

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Pila Nguru, Pitjantjatjara, Wati

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

PJT - Pitjantjatjara

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

10 km Northwest of Tjuntjuntjara, Australia: (-29.30, 129.30)¹

1.4 Brief history:

The Spinifex people are a hunter-gatherer society found in the southern part of Australia, approximately 10km NW of Tjuntjuntjara, Australia. How long the Spinifex have occupied the area is debated but some archeologist suggest human presence up to 40,000 years ago.³ This means in order for the Pila Nguru to survive they needed the capacity to find, conserve and share water.¹ When settlers were granted land in the early 1900s they did not try to grow in the desert's harsh terrain where the Pila Nguru resided.² Their first contact with modern society occurred in the 1950s with Britain's atomic testing at Maralinga in the far west of South Australia.¹

"A total of nine small hydrogen bombs ranging up to 25 kilotons were tested at Emu Junction (2 tests, 1953) and Maralinga (7 tests, 1956–1957). Given that only one officer and an assistant were assigned to warn the Spinifex people who lived across an enormous area far to the west of the test sites, many of the Spinifex were never informed, nor did they leave the area. Officially, all were forced to leave their lands and were not allowed within 200 km of ground zero. Officials made a leaflet drop, but the Spinifex could not read the leaflets and were wary and afraid of the aircraft.

- World Heritage Encyclopedia²

There was a push for Pila Nguru to reclaim some of the land lost with an application for the Commonwealth Native Title Act of 1993, and was made official in 2000 giving the Spinifex rights to 55,000 square kilometers of land.^{[2] [3]}

There are four major family groups³:

1. (The Anderson + Hogan + Underwood)
2. (Brooks + Donaldson)
3. (Hansen + Donnegan)
4. (Walker + Brown + Thomas + Jackson + Stewart)

The family ties however are quite complicated because they rely both on the family lineage and geographical location of birth. For example, the Spinifex place great emphasis on where the umbilical cord falls off after birth, however if someone else had the same birthright then the land was shared between the parties.³

In today's society, some still continue the tradition of hunting and gathering by hunting medium sized prey but most children are encouraged to pursue an education like in other modernized societies. The Pila Nguru have managed to survive this long because of their complex yet peaceful social structure. The Pila Nguru are a perfect example of hunter gatherer's because as they were able to develop untouched until the 1950s, which says that these are smart people who choose when to reveal themselves in their home terrain.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: See 1.4

1.6 Ecology:

The Great Victoria Desert's color changes from grey limestone to red and vegetation from bluish green woodland to lime-green spinifex grasslands.³ They would also burn hectares of desert that produced enough smoke to be visible on satellite, this is for both religious ceremonies and subsistence needs. Certain areas could not be torched because of religious beliefs, there are several acts of agency otherwise overlooked by people regarding the desert's ecology and its inhabitants.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

Low population density, highly nomadic with inclusive social networks; believed to have been over to 2,000 in the early 1900s.³

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Tuber, seeds, nuts

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Bandicoots, bettongs, wallabies, brush-tailed possums, snakes, goannas, witchetty grub, emu, bustard and kangaroo¹

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The Spinifex used to spears, boomerangs or elaborate nets¹ but some members have been known to use hunting rifles post contact.

2.4 Food storage:

As well as permanent waterholes and soaks, people moved to exploit the erratic and seasonal fillings of swamps, clay pans and salt lakes. Water supplies in rock holes and soaks were cleared and often covered to limit evaporation.¹(WATER) Stems and roots of certain mallee and wattles could yield water. Long, lateral roots were dug up, cut and upended so moisture within would drain into a dish or bag. Other water sources included animals, such as species of water-holding frogs that were unearthed and emptied.¹ (ROOTS)

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Women were the main producers and would forage for plant foods (fruits, nectars, tubers and seeds) while the men would hunt for animals (emus, bustards, kangaroo etc.).³

2.6 Land tenure:

The Spinifex People practice a system of land ownership around individual property. Depending on where subsequent generations are born and lose their umbilical cord, the land ownership would change as the person's parent's or grandparent's country could also be another person's birthright as well.³

2.7 Ceramics:

Clay pots

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

The desert extremes demanded a social order giving security. In such challenging terrain self-reliance had limits. Survival involved sharing country, knowledge and resources. You had to connect with neighbors. The desert was -- and still is -- a surprisingly communal place.¹

2.9 Food taboos:

The Spinifex did not add any salt or any other type of seasoning to their meals, but instead ate the meal solely after it was cooked.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns: See 1.4

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Typical family structuring that would be seen in most European civilizations: Father at the head with the mother supporting and raising the children.³

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

The myth of the Seven Sisters dictates women's sexual freedom, so they do not enjoy true sexual freedom.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

The husband must avoid the step parents and step family while in the process of getting married.³

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Today traditional marriages are encouraged.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Marriages used to be arranged with a 'promised partner' but now there is encouragement to traditionally marry and pick your own partner.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

The tribe behaves like several independent families with a tribal background, akin to the states making the country.

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The Spinifex would 'chase rain' which means they would follow the rains because in the harsh desert rain was a precious commodity.

This would vary depending on where the winter and summer rains were heading.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

The territory has defined boundaries but they changed according to birthing location and several other variables.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Hammocks were used but so was the ground.³

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

The Pila Nguru are known for their art and use it as a commodity.¹

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Yes, the more 'country' owned meant more ritual sites and higher status in the Pila Nguru society.³

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

Alcohol is banned and is considered a serious crime to the Spinifex.³

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

The fathers and uncles travel together, to the north and in the sun; cousins and sons travel together, to the south and in the shade or the lower terrain³. There are also puberty rituals for the boys as they become men

6.4 Other rituals:

A massive dance (inma)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Wati Kutjarra (The Two Men), Minyma Tjuta (Seven Sisters), Python Man (Wati Kuniya), Eaglehawk (Wati Walawuru), Female

Goanna (Milpali), Thorny Devil (Nyiarri), and several more all made with murals to help tell the story.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Spinifex are known for their art and are very valuable in the art world. They tell stories through their paintings like those listed in

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: None

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Tjukurrpa (Dreaming)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

After someone dies their name is not spoken until long after reburial.³

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Tjukurrpa was told through beautiful paintings, which encompassed several scenes but needed to be interpreted by someone versed in the Tjukurrpa.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: They paint themselves for rituals on their face and body.³

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect: None

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Siblings are seen as intellectual equals and education is encouraged for both boys and girls.³

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. CHESTER, QUENTIN. 2013. "THE SPINIFEX PEOPLE." Australian Geographic no. 116: 86. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost
2. World Heritage Encyclopedia. "Pila Nguru." Pila Nguru | Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing - EBooks | Read EBooks Online. N.p., n.d. Web. Feb. 2017.
3. Cane, Scott. Pila Nguru: The Spinifex People. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 2002. Print.