

## 1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Alternative names include Elpira, Ilpara, Ngaliya, Ngardilpa, Wailbri, Walbiri, Walmama, Walpiri. The language family lineage of Warlpiri is Australian, Pama-Nyungan, South-West, and most specifically Ngarga.<sup>1</sup> The genetic relationship with languages outside the country has been lost.<sup>2</sup>

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): wbp<sup>1</sup>

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): The Tanami Desert is the traditional place where Warlpiri-speaking people lived; today they live in various towns on the cattle station of willowra as well as in Alice Springs and across the top of northern Australia.<sup>2</sup>

1.4 Brief history: Although there is no archaeological evidence indicating when the Warlpiri first inhabited the region, we know that other parts of central Australia have been occupied for 22,000 years. Starting in 1862 European explorers began passing through Warlpiri country but the development of the pastoral industry in the Victoria River District in combination with a gold rush in the Halls Creek region in the 1880's is what initiated sustained contact for some of the Warlpiri. The pastoral and gold mine industries brought conflict and displacement to those around them. Since the pastoral settlement of the area to the northwest of Alice Springs infringed more directly on the Warlpiri, the 1928 killing of a station hand at Coniston Station resulted and this led to reprisal expeditions in which 31 people were admittedly killed by police and station workers. Warlpiri in the area were scattered because of this and some retreated to other cattle stations. The settlement of Yuendumu was established by the government in 1946 and this is where many Warlpiri in the region moved. The period in which any Warlpiri were living completely independent life "in the bush" was ended by this settlement. There is limited recolonization of the remoter desert regions due to outstations and homeland centers being set up in the area of traditional Warlpiri land interests. Until settlement, hunting and gathering was the method by which the Warlpiri survived.<sup>2</sup>

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The government set up the Yuendumu settlement which relocated many Warlpiri.<sup>2</sup>

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Warlpiri people generally belong to the arid region to the northwest of Alice Springs in Australia.<sup>3</sup> The traditional home of the Warlpiri tribe was an area with a boundaries to the south by the Stuart Bluff Range, to the east by Lander Creek, to the north by (roughly) latitude twenty degrees south, and to the west by the Granites and Waite Creek – which is about 20,000 square miles of desert and mountainous semi-desert country.<sup>4</sup>

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 2,670 people in the population according to 1996 census.<sup>1</sup> Population density could be as low as one Warlpiri person per 90 square kilometers.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): roots, fruits, grass, tree seeds.<sup>2</sup>

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: lizards, small marsupials, and occasionally kangaroos and emus.<sup>2</sup>

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Spearheads were traditionally used for hunting<sup>2</sup>;

2.4 Food storage: *N/A*

2.5 Sexual division of production: Women gather vegetables and small game while men focus on hunting small and large game.<sup>2</sup>

2.6 Land tenure: Rights come from one's father or mother, but one's place of conception, burial place of a parent, or shared ceremonial interests in terms of an ancestral hero also play a role. Patrilineal descent is the primary means of conferring rights to use resources of a tract of land. Lines of ancestral travel link important places, and by being linked to one of these places one has the expectancy of being consulted on matters regarding that place. Maternal interest has a level of high importance as well. The Warlpiri now own most of their traditional lands and receive payments from any mining activity that occurs on their lands.<sup>2</sup>

2.7 Ceramics: *Not specified.*

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: *Not specified.*

2.9 Food taboos: *Not specified.*

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? *N/A*

## 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): *Not specified.*

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): *Not specified.*

#### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): *Not specified.*

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Females are typically in early teens at first birth. Age of males varies.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970's, men would have to wait until their thirties to have their first child with their wives that were often 15 years younger than them. Nowadays, men tend to marry women of their own age and are having children in their teens.<sup>7</sup>

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): *Variable.*

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): *Variable.*

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): In the past, females were typically around 10 years old at the time of their first marriage while the man was in his thirties giving an average age difference of about 21 years.<sup>2</sup>

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Permanent, stable unions are the ideal, but males and females can both expect to have 2 to 3 spouses in their lifetime. Comparative to the amount of marriages not ending in divorces, divorces don't occur as often, but they are still prevalent.<sup>2</sup> Marriages are generally short-lived and not very stable until people reach middle-age. Divorces are not a formal or legal thing, they are signified by the man or woman moving out.<sup>6</sup>

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: As of 1959, the Warlpiri have been characterized by a low incidence of polygamy.<sup>6</sup> However, before then, the Warlpiri have been considered polygynous with men averaging about 2 wives each.<sup>4</sup>

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Bride price is a part of some marriages.<sup>6</sup>

4.9 Inheritance patterns: There is a high level of importance placed on patrilineal descent, although maternal linkages play a role as well. There are not many material items to inherit, but the senior mother's brother is the one who takes care of the allocating of possessions. He is also in charge of the avenging of a death. See 2.6 for more information on inheritance.<sup>2</sup>

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Nowadays, biological parents aren't quite as involved with the rearing of their own children since marriage and sexual relations are so fluid. Typically the grandparents or those on the paternal side of the family take a big role in the care of the children. Mothers typically teach their daughters and fathers typically teach their sons.<sup>6</sup>

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: *Not specified.*

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Marriage is generally and preferably endogamous, but the main point of importance is the kinship relationship.<sup>6</sup>

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? If a "boyfriend" is the father of the child, the husband is still socially recognized as the father. Even when genealogies are taken, the biological father is referenced but then the husband of the mother is still recognized as the father.<sup>6</sup>

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"): *Not specified.*

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No.<sup>6</sup>

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Domestic violence is frequent and is perpetuated by both men and women, but women often are hurt more often by men.<sup>6</sup>

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): In the past, preferred marriage partners were second cousins, but recently more and more Warlpiri have been marrying first cousins.<sup>2</sup> A man prefers his wife to be either his "mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughters" or his "mother's brother's daughter." All other relationships are considered to be prohibited and make up only about 8% of Warlpiri marriages.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, the mother of potential husband and mother of potential wife traditionally have a ritual in which the future mother-in-law of the husband dances with a firestick, and this not only confirms her approval for her young/unborn daughter, but it creates a bond between her and the boy's mother. The mothers are typically cross-cousins. The future father-in-law of the husband acts as the boy's circumciser.<sup>7</sup>

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Females have more say in who they marry as they get older. Females can expect to have several husbands in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Women can have "boyfriends" when they are married as long as they follow the "accepted" choices for a spouse (they can't marry someone of the "wrong skin").<sup>6</sup>

- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: extramarital offspring are often public knowledge, but the husband of the wife is generally deemed to be the father of the child regardless.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Paternal grandmother is likely to take charge of children. However, if the children are a result from a “wrong” marriage, then the mother’s mother will typically care for the child.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: *Not specified*. Back in the days of hunting and gathering, female infanticide was practiced in many aboriginal societies, as well as polygyny, which led to females being scarce. Many more boys were present in childhood than were girls. Some aboriginal Australian cultures had ratios of 127:100 boys to girls. I haven’t seen specific numbers for the Warlpiri though.<sup>5</sup>
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: *No*.
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): Husband of mother, regardless of whether or not he is the biological father, is considered to be the father.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Respect is given to the men and women who are middle-aged and elderly in the community.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Yes, an example is when a man and woman are “promised” to be married, people who are sitting around gossiping will jokingly call the man “your husband” to the woman before the two are married, and this is generally followed by a lot of laughter.<sup>6</sup> There is a practice called *jiliwirri* that is performed in the female realm that involves excessive joking that leaves everyone laughing.<sup>7</sup>
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Patrilineal descent is the primary means of conferring rights to use resources of a tract of land. Lines of ancestral travel link important places, and by being linked to one of these places one has the expectancy of being consulted on matters regarding that place. Maternal interest has a level of high importance as well. The Warlpiri now own most of their traditional lands and receive payments from any mining activity that occurs on their lands.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Siblings are not deemed appropriate to marry.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No, after the promise at initiation, the marriage is announced by the new wife moving into her husband’s camp. The girl joins her husband without any formality. Today, the announcement is done in a similar fashion, only it may be the wife moving in with the husband or the husband moving in with the wife that constitutes the announcement of their marriage.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? *Not specified*.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Marriages occur within the tribe most times, but there are a percentage intertribal marriages. The main point of concern is kinship relatedness. Typically the newly married couple lives with the wife’s tribe but the children eventually come back to the Warlpiri father.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? In the past, first marriages were almost always arranged, often when the girl was really young or even before she was born. The number of arranged marriages are in sharp decline now.<sup>2</sup> Marriages have traditionally happened in three ways: the levirate (widow marries deceased husband’s brother), matriline negotiations, and promised marriage (includes bride price and betrothal).<sup>6</sup>
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: *Not that I’ve seen*.

## **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: A percentage isn’t given, but it was considered a large number if 20 men were killed in a war-like event.<sup>5</sup>
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Neighboring tribes such as the Warramunga would raid the Warlpiri lands for sport and to abduct women, so the Warlpiri would put together war parties to retaliate. If they were successful in killing and driving off the men, they would carry away any women they found.<sup>5</sup>
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Retaliation was one reason for killing those in outside tribes, but there have been reported instances of fighting for the claims of water. One instance was with the tribe called the Waringari. The Warlpiri were victorious in the battle for the water, and both sides took casualties of about 20 men.<sup>5</sup>

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Not really specified, but in the days of hunting and gathering the Warlpiri had problems with their neighboring tribe, the Warramunga.<sup>5</sup>

4.18 Cannibalism? No.

## **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: *Not specified*.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Traditionally nomadic,<sup>1</sup> but have recently shifted to a more stable stationary residence.<sup>3</sup>

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): There is no formalized political system, but senior members of a patriline have considerable authority in religious affairs. Large sums of money and resources are controlled by town council chairmen and councilors.<sup>2</sup>

5.4 Post marital residence: The wife traditionally moves into the husband's camp, but nowadays the husband can move in with the wife if that is the best circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Boundaries are not well defined.<sup>2</sup>

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): At age 10, boys go to sleep at single men's camp.<sup>2</sup> Women's camps, *jilimi*, have become more prevalent.<sup>6</sup>

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: *Not specified*.

5.8 Village and house organization: Most Warlpiri live in towns ranging from 300 to 1200 people in size. At the core of each town resides a store, a clinic, a primary school, a municipal office, a workshop, a church, a police station, and a number of European-style houses. Only a limited number of Warlpiri occupy these European houses, and the remainder of the population lives in a wide variety of housing. "Humpies" (which are sheets of iron arranged in a tent-like structure) and one- and two-room huts are two sides of the housing spectrum in which the Warlpiri reside. Access to immediately located water and electricity is limited for everyone except for those in good housing. The domestic unit typically consists of husband, wife/wives, unmarried children and sometimes elderly dependent (usually one of the couple's parents).<sup>2</sup>

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): *See 5.8*.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? *Not specified*.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Moieties are a very important factor in determining acceptable marriages.<sup>6</sup>

5.12 Trade: In the past, many material items were exchanged, but it was more in the nature of gift exchange. Red ochre from the mine at Mount Stanley. Balls of hair, spear shafts, and shields were items that were exchanged for the red ochre. Exchanges of ceremonies occur between the Warlpiri and other linguistic groups in the area.<sup>2</sup>

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? *Not that I've seen*.

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Most people in the community are actively involved in religious life, although time allocation is not specified.<sup>2</sup>

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): There is no separate class of religious practitioners. All adults have an active role in religious life. Some people, however, are noted to be particularly knowledgeable about specific bodies of religious knowledge. A number of older people are thought to have healing powers.<sup>2</sup>

6.2 Stimulants: *Not specified*.

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): at the age of 11-13 boys go through "initiation" which is a period of seclusion and they are circumcised.<sup>2</sup> There is an initiation journey called *Jilkaja* in which a group of directly related males travel 2250 kilometers from Yuendumu to Tjuntjuntjara. At some stages this journey involved up to 600 people. *Jilkaja* is part of the even larger initiation ritual called *Kurdiji* and this involves up to 20 boys in one ceremony as well as hundreds of participants composed of immediate family members. Boys of age thirteen and fourteen are "caught" and then taken to a secluded area. Shields are painted with dreaming designs and men and women are singing while painting. The women paint their chests with dreaming designs. An all-night ceremony ensues and men sing songs of ancestral women undergoing an eastward journey. There is deep symbolic meaning behind the songs and dances, but in recent days very few understand the symbolism. This initiation emphasizes the transition of being born into a new role

with a new social function.<sup>7</sup> Upon death, there have been rituals in the past in which there was a platform burial with disposal of bones in a termite mound. In recent times people are buried in cemeteries.<sup>2</sup>

6.4 Other rituals: In addition to maturation ceremonies, there are community-based ceremonies to resolve conflicts and to celebrate the winter solstice and there are important religious festivals.<sup>2</sup>

6.5 Myths (Creation): Ancestral heroes are believed to have crafted the landscape.<sup>2</sup>

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Art is central to religious life. Designs given to people by ancestors are religious property. Songs commemorating the deeds of heroic ancestors are even more important than the designs. Singing is essential for turning boys into men, curing those who are sick, easing the pain of childbirth, attacking enemies, guaranteeing fertility, and tapping into the powers of the Dreaming. There is also a huge range of religious sculpture.<sup>2</sup>

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Women have lower status than men and have a significantly lower involvement in ceremonial life.<sup>4</sup>

6.8 Missionary effect: *N/A*

6.9 RCR revival: *N/A*

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The personality of an individual is believed to disappear with death, but the spirit is believed to return to the ancestral spirit world.<sup>2</sup>

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? *Not according to any source I've come across thus far.*

6.12 Is there teknonymy? *No.*

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): The concept is called *jukurra*, translated as “the Dreaming.” Ancestral heroes are believed to have created the world and landscape. These beings emerged from the subterranean ancestral spirit world. The activity of these beings is what is believed to have transformed the land’s surface. Creative acts of these beings are denoted by sources of water. Spirit children reside in places in which these ancestral beings left behind life force. This life force is responsible for human and nonhuman life. The designs on the bodies of the ancestral heroes are the designs that are reproduced in ceremony today. Mildly malevolent spirits called *gugu* are often used to keep children close to adults at night or away from ceremonies being held by men. *Mungamunga* are female ancestral spirits that appear in dreams with new songs, dances, or designs. Bodies of water are believed to harbor rainbow serpents.<sup>2</sup> The “Ancestral period” is referred to as “the Dream time” and ancestors are referred to as “the Dreamings.”<sup>3</sup>

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: “The skin provides a medium through which women transform into the object world.” Warlpiri inscriptions are called *kuruwarria* which means ancestral presence, essence, and/or birthmark or freckle.<sup>8</sup>

7.2 Piercings: *N/A*

7.3 Haircut: *Not specified. Pictures I have seen show a variety of haircuts.*

7.4 Scarification: *No sources I've come across have said anything regarding scarification.*

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Necklaces and other body adornments worn around the neck are indicative of love and are worn during love-related ceremonies since love and sexual yearning is believed to originate in the throat, and not the heart. Often these necklaces are woven out of hairstring.<sup>9</sup>

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Ancestral designs are painted on men and women during ceremonies.<sup>2</sup>

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: *Not specified.*

7.8 Missionary effect: *N/A*

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: *N/A*

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: *Not specified.* The Warlpiri use an Arandic system of kinship.<sup>2</sup>

8.2 Sororate, levirate: There is somewhat of a pressure from society and the Warlpiri culture for the widow of a deceased man to marry his brother, but it is not required.<sup>6</sup>

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): The Warlpiri have what is called an Arandic system of kinship that has four lines of descent, but has no named patrilineal or matrilineal descent groups. There are generational moieties, semimoieties, and subsections. The subsection system divides the population into eight categories and they appear to be a shorthand way of referring to matters organized by genealogy, land, religious matters, and other things.<sup>2</sup>

#### 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

They were hunter/gatherers.<sup>1</sup>

They're writing system is Latin script.<sup>1</sup>

Widows had to observe a one-year speaking taboo following the death of a husband, leading to the use of a highly elaborated sign language which is still in use among older people.<sup>2</sup>

Adultery is commonplace, and men and women typically have boyfriends and girlfriends while in a married relationship. These relationships are generally public knowledge, and as long as they follow the accepted choices for a partner (when they involve partners in the right classificatory kin relationship) and as long as the husband/wife doesn't react, the relationship is publicly accepted.<sup>6</sup>

Emotions are believed to stem from the stomach, not the heart. And love/lust/sexual desire is believed to stem from the throat.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <<http://www.ethnologue.com/>>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Warlpiri.html>

<sup>3</sup> Munn, Nancy D. "Walbiri Graphic Signs: An Analysis." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 64, No. 5, Part 1 (Oct., 1962), pp. 972-984. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/666947>>.

<sup>4</sup> Meggitt, Mervyn. "Djanba among the Walbiri, Central Australia." *Anthropos* (1955): 375-403. *JSTOR*. Anthropos Institute. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40451033>>.

<sup>5</sup> Gat, Azar. *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Musharbash, Yasmine. "Marriage, Love Magic, And Adultery: Warlpiri Relationships As Seen By Three Generations Of Anthropologists." *Oceania* 80.3 (2010): 272-288. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 19 Mar. 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Curran, Georgia. *Ethnography & the Production of Anthropological Knowledge: Essays in Honour of Nicolas Peterson*. Ed. Yasmine Musharbash and Marcus Barber. *The 'Expanding Domain' of Warlpiri Initiation Rituals*. Australian National University. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <[http://epress.anu.edu.au/apps/bookworm/view/Ethnography & the Production of Anthropological Knowledge: Essays in honour of Nicolas Peterson/5581/ch03.xhtml](http://epress.anu.edu.au/apps/bookworm/view/Ethnography%20&%20the%20Production%20of%20Anthropological%20Knowledge%3A%20Essays%20in%20honour%20of%20Nicolas%20Peterson/5581/ch03.xhtml)>.

<sup>8</sup> Schildkrout, Enid. "Inscribing the Body." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 33, (2004), pp. 319-344. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/25064856.pdf?acceptTC=true>>.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholls, Christine. "Yilpinji Love Magic And Ceremony." *ArtMob*. <<http://www.artmob.com.au/artists/yilpinji/essay.html>>.