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An Expanding Aboriginal Domain: Mobility and the Initiation Journey

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ABSTRACT

Some pre-circumcision candidates in the Western Desert culture area are taken on a journey to gather people for the final ceremony. Since Aboriginal people started to own cars in the 1960s, these journeys have expanded to such an extent that the outward journey discussed here covered 2250 km. The question of why it is the initiation ceremony, rather than some other ceremonial form, that is becoming the basis for the integration of this expanding Aboriginal domain is addressed and the fragmentary evidence on the historical growth of the journeys presented. Three kinds of ceremonial integration are distinguished and a suggestion made as to why it is the initiation form that is the focus of this expansion.

Early in the spring of 1994 a Western Desert circumcision candidate set out on a pre-initiation journey, under the care of a guardian, to gather people for his ceremony. Such journeys are a long standing practice but this particular journey was remarkable for the distance covered: it took the boy and his guardian over 2250 km on their outward jouney. At that point they turned round to retrace their steps gathering people along the way in a party widely known as *jilkaja*.[1] By the time the *jilkaja* party arrived back at the boy's home community over 600 people were travelling with the initiate.

Circumcision ceremonies have long been central to biological and social reproduction in central Australia because the circumcisor(s) — more than one man may participate in the cutting of a boy — takes on an obligation to find the initiate a wife, typically his daughter. While these contractual obligations are still incurred by the circumcisor(s), people are aware that the younger generation frequently make their own choice of marriage partner independently of their parents's wishes and that circumcisors may not be able to deliver.[2] Despite this some of these initiation ceremonies are now bigger than ever in terms of the numbers attending and the distances travelled to gather people for them, although the numbers of boys circumcised at any one ceremony has generally remained in the range two to four.[3]

In this paper I want to address the question of why it is the initiation ceremony, rather than some other ceremonial form, that is growing in the size of its catchment and in the numbers of participants and to look at the historical growth of the initiation journey.

ABORIGINAL DOMAINS

Despite fifty years of government policy that has seen Aboriginal people in the greater Western Desert[4] become inextricably enmeshed in the welfare state, with a dependence on the market for food and the Department of Social Security for income, the social relations from their pre-settlement times remain relatively lightly transformed (see Peterson 1991).

Between the late 1930s and the early 1970s Aboriginal people in the Western Desert moved from an independent self-supporting life to living in heavily institutionalised villages, known as settlements until the 1970s, that were meant to serve as mediums of assimilation with their schools, clinics, more or less compulsory work programs, and shops for the supply of subsistence. Yet from their inception these institutional villages were founded on an inescapable contradiction. People who had lived in groups with an average size of 13.6 people (see Peterson and Long 1986:135) and at densities ranging from one person to 50 to 200 square kms were now living in settled communities of 200–1000 people which created a permanently expanded social universe that facilitated the reproduction of many pre-settlement practices. This was further underwritten by the economic, social and geographical isolation of these villages in huge Aboriginal reserves, entry to which was by permit for non-Aboriginal people.

From the 1970s onwards a more sympathetic, if still contradictory, set of government policies towards Aboriginal people, replaced the assimilation policy with one of self-determination which recognised Aboriginal people's right to determine their own future and to pursue lifestyles in accordance with their culture. The introduction of this policy led to a decline in the size of many of the major institutional villages which fragmented as small groups of kin moved away to set up their own residences back in the areas they had left in the previous 10–30 years — the so-called outstation or homeland movement (see Coombs et al. 1982). Some of the large institutional villages halved in size and outstations with an average size of 20–50 people sprang up in a hundred km radius of the villages which served as the local service and resource centres.

One result of the policy of creating large protective reserves is that, as John Von Sturmer has argued,

> [i]n parts of remote Australia it is possible to talk of Aboriginal domains, areas in which the dominant social life and culture are Aboriginal, where the major language or languages are Aboriginal, where the dominant religion and world views are Aboriginal, where the system of knowledge is Aboriginal; in short, where the resident Aboriginal population constitutes the public. (1984:219)

These reserves, now Aboriginal lands, have helped maintain and reproduce largely separate arenas or domains of social life which David Trigger has defined in terms of distinctive spheres of thought, attitudes, social relations and styles of behaviour (1986:99; see also Rowse 1992).[5] Although these domains usually have a spatial expression, they only equate with physical space where the spaces are clearly the province of Aboriginal social processes. While reserves/Aboriginal lands have helped Aboriginal people maintain social closure, Trigger argues (1992:100–102) that the issue is power relations and the limiting of the intrusion and influences of non-Aboriginal people and institutions in Aboriginal lives.

Although there is an element of resistance in the maintenance of the domains by Aboriginal people the separation was initially imposed as a way to protect them from the effects of interaction with Europeans. Even the separate social and spatial domains for Europeans living and working in some of the villages on Aboriginal lands are as much a product of a European desire for separation as that of Aboriginal people.

Formulating a sociological definition of Aboriginal domains in any region raises conceptual problems. Terms like tribe or society are problematic because they are reified entities which imply a non-existent unity and boundedness and set up a dichotomy between

group and individual that the indeterminancies of every day life belie (e.g. see Keen 1994, especially 1–35). Yet social life across the continent was not one continuous social network without focal points or variable degrees of intensity of interaction between nodes.

Prior to sedentarisation the basic residential unit was a group of households that made up a band which occupied a range. The band was integrated into a regional network through the personal, social, political and ceremonial ties of individuals to other individuals in nearby bands. Aboriginal people speak of this network in a spatial way as being made up of one-countrymen which Fred Myers has glossed as a term, 'delineating the widely extended set of persons with whom one might reside and cooperate' (1982:180). While occupants of any one locality would have slightly different ideas about the social and spatial composition of such a group there would be considerable overlap for people in any area principally because of the influences of topography and ecology, making it possible to refer to them as a community. The ethnography does not provide any substantial generalisable evidence on the sort of numbers of people, area over which they might be distributed, or relationship of language to such a group.

Beyond the community the social analyst can detect an even larger unit which I have called the culture area (see Peterson 1976); in the Western Desert this is often referred to as the Western Desert culture bloc (see Berndt 1959; Myers 1986:298–9). This latter unit is of a different order from the social and spatial groups already referred to in that it is not one that has been recognised by Aboriginal people, so far, but one that appears to be emerging. It is marked by an evident cultural similarity over a wide area and coincides quite closely with the area of uncoordinated drainage in the centre of the continent that covers some 256,500 square kilometres (Bauer 1955:9,7).

INTEGRATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

The loose integration at the regional level of one-countrymen/community was maintained, prior to settling down, by everyday social processes of visiting, trading, fighting, marrying and the less frequent but more significant activity of holding any of a wide range of ceremonies. This regional ceremonial life is and has been complex and dynamic for a long time. In the period immediately prior to European arrival, and subsequently, a major dynamic has been the competition between prominent men to create their own social domains, usually within more or less common 'one-countryman' communities, by promoting ceremonial gatherings of which they are the focus. They do this in a number of ways but it is clear that acquiring new ceremonies by exchange (see Kolig 1981; Petri 1979) is most important.[6] Father Worms reports Aboriginal people in the 1940s talking of a newly introduced cult in the following terms: 'Some people like goranara [Kurangara] to make themselves great. They think they can rule the others' (quoted in Widlok 1992:123).

Three types of ceremonies that contributed to the integration of regional domains can be distinguished: religious festivals, initiation ceremonies and cults.[7] Each of these linked up widely dispersed people but in different ways.

The religious festival was based on a number of neighbouring local groups getting together and showing each other some of their ceremonial patrimony (so-called increase rites) before a finale in which the difference between local groups was submerged in mass collective dancing. Into this category fall the Engwura of the Arrernte, the Kajirri and Kankalu of the Warlpiri and, possibly, the Worgaia[8] of the Kimberley. These festivals are distinguished by being based first and foremost on the celebration of ties to specific localities and because of this they are part of the economy of knowledge controlled by senior men. The Kajirri form is of fairly recent origin and highly mobile (see Meggitt 1966), having moved east and north into Arnhem Land and south from the Victoria River District in historic times and in the 1980s into the Pitjantjatjara lands as far as Docker River (Dussart 1988:241–246; Glowczewski 1991:272). Because it is based on land relations it is central to

the religious education of youths following their circumcision and subincision.[9] Through participation in such festivals youths become aware of the regional religious geography, the related patterns of rights in land and enter the bottom ranks of the male religious hierarchy.

The second type of ceremonial integration was through initiation, less ambiguously referred to as the circumcision ceremony.[10] In broad outline a group planning to circumcise young boys would choose one of them and send him on a circuit of neighbouring bands usually in the company of two men one of whom was often his actual sister's husband. For two to three or more months they would move from one group to another, staying briefly with each, holding a small ritual with them and in so doing securing the agreement of people from that group to come to the circumcision ceremony itself. The initiate and guardian having reached the farthest extent of their travels would then return by the route they had come gathering people from each group in a growing party until they arrived back at the home band where the ceremony was to take place (see Wallace 1977; Meggitt 1962:284–5; Tonkinson 1991:88–90). Other people might be invited by just sending the hair string belt worn by circumcision novices to particular groups.[11] Exactly how the spatial dimensions of the domain established by such gatherings related to that created by the festival, is unclear, except that because there is an emphasis in much of the Western Desert area on marrying geographically distant classificatory kin some of the people are likely to have come from much further away than in the festival gatherings. What is clear, however, is that the form of integration created by the initiation is rather different. In its widely spread Western Desert form, in particular, it is not tied to territorial organisation in any direct way but rather based on generational moieties which cut across local affiliations in a way somewhat reminiscent of an African age-set.[12] Although the whole of the host group is involved the emphasis is on the younger mature men who are the main organisers. The songs and dances are known by all adult men and there is no dependency on senior ritual specialists.

The third form of ceremonial integration was established by cults. These differ substantially from the other two types in their mode of integration because, today at least, they are based neither on locality nor on generational moieties but are voluntary and largely held by members of a particular village with only a limited supplementation of people from elsewhere. The cults can take one of several forms but the two most common at present are: a highly esoteric cult surrounded with secrecy and based on the movement of one or more sets of sacred objects from group to group rather than large movements of people;[13] and a less esoteric cult, *juluru* , but nonetheless with a major secret compononent. In the former, objects are documented as having moved over much bigger areas than the catchment from which participants in a festival or an inititation ceremony could possibly have come, indeed at their maximum extent, in one cult, they moved from near Broome in the north to Port Augusta in the south. It has been estimated that it took from 20–30 years for the objects to complete a full circuit of this area (Wallace 1977:86). Within this area there are two major subcircuits: a northern and a southern circuit (see Akerman 1979:238). In general terms the main objects travel around the Western Desert in a broadly anti-clockwise direction although there are others going in the opposite direction. Both of these cults tend to be controlled locally by senior men making them similar to the religious festival in this respect.

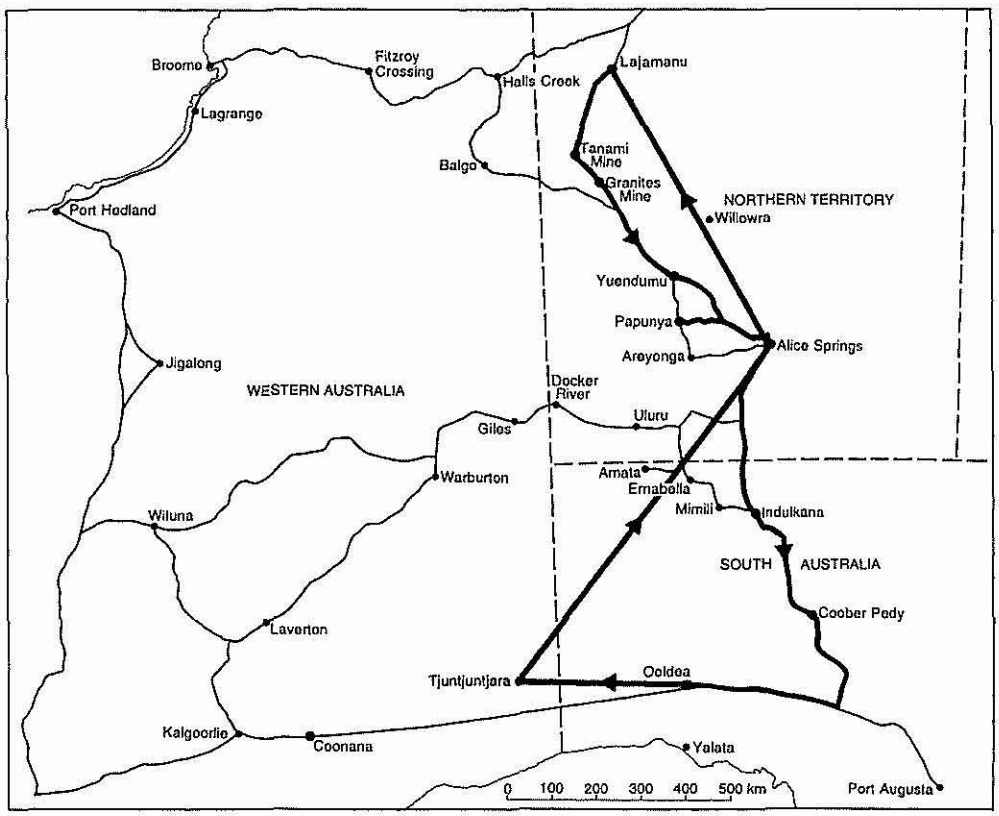
Thus while all three kinds of ceremony today are based around a local population (some part or all of an Aboriginal village), as presumably they were in the past, they are associated with different kinds of social fields. Generalising one can say that the festivals set up a gravitational field about the local population that varies in size with the status of the people sponsoring them. The circumcision rituals that involve *jilkaja* journeys, draw in people on the basis of geographically extended networks.[14] And the cults are largely confined to the local population supplemented by a few ritual experts from elsewhere. All three ceremonial types have spread, along with many other ceremonial types such as women's *yawalyu*, so-called fire ceremonies (see Peterson 1970) and others, and once established in a new area most take on a local cast, although not the circumcision ceremonies nor, probably, the cults.

SEDENTARISATION, VEHICLES AND THE INITIATION JOURNEY

Sedentarisation has affected the wider patterns of interaction. First it redistributed people into institutional villages that were widely dispersed (see Map 1). Second it made communication between people more difficult until the 1970s since Aboriginal people had problems getting access to transport. This did not greatly reduce the amount of ceremonial life within villages, indeed it led to an intensification (Long 1965:78) because now Aboriginal people were living permanently in larger groups (between 200–1000 people) than ever before but it made linking up with people in other communities more difficult. However the cult ceremonies, in particular, were still held as they were dependent only on small groups of men who would bring the objects from one village to another on foot, by donkey,[15] camel, horse or even bicycle (Petri 1979:232) and from the middle 1960s increasingly by car.

From time to time the superintendents of the institutional villages could be persuaded to allow one or two trucks to take a party of people to a nearby village for initiation ceremonies or participation in a religious festival but the administrators exercised a great deal of control over these inter-community gatherings because of their monopoly of transport and control of access to jobs and money. All this began to change from the 1960s onward as Aboriginal people started to gain independent access to cars.[16]

The first motor vehicle owned by a Pitjantjatjara man on the eastern side of the desert was a second-hand land rover purchased in 1961 with wages from employment on a water drilling rig (Edwards 1994:148). On the western side of the desert at Warburton they started to come in around 1966 with the opening up of a mine near the mission (see Gould



Map 1. Communities mentioned in the text.

1969:171–172). By 1970, a period that Hamilton refers to as a bridge between the use of camels and cars, cars were becoming more common in the Pitjantjatjara area (see Peterson 1977:144 and Hamilton 1987:51) and in the west around Wiluna (see Sackett 1980–2:130).[17]

1968 was the watershed because in that year the Department of Social Security started paying allowances in cash direct to the beneficiaries rather than to the superintendent of the village in which they lived: it was this access that led to the instant abandonment of camels, used by some Pitjantjatjara groups up until that time, and a greatly increased involvement with cars.[18] Akerman has noted (1979:236–7, 238) that there was a marked increase in ritual activity in the Kimberley around the same time (1972–1978) and mentions access to motor vehicles as one important factor in this increase. Today Aboriginal people generally have much greater access to vehicles but keeping them in running order remains a problem and most vehicles have quite short lives.[19]

The recent history of *jilkaja* journeys is not easily documented. Even where large numbers of people descend on a village for a few days it is only when there is a logistical problem for the European staff that they appear to make any lasting impression. Otherwise such movements are common enough that they attract only passing attention from non-Aboriginal people working closely with Aboriginal people.[20]

For the general public such movements largely go unseen since they mainly take place on back roads, firmly on Aboriginal lands and within Aboriginal domains, and where they leave these areas such large groups of Aboriginal people together are seen as intimidating and avoided. For Aboriginal people in any community they have a marked influence on patterns of movement. Roads become closed to Aboriginal movement for nobody should meet a *jilkaja* party on the road or leave a community before it, especially women and uninitiated males. As a consequence roads may be devoid of any Aboriginal travellers for days at a time in anticipation of a party arriving.[21]

The following information on specific *jilkaja* journeys is fragmentary but indicative. The first documented large gathering based on the car was at Docker River in October 1972. In that month circa 1700 people descended on the village in 55 cars and 7 trucks for a week (Peterson 1977:146). Sackett reports that Wiluna residents travelled 1,385 km to Docker River in that year, presumably to the above mentioned ceremony. He also indicates that they travelled 1000 km to Warburton in 1973 and 1,090 km to Strelly in 1974 (1978:111). Hope shows the range of *jilkaja* journeys made from Amata for a twelve year period from 1968 which included Yalata, Warburton, Papunya and Indulkana at the extremities (1983:80). This evidence appears to confirm the early and strong involvement of Pitjantjatjara and people to the west with the expansion of the journeys through their early access to cars.

At Yuendumu, on the eastern fringe of the greater Western Desert area access to cars was slower to develop. At the time I commenced fieldwork in Yuendumu in 1972 Aboriginal people had been integrated into the cash economy for about four years. Most of this money came from social security and the rest from a government commitment to provide a job for any Aboriginal person who wanted one on a training allowance which ran at about one third of the minimum wage. Thus although people were not wealthy they started to be able to afford secondhand cars through accumulating money in card games or through the pooling of funds by close kinsfolk. These were nearly always of poor quality and had a short useful life as the huge dead car dumps at the fringe of all villages attested.

There is limited information on the extent of *jilkaja* journeys prior to 1972 in the Yuendumu area, although Meggitt (1962:285) does indicate that in the early 1950s initiates from Yuendumu visited Mt Doreen, Mt Denison and Coniston cattle stations, all close by, and occasionally Haasts Bluff to the south (see also Long 1970:329).[22] For most of 1972 -1973 there were only two regularly working cars owned among one thousand Warlpiri people, although a number of others put in brief appearances of a week or two before breaking down irreparably. But with more money around the Yuendumu community responded to the

visit of an initiate from Papunya, 90 km to the south, in February 1973 by having a collection on pay day of $A7 per head to hire three buses. One hundred and twenty one men bought tickets and a few additional people went with me in my fourwheel drive. The *jilkaja* stayed three days before returning to Papunya accompanied by the above party. Later on that year a relatively small group hired a lorry that took them to LaGrange, 1200 km to the northwest, where they stayed two nights before coming back. It was the first time that many on the journey had seen the sea.

This expansion of the catchment of initiation ceremonies was not just dependent on access to vehicles but also a product of expanded, government inspired meetings on policy issues and, more importantly, sporting events that followed the election of the Federal Labor government in 1972 and a radical shift in policies. In particular the Yuendumu Sports Weekend, a central Australia-wide sports carnival held each August, grew rapidly through the 1970s.[23] In 1973 Pitjantjatjara men and Warlpiri men who were total strangers met for the first time at the Yuendumu Sports Weekend. The next year initiation ceremonies at Yuendumu had over 700 men present some of them Pitjantjatjara men from Docker River. In the Pitjantjatjara area the major sports carnival held at Amata in July 1976 was a turning point in the unification of the Pitjantjatjara who formed the Pitjantjatjara Council immediately following that event (Edwards 1983:297). Improvements in the outback road system (see Stanton 1983:171) and the growth in the availability of radio and telephone services to Aboriginal people have also played a significant part in the organisation and growth of the Aboriginal domain.

In April 1976 a major initiation ceremony was held in Papunya with people in attendance from the communities of Yuendumu, Hermannsburg, Areyonga, Indulkana, Ernabella, Mimili, Amata, Pipalyatjara and Docker River. The youth only travelled to Indulkana, from there on the hairstring belt worn by the novice was sent summoning people. Over 600 men were involved in the ceremony, three youths were circumcised and more than three hundred of the men were involved in aspects of second stage rites (Kimber 11/4/76).

The following month another novice was sent out from Papunya, this time on a northerly circuit to Yuendumu, Willowra, Balgo and probably Lajamanu. The differences between these two circuits suggest that the April 1976 novice was a Pintupi or Pitjantjatjara youth while the May 1976 youth was probably Warlpiri.

In 1977 or 1978 a senior Pintupi man set out with a novice and a driver from Papunya with enough food and petrol to get to Yuendumu. From Yuendumu he travelled to Balgo, Halls Creek, Port Hedland, Kalgoorlie, Warburton, Docker River, Alice Springs and back to Papunya (Kimber pers com). This route was unusual in that being a circuit the novice would not have brought everybody attending back with him. But it is typical in the way that one aspect of these journeys is funded: the novice and guardian(s) are supported by each community they turn up to and it is the senior members of that community that pass them on to senior members of the next community.

Even from this limited information it is clear that with access to the car and the new networks created partly as a result of the increased catchment of meetings and sporting events that the *jilkaja* journeys expanded rapidly from the beginning of the 1970s and the numbers of people attending some initiations also grew substantially.

JILKAJA JOURNEY TO TJUNTJUNTJARA

In April 1995 I was in a vehicle that gave a lift to a Warlpiri friend from Yuendumu into Alice Springs. During our trip he started talking with great enthusiasm about a *jilkaja* trip he had greatly enjoyed in October 1994. The novice had set out from Coonana, the resource village for Tjuntjuntjara outstation in Western Australia flying to Alice Springs and then on to Willowra. A leading man at Willowra then handed the novice and his guardian on to the Lajamanu community: by road Lajamanu is approximately 2250 km from Tjuntjuntjara. At Lajamanu the novice started the journey back. He was accompanied by two buses, one small

car, one Toyota Landcruiser and a large truck filled with supplies. These supplies were provided through the outstation resource centre. At Yuendumu twelve cars joined the party.

By the time they reached Alice Springs they had been joined by people from Napperby station, Willowra and the nearby Aboriginal owned station of Ti-tree and people from the Papunya area. They camped in Alice Springs for two days securing money from royalty accounts set up to assist with ceremonial expenses and administered by the Central Land Council. Most of these royalties came from three large goldmines in the Tanami desert; something of the order of fifty thousand dollars was obtained from this source.[24] Some of the money obtained here, as elsewhere along the route was spent on alcohol.

They then drove south to Mimili and Indulkana staying two days in the latter place where the Yuendumu contingent secured supplementary funding through the Yuendumu Social Club that runs the village store, for an eventual contribution of around thirty-six thousand dollars. In addition people were using their social security money. From Indulkana they went to Coober Pedy, then drove south to the railway line and followed the railway service track west until they arrived at Tjuntjuntjara. They were all impressed by passing near the area where atom bombs had been tested which the Lajamanu men believed had killed two Pitjantjatjara men. One man from Lajamanu also commented that his female relatives who were with him on the journey, travelling in the rear, were crying in fear at the huge sandhills and tall trees in this region.

By the time the convoy reached Tjuntjuntjara it had more than 30 vehicles (cars, buses and trucks) carrying some 300 men and a similar number of women and children. They joined over 400 people gathered at Tjuntjuntjara, the normal population of which is around 200, with the eventual estimated total number of people present around 1200 people. The Northern Territory group stayed there three or four nights during which time a number of young men were circumcised.[25] Two of the circumcisors were among the most influential men from Lajamanu, who as a result of this action, theoretically, incurred an obligation to provide a wife for the boys they circumcised. On the return journey many came back via Uluru to which the Warlpiri people from Yuendumu had had their social security cheques sent so that they had money for the rest of the return trip.

While at Tjuntjuntjara a Lajamanu Warlpiri man committed his son (unknown to the boy) to make the return trip from Lajamanu as a novice at Christmas 1995. It was planned that he would fly to Coonana/Tjuntjuntjara and then come back by road, presumably with a similar sized cavalcade. As it has turned out a return journey has not yet taken place at the end of 1998 and the boy has been made a young man at home.

The full cost of the gathering is uncertain but for twelve hundred people to be involved for two weeks at a modest cost of $100 per head for food and petrol, means that one hundred and twenty thousand dollars would be a conservative estimate.[26]

CONCLUSION

Through the extension of the initiation journey the greater Western Desert area is gradually being integrated into a common moral community, based on pre-existing broad commonalities of language and culture and improved access to transport. In the mid-1970s when Myers was working in the Western Desert he saw this unification taking place in the context of the *juluru* cult. This cult has a proselytizing character which emphasises the abandonment of drinking and violence and claims that it will draw young people away from personal sexual pursuits and rock-and-roll back into community ceremonial activity (1986:269). Since Myers was writing this cult seems to have lost its momentum and no longer draws so many people to it.

Reproduction of this wider regional sociality is now taking place primarily through initiation ceremonies. It is these ceremonies, which are still vital to the production of social persons, that are also reproducing the conditions of widespread relatedness, rather than either the religious festivals or cults. This is not entirely surprising. In his book on the

changes taking place in the religious life of the Kimberley region during the 1970s, Eric Kolig predicts an increasing egalitarianism within both the social and religious community (1981:182) marked by a decline in the territorially focused site based rites (the so-called increase rites) around which the religious festivals are organised.

Both religious festivals and cults are still dependent on a knowledge of extended song cycles, of totemic geography, of body designs and of sacred objects which place these ceremonies firmly in the control of the senior men. For the generation of Aboriginal people born in the villages, site based ceremonies have a reduced significance because they often refer to places and country that are largely, if not completely, unknown. The decline in the significance of such site based ceremonies may well have been partially arrested by the outstation movement and, in the Northern Territory, by land claims which return land to Aboriginal people on the basis of demonstrated connection to it. In the case of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* this specifically involves spiritual connection to sites on the land which has often been demonstrated through staging site-based male and female rites for the Aboriginal Land Commissioner when making claims to land. And now with native title applications, geographical knowledge that was in danger of disappearing has a new significance across the continent. Nevertheless such rites are dependent on knowledge of extended song cycles and require a long term dedication and discipline that is less common now than it used to be.

By contrast the initiation ceremonies are neither bound to locality nor to specialised knowledge under the control of senior men in the same way: the songs, dances and designs are known to all adult males.[27] In their widespread Pitjantjatjara form, which dominates much of the greater Western Desert, their age-set like character cuts across locality and gives prominence to younger men in their thirties as the organisers and key participants. These ceremonies are open ended and inclusive, based on knowledge and understandings that are widely held by all adult men. The conjunction of increased independent access to vehicles with the ever present desire to expand relatedness has meant the initiation ceremonies are the ideal means for extending social relations in an egalitarian way and at a time when there is less interest in the stricter disciplines of the site-based rituals. Further it is quite clear that all men get great pleasure from the travelling and more importantly from the mass singing of the powerful and moving songs of the initiation cycles and that they enjoy the playful competition, manifested mainly in verbal jousting, between the generation levels and the general ceremonial effervescence. [28]

Despite the greatly increased mobility and the loss of ties to many places this is only the beginning of deterritorialisation on a regional scale. At present most Aboriginal people remain firmly embedded in their home village even if there is high mobility between the villages and the regional town centres. Kinship, cultural practice, geography and racial difference ensure the continued reproduction of the village communities although it seems inevitable that increasing numbers of people will take up residence in the towns as time goes by. While most families are thus reproduced within the villages some few will be built on radical dislocation, usually for the wife, as a result of expanded *jilkaja* journeys and doubtless young men will expand their post initiation travels along routes first travelled on initiation trips.[29]

So far this expanded network has not been mobilised, to my knowledge, for political action nor by prominent men seeking election to political office in the Land Councils. Neither does it seem to be the basis of opposition to Europeans at this stage, although it is an entirely Aboriginal domain of which some people are consciously aware and proud.

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NOTES

1 This word is widely used in the Western Desert although various sources give slightly different meanings: it is not clear whether these reflect Aboriginal usage or different European interpretations/misunderstandings. The Hansens in their Pintupi Dictionary define '*tjilkatja wikarru*' as : 'Older boy. Used to refer to a lad taken on a ceremonial trip prior to his initiation' (1974:221). The Warlpiri dictionary defines '*jilkaja*', as 'travel on which young male initiate (*jakurdukurdu*) is taken to gather relations for initiation rites'. Hope (1983:94) suggests that among Pitjantjatjara the initiate is called *ulpuru* on the outward trip and *jilkitja* on the return trip.

2 While the system of contractual marriages and polygyny is undergoing transformation, the shortage of wives for young men continues in some Aboriginal communities. In Arnhem Land some enterprising young men who can see no chance to secure a legitimate wife locally, in the near future, are travelling to Alice Springs to find Arrernte women. Why they are able to find wives there is not entirely clear but there are around half a dozen Arrernte women married to young men in central Arnhem Land. Likewise in some Warlpiri communities the older male monopoly of wives is forcing younger men to seek Pitjantjatjara wives on their own initiative (Petronella Vaarzon-Morel — pers com).

3 Not all circumcision ceremonies involve a *jilkaja* journey today, although they probably did in the past. For an account of a circumcision ceremony held by Pitjantjatjara people at a time when they were entirely self-supporting see (Tindale 1935; 1972).

4 By 'greater Western Desert' I mean the Western Desert culture area as defined by the area of uncoordinated drainage in the central western part of the continent (see Peterson 1976:65–66). This is a larger area than that conventionally associated with the term Western Desert because it includes the Nullabor Plain and areas further to the southwest and northeast which are beyond the core areas occupied by the people typically associated with the term, namely, the Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Ngatatjarra, Martutjara, Yankunytjatjara, Kukatja and Pintupi. It includes the Warlpiri, Warlmanpa, Karajarri, Spinifex people of the Shell Lakes area and a number of other groups. There are, however, broad cultural and linguistic commonalities among all these people. Because of the impact of colonialism some people in the eastern Western Desert area actually have their communities just outside the area of uncoordinated drainage (e.g. Indulkana) but contiguous with it. While individual Aboriginal people in the areas immediately surrounding this greater Western Desert area may get drawn into the initiation domain, and particular journeys, such as Arrernte speaking people in Alice Springs and Hermannsburg, they are not (yet?) collectively integrated into the system.

5 This domain separation has a long history on cattle stations. In many cases it was further elaborated by separate camps for the Aboriginal stockmen and their families on the one hand and the non-employed Aboriginal people, often called the 'bush blacks', on the other.

6 The German tradition (see Petrie and Petrie-Oderman 1970:259; also Lommel 1952; Widlok 1992; 1997) is to speak of 'travelling business/ceremonies' which is glossed as 'migrating cult complexes'. I do not believe that this is a useful term because it suggests that there is a special kind of cult — the travelling cult — when in fact it lumps a number of different kinds of ceremony and types of ceremonial movement together. It is based on only a partial understanding of the dynamics of indigenous religion and does not refer to ceremonies associated with the common place long dreaming tracks but seems to have been derived from encountering the so-called Kurungura cultural revival (see Wilson 1954). It is now clear that the movement of sacred and secular objects, songs, dances, designs and ceremonies from one area to another has been intrinsic to most if not all aspects of Aboriginal religion for a long time, as Eric Kolig and Sylvie Poirier emphasise (1981; 1992), and does not just apply to a special category of ceremony. Poirier herself speaks of 'nomadic rituals' but again this does not define a particular type of ceremony, since all that is meant by the term is ceremonies that are exchanged for payment of various kinds. She emphasises the ways in which these exchanged ceremonies take on local place identifications over time.

7 The terminology in relation to these ceremonial types is not set and is somewhat confusing. In using the term 'religious festival' I am following Strehlow (1947:100). This is to be distinguished from contemporary dance festivals, women's (law) meetings (e.g. see Young and Doohan 1989:96) and the like, organised with the assis-

tance of state funded Aboriginal organisations (e.g. like the former Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, now the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation), and a relatively recent (1970s) innovation. These also serve to extend Aboriginal networks and it would be interesting to know in what ways their catchments are similar to or different from those of the three types of ceremonies mentioned above. More thought needs to be given to the classification of types of ceremonies and their inter-relationship than there is space for here.

8 The qualification is introduced because in the absence of a full description of the Worgaia it is not entirely certain that it is of the religious festival genre. While Petrie and Petrie-Odermann (1970:266–267) actually equate the Worgaia with the Gadjeri (Kajirri) in the La Grange area, Akerman (1979:236) is slightly more equivocal. Kolig, however, (1981:Chapter 10) identifies it with a quite different form of ceremony in the Fitzroy Crossing area.

9 Although there is no evidence available as to how the Kajirri is structured and performed at Docker River, if it still is, it is clear from the relationship between the Kajirri of the Lajamanu area and the Kunapipi of Arnhem Land that what is mobile is the form while most of the content becomes quite localised especially before the climatic few days.

10 Even this terminology is not fully satisfactory since while some boys are being circumcised others may be being subincised and older men taking on new roles in the ceremonies which both reflect and instantiate their constantly changing status.

11 Sometimes a number of separate journeys were made out from the home area. Just how the timing of the gathering for the final ceremony was managed in these situations is unclear. It is possible that it was with notched message sticks, as one or two sources hint, but this is a matter that requires further investigation.

12 There are a number of different forms of the initation ceremony. The most distinctive in the Western Desert is the Warlpiri form (see Meggitt 1962) but even this includes a substantial element that is derived from the Pitjantjatjara form with which most Warlpiri men are, anyway, familiar.

13 This is the so-called Red Ochre ceremony (see Mountford 1976:514–517). Although Yengoyan (1970:86,90) refers to it as an initiation ceremony it is important to distinguish it from the circumcision form of ceremony since you can only be inducted into it subsequent to having undergone the two physical maturation rites. The Kurungura (there are various spellings) was an earlier cult as defined here (see Lommel 1950).

14 Tindale's account (Tindale and Hackett 1933:102) of the dispersal of the people who attended the initiation at Konapandi hints at this kind of more linear network with a large party setting out to return home and groups dropping off along the way.

15 Donkeys were also used for going to circumcision ceremonies. Bill Harney (1953) has published a splendid picture, taken on Mt Wedge station, of a group of men riding donkeys on their way from Haasts Bluff to Yuendumu for such ceremonies. He comments that the party included people riding on '30 odd donkeys', a camel and a horse. The great logistical impact of the arrival of such a group is indicated not by a reference to the numbers in the party but by a request to Alice Springs, heard on the radio seven days later, for five extra tons of flour from Yuendumu.

16 See Young and Doohan 1989: Chapter 4, for a general discussion of population movement in relation to ceremonial life in recent times.

17 Vehicles were appearing in Amata around 1965, according to one of the referee's reports for this paper and none was available at Everard Park (Mimili) at the beginning of 1970 (Hamilton 1987:51). It seems that limited access to private vehicles may have been earlier in the northwest of Western Australia as John Wilson, writing about the Kurungura cult (in my terms) in 1954, suggests some people would arrive in 'ancient' cars (1954:15).

18 For the Aboriginal use of camels see the film, 'Camels and the Pitjantjatjara' (Sandall 1969). This film was made in 1967 with one of the last men in central Australia to have his own string of camels and to make active use of them, often by hiring them to other Aboriginal people to carry their swags (bedding-rolls). The second part of the film documents part of the journey from Areyonga to Papunya on the occasion of a number of Pintupi men hiring the camels to carry their swags back to Papunya after attending rituals at Areyonga, because no vehicles were available to do so.

19 Most men's access to cars is intermittent since cars rarely have a long life although this is gradually changing. Today the majority of Warlpiri vehicles are obtained with royalty monies paid out from the gold mines on their land. Because this involves substantial sums many people are able to purchase the preferred vehicle, a Toyota Landcruiser. Young men and those without access to royalty payments, such as most of the people in the greater Western Desert area, tend to purchase cheap secondhand cars. Another means of obtaining vehicles is through government grants: often people who have established an outstation and demonstrated its viability are able to secure a grant for a Toyota to service the outstation. Women have a much more limited access to vehicles and few of them can drive, although this is also gradually changing. Sometimes they are able to obtain a vehicle in connection with the establishment of a Women's Centre or in a few situations they may save money from performances of *yawulyu* (women's ceremonies) in the southern capitals (e.g. see M. Nungarrayi 1995:103–104). Cars, like most material possessions, can pose considerable problems for their owners because

of the enormous pressures placed on the owners to share access to them. Constant demands to ferry people around, to take them on trips, to go hunting, to collect firewood or to use the vehicle for socially problematic activities like gaining access to or transporting alcohol can create high levels of stress for vehicle owners leading them, on occasions, to destroy perfectly good vehicles as the only way to solve the problem (e.g. see Gould 1969:171–172; Myers 1989:23, and 23–26; Dunlop 1995; for the stress cars can create for fieldworkers in Australia see Gerrard 1989:110). For a marvellously light hearted self-parody of Warlpiri people's relationship with cars see the video '*Bush mechanics: a story of the outback car trade*'. Produced by Warlpiri Media Association Inc., CMB, Yuendumu, NT 0872, Australia 1998 (running time circa 30 mins).

20 Initiation journeys and the movement of large numbers of people occur most frequently on the Aboriginally controlled lands between Warburton and Indulkana, well hidden from public view.

21 In 1997 a young man driving a car from Katherine back to the Halls Creek area, with a young woman passenger, overtook a group of men travelling for ceremony from Kalkaringi to Ringer Soak. This immediately aborted the ceremony and has led to the young man being marked for life.

22 Norman Tindale has a marvellous detailed account of the post initiation travels of a young man in the Mt Leibig-Yuendumu area from 1931–1932 which I will analyse elsewhere. I thank Philip Jones of the South Australian Museum for drawing this to my attention.

23 Hope plots the meetings of the Pitjantjatjara Council against the range of initiation venues to show a (not unexpected) considerable congruence (1983:80).

24 Accurate costing is very difficult and none of these figures has been unequivocally substantiated, however I am quite confident about this sum and the minimum level of expenditure — see below.

25 According to information supplied to me by Scott Cane via the community coordinator, ten boys were circumcised. The ceremonies seem to have been affected by heavy rain which left people cold and somewhat miserable.

26 The sum would certainly be in excess of this. The store took $12,000 -$17,000 while the ceremony was on and handed out just over $15,000 from store takings to help people on their way home. This latter sum included free petrol/diesel. Almost all of this money was subsequently repaid. When this is added to the royalty monies, the Yuendumu store monies and probably two lots of social security payment (i.e. before setting out and on the return trip) it can be seen that the estimate is clearly on the low side.

27 In what has been referred to as the Pitjantjatjara form of the initiation ceremony, the ceremony is built around a song cycle that follows extended ancestral travels of the red kangaroo but the route and songs are widely known. In the main Warlpiri form of initiation the first sequence of the ceremony is based on site rituals before moving to a second phase which follows the extended travels of a group of female ancestors, their route and the songs being widely known.

28 See Tonkinson (1991:76) for a brief description of this behaviour. It should be said that there are also explicitly articulated fears associated with travel to distant places and residence among unrelated people which partly account for the short turn around times: people rarely stay more than three to four nights and commonly only two despite having travelled a thousand or more kilometres.

29 Berndt (1943:267) states that after the second stage of initiation young men were often taken on a detailed tour of their own immediate region to learn about the country in more detail. Certainly today, as in the past, such post initiation youths are footloose and travel widely together. In Warlpiri metaphor such youths are likened to budgerigars which travel widely in flocks and are shiny and colourful as the ochred intiates with their formerly distinctive hairstyles used to be.

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