend is the *Kurdiji* ceremonies which are held several times each year and involve ever-increasing numbers of people (see Curran 2010, Peterson 2011, Curran 2011)

¹⁴ Warlpiri people had contact with *kardiya* before the settlement of Yuendumu was established because of their involvement working on cattle stations in Warlpiri country and other mission based depots.

¹⁵ This was the beginnings of an understanding of an audience for Warlpiri people who previously had only ever performed songs and dances as part of ceremonial contexts involving kin with particular roles (or other people who had been given classificatory kin categories).

¹⁶ James Teh, who was employed by the Yuendumu Council in 2006, opened discussions about holding a *Jardiwanpa* ceremony for the purpose of resolving long running family feuds which were plaguing Yuendumu with violence. This re-emerged in 2009 when two Warlpiri women, Peggy Nampijinpa Brown and Coral Napangardi Gallagher travelled to Elcho Island where they witnessed ‘conflict resolution’ type ceremonies performed. When they arrived back in Yuendumu there was again some mention of holding *Jardiwanpa* for these purposes but this never occurred.

¹⁷ Similarly other films held in prior decades were not spoken of whereas those that had been filmed were mentioned often.

¹⁸ A response to the 2015 SBS call for ‘Songlines on Screen’. To be broadcast nationally this year.

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