Journey of the *Lorrkon*: Indigenous Burial Rituals and Colonisation in southern Arnhem Land

By

Peter Carty

BA (Honours), BA

Thesis submitted to Flinders University
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Archaeology
and
Heritage Management

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

28 March 2025

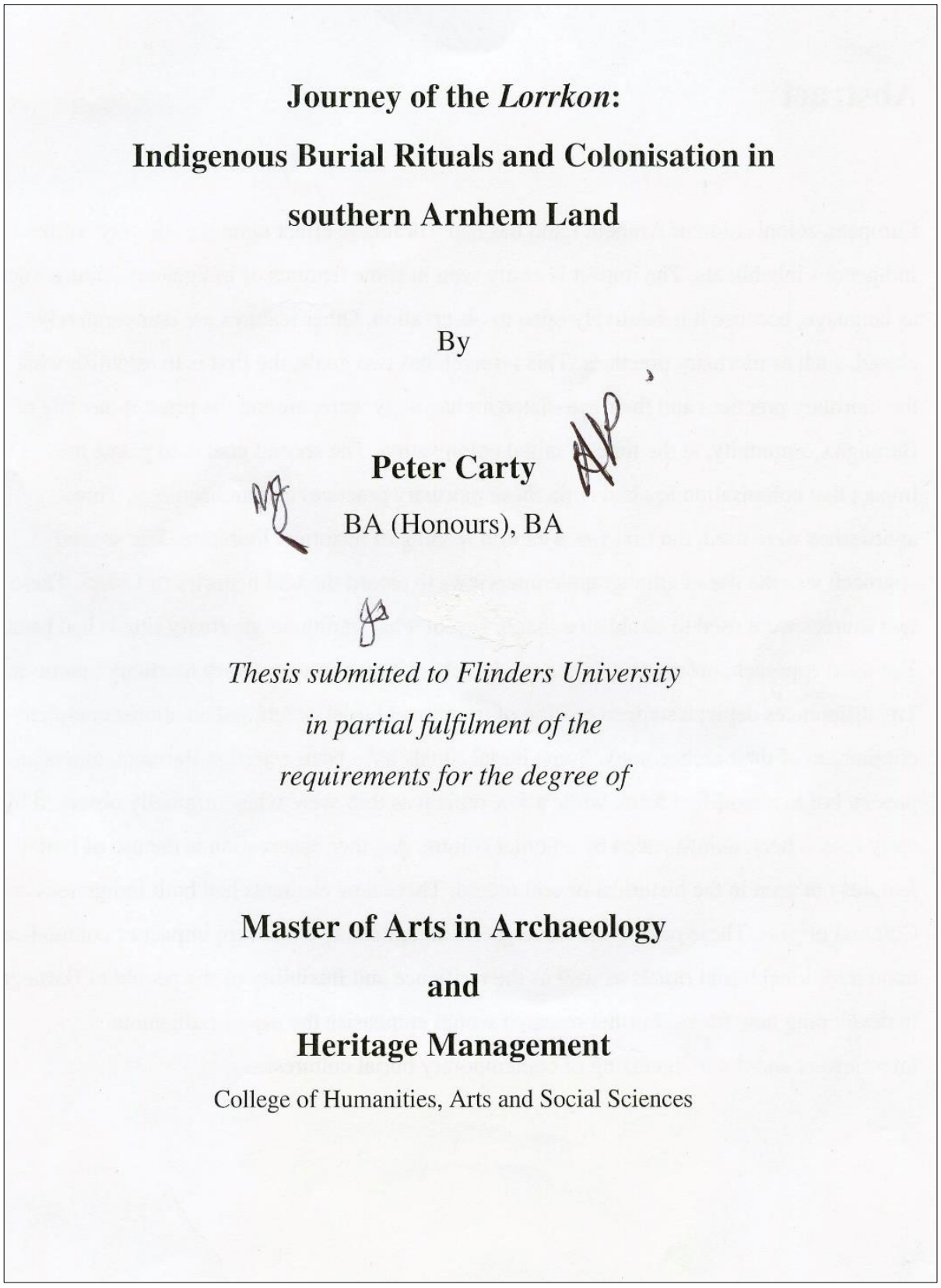

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Figure i. The title page of the penultimate draft of this paper signed by community Elders.

Acknowledgements

Without the assistance of the following people this research would not have been possible.

From top left, Jocelyn McCartney and Mavis Jumbiri with Anita Painter behind the keyboard.
Top middle, Lachlan Jumbiri,
Top right, Guy Rankin.
Middle, Eduard Ikara and Eddie Oenpelli.
Bottom left, Seth Jumbiri and Jeff MacDonald.
Bottom Right, Chadwick Koimala, an incredibly helpful and generous person.

Figure ii. Local research assistants and their signatures, indicating permission to use their image in this paper.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Claire Smith for assisting me financially, as well as with her knowledge and wisdom throughout my research. She is a true *Boddhisatva* of the academic realm. Claire's personal history and knowledge of the people at Barunga were essential for this research. It would never have taken place without her.

At Flinders University Library my thanks go out to Briar Tyndall, the queen of patron engagement, who assisted in finding old books and old films from older storage facilities.

Finally, a huge thank you goes to my mother who has given me unwavering support throughout this project.

WARNING

This research contains descriptions and photographs of indigenous burial practices and human bones.

Viewer discretion is advised.

Abstract

European colonisation of Arnhem Land has had a dramatic effect upon the life ways of its Indigenous inhabitants. The impact is easily seen in some features of Indigenous culture, such as language, because it is relatively open to observation. Other features are comparatively closed, such as burial practices. This research has two goals, the first is to establish what the burial practices and their associated archaeology were, in southern Arnhem Land in general and the Barunga Community in particular, at the time of colonisation. The second goal is to gauge the impact that colonisation has had upon these burial practices and archaeology. Three approaches were used, the first was a forensic reading of literature for descriptions of traditional burial practices. The second approach was interviewing Elders at Barunga for their recollections of traditional burial practices. These two sources were used to construct a Baseline of traditional burial practices. The third approach, observations, was used to record contemporary burial practices. The differences between the Baseline and contemporary burial practices describe a stepped, or staged erosion of traditional burial rituals and an almost complete elimination of their traditional material culture. At Barunga, some burial practices have been eliminated or are currently neglected, others are present but in a modified form, while roughly one quarter remain as they were when originally observed by early researchers, uninfluenced by colonial culture. Another observation is the use of burial practices not seen in the historical or oral record. These new elements have both Indigenous and Colonial origins. The results illustrate both the severe impact that colonialism has had upon traditional burial practices, as well as the resilience and flexibility of the people of Barunga in maintaining some practices and developing new ones. Further research would emphasise the use of Indigenous interviewers to gain a more nuanced understanding of burial practices and the re-Indigenizing of contemporary burial practices.

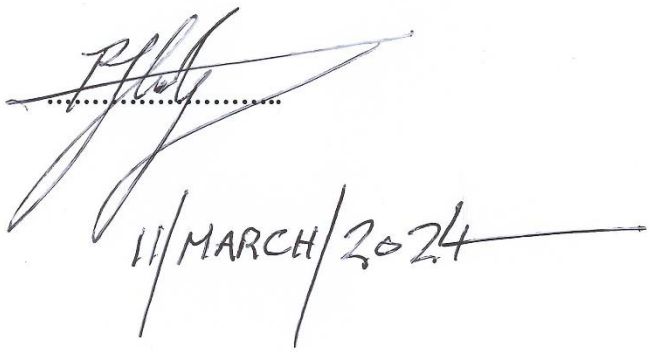
Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university,

2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and

3. that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



Peter Carty

Date 11/MARCH/2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Questions

Indigenous populations around the world have been impacted by European colonisation in many profoundly negative ways. Two pervasive impacts have been cultural decline and acculturation (Berry 1994:1-2). In Australia, the traditional customs and beliefs of many Indigenous communities have diminished due to colonisation (Gee et al. 2014:60). This decline is not a new or isolated phenomenon, and has occurred throughout Australia in varying degrees. In Northern Australia the decline of traditional culture in most communities has been noted since the turn of the 20th century by Basedow (1907:8), Spencer (1914:266) and more recently in southern Arnhem Land by Smith (2004:157-8). Simultaneous with the decline in traditional culture, because it is part of the same process, is the slow and steady adaption, or acculturation, of the colonised to the customs and beliefs of the colonisers. This has, and is, happening to Indigenous groups throughout Australia, and the people of southern Arnhem Land are no exception.

The decline of cultural features in some areas of Indigenous life is easy to see. One such feature is the use of traditional language. In southern Arnhem Land, in the traditional land of the Jawoyn, the Jawoyn language is fading from use. This was driven home to me sharply during my time of fieldwork at Barunga when I attended the funeral of one of the last fluent Jawoyn speakers. Unfortunately, it is likely that the Jawoyn language will soon cease to exist. This passing is being experienced by many Indigenous groups throughout Australia.

Harder to see, but happening nonetheless, is the fading of cultural features in other, more closed areas of Indigenous life. These are features that, while they are not necessarily *secret*, or actively hidden from the uninitiated, are of a sensitive nature and are not often displayed by communities. One of these features, and the focus of this paper, is traditional burial rituals. Here burial rituals, their decline, change and resilience since colonisation will be examined. The primary research question being:

1) What has been the impact of colonialism upon the traditional burial practices, and their associated archaeology, of the people living in Barunga Community specifically, and southern Arnhem Land in general?

To answer this question, several secondary research questions are addressed:

2) What were the burial practices at the time of contact with Europeans?
3) Which traditional burial rites are currently neglected?
4) Which traditional burial rites are performed today but in a modified form?
5) Which traditional burial rites remain resilient, uninfluenced by colonialism?
6) Have any new burial rituals come into existence?

It should be noted that this research emphasises the Indigenous burial rituals practiced and the changes they have undergone. Except in broad brushstrokes, an analysis of Colonialism, its origins and methods of application are beyond the scope of this paper.

1.2 Significance

The significance of this research is twofold. First, it constructs a list of the Indigenous burial practices, and their associated archaeology, that were in use at the time of contact with Europeans. This forms a time capsule of knowledge that can be repatriated to future generations of Indigenous people, should they desire to revive their traditional burial practices. Second, by using burial practices as a microcosm, the research illustrates the degree of cultural change that Colonisation has forced upon the Indigenous people of southern Arnhem Land.

1.3 Research Area

The research area had two foci, dependent upon the method used. Literature research incorporated the majority of Arnhem Land, while fieldwork was focussed in Barunga Community, with additional work in Katherine and Wugularr/Beswick, henceforth known as Wugularr (Figure 1).

1.3.1 Literature Research

Literature, in its broader sense of incorporating films, videos and photographic collections, produced by researchers working with Indigenous people across Arnhem Land was examined for observations of traditional burial rituals. This wide cast was due to three factors. First, the dearth of researchers focusing specifically on southern Arnhem Land. Second, the relatively recent creation of the Barunga Community in 1951, but then named Beswick Creek

Native Settlement. It was renamed Bamyili in 1964 and Barunga in 1984 (Roper Gulf Regional Council 2023a; Smith 2004:58). Third, the high degree of cultural interconnectedness and a similarity in cultural practices between neighbouring groups in south, central and western Arnhem Land.

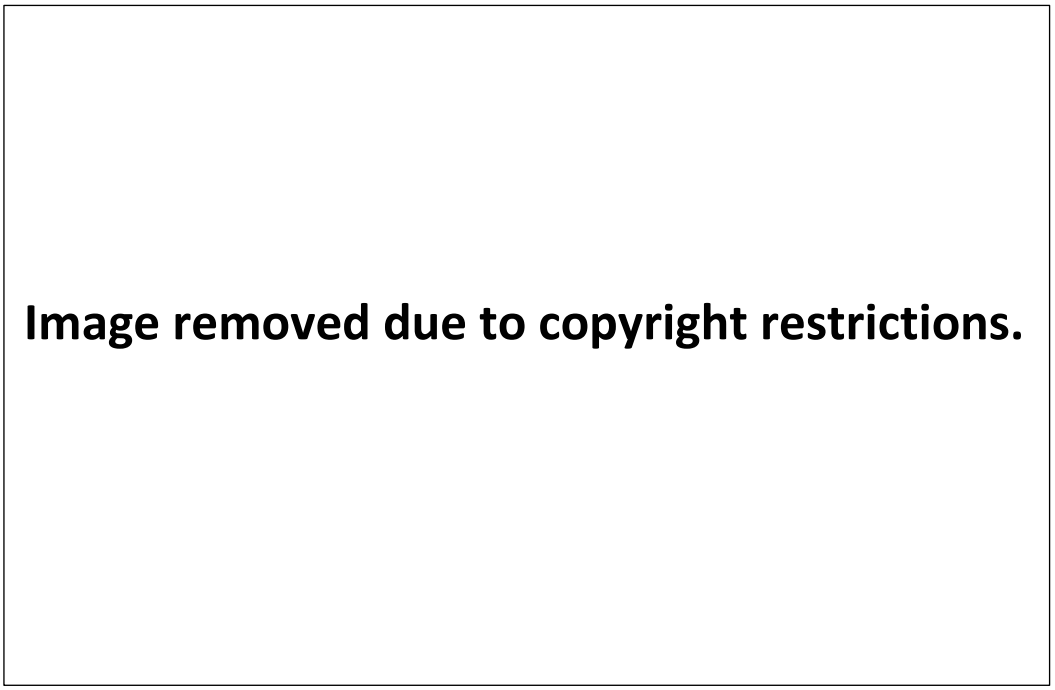

Figure 1: Showing Barunga, red starred, the focus of this research (Graphic base-layer, Jawoyn Association 2023a).

1.3.2 Fieldwork

The majority of field work was conducted at Barunga Community, 80km to the east of Katherine, population in 2021 of 337 (Roper Gulf Regional Council 2023a). Additional research occurred in Wugularr, 30km to the east of Barunga, population in 2021 of 542. Like Barunga, Wugularr is an Aboriginal Community on Jawoyn traditional lands (Roper Gulf Regional Council 2023b). While Katherine is a larger regional centre, with a population in 2021 of 9,643, of which, 2,460 were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024), (Figures 1 and 2).

1.4 The People and Culture of Arnhem Land

While some differences exist between the burial rituals of different language groups across Arnhem Land, there are also a surprising number of similarities. These similarities are due to: the kinship links between people, common Dreaming affiliations and trading networks, all of

which transcend language boundaries (Berndt 1951; McCarthy 1939; Thompson 1949). These social, ceremonial and economic networks transported both material goods and intangible cultural features such as songs, dances, stories and spiritual protocols. Group's ceremonial and spiritual worlds were not static, or locked into traditional forms. They were dynamic and changed through repeated borrowings and adoptions. Ceremonies, including those associated with death, and their accompanying dances and songs, moved around Arnhem Land giving neighbouring groups a high degree of cultural similarity (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Showing the major Indigenous language groups of Arnhem Land in 1961, with Barunga, Katherine and Wugularr, marked in red.
(Graphic base-layer, Elkin 1961c, reproduced with permission).

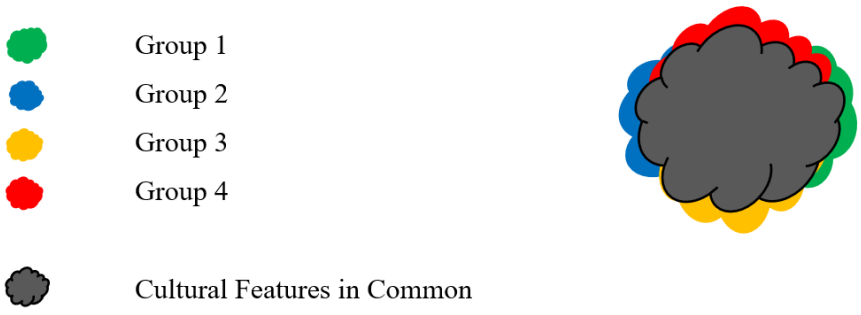

Figure 3. A graphic representation of the overlapping nature of the cultures of neighbouring language groups.

1.4.1 The People and Culture of Barunga

Southern Arnhem Land is the southern section of the Jawoyn peoples' traditional country. While once dominantly populated by Jawoyn speaking people, since colonisation the area has experienced an inflow of people from several neighbouring groups. Primary among these are the Ngalkbun from the east, and the Maielli from the north (Figure 2, Table 1). Elkin's map, with its lack of clearly defined borders delineating group territory, was used here as it better represents what was a dynamic and flexible concept. This mixing of groups at Barunga was observed by anthropologist Maddock, who noted:

> The majority of Beswick [Barunga] Aborigines are not only living outside their country, but have little or no first hand knowledge of it,…Despite their linguistic diversity, they perform close variants of the same ceremonies and have similar social organisation. (1969:43, 45)

It is therefore misleading to think of southern Arnhem Land, or Barunga, as being peopled solely by the Jawoyn, or the culture displayed here as being representative of Jawoyn culture. Just as the main language spoken in this area today is Kriol, a mixture of several Indigenous Arnhem Land languages and English, so too the people and culture of this area is a mixture of several Arnhem Land groups and European. An example of the mixing of people from different language groups is seen in records from 1961 for the Beswick Aboriginal Reserve (Table 1).

Table 1: Language Groups, Beswick Aboriginal Reserve, 1961. Later renamed Bamyilli, and then Barunga in 1984 (Smith 2004:70, reproduced with permission).

Language Group	**% of Population**
Jawoyn	17
Mielli	25
Ngalkbun	35
Rembarrnga	13
Mara and others	10
Total	100

The resulting picture of Arnhem Land and Barunga is that, before colonisation, there were several language groups whose populations shared a many cultural features, including burial practices. While after colonisation, social disruptions and physical displacements caused

many from neighbouring language groups to come to rest at Barunga. It became equal parts a government administrative center and a lifeboat in southern Arnhem Land.

1.7 Ethics

Ethical guidelines and procedures were a key consideration when planning and organising the fieldwork. This is a direct repercussion of the exploitation of Indigenous groups by researchers using the banner of 'science' to excuse their culturally abusive behaviours (Fitzpatrick 2020; May 2005; Mountford 1960). It is to guard against the mindset of exploitation, whether for land, artefacts or knowledge, that the Australian Archaeological Association (2023) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2023a) have both created Codes of Ethics for researchers working with Indigenous people. While these guidelines are non-binding, they were instrumental in framing the conduct and determining the attitude of this research.

Three examples of correct attitude and behaviour for research at Barunga are listed here. A more detailed description of ethical considerations is provided in the Methods chapter. The first example is an understanding of the nature of *permission*, and the need to acquire it on many levels before and during research. Whether to enter the community, perform research or publish a photograph of a resident. A second example is the understanding of the need to pay for using images of community members. While a third example is the need to be accompanied by at least one community member when travelling to culturally important sites on Country.

An ethical assessment was conducted by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), covering the greater research project of the lead researcher, Dr. Claire Smith. Approval for research being granted from 2014-2025 (SBREC 6390). This current research was undertaken within Dr. Smith's overarching program.

1.8 Terms

Following are several terns used throughout the paper and their intended meaning.

Arnhem Land - This label and geographical area is an imperial European construct that does not reflect any divisions between the Indigenous populations of the area. In 1623 a Captain of

the Dutch East India Company, Jan Carstensz, named the area after cruising along a small section of the northeastern coastline. He named it after a ship under his command, *Arnhem*. (Macknight 1976:97; McCarthy 2006:27-28). The internal boundaries of Arnhem Land were not established until 1931 with the creation of the Arnhem Land Reserve. These borders were then extended south in 1940 to include the Roper River area (Dewar 1992).

Colonisation - This word is used to represent the European occupation of Australia. It falsely suggests a calm, orderly and conflict-less expedition, an adventure into unknown lands that were previously unoccupied (Smith and Jackson 2006:319). In reality it was an armed invasion from whose beachheads expanded: diseases, soldiers and civilians armed with alcohol, advanced weaponry and an ideology of racial superiority. These forces killed a large percentage of the Indigenous population, many hundreds of thousands of people.

Traditional - Indicates the rituals or material culture of Indigenous people as they existed at and immediately before colonisation by Europeans, i.e. uninfluenced by European culture. This is not necessarily tied to a date or time period, as contact with European culture occurred in different decades and centuries in different regions. Also, Indigenous communities vary in their adoption of colonial culture. Some have remained resilient and continue to perform traditional rituals today (see Murray 2008; Thomas and Bijon 2018).

Traditional Owner or *Gidjan* - is an honorific title for half of the leaders who are responsible for overseeing and conducting the key spiritual ceremonies responsible for maintaining the health of their clan's land. *Junggayi*, also known as Custodian, is the title for the other half of the leaders. Traditional Owners and Custodians are mutually dependant, calling upon each other to assist in the correct, traditional performance of ceremonies (Jawoyn Association 2023b; Maddock 1982:47; Smith 2004:9,153). The term, Traditional Owner, is more commonly used, but does not indicate any superiority over *Junggayi*.

Junggayi - is a title given to a person who is seen to be the traditional Custodian of a skin group, or clan homeland. They are divided between the two moieties, *Dua* and *Yirritja*, and gender. They are responsible for the performance of ceremonial rites and duties, i.e. specific: songs, dances and artistic designs that are fundamental to their clan's, identity. They are bound in a reciprocal relationship to the *Junggayi* of the opposite moiety within their skin group (Jawoyn Association 2023b; Maddock 1982:47; Smith 2004:9,153).

Secondary Burial - This is a western academic label used to describe an Indigenous burial process that involves two distinct stages. The first stage lasts from weeks to months, and involves the decomposition of the soft tissues of the body. The second stage involves the processing of the bones, with the community then enacting a final set of burial rituals. It was these final rituals that laid the soul to rest (Ekengren 2013:176). For Indigenous groups in Arnhem Land this broad burial pattern is the traditional approach, with variations increasing with the distance between the groups. The complete sequence, from death to final burial, could take from months to over a year.

Lorrkon (Lorgun, Lorgan) - has two meanings. First, it is the name for a set of traditional burial ceremonies practiced by most, but not all, Indigenous groups in Arnhem Land. These ceremonies were held when the moon was wanning, and had slight variations according to the moiety, (Berndt and Berndt 1970:133) and the Dreaming of the deceased (Spencer 1914:252). The *Lorrkon* Ceremony corresponds to the second stage in the secondary burial process. *Lorrkon's* second meaning is as a noun. It is a container for the bones of the deceased after the soft matter has decayed away and they have been ceremonially processed. A *Lorrkon* is usually painted with red, yellow and/or white ochre in designs appropriate to the deceased's Dreaming and sung with appropriate Dreaming songs. A *Lorrkon* is made from a log that has been hollowed out, hence its alternate name, a hollow log coffin. After ceremonies were complete it was either planted in the ground upright in a secluded spot to decay naturally, or taken to a secret spot, such as a rockshelter in the hills, known only to male Elders.

1.9 Summary - Thesis Outline

This chapter has introduced the primary research question, *what has been the impact of colonisation upon the traditional burial rituals of the people living in southern Arnhem Land generally, and Barunga specifically*. It has also, located the research geographically in a remote area of northern Australia, outlined key ethical considerations and introduced important terms and concepts. Chapter Two examines previous research into Indigenous burial practices and outlines theoretical frameworks through which the research is guided and interpreted. Chapter Three describes the Methods used in data collection and their limitations. Chapter Four details the Results of data collection. While Chapter Five discusses and

interprets the impact that colonisation has had upon traditional burial practices, and examines emergent themes observed in contemporary funerals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Research into Indigenous burial practices is an ongoing theme in Australian archaeology. This chapter examines recent research, focusing on their theoretical and technological approaches, with strengths and weaknesses identified. Reviewed research is divided into two geographic areas, that conducted within Arnhem Land and that within the rest of Australia. This chapter also establishes the theoretical frameworks that guide the conduct of the research, and through which the results are interpreted.

2.2 Australia, Excluding Arnhem Land

Recent work on Aboriginal burial sites in areas other than Arnhem Land includes the work of Spry et al. (2023) with the Wiradjuri near Molong, in the Central Tablelands of NSW and Sutton et al. (2020; 2013) with the peoples of Mapoon, western Cape York.

Both these investigations have been heavily influenced by the methods of decolonising archaeology. Elements they share include; an emphasis on interviews with community Elders to gather knowledge, an understanding that there is a plurality of voices within a community and that no one person can speak for the entire clan, the need to have the finished research papers written in easy-to-understand English, and the use of sophisticated technologies such as ground penetrating radar (GPR) and 3-D imaging through photogrammetry. However, their research aims have been limited to establishing the traditional meanings embedded in specific archaeological features, such as tree carvings, or the locating of forgotten graves. They do not investigate the complete burial process, from death to final burial, or address the current state of Wiradjuri or Mapoon burial rituals. Therefore, they do not address change through time, i.e. the changes brought about by colonisation upon traditional burial practices. Also, both were heavily invested in locating gravesites using GPR. Superficially this technology promises a quick and non-invasive, and therefore culturally respectful method for detecting gravesites. However, this is a highly problematic technology, particularly when assessing Indigenous gravesites. The nature of Indigenous gravesites, e.g. small bundle burials, with limited grave goods and no coffins, make identification with GPR difficult. This is due to the high number of false positive responses created when rocks or other naturally

occurring subsurface features create reflections that are misinterpreted as burials. As Lowe et al. (2020) states, ‘interpretation [of GPR data] is often speculative, with excavation rarely carried out to confirm the specific nature of GPR-identified anomalies.’

Mainly working in south east Australia, Colin Pardoe (2017, 1995, 1988a, 1988b), Donald Pate (2003, 2002) and Judith Littleton (2015, 2007) have produced a prodigious body of work concentrating on traditional Aboriginal burials and cemeteries, of which only a small part are cited here. Independently, Pardoe and Littleton have focused on the locating and describing of Aboriginal burials, gravesites and cemeteries and understanding their usage patterns. Pardoe and Pate have primarily used bioarchaeological or osteological approaches. Where Pardoe has emphasised the use of GPR, Pate has utilised radio isotopic methods of analyses, and Littleton the use of historical literature. More recent work by Littleton (2019) has targeted the interactions between Europeans and Indigenous people, i.e., the impact of colonisation. However, she examines the roles of: disease, fence lines, water control and grazing, but not burial customs. These researchers have emphasised the archaeology of traditional burials. However, they have paid little, if any, attention to the rituals surrounding burials, and even less to contemporary Aboriginal burial practices and what they say about the impact of colonisation.

2.3 Arnhem Land

Early researchers in northern Arnhem Land, like Basedow (1907), Spencer (1914), Warner (1937/1958) and Thompson (1949) all recorded invaluable information, forming a foundation on top of which later researchers stand. Perhaps chief among these is the work of Berndt and Berndt (1970) among the *Gunwinggu* people in the north, and Morphy (2008; 1991; 1984) with the *Yolngu* in the north-east. Berndt and Berndt have provided perhaps the most complete description of the *Lorrkon* Ceremony. Possibly because the use of a husband and wife team allowed access to information from both sexes. Morphy has spent many years building close relationships with the *Yolngu*, closely examining their production of what westerners call ‘art’. With forays into its use in mortuary rituals and its spiritual symbolism.

The archaeological expeditions of some early researchers were ethically questionable, being little more than raids to acquire Indigenous material culture for institutions in their home cities. While they usually hired ‘informants’ these people were rarely acknowledged and usually paid

only an exploitative subsistence wage. This Colonial attitude continued into the 1940s, reaching its nadir with the American Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948, under the leadership of Charles Montford (1956; 1960). During their stay at Oenpelli, now known as Gunbalanya, archaeologists pillaged Indigenous burial caves for skeletons and artefacts, allegedly without the knowledge of the local people (May 2005). These remains have recently been repatriated and reburied in a traditional manner. A process captured explicitly on video by Martin Thomas (2018) in his documentary *Etched in Bone*, with permission granted by Traditional Owner Jacob Nayinggul. While not an academic work, this documentary reveals much about traditional burial practices, particularly the second stage of burial. Information, from the thoughts, considerations and decision making of the Traditional Owner, to the conduct of the burial, is conveyed not by a heavy, directing narration, but by showing the process openly to the camera, with the viewer becoming a first-hand witness.

While this last paragraph crosses into an historical overview, this transgression should be forgiven as it serves to illustrate the dramatic change in attitude, ethics and methods that research into burial practices have experienced in the last 80 years. The era of colonial pillaging is dead and buried. In an ethical reaction to this exploitation, community led research that foregrounds the considerations of Indigenous people is becoming the norm. Leading this 'new ethical wave' of decolonising methodologies in southern Arnhem Land has been researchers such as Claire Smith, Gary Jackson and Jordan Ralph.

At Barunga Community, research into Indigenous burials has been conducted by Ralph et al. (2021) and Smith, Jackson and Ralph (2018) with a survey of unmarked graves and their subsequent identification. This project practiced several tenants of decolonising archaeology, e.g. it was a community initiated and led project, performed at the request of community *Junggayi* Guy Rankin. It involved several long-term residents, Elders and Traditional Owners, and requested them to contribute oral histories of burials they had witnessed at the graveyard, and to perform surveys of the headstones present. This led to the identification of many who had previously been lost.

This is an example of community archaeology in action. Archaeology performed for the people, by the people. A commendable project, providing a sense of closure for the bereaved families. However, from a critical perspective, it only furthers the acculturation of the community to the colonial norm, with the dominant culture dictating the burial practices

used; a fenced off cemetery, neat rows of graves, an identifying headstone, flowers and a white crucifix.

Prior to this, archaeological research focusing on traditional burials in central and southern Arnhem Land area has been carried out by Gunn (2021), Jelinek (1979), and MacIntosh (1951; 1952). Archaeological discoveries made during this research confirmed the traditional use of bark bundles as a second stage of burial. With bundles found in remote rocky crevices and burial caves, extremely similar in description to those discovered by Mountford (1956; 1960) near Gunbalanya, western Arnhem Land. Thus, demonstrating the close cultural connection in burial practices between these two regions. Jelinek and MacIntosh also identified the practice of leaving grave goods, dilly-bags filled with the personal belongings of the deceased, in the bark bundles. While Gunn worked for the Jawoyn Association, and so his research is oriented towards Indigenous goals, the other research mentioned was colonial in orientation.

2.4 Summary

From this review, major and minor themes in recent research into Indigenous burial rituals come to the fore. The major one has been a shift in the overall attitude of archaeologists to their subject matter. This has been from one where the pillaging of sites for museum worthy examples of osteology and material culture was the main priority, to one where the concerns of the people being researched are acknowledged, and their participation requested. The minor theme in research has been the rise in the use of sophisticated technologies in the conduct of fieldwork. Ground penetrating radar technologies hold great promise but are not without their weaknesses, while 3-D imaging is a useful tool for the non-destructive documentation of in situ features. Herein lies the strength of the current research. It combines the use of modern technologies, such as 3-D imaging, with historical research, ethnographic interviews and contemporary observations of burial practices. These methods create an ethically collected, fine-grained picture of the impact that colonialism has had on traditional burial practices.

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks: Decolonising and Marxist Archaeologies

2.5.1 Introduction

Two theoretical frameworks are used in this research. The first is decolonizing research methodologies, the second is Marxist archaeology. Broadly speaking, the ideas and concepts of decolonising archaeological research are used as ethical guidelines for the acquisition of information. While the concepts of Marxist archaeology are used to understand the social and political influences on, and changes to, burial practices.

2.5.2 Decolonizing Research Methodologies

In Australia, as with other nations with colonial legacies, the last decades have seen a shift in national attitudes towards their Indigenous peoples. Policies emphasizing reconciliation and inclusion have entered national agendas. Here the archaeological community has followed suite. Moving away from imperialistic approaches where Indigenous understandings were ignored (Joan Gero 1987:97), towards approaches such as Decolonizing and Indigenous archaeologies, that emphasize the importance of Indigenous knowledge and the involvement of Indigenous people in research on their cultures (Jackson and Smith 2005, 2006; Ouzman 2005; Smith and Wobst 2005).

Under these theoretical umbrellas, the archaeological community is actively developing and honing ever more culturally appropriate frameworks and methods to collect, document and communicate Indigenous knowledge. McNiven and Russell (2007) outlines approaches that are entering the mainstream of archaeological practice. Three of these are briefly described;

1) *Host-Guest relationship.* This is a model for the relationship between the researcher and an Indigenous community. It establishes the fact that the Indigenous people are the owners and controllers of their land and heritage, constantly reminding the researcher of the power relations at play, and their junior position within them.

2) *Emphasis on oral traditions*. The focus on oral traditions foregrounds the Traditional Owners, *Junggayi* and Elders of the community. It shows them respect by honouring their memories with the recording process, acknowledging and demonstrating to all their ownership of important lore. In doing so it makes them active participants in the

construction of their own histories (McNiven and Russell 2007; Smith and Wobst 2005:7).

3) *Research goals focused on local cultural history*. Rather than research focused on Big Picture archaeological questions, that may well be irrelevant to the community hosting the research. Research should be focused on local cultural history, reflecting local community desires and needs (McNiven and Russel 2007).

2.5.3 Marxist Archaeology

Marxism provides a rich theoretical background for critical understandings of society, politics and economics. Many of the central themes and concepts of Marxist analysis have been adopted and applied to archaeology.

Perhaps the most potent theme in Marxism is class conflict. Latin America has therefore been fertile ground for the growth of Marxist archaeology (McGuire 2007:84,89). Here, societies are often split between coloniser and colonised, Imperialistic invader and Indigenous inhabitant. The violent imposition of Spanish rule over Indigenous populations in Latin America has direct parallels with the violent imposition of English rule over Indigenous populations in Australia.

Other Marxist concepts of direct relevance to this research include:

1) *The Means of Production* - In a capitalist economy these are; i) the land or raw materials, ii) labour or people, iii) the organisation of labour and, iv) the tools used to produce goods and services (McGuire 2007:81). Here, the land produced not only physical sustenance, but also through sacred sites, the social and spiritual identity of the Indigenous people.

2) *Dialectic* - Is the relationship between individuals and groups in society with opposing, contradictory and eventually conflicting interests (McGuire 2007:79, 81; 2002:12). These contradictions produce social tension that can intensify, initiating social change. In the Northern Territory, a key dialectic is the ownership of land. Originally owned by Indigenous peoples, it was violently appropriated by pastoralists, then through political organisation and agitation, in many cases given back. The reversion of Beswick Station

to Indigenous ownership in 1976, and the granting to the Jawoyn people Native Title to their land in 1991 are but two examples (Roper Gulf Regional Council 2023a).

3) *Praxis*, theoretically informed practice or *agency*, where human activity transforms the world and themselves (McGuire 2007:83). An Indigenous example of this is the political organisation and legal action that led to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. This* allowed Aboriginals to claim rights over land they could show traditional ownership of, and has resulted in almost 50 per cent of the Northern Territory being returned (AIATSIS 2023b).

4) *Alienation*, is when an individual is powerless, when they have lost property rights or ownership of land, and so rights to its produce (McGuire 2002:49). In Australia, the alienation of Indigenous people was initiated with the British legal fiction of *Terra nullius*, which translated as, 'land belonging to no one' (Buchan and Heath 2006). The British Crown claimed sovereignty over the land, and parcelled it out to pastoralists who stocked the land with cattle, removing the Indigenous inhabitants from their traditional sources of food, water and spirituality, (Thomson 2003:121). Thus, alienating them and creating an outback proletariat, a pool of cheap labour for stations and mines, such as the Maranboy Tin Mine, close to Barunga.

2.6 Summary

This overview of recent research into Indigenous burial practices in Australia and specifically Arnhem Land, highlights both the useful and problematic approaches of previous researchers. The theoretical concepts embedded in decolonising research methodologies, and a Marxist framework, aid in a more ethical acquisition of knowledge and provide a critical understanding of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous burial practices. How these concepts and others are be implemented, and their limitations, are the subject of the next chapter, Methods.

3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides a description of the methodologies used during research. This is to allow a high degree of reproducibility, enabling future researchers to replicate aspects of this study, or base further research from it. Other emphases are: the ethical concerns involved, the limitations of the data collection methods and the limitations of the study as a whole.

3.2 Selection of the Study Area

The research was conducted in southern Arnhem Land. Primarily at Barunga Community, 80 km south-east of Katherine, with additional research conducted in the Wugularr Community, 30 km east of Barunga and also in Katherine, the regional centre. The selection of Barunga as the focus for this study was based on its accessibility. Traditional Owners, *Junggayi*, Elders and Community members have a long and positive history with the supervisor for this research, Dr. Claire Smith.

3.3 Ethics

> 'So what you're walking in is a minefield of ethics,' (Claire Smith, Appendix II, Int. 1, 5:50, 2023).

Ethical considerations are an essential part of research with Indigenous people today, and a major focus for methods used in decolonising archaeology. These methods help guard against a mindset of exploitation often held by researchers, whether for material culture or knowledge. Acknowledging this mindset, the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) have both created Codes of Ethics for researchers to follow (AAA Code of Ethics 2023; AIATSIS Code of Ethics 2023a).

Space does not allow for a complete listing of all guidelines. However, key concepts followed in this research include:

1) *That equitable agreements between the researcher and Indigenous participants should be established.*

To arrange an interview, interviewees were asked to nominate a time and place convenient to themselves. This usually resulted in interviews being conducted in the late afternoon, in the interviewee's front or back yard. The equitable agreement established for interviews was that participants were paid $50 cash per hour, while excursions into the surrounding landscape lasting more than an hour were paid at $100 for half a day.

2) *That researchers understand that Indigenous people place a special importance on ancestral remains, and with objects and sites associated with those remains. With researchers treating such remains with the respect desired by the community of concern.*

The importance of ancestral remains to the community was understood. Permission to visit a rockshelter was first requested of, and then granted by a male Elder. Two male community members were then assigned to guide this researcher to a rockshelter. Here instructions were given to not touch anything, and a vigilant watch was maintained.

3) *Indigenous interpretations of their cultural heritage must be acknowledged.*

The emphasis on interviewing Elders in this research acknowledges the importance of Indigenous interpretations of ritual behaviours, archaeological features and artefacts. Elders also evaluated the penultimate draft of this paper for culturally correct interpretations and general appropriateness, signing its title page (Figure i) and photographs to indicate that permission was granted, e.g. Figures 28, 32 and 33.

4) *Researchers will use plain language to describe their work and distribute it widely.*

Plain language is used throughout the paper, and the finished paper will be available to the entire community through the Barunga Community library.

3.3.1 Working with Indigenous People

Many aspects of life are approached differently in an Indigenous community compared to a non-Indigenous one. The unspoken rules that regulate behaviour are known as cultural protocols. One of these protocols with its roots deep in time is the concept of permission.

3.3.2 Permissions

The need to gain permission from an Indigenous individual or group when entering their land is a deeply ingrained feature of Indigenous life. This need for permission establishes the balance of power between the two parties. Entering land without gaining permission is an act of trespass, on a sliding scale from breaking-and-entering to a declaration of war, or colonisation. Today, gaining permission is an essential first step in conducting research with an Indigenous community. AIATSIS has codified this concept in its Code of Ethics as, 'Informed Consent 1.9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a right to determine what research is and is not carried out in their communities.' (AIATSIS 2023a). Thus, the need to gain permission from a Community's Traditional Owner and/or *Junggayi* before starting work establishes their power over the researcher.

For this research to occur several levels of permission were needed. Claire Smith, the lead researcher, first obtained high level permissions from both sides of the research equation, the academic and the Indigenous. From the academic, permission was requested from Flinders University's Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, (SBREC), who granted permission for research from 2014 to 2025 (approval number, SBREC 6390). From the Indigenous side, permission was granted from the Community's Traditional Owners, Esther Bulumbara and Ambrose Bulumbara and Traditional Custodians/*Junggayi* Nell Brown and Guy Rankin. With day-to-day research supervised by community Elder Anita Painter.

At Barunga, not all areas of the landscape are considered equal. Access to the general community, its streets, shops and sporting facilities is granted with the permission to enter and conduct research. However, further permission is needed to enter other areas in which the community is more spiritually invested. Areas, like the grounds for high level, 'Big Sunday' ceremonies, rockshelters that contain rock art or those containing burial remains, need special permission *and* escorts to enter. During research, permission was requested of, and granted by, a community Elder to visit a rockshelter, with escorts.

Permission is also needed to publish photographs of people. Permission was requested from each individual whose image was used in this paper. The granting of permission was indicated by the individual initialling their photograph/s in this paper's penultimate draft. Initialled photographs were then scanned and included in this final draft. Compensation for the use of an individual's image was given at a rate of $100 per photograph.

Permission should also be asked before taking a person's photograph. Researchers *taking* photographs of Indigenous people is a practice dating back to before Spencer and Gillen, with Spencer being a master of the art, see Vanderwal's *The Aboriginal Photographs of Baldwin Spencer*. In this research permission was asked for, and repayment was made, in the form of laminated A4 sized prints of the photograph taken. This process of *giving* photos was appreciated by recipients, creating a feeling of good-will, and possibly tied into a deeper cultural custom of reciprocal gift giving (Thompson 1949). Approximately two dozen photographs were returned in this way. Using research methods to give something back, not just taking, aligns with the central theme of decolonising archaeology.

3.3.3 Gender Divisions

Like the concept of permission, the gender divisions in Aboriginal society run deep. Communication and knowledge flow is easier between members of the same gender, than between genders. This protocol was observed by; interviewing mainly, but not only, male Elders, taking three male teenagers on a fishing trip and being escorted to a secret rockshelter by two male community members.

3.3.4 Community Led and Engaged Research

At various stages of its history, the greater research project into the Barunga Cemetery has been both community led and community engaged (Smith 2021). Originally it was Community led, initiated by the Barunga *Junggayi* Guy Rankin. However, this current research should be categorised as one of community engagement.

During research, community engagement was practiced on multiple levels. The most direct or formal level was when asking Elders to sit for interviews. Here Elders answered questions directly related to traditional burial rituals. Community members were also engaged informally in several instances, such as when taking teenagers on a fishing trip to Mataranka, or when driving people to Katherine for dialysis treatment. However, perhaps the most important form of

community engagement was around the campfire at night. Here people sat, ate and chatted with each other. Ideas were weighed, passed around, solutions found and connections made.

3.4 Occupational Health and Safety of the Researcher

Health and safety guidelines were issued by both the University and the Community. The University was primarily concerned for the physical health of its students. Taking demonstratable steps to raise student researcher's awareness of both, the dangers that surrounded them, and the steps to take if an accident did occur. The community's safety concerns centred on accessing the various areas in and around Baringa. Trespassing on grounds deemed forbidden could potentially affect the safety of the researcher.

3.4.1 Working in Remote Areas

The response time for emergency services in remote areas of the Northern Territory is measured in hours. Therefore, the university took measures to reduce the possibility of a medical emergency. This occurred mainly through the online portal titled Flinsafe (2023), a comprehensive workplace safety website. Here, dangers most likely to occur were identified, such as; lack of telephone communication, animal collisions when driving, snake bite and heat exhaustion. Second, preventative measures were undertaken to avoid or minimise their impact, such as; taking a satellite phone, not driving at night, wearing boots while in the bush, taking a snake bite kit, wearing a hat. Third, a St John Ambulance First Aid course was taken, with training covering treatment for a range of cuts, breaks and burns, as well as resuscitation techniques.

3.4.2 Community Safety Protocols

From the community's perspective, Barunga and its surrounds are a landscape composed of areas in which different types of cultural activities take place. For an outsider to enter the different areas requires different levels of permission. To ensure safety, all travel into areas beyond the general community area were in partnership with a community member. Similarly, the ease of access to the ceremonial caves and rock-shelters deeper in the landscape varies. Some are relatively open to visits, others should only be visited when accompanied by an initiated male, while finally there are some where a Traditional Owner, *Junggayi* or Elder should be present.

3.4.3 COVID-19 Safe Practices

Before commencing research all available COVID-19 vaccination and booster shots were taken. Personal health was monitored in the weeks prior to the commencement of research to prevent carrying any infection into the community. Anti-bacterial lotions were used to wash hands repeatedly throughout the day. Interviews were conducted in an open-air situation to minimise the possibility of transmission.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Due to the need to record Indigenous understandings and meanings of ritual events, data collection was oriented to qualitative methods (Carter and Little 2007:1325). After the literature review, fieldwork methods included interviews with Barunga Elders, and observations of contemporary burials and burial features. Here an iterative element emerged, with observations of contemporary burial practices prompting further interview questions about traditional burial practices.

3.5.1 Literature Review

The works of researchers and government officials from Arnhem Land was examined. Resources included; the University's library, special collections, storage facilities, the National Library of Australia's online TROVE platform and the National Gallery of Australia. Formats included; journals, books, films, videos, audio recordings, photographic collections and websites. These materials were examined for descriptions or imagery of traditional Indigenous burial practices, as well as archaeological features and artefacts associated with these burial practices.

A significant item within this collection was the documentary *Etched in Bone* (2018) directed by Martin Thomas. This documentary followed the repatriation and traditional re-burial of Indigenous skeletal material taken from Gunbalanya by the American Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948 (May 2005, 2009; Mountford 1948; 1956; 1960). The Traditional Owner of the community, Jacob Nayinggul, gave permission for the film to be made, giving the camera unique access to one version of the second stage of the secondary burial process. This window is invaluable as Gunbalanya is considered a community 'strong in culture'. A community where the current knowledge holders are part of an unbroken chain stretching back to before European contact, down which traditional lore has passed. This

contrasts with Barunga which is seen as ‘weak in culture’, due to the majority of its population being arrivals from neighbouring areas and language groups and so not tied spiritually to the land.

3.5.2 Interviews with Elders

Interviews served two functions, first, they were used to corroborate, refine or refute the use of rituals identified in the literature review stage. Second, they were used to interpret and give context to, behaviours and artefacts observed at contemporary funerals and burial features.

Interview Participants - The selection of participants was through a process of convenience or purposive sampling. With participants chosen because they had characteristics that were appropriate to the research question (Rodriguez 2021:146) These being that they:

1) Live at Barunga Community.
2) Have lived in Barunga for most of their lives.
3) Be male.
4) Be over 50 years of age.
5) Could speak English.

Recording Materials - Interviews were recorded using audio only. They were recorded with the Google ‘Recorder’ mobile phone application on a Google Pixel 7a, and with the Olympus VN-541PC, hand held sound recorder.

Procedure - Potential interview subjects were first contacted to assess their interest in participating in an interview about traditional burial practices. If they agreed to this, they were asked to choose a time and place to conduct the interview. Most chose the front or back yard of their house in the late afternoon, e.g. 4pm. On occasion, further interviews were suggested by the interviewee or interviewer, in the field, such as at the cemetery. Interview subjects were paid $50 cash for a one-hour interview, or $100 for interviews in the field.

Interview Questions - These differed according to the function of the interview. Interviews to corroborate the rituals identified in the literature review stage consisted of reading out questions containing the specific rituals. These often acted as memory prompts and interviewees then corroborated or refuted their presence in any burial rituals they could

remember. Interviews were also used to interpret, or give context to, rituals or artefacts seen when observing funerals, cemeteries or roadside memorials.

Anonymity - Interviewees were given the option of aliases in this paper to protect their identity. One chose to do so and another could not be contacted so was given it. This was done as a precaution since other community members may take exception to what they said.

3.5.3 Observations

Observations of burial rituals and their associated archaeology were made at: two funerals, three cemeteries and two roadside memorials. A daily journal was kept recording all observations, including spontaneous comments or events that produced insights into traditional belief systems and customs.

Recoding Techniques and Materials - Observations were recorded primarily through photography, with 105 photographs being taken during the fieldwork period, excluding those taken for photogrammetry. The camera used was built into the Google Pixel 7a mobile phone. Photogrammetry was used to document two gravesites, with approximately 90 photographs taken of each site. These were later combined in the program Agisoft Metashape to create photographically realistic 3-D representations of the gravesites (See Figure 36, pg. 62). Video was also taken at funerals with the Google Pixel 7a mobile phone. Last, when the use of electronic devices was judged to be too intrusive, a paper and pencil were used to write notes.

Selection - Funerals were selected opportunistically. Requests were made to Community Elder Anita Painter for permission to attend a funeral when it became known that it was imminent. Permission was granted to attend two during the research period. Cemeteries were visited while being accompanied by a community Elder, and also alone after permission was granted. Roadside memorials were visited when noticed. While the rockshelter was visited after permission was granted by a community Elder and while being accompanied and overseen by two male community members.

Daily Journal - This was used to record observations of daily life at Barunga, Wugularr and Katherine. Special attention was paid to any observation of, or reference to, traditional burial practices, belief systems or cultural protocols. Notes were taken on most

people met, excursions taken and activities attended, such as fishing trips, football games or grocery shopping. Notes were often accompanied by photography depicting the events mentioned in the text. Total length was 13,000 words.

3.6 Data Analysis

Literature Review - From the literature review, burial practices were treated to a reductionist process whereby descriptions, including video shots and scenes, were broken down into a chronological list of single distinct rituals, or records, starting from the time of death and ending with the final burial ceremonies. However, due to the length of traditional burial practices, no one observation was ever complete, being a description of only a part of the process. To create a complete picture, observations from many sources were combined, creating a patchworked continuum of records (Appendix I, Table 6, Pg. 93). This list of records helped constitute what became the Baseline of traditional burial practices. The Baseline also became the framework for the questionnaire used in the interviews.

Interviews - Interviewees were asked questions about their memories of traditional burial practices, with answers transcribed (Appendix II, Pg. 97). Key records contributed to the Baseline of traditional burial practices.

The Baseline of traditional burial practices - This was constructed from a synthesis of records extracted from the literature research and the interviews with Elders.

Observations - Contemporary Indigenous burial practices were recorded and compared against the Baseline of traditional burial practices. This resulted in practices falling into one of four categories. These being: one, practices not observed or currently neglected, two, practices changed or modified by colonialism, three, practices resilient and uninfluenced by colonialism, and four, new or previously unrecorded burial practices. Contemporary archaeological features and artefacts were also recorded for comparison to those recorded in the Baseline of traditional features and artefacts.

3.7 Limitations of the Data

Research methodologies are not without their weaknesses. However, if weaknesses are recognised and understood, they may be compensated for.

3.7.1 Historical Literature

Historical literature contains biases. Some are easy to detect, such as the age-old truism that, *history is written by the victors.* In the context of Australian historical literature, this translates as,‘ “ It is usually about the triumph of the coloniser” ’ (Farrugia et al 2018), highlighting a view expressed by young European Australians about Australian history. The mainstream view perpetuated by the Australian government. In contrast, biases can come from the opposite end of political spectrum. Breen (2017) describes Windshuttle’s attack on historians that he accuses of fabricating evidence about historical violence against Indigenous people to promote white shame and guilt. Clearly, the political agenda of the authors of historical literature directs the descriptions portrayed and conclusions made, regardless of the facts.

Similarly, Ethnographers, anthropologists and government officials tended to be educated, wealthy, white males who employed male Indigenous interpreters and guides. Their observations and understandings of Aboriginal cultural life is therefore biased towards a male perspective. Although observations of female cultural life are not absent, only a few of the early ethnographers or anthropologists in Arnhem Land were female or reported on the lives of Indigenous females. This has led our understanding of Aboriginal cultural life to be skewed towards a male perspective, limiting our understanding of what the roles and responsibilities of women were during traditional burials.

3.7.2 Interviews

The information obtained through interviews is limited by several factors, the main ones being: the interviewer, the interviewee and the relationship between them. With, the repatriation of knowledge, sample size and the questionnaire also potentially affecting the information collected.

The Interviewer - The biggest limitation to the gathering of knowledge was that I was an outsider to the community and the culture. My formative years were in middle class suburbs of Sydney, during which I had no contact with Aboriginal people. My introduction to Aboriginal culture was in the mid-1990’s when, at 28, I worked for two years in an Aboriginal television station in Alice Springs. The year before this current research, I attended the week-long Community Archaeology Field School at Barunga. This introduced me to: key people in Barunga, and the living conditions and cultural protocols of the

community. However, a year later, at the beginning of research I was still an unknown quantity to the people, as they were to me. Other limiting factors include:

1) My background in cultural knowledge, which was limited mainly to academic reading. My main weakness was the lack of a thorough understanding of the kinship system and how the roles, responsibilities and obligations of different kin relations affect the performance of burial rituals. A better understanding would have helped me ask more appropriate questions and fully understand answers.
2) My gender, being male guided me to mainly interviewing male Elders. As it is believed that information is more likely to flow within a gender than between genders, due to the deep sexual/gender divisions in Aboriginal society.

The Interviewee - An equally pivotal person in the research process is the interviewee, as it is their decision on how much, if anything, to tell the researcher. Important characteristics of the interviewee include:

1) Their degree of Initiation, and so their right to talk about traditional lore associated with burial rituals.

2) How they judge the researcher, with an emphasis on what the researcher intends to do with their knowledge.

3) Their personal history in relation to burial practices. This is a significant and delicate aspect. Some of the participants seemed to have issues with their memories and/or attention spans. These issues affected their ability to remember incidents from their teenage years, the time when the last traditional burials were practiced, and when their fathers talked to them about 'the old days'.

4) Their belief system. At least two interviewees were practicing Christians, raising the possibility that their belief system may have affected the extent to which they talked about traditional burial rituals.

Another important consideration is the idea that no one interviewee is able to speak for the entire community. The community is composed of many families, a plurality of voices. Several of these families compete for status and political position, and so answers may be skewed by presenting, or not presenting, information.

The Repatriation of Knowledge – Past researchers have collected knowledge from Indigenous people and stored it in institutions such as Universities, Museums and Art Gallery's in the form of academic papers, books, films and items of material culture. Indigenous people today then view this traditional knowledge and may choose to present it as their own cultural inheritance, handed down from their parents and grandparents in an unbroken chain since ancestral times. This I have personally witnessed on a commercial project in another part of the country. The recycling of information may not be too dangerous, if the interviewee is presenting knowledge from a clan or language group with the same or similar cultural background. When deposited in the Barunga Community library, this paper will become part of the ongoing repatriation of knowledge.

The Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship - is the key dynamic, one which is based on the building of trust. Constructing a trusting relationship takes time, a resource in short supply for a research project at this level. This issue is expanded upon below in section 3.8 Limitations of the Study. An attempt was made to interview key people multiple times, rather than many people only once. This helped with relationship building in two notable cases, but limited sample size.

Sample Size - The more people interviewed, the more aspects of burial practice may be recorded, with common and outlier aspects understood for what they are. Increasing sample size was an option, but relationship building was prioritised.

The Questionnaire - While a good starting point, the questionnaire proved problematic. Few interviewees responded positively to such a structured questioning style. Instead, they tended to flow to wherever their memories took them. Some became tired of the interview process before the questionnaire was finished and terminated the interview.

3.7.3 Observations

Observations of funerals were limited in several ways.

Being an Outsider - As one of the few non-Indigenous people present, I felt a pressure to appear as respectful as possible, maintain a low profile and wearing appropriate clothing. This pressure prevented a more proactive information gathering style.

Subjectivity - At the funerals, as well as when visiting cemeteries, roadside memorials or the rockshelter, a multitude of subjective choices were made. Attempts were made to photograph subjects clearly and plainly in an objective, non-dramatic fashion.

Sample Size - As only two funerals were attended, there is the possibility that unusual one-off features were confused with standard burial practices, or that some funeral practices were completely missed. Attending a greater number of funerals would allow for the identification of features that were stable burial practices.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

Two limitations of the study are examined here, the time constraints placed upon research and the different cultural approaches to knowledge acquisition and communication between Western and Indigenous societies.

This study followed the basic research format practiced throughout the western world. A product of the western education system geared to the time constraints of the academic year. Therefore, this research is embedded in a colonial framework of knowledge acquisition, and much has been written about the need to decolonise Indigenous research (Denzin et al. 2008; Smith 2021; Smith and Wobst 2005). For example, fieldwork in this study can be critically described as: an abrupt insertion into an Indigenous community, a quick interrogation of residents who are expected to divulge secret or sacred cultural information, and then an equally abrupt exit. Total length, four weeks. The brevity of the fieldwork limits the development of the key factor in qualitative social research, the building of a trusting researcher-community relationship. This process could be labelled as both rude and arrogant, a part of the colonial-scientific mindset, an ongoing act of information-exploitation. However, community members are not ignorant of this. They know that most visiting researchers, especially students, are there for only a short time. As such, the information

revealed tends to be of the more generic, entry level type, and the money received for offering this very much welcome.

This introduces a friction between Western and Indigenous cultures based on their orientation towards the learning and storing of knowledge. At the core of western society is the method for producing new knowledge. It harnesses the natural forces of inquisitiveness and curiosity and has formalised them in the approach known as The Scientific Method. Schools and Universities teach both the knowledge gained and the method itself, from generation to generation, century to century, storing this information in libraries open to all. In Aboriginal society knowledge is segregated into a number of social divisions and kept secretly within them. The primary division is the sexual/gender division, where different types of information are kept secret within each gender. This is the origin of the popular phrases, 'secret men's business' / 'secret women's business.' Other divisions in society, such as moiety and Dreaming affiliations, hold their own secret knowledges. Thus, there is a basic tension between Indigenous and Western culture in their perceptions of how to gain and store knowledge, and how it is released, or passed on to the next generation. A tension that limits the acquisition of knowledge in cross-cultural research studies such as this.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has summarised the methods used to collect information. It considers ethically appropriate approaches that avoid or minimise the exploitation of individuals and communities, with an emphasis on the seeking of Indigenous permissions in several aspects of research. Researcher safety concerns are also addressed, from both the western and Indigenous viewpoints. The limitations of the information collection methods used were considered, as well as those of the study as a whole.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the three approaches to knowledge collection: literature review, interviews with Elders at Barunga and field observations. From the literature review and interviews, a Baseline was constructed that represents a close approximation of burial practices, and their associated archaeology, in the period soon after contact. Next, this Baseline were compared against observations made at: two funerals, three cemeteries and two roadside memorials. The similarities and differences between the two, i.e. the change across time, gives an idea of the impact that colonisation has had.

4.2 Historical Literature and Interviews - Burial Practices

A list of 42 traditional burial rituals, or records, was compiled. This list was composed from two main sources;

1) A literature review, including film, video and photographic productions and collections, of ethnographers, anthropologists, government officials and academics who have worked in Arnhem Land with Indigenous groups.

2) Interviews with Elders at Barunga focusing on the burial rituals practiced, observed or told to them by their parents and grandparents.

Many of the historical records were observed by more than one researcher. However, due to space considerations only one or two records are listed here, alongside any corroborations from Barunga Elders. A complete list of all historical records is compiled in Appendix I, Table 6, Pg. 93. Quoted descriptions of the burial practice, accompanied by photographic documentation from Arnhem Land, is listed.

Record 1: Loud vocal mourning and grieving by women and men.

(Note: a key Elder at Barunga objected to the term ‘wailing’ used to describe the loud vocal morning of grieving people. The term ‘loud vocal mourning’ was agreed upon as an acceptable substitution. Except when directly quoting an historical source.)

During burial rituals both sexes expressed their grief with loud vocal mourning. For example, Spencer (1914:241), recorded, 'While this [the burial] was going on and after it was over, everyone wailed…’

Record 2: Self harm to the head with tools during grieving by women.

As an expression of intense grief, women would injure themselves with rocks or tools to the point of blood flow. Basedow (1907:6) notes, 'The female mourners gash their scalps with the points of yam-sticks and scar the backs of one another.' While Barunga Elder Lachlan states, ‘my mother, if she was here, I'd probably show you her head. She got all the scars from killing herself with knife’ (App. II, Int. 4, 28:44).

Record 3: Self harm to the thighs with tools during grieving by the men.

Similar to the women, men would express their grief by inflicting grievous bodily harm onto themselves. For example, Basedow (1907:6) notes, 'The men cut their upper arms and thighs transversely with stone knives, or gash their foreheads with the sharp edges of their spear-throwers.'

Record 4: Taboo against naming the dead.

The name of a deceased person cannot be spoken for 3-4 years. Spencer stated that:

> As amongst other tribes, when anyone dies their name is not mentioned and they are referred to, if there be any necessity for doing so, as "the old man" or "the old woman (1914:245-246).

Record 5: Taboo against another person using the deceased’s name.

Elkin (1979:343) noted that, ‘In addition, any person or objects bearing the same name [as the deceased] must no longer be referred to by it.’

Record 6: Painting the deceased’s body with ochre or Dreaming specific designs.

(Figures 4 and 5)

Elkin (1979:340) notes, ‘In Arnhem Land, the deceased’s totem is painted on his body, so that his ancestors will readily know to which totemic spirit-home they must carry his soul.’ The designs painted on a youth for initiation/circumcision are thought to be similar to those painted on a dead body, as they both involve identifying the person with their Dreaming. Mountford elaborates:

> Next morning, [after a death] the men proceed with the rites of burial, first by rubbing red ochre over the body of the corpse, and on that painting his totemic design.[13] [Footnote]
> 13. This totemic design is the same as that painted on his body during circumcision (1956:311).

Figure 4: Left, *detail*, a male youth being painted in preparation for an initiation/circumcision ceremony (Photograph, Thomson, 1933/2003:142).
Figure 5: Right, *detail*, a male youth displaying his Dreaming design prior to his initiation ceremony (Photograph, Murray 2006 ©, reproduced with permission).

Record 7: Men carry the body to the tree platform or burial place.

Spencer (1914:240) observed that, ‘Two men, … neither of whom was closely related to the dead woman, lifted it [the body] from the ground and carried it away on their shoulders through the scrub…’.

Record 8: The use of a tree platform as the first stage of the burial process.

This is a widely observed burial practice and archaeological feature not restricted to Arnhem Land, and perhaps not to Australia. In an interview, Barunga Elder Lachlan referred to the

placement of bodies in tree platforms, ‘Put ‘em on paperback and walk away, just leave ‘em there until all the ants do their business. Be up there for months,…’ (App. II, Int. 4, 01:02:55). While Basedow noted that:

> In former days the general custom... was to construct a platform of boughs and bark in the forks of trees, upon which the body was left until all the soft parts had been removed by birds of prey (1907:6).

Interestingly, Mountford (1956:312) reiterates an observation by Frazer (1936) that the people of Misol, a small island to the north west of Arnhem Land near New Guinea, also built tree platforms to hold the dead while the flesh was decaying, and then placed the bones in a burial cave. That is, they practiced secondary, or two stage burial. He notes that this is the same set of rituals as many groups in north Arnhem Land, [and southern Arnhem Land], and proposes it as the origin of the customs (Figures 6 and 7).

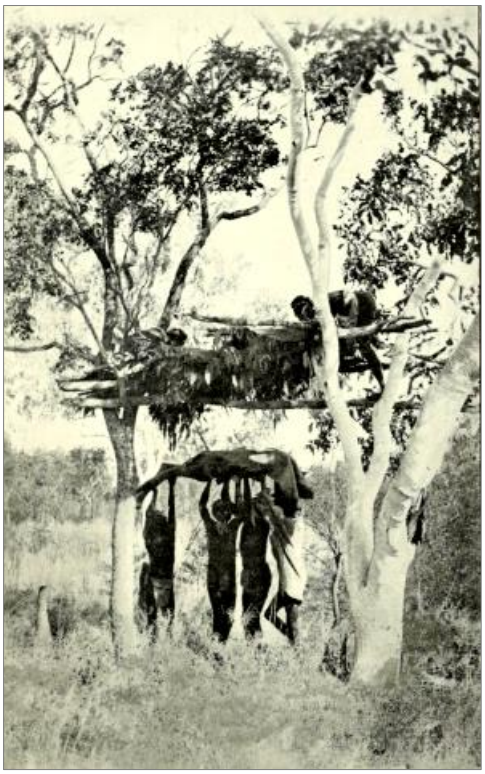

Figure 6. Left, lifting a corpse to a platform of boughs (Basedow, 1907: Plate V).
Figure 7. Right, burial platform near Knuckey’s Lagoon (Basedow, 1907: Plate VI).

During fieldwork at Barunga, two male Elders, Lachlan and Luke, independently took me to the same copse of trees, situated very close to the cemetery. They stated that when they were young this was a place where they had seen a tree platform (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Barunga Elder Lachlan and son Seth Jumbiri, viewing a copse of trees that had held a tree platform decades earlier. Reproduced with permission.

Record 9: Use of an earth burial as the first stage of the burial process.

The choice of methods for the decomposition of the flesh, the first stage of burial, varied between elevation in a tree and burial in the ground. The practical reason for both being to keep the body out of the reach of dingoes. Other factors determining which method was used may have been traditional and spiritual, although expediency and convenience are also factors. Mountford (1956:312) states in a footnote, '15. If when a man dies there are only a

few people present, the corpse is wrapped in paper-bark and buried in the ground.' (Figures 9 and 10).

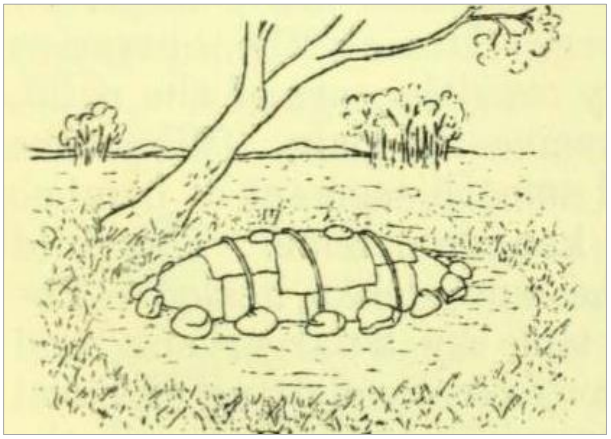

Figure 9: Left, *detail*, 'Kakadu men digging the woman's grave.'(Vanderwal 1987/1914:151).
Figure 10: Right, Burial mound with paperbark sheets tied down with ropes and rocks to prevent Dingo intrusions (Basedow, 1907:7).

Record 10: Women perform rites/dance at the burial spot.

Spencer observed:

> When the exact site had been selected and before digging actually began, the women and children were summoned and came up, led by one of the older women named Kumbainba. She carried in her hand a shell that the natives commonly use for holding water or ochre, but, on this occasion, it held a few small stones which she jingled about as the women and children followed her in single file round the grave. This walking round is called *Kulorbuto.* As they walked round they sang the following words, which were supposed to be addressed to the spirit of the dead woman, … " You lie down quietly, do not come back, lie down all right — if the children see your spirit, later on they will be sick." (1914:240-241).

Record 11: Men build the tree platform or dig the grave.

Spencer noted that:

> Three or four men set to work to dig, … a trench, about four and a half feet long and two and a half wide and three deep, was dug with the aid of sticks and hands. There are no special individuals who are supposed to take part in the digging, any grown man is allowed to help. The grave itself is called *Keramu* (1914:240).

Record 12: Men lift the body up to the platform, or, place the body into the grave.
Spencer (1914:241) noted that, 'The body was… placed in the grave, lying on its right side, and a thick covering of grass stalks and leaves was placed above it.'

Record 13: Women collect grass/leaves to line the grave and cover the body.
Spencer (1914:241) observed, 'When the grave was approaching completion, three women,… went into the scrub and gathered armfuls of grass stalks and leafy twigs and, returning, placed them by the grave.' These were then placed into the grave by men, forming a bed onto which the body was placed, and also a covering for the body.

Record 14: The painting of mourner's bodies and hair white, with ash or pipeclay.
According to Spencer (1914:245), as a sign of mourning, 'The men, …. are supposed to paint themselves white at this ceremony…' (Figure 13).

Record 15: Women wearing special grieving armbands (Figures 11 and 12).
Spencer observed that:

> The women were grouped together in one spot…. Each one wore two or more of the heavy armlets called *Kundama*. These are made of a circlet of pliable cane twisted round with a coarse string made from fibres of the bark of the Banyan tree…They are never coloured or decorated in any way, … (1914:244-245).

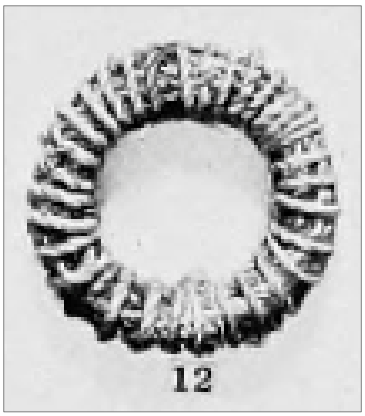

Figure 11: Left, *detail,* A *Kundama* funeral bracelet. (Photograph, Spencer 1914:Plate XXVIII).
Figure 12: Right, *detail*, 'Women wearing armlets called *Kundama,* during mourning ceremony. Kakadu Tribe.' (Photograph, Spencer 1914:Fig.62).

Record 16: Food was prepared by women for the older men conducting ceremonial business. (Figure 13).

Elder Lachlan recalled, '…but women, you know, they do a lot of work, like make tucker for men when they're dancing.' (App. II, Int. 4, 36:05)

While Spencer wrote that:

> The women bring in numbers of little cakes, called *munduaii*, made out of lily seeds. These were eaten by the older men only, the *Umulakiri*, or younger men, are not allowed to eat them. (1914:244).

Figure 13: *detail*, 'Elderly men eating the lily seed cakes prepared by the women for the Morlil Ceremony. 22 July, 1912.' (Vanderwal 1987/1914:157). Note that the man is covered in pipeclay.

Record 17: Musicians play didgeridoo and clap sticks.

Thomas (2018 TC.52:25) recoded musicians playing didgeridoo and clapsticks in the funeral procession for repatriated bones about to be traditionally re-buried (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Musicians playing didgeridoo and clap sticks at a funeral ceremony for bones repatriated in 2012 (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon 2018 TC.52:25, reproduced with permission).

Record 18: Assumption of supernatural murder and an inquisition by the men.

This belief was widely noted. Elkin, (1979:341) observed that, '…threats are made by word and gesture against the actual worker of black magic, who will be determined upon later and dealt with.'

Record 19: Old men, old women and children are treated differently.

It is possible that burials varied between people of different ages. Basedow (1907:6) noted that, 'The bodies of old men and old gins are buried in the ground without having been previously placed in a tree'. However, it is possible that he was witnessing the first stage of a secondary burial without realising exhumation and bark bundling or a *Lorrkon* Ceremony would follow later.

Record 20: Camp is moved soon after death.

Berndt and Berndt (1970:165), recorded a family member saying after the death of a baby, 'and then the whole group moved out of the area, 'away from that country where our baby died', while Elkin (1979:343) states briefly, '[h]is [the deceased] camp and grave are deserted'.

Second Burial, months or years later.

Record 21: Messengers sent out to tell relatives and call for assistance

Berndt and Berndt (1970:134) observed an early step in the *Lorrkon* Ceremony was, '…to send out messengers, carrying a *gadgad* message stick with feathers attached, inviting various groups to attend the rites.' (Figure 15).

Figure 15: A draw full of message sticks. From the Ethnology collection of the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. The tag reads, 'OC AUS NORTH, HALF UNIT ETHNOLOGY DRAWER' (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon 2018 TC.16:07. Reproduced with permission).

Record 22: A *Junggayi* of the same gender but opposite moiety officiates.

According to Lachlan and Luke, Elders at Barunga, the 'correct' person to help organise and conduct a burial ceremony was a *Junggayi* of the opposite moiety but the same gender as that of the deceased (App. II, Int. 2, 33:55). For instance, if the deceased was a male of the *Dua* moiety, then the *Jungayii* should be a male from the *Yirritja* moiety. This is not a unique situation, and it reoccurs in other areas of ceremonial life. Berndt (1951:161) notes that when an exchange ceremony was held, interactions between the members of the different tribal groups was through people of the opposite moieties. This emphasises the complimentary nature of the moieties, the members of one cannot exist or operate without cooperation from members of the other.

Record 23: Painting of bones with red or yellow ochre by the men or women.

At Gunbalanya, Thomas (2018:TC.9:50) recorded Traditional Owner Jacob Nayinggul stating, '...they would take the old bones and they would paint them in either yellow or red ochre...' (Figures 16 and 17).

Figure 16: Left, a skull, repatriated in 2012, being ochred prior to wrapping in paperbark for a traditional burial. Note the grinding stone, or pestle on the left (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon, 2018 TC.48:18).
Figure 17: Right, long bones, repatriated in 2012, being ochred prior to wrapping in paperbark and traditionally buried (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon, 2018 TC.43.20).

Record 24: A bone from the deceased is kept as a memento.

Warner (1937:436) notes that, 'Some of the relatives prefer to take the finger bones as relics, rather than the rib bones, since they are smaller.' While Spencer (1914:248) found several baby bones in a dilly bag he purchased from a woman.

Record 25: Bundling of the bones in paperbark.

This was a well attested burial ritual, with Jelinek (1979) recording near Barunga, 'Human remains were usually found in rock niches or fissures, either wrapped with bark and tied up with fibres,…' While Thomas (2018 TC.49:45) videoed bones being bundled with paperbark and tied with Bunyan tree fibre, prior to burial (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Bones repatriated in 2012 being bundled in paperbark and tied with Bunyan tree fibre prior to burial (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon, 2018 TC.49:45).

Record 26: Paperbark bone bundle placed in a crevice.

During the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, American archaeologist Frank Setzler removed skeletal remains from a crevice, at a site near Gunbalanya, without the knowledge of the local community. In the screenshot below, Setzler, with *faux* drama, recreates his removal of a skull from a crevice for the expedition's cameraman (Figure 19).

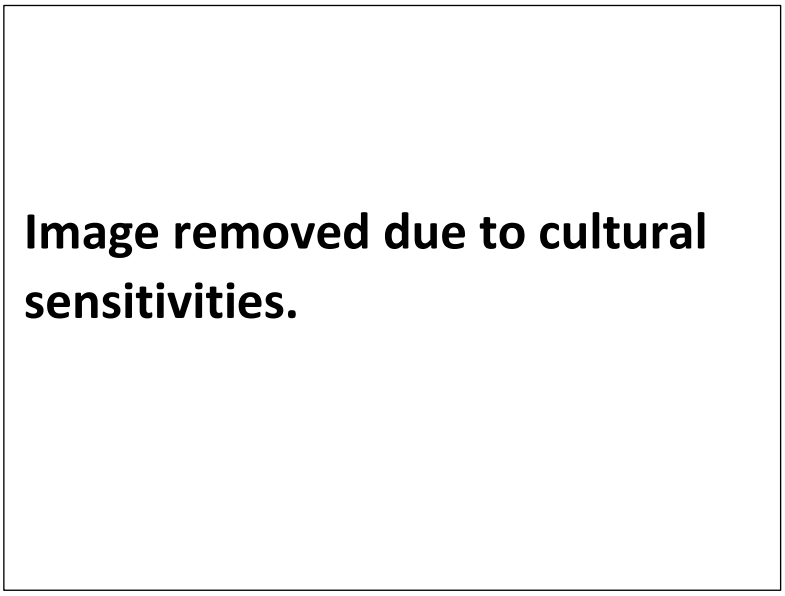

Figure 19: Archaeologist Frank Setzler, playing for the camera, steals a skull from a cliff face crevice (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon, 2018 TC.19:06).

To the south on Jawoyn lands, up on the Arnhem Land Plateau, Gunn (2021:39) describes his findings near Narwala Gabarnmung, an important ceremonial center, ‘Four burial crypts were located: all were the remains of bundle burials (bones bound within paperbark sheets) placed in clefts…Two are within narrow ledges some two metres above the ground,' While close to Barunga, Jelinek recorded:

> Human remains were usually found in rock niches or fissures, either wrapped with bark and tied up with fibres,…In Bamyili the burial place was in a rock cliff, high on the slope above Beswick Creek. … (1979:159).

Record 27: Paperbark bone bundle buried in the ground.

As an alternate to being placed in caves or rock crevices, bone bundles were also buried. Basedow (1907:6) notes that, 'The remaining bones of the skeleton are wrapped up in paper-bark *(Melaleuca leueodendron)* and buried.' Recently, Thomas (2018:TC:59:10) recorded paperbark bone bundles being buried by men at Gunbalanya (Figure 20).

Figure 20: A paperbark bundle of bones repatriated in 2012, at the bottom of a grave being buried (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon 2018: TC.59:10. Reproduced with permission).

Record 28: Painting of a *lorrkon* with designs of the deceased's Dreaming.

Spencer (1914:252) describes that, 'The *lurkun* is decorated with a design of the man's own totem; for example, if he be a lizard man, a lizard drawing will be made….' (Figures 21, 22).

Figure 21: Left, showing two painted hollow log coffins (Meehan 1971).
Figure 22: Right, showing one *lorrkon*, no paint visible, but with two parallel engraved lines circling the log (Meehan 1971).

While Mountford notes:

> I saw several log coffins at Yirrkalla. They were placed vertically in the ground and stood up to seven feet in height. Although some had rings cut round their circumference, all evidence of painted decoration had been washed away by the elements (1956:317).

Record 29: Deposit of the painted bones into a *lorrkon*.

Interestingly, Spencer's description includes the kinship relationship responsible for depositing the bones into the *Lorrkon*, noting:

> *Lurkun* is the name of the bough coffin in which the bones are finally placed,…The coffin is simply a section of the bough of a gum tree that has been hollowed out by white ants. It is prepared and the bones are placed within it by the *ngagung* (mother's brother) (1914:251).

While Elder Lachlan describes the larger process, 'Probably platform first, so, like I was saying, ants or birds can peck away at that meat, and when 'em bone, they paint 'em and put 'em in *lorrkon*' (App. II, Int. 4, 19:45).

Record 30: The Waak Waak (Black Crow) dance was a men's dance performed at *Lorrkon* ceremonies.

Elder Lachlan Jumbiri recalled dancing at *Lorrkon* ceremonies when he was young. 'Crunching the bone and putting it in a thing and doing that Waak Waak dance. That was that main one there, the Waak Waak dance, you know...' (App. II, Int. 4, 20:30).

Record 31: Women dance at the spot for the *lorrkon* and dance around it when in place.

Berndt and Berndt observed that:

> …women perform a shuffling dance in the camp, circling around the place where the pole is to be set: the dead man's sisters' daughters, half-mothers, and father's sisters. At sunrise the pole is brought to the main camp, while some women weep… Others have been clearing the ground and digging a hole ready for the pole…Others, again, continue to dance…' (1970:134)

Record 32: Singing a song cycle specific to the Dreaming of the deceased.

Elkin (1979:340) noted that, 'Cycles of totemic songs are sung.' While Morphy (1991:1) also observed that, 'They paint for hours at a time at the back of the shade, separated from the open entrance by other men who sing songs of clans connected to the person who has died.'

Record 33: Exchange of goods between funeral attendees.

Berndt and Berndt (1970:135) noted, 'Exchange of goods is an important feature of these mortuary rites,' while Spencer (1914:247-8) quizzically states, 'In some curious way this ceremony [the *Lorrkon*] has become associated with a system of barter.'

Record 34: The *lorrkon* is left to decay in the bush naturally.

Morphy notes the differing attitudes towards the preservation of cultural artefacts, such as paintings and hollow log coffins, that Indigenous people hold compared to Europeans:

> If the paintings survive for longer it is not to be admired or preserved but, as in the case with hollow log coffins and memorial posts, to be left to undergo a natural process of decay.' (1991:21-22).

This attitude was noticed at Barunga, when Elder Lachlan took me to where a *Lorrkon* had once been. It could not be found and was casually guessed to have been washed away in recent floods. Similar to flooding, the yearly burnings would eliminate many *lorrkons* from the landscape (Figure 23).

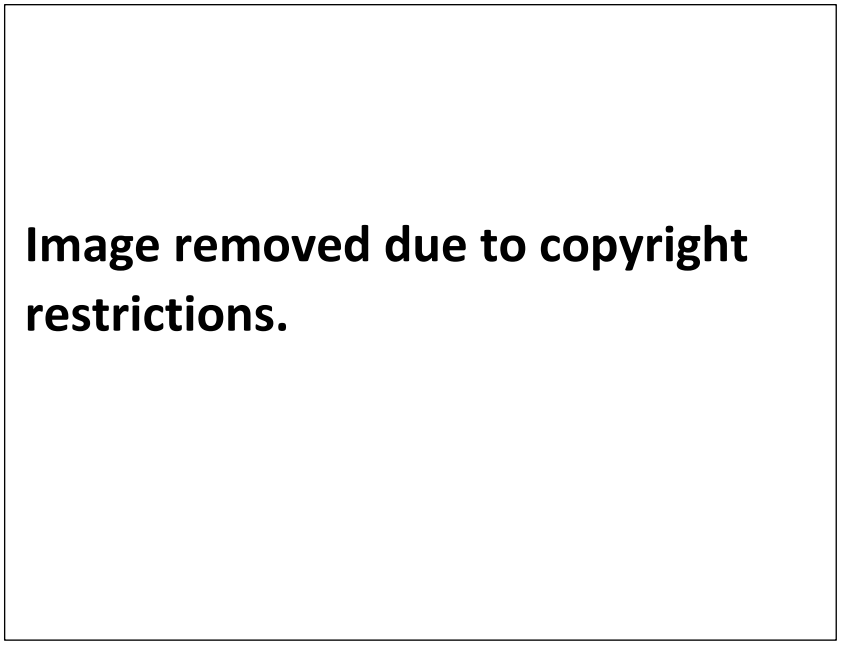

Figure 23: A hollow log coffin / *lorrkon* left to decay naturally (Meehan 1971).

Record 35: The *lorrkon* is hidden in a cave after the *Lorrkon* Ceremony (Figures 24, 25).

After the *Lorrkon* Ceremony, male Elders hide the *lorrkon*, as described by Spencer:

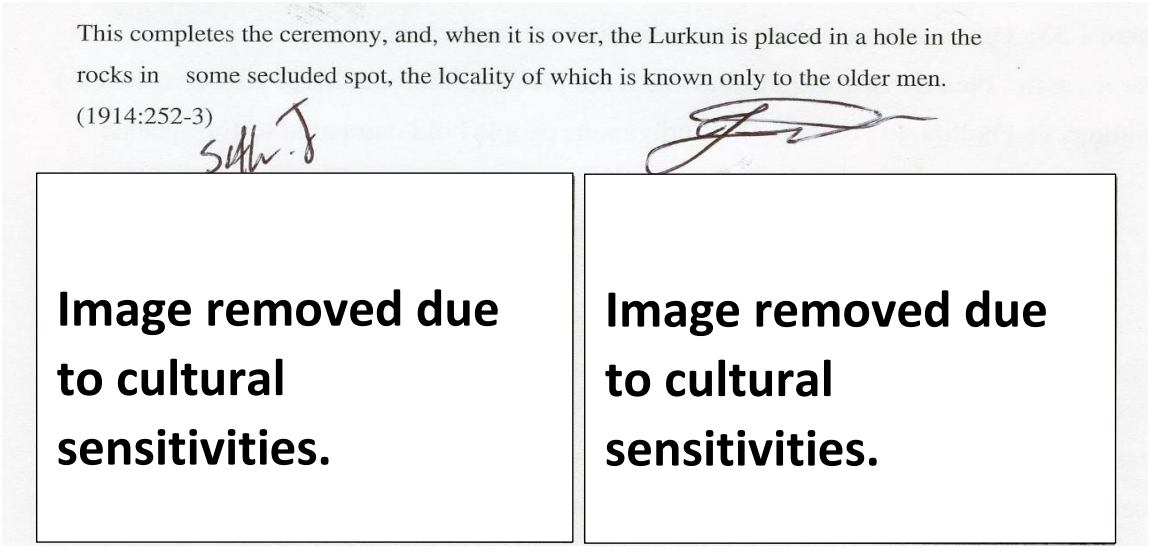

Figure 24. Left, two local research assistants, Seth Jumbiri and Jeff MacDonald outside a rockshelter in the Barunga-Wugularr area.
Figure 25. Right, Jeff MacDonald guarding *lorrkons* inside a rockshelter. Note the two parallel engraved lines circling the pole, similar to Figure 22 and Mountford's quote in Record 28. Photographs initialled in the penultimate draft of this paper indicating permission to use this imagery.

Record 36: The grouping of burials in a cave.

On occasion, burials were grouped together, as Mountford (1960:266-267) noted near Gunbalanya, 'Parts of eleven human burials were taken from this deposit….These represented the only grouping of individual burials.' While Jelinek (1979:159) records from the Barunga area, 'In one cave I found there two burial parcels…In the adjoining rock wall, in fissures and below overhangs we found some more burials.'

Record 37: The deposit of grave goods.

Jelinek recorded:

> One of the burial parcels contained the skeleton of an adult male and a small dilly bag made of plant fibres…In the dilly bag there were short pieces of a broken spear, a tin spoon, three pieces of textile and a woomera. In the second parcel there were human bones… In a dilly bag there was a small fragment of a mirror glass, a big kitchen knife, ten tin spoons, two sacred objects, a flat metal spear point, three metal points, (prongs) for a fishing spear and two bone sticks for making holes in the nose septum (1979:159).

In an interview, Elder Lachlan commented on grave goods, 'Your clothes would be the main thing, the main thing would be spears and that little *Wirritji*, little dilly bag.' (App. II, Int. 4, 26:20).

Record 38: Attendees throw earth into the grave.

Warner (1937:432) observed at a burial that, 'The earth is symbolically neither *Dua* or *Yiritja*, and everyone including men, women, and children, throws a certain amount of earth into the open grave.'

Record 39: Final purification ceremony by smoking.

At the end of a burial ceremony purification rituals had to be performed, Spencer notes that:

> …a special fire was made and the dillybags of the eldest surviving sister were placed close to it, so the smoke from the fire passed over and through them. The bags were thus purified and could be used again to hold food. After this…the men who were to paint themselves went inside the circle and, while the smoke curled around them,… (1914:243).

While Thomas and Bijon (2018:TC, 50:20) recorded video of people being smoked / purified after preparing bones for burial the next day (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Smoking ceremony to purify people involved in ceremonially preparing repatriated bones prior to burial (Screenshot, Thomas and Bijon 2018:TC.50:20. Reproduced with permission).

Record 40: Final purification by water pouring.

Here Spencer notes that:

> the men who were to paint themselves went inside the circle and, while the smoke curled round them, they lifted up the baskets containing water and poured this over one another's heads. (1914:243)

While Elder Lachlan commented in an interview, 'Yeah, when you have funeral, they make kind of like a little peep hole, for you to stand in there, everyone, and then pour water over you' (App. II, Int. 4, 18:42) (Figure 27).

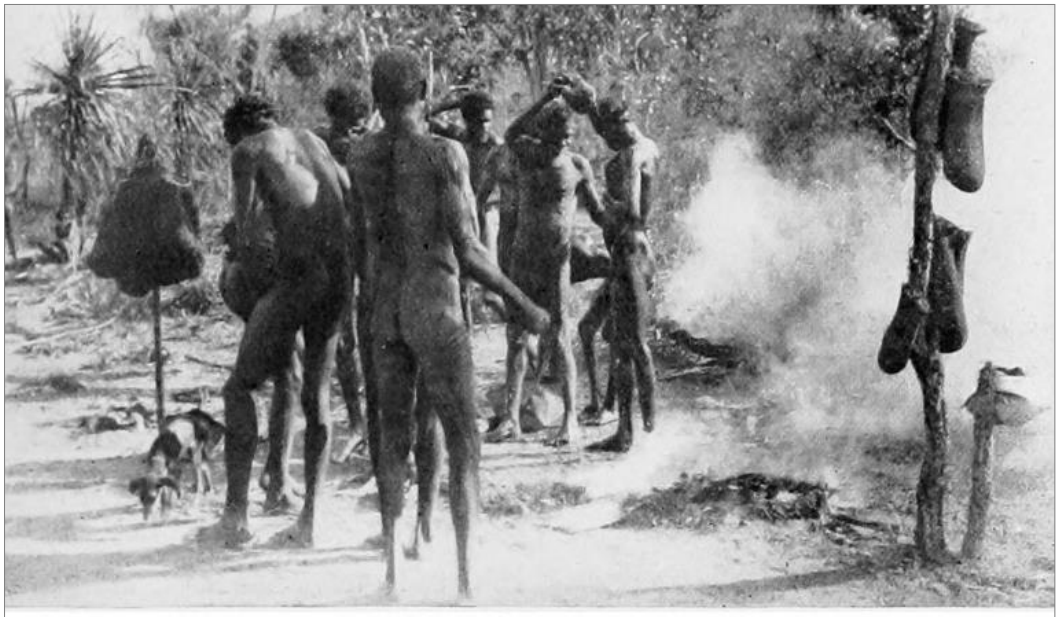

Fig. 60. Water-pouring Ceremony. The Men are Standing in the Middle of the Circle of Grass Stalks, which have first been set on Fire. Kakadu Tribe.

Figure 27: Water pouring ceremony at the end of a burial ritual.
(Photograph, Spencer 1914:243).

Record 41: Complete burial rituals may last many months to many years.

Berndt (1951:174) observes that, ‘the Gunwinggu have elaborate death ceremonies that extend over a number of years,’. One reason for the length of burial rituals was the seasonal round of hunter-gatherers. Nomadic groups may have only made camp in a spot for a few nights before moving on. If a person died, they would need to be buried or put in a tree platform within a day or two. However, the features that attracted the group to that area, such as a supply of water, fruiting trees or migrating birds may not occur again until the same time next year.

Record 42: Post-burial 'Sorry Business' lasted for days or weeks.

I asked Barunga Elder Luke, 'OK, in the olden days sorry business was a lot longer?' to which he replied, 'Yeah, yeah, we're just so..., maybe days or weeks you know, dance, dance, dance' (App. II, Int. 5, 21:36). 'The purpose of the corroboree is to, you know, keep the spirit away from family, you know, just keep the dead spirit away from the family. ' (App. II, Int. 5, 7.40).

4.3 Historical Literature and Interviews - Archaeological Features and Artefacts

As well as describing the burial practices performed, the historical literature mentions items of material culture used in their performance. These are the:

1) **Message Stick** – Named *gadgad* by Berndt and Berndt (1970:134). A piece of wood with symbols carved into it and/or decorations, such as a human hair string and feathers. Specific designs could indicate a death had occurred. It was taken to distant kin by a man and requested them to come to the *Lorrkon* Ceremony (Record 21, Figure 15).

2) **Tree Platform** - Often, but not always used for the first burial. This was a platform constructed by men either in a tree or standing alone. It was used to hold the body of the deceased off the ground, out of reach of dingoes, for several months during which time the soft tissues decomposed (Record 8).

3) **Armbands of Grieving** - Named *Kundama*, by the Kakadu tribe. They were armbands made of twisted cane but otherwise undecorated, worn by women as a sign of grieving (Record 15, Figures 6 and 7).

4) **Bones painted with ochre** - After any remaining flesh was cleaned from the bones, they were painted with ochre, usually red, but sometimes yellow, in preparation for the second burial (Record 23, Figures 16 and 17).

5) **Paperbark Bundles** - After the bones were painted with ochre, they were sometimes wrapped in paperbark bundles, which were tied with the fibres of another tree, such as a Banyan, then either buried, or placed in an elevated rock crevice or cave (Record 25, Figure 18).

6) **Grave Goods** - Items that the deceased carried with them, particularly their dilly bag and its contents. They were placed with the bones of the deceased in the paperbark bundle prior to wrapping (Record 37).

7) **Lorrkon** - *Lorrkon* as a piece of material culture, is an artefact, a trunk of a tree hollowed out by termites. It was cut, often to about 2 meters in length, but often shorter. Its exterior was painted with Dreaming designs matching the deceased. In it the bones of the deceased were placed during the *Lorrkon* Ceremony. Both ends were then stoppered with paperbark. It was either planted in the ground and left to decay naturally, or secreted away in a special burial cave by male Elders (Records 28, 34 and 35, Figures 21 and 25).

8) **Burial Rockshelter** – A burial rockshelter is an archaeological feature containing numerous sets of skeletal remains. The remains were often, but not always, in paperbark bundles buried in the floor of the cave, or placed into rock niches and crevices, or both. *Lorrkons* were also deposited in caves (Records 35 and Figures 24 and 25).

4.4 Summary

The concept of secondary, or two-stage burial is universal throughout Arnhem Land. In most areas there are two methods for the first burial, tree platforms or earth burial, and two methods for the secondary burial, bark bundles or *lorrkons*. This largely holds for the region that would later hold Barunga. For the first stage of burial, the use of tree platforms has been stated by several Barunga Elders. However, earth burials where not mentioned in the historical literature or by any Elder as a method for initial burial. For the second burial, two methods are indicated. Archaeological evidence described by Gunn (2021) and Jelinek (1979) on traditional Jawoyn land not far from Barunga, indicates that bark bundles had been used to deposit human remains in remote rocky areas, in isolated crevices and in burial caves. While both archaeological evidence, as seen by the *lorrkons* collected in a nearby rockshelter, and the oral histories of Elders at Barunga, support the use of *lorrkons* for secondary burial.

This section completes one of the two major goals of this research. The compilation of a detailed list of the traditional burial practices in use in the Barunga area at the time of contact with Europeans. This list has been constructed from European historical sources, oral histories provided by Elders living in Barunga and in traditional burials practiced in communities seen as being ‘strong in culture’, such as Gunbalanya. It is not believed to be a complete or definitive list of rituals or archaeological features and artefacts, but a close approximation that may be improved upon with further research. This list forms the Baseline

of traditional burial practices, against which contemporary burial practices are compared and the impact of colonisation assessed.

4.5 Observations; Contemporary Burial Practices

4.5.1 Introduction

To gauge the impact of colonialisation on traditional burial practices, the Baseline record approximating traditional practices was compared against observations made during field work. These observations occurred at: two funerals, three cemeteries and two roadside memorials.

4.5.2 Baseline Records

Following are the 42 baseline records and notes about their presence or absence.

Record 1: Loud vocal mourning and grieving by women and men.

This was observed at both funerals attended, with men and women leaning on and over the casket as they grieved.

Record 2: Self harm to the head with tools during grieving by the women.

Not observed at either funeral.

Record 3: Self harm to the thighs or head with tools during grieving by the men.

Not observed at either funeral.

Record 4: Taboo against naming the dead.

This taboo was encountered, precisely as Spencer described it in 1914.

Record 5: Taboo against another person using the deceased's name.

This taboo was also encountered. A Barunga Elder, Jocelyn McCartney, related that when she was a teenager, a person with the same first name had died, and she had been forced to change her name. The new name had stuck and she continued to be known by this new name until today, some 45 years later.

Record 6: Painting the deceased's body with ochre or Dreaming specific designs.

It is unknown if this happened, but it seems unlikely as the body came from the morgue.

Record 7: Men carry the body to the tree platform or burial place.

Observed at both funerals. Men carried the casket from the bough shelter, or church, to the hearse, and then from the hearse to the gravesite (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Men carrying the casket to the gravesite and place it into the grave at Barunga. Women wait on the right with a box of flowers ready to decorate the filled grave. Initialled in the penultimate draft of this paper by a community Elder and a family member.

Record 8: The use of a tree platform as the first stage in the burial process.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 9: Use of an earth burial as the first stage of the burial process.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 10: Women perform rites/dance at the burial spot.

This was observed at both funerals (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Young girls perform synchronised dancing to Christian music in front of the casket at the cemetery. Note the centipede image on the front of at least four girls.

Record 11: Men build the tree platform or dig the grave.

Believed to have happened, as men filled in the grave.

Record 12: Men lift the body up to the platform, or, place the body into the grave.

Observed at both funerals (Figure 28).

Record 13: Women collect grass and leaves to line the grave and cover the body.

Observed at both funerals. Women had collected artificial flowers to decorate: the casket when it was in the church, the interior of the bough shelter and the gravesite (Figures 30, 36).

Figure 30: After the burial, fresh artificial flowers decorate the gravesite in the Katherine cemetery.

Record 14: The painting of mourner's bodies and hair white, with ash or pipeclay.
This was not observed, however, as a possible substitute, a dress code exists where people attending a funeral wear a white shirt or top. This could be a cultural echo of being painted with pipeclay. According to Elder Luke, (App. II, Int. 6, 1:05, 2:10) this started in the 1990s.

Record 15: Women wearing special grieving armbands.
Not observed and not believed to have been worn at either funeral.

Record 16: Food was prepared by women for the older men conducting ceremonial business.
At one funeral, women prepared a meal for a large number of mourners, but no age restrictions were noted.

Record 17: Musicians playing didgeridoo and clap sticks.
This was observed at one funeral, with didgeridoo and clap sticks being played.
Live and recorded Christian music was also played at both funerals (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Barunga Elder Anita Painter playing Christian music on a keyboard at a funeral. Reproduced with permission.

Record 18: Assumption of supernatural murder and an inquisition by the men.
Not observed at either funeral.

Record 19: Old men, old women and children are treated differently.

Not observed, or believed to happen. Headstones in the cemetery described young and old.

Record 20: Camp is moved soon after death.

Not observed, but according to Elder Lachlan, (App. II, Int. 4, 11:00) the house of the deceased may be smoked and/or left vacant for some time.

Record 21: Messengers sent out to tell relatives and call for assistance.

This happened by mobile phone.

Record 22: A *Junggayi* of the opposite moiety but same gender officiates.

Not observed, not believed to have happened.

Record 23: Painting of bones with red or yellow ochre by the men or women.

Not observed and not believed to have happened, as the deceased's body would have come from the morgue with flesh on it.

Record 24: A bone from the deceased is kept as a memento.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 25: Bundling of the bones in paperbark.

Not observed, did not happen.

Record 26: Paperbark bone bundle placed in a crevice.

Not observed, did not happen.

Record 27: Paperbark bone bundle buried in the ground.

Not observed, did not happen.

Record 28: Painting of the *lorrkon* with Dreaming designs specific to the deceased.

Both caskets were decorated with imagery emotionally meaningful to the deceased. One with stickers of AFL football teams (Figure 32), the other with an idealistic garden scene (Figure 33).

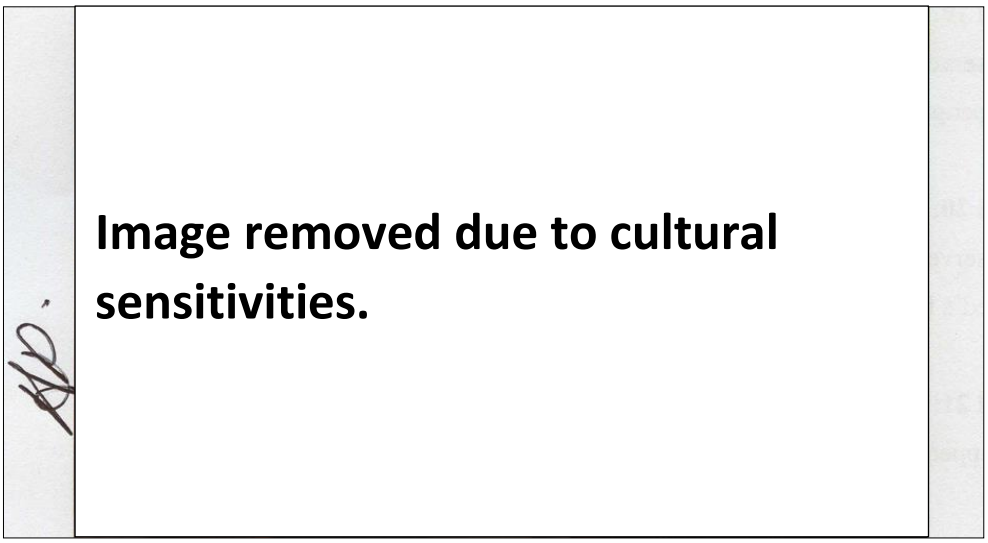

Figure 32: A casket decorated with the stickers of AFL football teams, being photographed by many. Initialled by a community Elder.

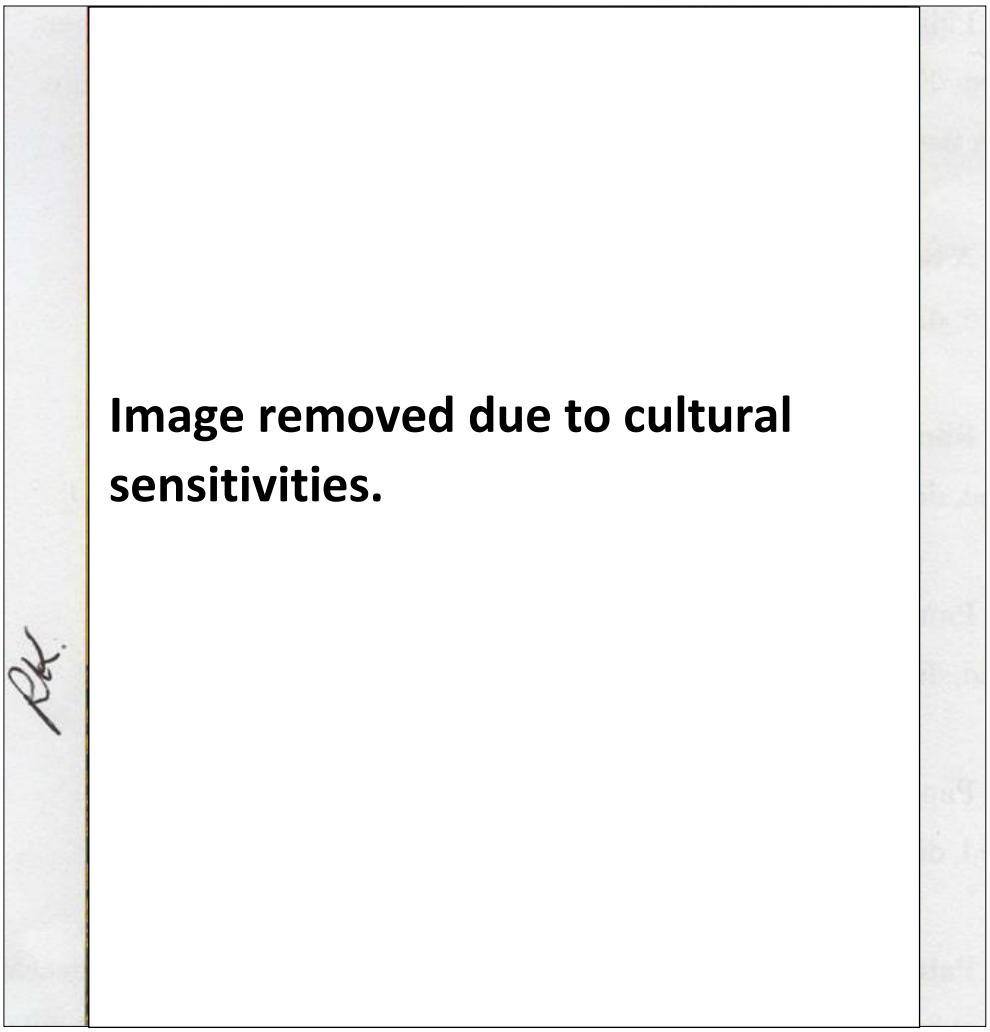

Figure 33: Interior bough shelter, the casket is inlaid with an idealistic garden scene and a photographic portrait of the deceased, obscured. Their favourite AFL team flag flies proudly above. Initialled by a family member.

Record 29: Deposit of bones into a *lorrkon.*

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 30: The Waak Waak (Black Crow) Dance was performed by men at *Lorrkon* ceremonies.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 31: Women dance around the spot for the *lorrkon*, then dance around it when it is in place.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 32: Singing a song cycle specific to the Dreaming of the deceased.

At one funeral, Indigenous musicians played a didgeridoo and clap sticks while singing in language at the funeral ceremonies and gravesite.

Record 33: Exchange of goods between funeral attendees.

Not observed and not believed to have happened.

Record 34: The *lorrkon* is left to decay in the bush naturally.

Not observed, no *lorrkon* used.

Record 35: The *lorrkon* is hidden in a cave after the ceremony.

Not observed, no *lorrkon* used.

Record 36: The grouping of burials in a cave.

Not observed in caves, but in their respective cemeteries.

Record 37: The deposit of grave goods.

Observed at both funerals. Large plastic shopping bags were placed at the foot of the deceased's casket immediately prior to infill. According to Elder Luke, 'but we mostly bury the clothes with the deceased' (App. II, Int. 6, 5:10).

Record 38: Attendees throw earth into the grave.
Observed at both funerals. One of the final rituals was that the vast majority of mourners formed a single file starting from the open grave, with each person in turn throwing a handful of soil onto the casket.

Record 39: Final purification ceremony by smoking.
Observed at one funeral.

Record 40: Final purification by water pouring.
Not observed, not believed to have happened.

Record 41: Complete burial rituals may last many months to over a year.
Believed to have been the case in both funerals, with the body kept at the morgue for months between death and burial.

Record 42: Post-burial 'Sorry Business' lasted for days or weeks.
At Barunga, the length of Sorry Business after a funeral has been reduced to one day for the general community. It is a period of quietness, with few people seen on the streets and doors generally closed. The deceased's family may retreat for longer.

4.6 Contemporary Observations - Archaeological Features and Artefacts

Eight traditional features or artefacts, i.e. items of material culture, were identified in the literature review and interview stages, section 4.3. None of these were observed in contemporary burial practices. Grave goods were present in both, however, the material culture deposited had changed.

Contemporary burial practices were performed in association with the following features and/or items of material culture.

1) **Bough Shelter** - Only observed at the Barunga funeral. The bough shelter was used to shelter the casket from the sun and to create a private mourning space. After the casket arrived from the morgue, community members visited to say their last goodbyes to the deceased. Both red and yellow material, symbolising *Dua* and

Yirritja moieties, is used to create a screen around it, meaning that the shelter is open to all people. The bough shelter is probably derived from either one or two traditional structures. It may be a modified tree platform, upon which bodies were placed for decomposition. It may also be a modified shade. Shades were shelters constructed during important ceremonies to house sacred/spiritually potent items out of sight of the uninitiated (Figures 33, 34, 35).

Figure 34: Left, a bough shelter used for private mourning and last goodbyes at Barunga.
Figure 35: Right, a traditional shade used for housing potent spiritual items out of sight of the uninitiated during important 'Big Sunday' ceremonies (Elkin 1961c:194. Reproduced with permission).

2) **Casket** - These were European style caskets with distinctive decorations on them. One held stickers of AFL teams, Record 28, (Figure 32) the other was inlaid with an idealistic garden scene (Figure 33). Both had photographic portraits of the deceased imprinted on their top surface and were decorated with artificial flowers.

3) **Cemetery** - Barunga and Katherine cemeteries are western style cemeteries, with their outer perimeter fenced and a gate to allow access for vehicles and people. They hold many graves, often plotted shoulder to shoulder, and a scattering of trees (Figure 28).

4) **Grave** - The graves were European style, approximately two meters long, 75cm wide and 1.5 meters deep. Until recently, it was not compulsory to register, or mark, Aboriginal graves. This left many graves at Barunga unmarked and only apparent by a depression in the ground (Ralph et al. 2021) (Figures 30, 36, 47).

The gravesite of one of the last fluent Jawoyn speakers was documented with the use of photogrammetry, one week after the burial. A virtual 3-D model was produced (Figure 36)

Figure 36: Three screenshots from a photorealistic 3-D model. Giving 360^0 rotation around the gravesite was created to document the site and the material culture present.

Grave Decorations – Graves were decorated in numerous ways:

5) **Artificial Flowers** - These are brightly coloured plastic flowers. Their use began approximately 20-25 years ago (pers. comm. Lara Read 2023) and are now almost universal on Indigenous gravesites (Figures 30 and 36).

6) **Catholic Statuary** - Some graves displayed small white concrete statues of the Virgin Mary or Cupids (Figure 37).

7) **Crucifix** - Most, but not all, graves displayed a white crucifix with a small plaque describing the deceased (Figures 37, 47).

8) **Football Paraphernalia** - Flags and clothing featuring the deceased's favourite AFL team is common. Funeral attendees have also been asked to wear the appropriate colours, or team clothing (Figures 32, 33 and 37).

Figure 37: Showing gravesites from Barunga, Wugularr and Katherine cemeteries and their decorations; artificial flowers, football team flags, Catholic statuary, crucifixes and headstones.

9) **Funeral Clothes** - At the Barunga funeral most people wore a white top and black bottom. At the Katherine funeral, attendees had been asked to wear the colours of the deceased's favourite football team, red top and black bottom (Figure 38). Elder Luke later stated (App. II, Int. 6, 1:05) that the choice of clothing to be worn at a funeral was the family's, communicated by the *Junggayi*. Funeral 'uniforms' are a developing trait among Indigenous communities. The white top and black bottom noted at the Barunga funeral has been seen previously outside of Arnhem Land by McDonald (2001:148) in the East Kimberley, and could be a pattern becoming standard at Aboriginal funerals. It is conjectured, that the white shirt is a cultural echo of the

white pipeclay that was used to cover the body during traditional funeral ceremonies. At the Katherine funeral, attendees had been asked to wear the colours of the deceased's favourite football team, a red top and black bottom. This is rare but re-occurring, as McCoy (2008:66-67) records a funeral in the Tanami where mourners were asked to wear blue, in reverence for the deceased's love of Lake Gregory, WA. While on an individual level, Barunga Elder Anita Painter stated emphatically that, 'Fashion' was a major determining factor in the clothes worn at funerals these days (Pers comm 2024).

Figure 38: Mourners at a funeral in Katherine. Red and black colours were in respect to the deceased's love of the 'Bombers' AFL team.

10) **Clothing with Dreaming Affiliation** - At one funeral several people were observed wearing clothes with an image of a centipede on them. Apparently, this had been the Dreaming of the deceased, and those wearing it were said to share that Dreaming (pers. comm Elder Luke 2023 (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Mourners who share the Centipede Dreaming with the deceased.

11) **Grave Goods -** At both funerals large plastic shopping bags were placed at the foot of the casket. According to Elder Luke (App. II, Int. 6, 5:10), these would have been filled with the clothes and personal belongings of the deceased.

12) **Roadside Memorials -** Another new feature of Indigenous burial rituals is the use of roadside memorials to mark the place of passing of family and friends. Like gravesites, roadside memorials are decorated with artificial flowers and often the flag of the deceased's favourite AFL team (Figures 40, 41, 42). Of these, Elder Lachlan (App. II Int.4, 16:27) stated that it 'used to be put flowers, that's all. But this just come up now. At this time, you know this, probably in the 2000s.'

Figure 40: Left, showing a roadside memorial flying an AFL team flag.
Figure 41: Middle, the reverse of figure 40, showing artificial flowers.
Figure 42: Right, a memorial decorated with artificial flowers, and a candle lamp.

Anecdotally, when driving the Central Arnhem Road between Highway 1 and Barunga, I passed a roadside memorial and was asked by a passenger to give the horn a couple of short sharp hits. This I did, and when I asked why, the passenger, a male Barunga community member, advised me that it was done as a sign of respect and acknowledgement of the people who had died there. This was later corroborated in an interview with Elder Lachlan who stated it was, '…just out of respect or just to say *bobo* like, see you...'. (App. II, Int. 4, 16.56). Also, the passenger revealed, he didn't want the spirits of the dead thinking that they had been forgotten or were being ignored, and so become angry and follow the car back to the community to cause mischief. This, I realised later, was a cultural echo of a behaviour that Elkin had observed during burial ceremonies:

> A zig zag path is followed to and from the grave at the time of burial, or a smoke screen is passed through so that the spirit of the dead will not be able to follow the mourners.
> (Elkin 1979:343)

Respect, or fear, of the spirits of the dead, is alive and well at Barunga.

4.6 Baseline Records vs Contemporary Ceremonies

When considering the primary research question, *what was the impact of colonialism upon the burial rituals of people in the Barunga area?,* the impact was graded into four categories:

1) A complete change, where traditional burial rituals are no longer observed.

2) A partial change, that has resulted in a modified burial ritual that retains some aspect of traditional practice.

3) No change, where burial rituals remain resilient, unaffected by colonialism and are practiced the same today as they were when initially recorded.

As well as these three, a fourth category was observed.

4) Those that seem to be new, and were not recorded historically in association with burial practices.

4.6.1 Traditional Rituals Not Observed at the Two Funerals Witnessed.

From the Baseline of traditional rituals, 21 of 42, or 50%, are no longer practiced (Table 2).

Table 2: Showing the Records from the Baseline not observed at either funeral.

Rituals Not Observed – 21/42 = 50%
Record 2: Self harm to the head with tools during grieving by the women.
Record 3: Self harm to the thighs or head with tools during grieving by the men.
Record 6: Painting the deceased's body with ochre or Dreaming specific designs.
Record 8: Use of a tree platform as the first stage in the burial process.
Record 9: Use of an earth burial as the first stage of the burial process.
Record 15: Women wearing special grieving armbands.
Record 18: Assumption of supernatural murder and an inquisition by the men.
Record 19: Old men, old women and children are treated differently.
Record 22: A *Junggayi* of the opposite moiety but same gender officiates the funeral.
Record 23: Painting of bones with red or yellow ochre by the men or women.
Record 24: A bone from the deceased is kept as a memento.
Record 25: Bundling of the bones in paperbark.
Record 26: Paperbark bone bundle placed in a crevice.

Record 27: Paperbark bone bundle buried in the ground.
Record 29: Deposit of bones into a *lorrkon.*
Record 30: The Waak Waak dance was performed by men at *Lorrkon* ceremonies.
Record 31: Women dance around the spot for the *lorrkon,* then dance around it when it is in place.
Record 33: Exchange of goods between funeral attendees.
Record 34: The *lorrkon* is left to decay in the bush naturally.
Record 35: The *lorrkon* is hidden in a cave after the ceremony.
Record 40: Final purification by water pouring.

4.6.2 Rituals Practiced in a Modified Form

Rituals that have strong resemblance to traditional burial practices but have been modified or changed by colonial culture. They constitute 10/42 burial rituals recorded, or 24% (Table 3).

Table 3: Showing traditional rituals practiced in modified form.

Rituals Practiced in a Modified Form – 10/42 = 24%
Record 10: Women perform rites/dance at the burial spot.
Record 13: Women collect grass and leaves to line the grave and cover the body.
Record 14: The painting of mourners' bodies and hair with ash or pipeclay.
Record 16: Food was prepared by women for the older men conducting ceremonial business.
Record 20: Camp is moved soon after death.
Record 21: Messengers sent out to tell relatives and ask for assistance.
Record 28: Painting of the *lorrkon* with Dreaming designs specific to the deceased.
Record 36: The grouping of burials.
Record 41: Complete burial rituals may last many months to over a year.
Record 42: Post-burial 'Sorry Business' lasted for days or weeks.

4.6.3 Resilient Rituals

Of the 42 traditional practices recorded, 11, or 26%, were observed to be virtually identical to those from the historical record (Table 4).

Table 4: Showing contemporary rituals the same as those recorded in the historical Baseline.

Rituals Resilient to Colonialism – 11/42 = 26%
Record 1: Loud vocal mourning and grieving by women and men.
Record 4: Taboo against naming the dead.
Record 5: Taboo against another person using the deceased's name.
Record 7: Men carry the body to the tree platform/burial place.
Record 11: Men build the tree platform or dig the grave.
Record 12: Men lift the body up to, or, place the body into the grave.
Record 17: Musicians playing didgeridoo and clap sticks.
Record 32: Singing a song cycle specific to the Dreaming or clan of the deceased.
Record 37: The deposit of grave goods.
Record 38: Attendees throw earth into the grave.
Record 39: Final purification ceremony by smoking.

4.6.4 New Burial Rituals and Material Culture

One Indigenous burial ritual was witnessed that had not been recorded in any historical literature relating to *burial* rituals that this author had read. This was the sharing of sweat with the deceased. Early in both funeral ceremonies, time was given for mourners, mainly men but also to a lesser degree, women, approaching the casket rubbing a hand under an armpit to collect sweat. This hand would then be wiped slowly and solemnly over a section of the casket while the mourner talked, and presumably said their final good byes, to the deceased. Although sweat use had not been recorded in burial rituals, its use has been observed by Elkin (1961a:264; 1961b:13; 1961c:195) in other spiritual situations, such as the 'Big Sunday', Maraian and Yabuduruwa Ceremonies. While Spencer (1914:320) records it being used by a Medicine Man in a healing procedure. More recently, on the southern coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, li-Yanyuwa Li-Wirdiwalangu (Yanyuwa Elders) et al. (2023:34)

recorded sweat's importance to the Yanyuwa people. It is a vital essence that all living and non-living things have that communicates social, sensual and spiritual information.

Thirteen new burial features were observed, eleven were features or items of material culture, two were rituals. Three were Indigenous in origin and ten adopted from Christian forms (Table 5).

Table 5: Showing new burial practices and material culture and their source.

New Burial Rituals and Material Culture	Influence / Source
1. Communing with the dead through sharing sweat	Indigenous
2. Bough Shelter	Indigenous
3. Clothing with Dreaming Affiliation	Indigenous
4. Casket	Colonial
5. Cemetery	Colonial
6. Grave	Colonial
7. Catholic Statuary	Colonial
8. Artificial Flowers	Colonial
9. Crucifix	Colonial
10. Football Paraphernalia	Colonial
11. Funeral Uniform: Black and White or Coloured	Colonial
12. Reading an extract from the Bible.	Colonial
13. Roadside Memorials	Colonial

4.7 A Return to Country

On the 26th August 2018 Margaret Katherine, a senior Elder of the Buhymi Clan at Barunga and Traditional Owner of the lands around Narwala Gabarnmung, a remote ceremonial site, died. As related by Elder Anita Painter, (App. II, Int. 1, 00:30) her body was placed in a helicopter at the Barunga Community oval in a very emotional scene involving many community members. It was flown to Narwala Gabarnmung where she was buried in a European style grave, with only close family and friends attending (Figures 43 and 44).

Figure 43: Left, showing the helicopter that flew Margaret back to her Country.
Figure 44: Right, Margaret's gravesite near Narwala Gabarnmung
(Photographs: Ray Whear, reproduced with permission).

This 'return to country' burial is a more traditional approach where the deceased's body and spirits, are taken to the origin point or well-spring of their Dreaming affiliation. A very rare event in Barunga. However, another Barunga Elder, Liz, has suggested (App. II, Int. 7, 1:45) that a close relative of hers who died several years ago, will undergo a secondary burial in 2024, in their ancestral Country. These burials may mark a move away from the colonial burial format of being buried off-country in the cemetery at Barunga, and a return to more traditional forms and locations.

4.8 Summary

Through literature review and oral histories, the traditional Indigenous approach to burial has been closely approximated. Contemporary practices have then been compared against them. While half the traditional rituals are no longer practiced, one quarter have survived relatively untouched, with the remaining quarter surviving in a modified form. Interestingly, 13 new burial practices were observed. Eleven of which were features or artefacts of material culture, with three being of Indigenous origin and ten colonial.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research questions put forward in the introduction. It also discusses Indigenous burial practices in relation to: personal and collective spiritual identity, the nature of ritual and ceremony and the transformative nature of Indigenous culture and its resilience in the 21st century. Last, it looks at new directions that research into Indigenous burial practices could take in the future.

5.2 The Impact of Colonialism

Like its impact on traditional languages, many of which have died out or are about to, colonialism has destroyed many features of traditional burial practices. This loss has been severe, but far from complete. As the results show, 50 per cent of traditional burial practices have been lost or are currently neglected, (Table 2), with a further 24 per cent modified or changed from their original form, (Table 3). The remaining 26 per cent of traditional practices still exist today, in forms relatively untouched from their traditional state (Table 4). The archaeology, or material culture of burial practices has fared worse, with only one element out of the original eight documented, the deposition of the deceased's personal items into the grave, being observed in funeral ceremonies. However, this was just the ritual of depositing goods. The goods themselves have changed completely over time, like the other items of material culture. Overall, this indicates a significant degree of culture loss. However, the material culture and the rituals performed are just the mechanics of burial practices. Layered on top of these are intangible aspects, such as burial organisation and belief systems.

The people of the Barunga area traditionally practiced a secondary, or two stage, burial process. Although rare exceptions still happen, colonialism has effectively extinguished this pattern, with Elder Lachlan (App. II, Int. 4, 49:15) noting, 'the *lorrkon* and everything was doing okay, but this Church was built, '68, I think? that's when everyone started coming out of that *lorrkon*,' In policies designed to enforce acculturation, the colonial government, with the assistance of the Church and Missions, has largely, but not completely, conformed Indigenous burial practices at Barunga to the civil standard and Christian norm.

Today at death, government officials such as police and doctors, people unrelated to the deceased or their family, appropriate the body and isolate it in the morgue at Katherine Hospital, 80 km away (pers. comm Stacey Orderly 2023). The appropriation of the deceased's body by the colonial government spiritually alienates the family from their grieving process. It deprives family and kin of their opportunity to perform their traditional rituals, to faithfully fulfill obligations to their loved ones. In the minds of the mourners, these rituals are essential in appeasing the deceased's spirits, and not giving them cause to be angry and linger malevolently at the place of death or in the community. This is one intangible and profound aspect of colonialism's impact on traditional burial practices. The infliction of feelings of spiritual and psychological inadequacy and guilt onto the deceased's family. Feelings felt for not being able to perform the traditional rituals that would ensure their loved one's journey to their spiritual homeland.

Further intangible aspects of colonialism's impact, and the degree of acculturation to the colonial norm, are seen in the organisation of the burial process. When a bereaved family is ready to bury their deceased member, they must first notify the colonial administration, i.e. the morgue, to ask for the body to be released and delivered to a church or their family home (pers. comm Stacey Orderly 2023). In one funeral observed, the family constructed a bough shelter in their front yard to house the casket for a day. One of the few features of Indigenous culture used. In the other funeral, the casket was delivered to an Australian Indigenous Ministries Church for a formal Christian funeral service. That the government controls access to their deceased is a severe imposition on the spirituality of Indigenous people. A European style casket is used to hold the body for transportation to the home or church and then to the cemetery. This cemetery is a distinct and demarcated area for the dead, on the edge of a township or community. A feature of a sedentary, agriculturally based society, where land ownership is required to be physically marked out. It is not a feature of a nomadic hunter-gatherer society. Within the cemetery, standardised gravesites are allotted, two meters long, one meter wide, one and a half deep, shoulder to shoulder. With gravesites often displaying Catholic statuary, headstones and/or crucifixes, the same as any Christian cemetery in Australia. Grave decorations consist of a profusion of artificial flowers and football paraphernalia. Last, the majority of the people living at Barunga are from distant tribal groups. This means that these people do not have any ancestral Dreaming ties to the land. By being buried in the Barunga cemetery they are being buried off-Country, alienated from their

spiritual homelands. The acculturation of Indigenous people to the western Christian norm is pervasive.

Another repercussion of the colonial control and organisation of the burial process has been a readjustment of the gender power balance within the community. A reduction in the importance of the previous organisers of burials, the men, has occurred. Traditionally, male and female roles and responsibilities to the dead were strictly demarcated. With the complete burial ceremony being an almost seamless interplay of male and female elements. However, not all elements were equal. Men took it upon themselves, through justifications based on having been initiated into the deeper mysteries of life, to perform the more spiritually potent/important aspects of the burial procedure. These being: touching the dead body to paint it or place it in a tree platform, the making, painting and filling of a *lorrkon*, the playing of sacred music with the didgeridoo, etc. In an interview anticipating a future return-to-country traditional burial ceremony, Barunga Elder Liz affirmed the role of the men of the community, stating, (App. II, Int. 7, 9:45) 'We'll do that *lorrkon*, they'll do it, the men will do it'. With the colonial appropriation of the burial process, the men were out of a job. With the Christianisation of the belief system, ancestral Dreaming beings were on shaky ground too. Losing control of the death process, the traditional methods for spiritual regeneration, lowered men's importance within the community. This lowered their social self-esteem and further fuelled their anger.

However, colonial elements do not completely dominate the burial practices. Twenty four percent of traditional burial practices still existed, but in a modified form, while 26% of traditional burial practices were still present, unaffected by colonialism. While new Indigenous rituals, previously undocumented in funeral situations, and new features of Indigenous material culture were observed. The use of sweat to commune with the dead, the placing of Dreaming beings on clothing, and the use of bough shelters/shades to house the dead for mourning, all indicate a pride in traditional Indigenous spirituality and a desire to incorporate it into modern day burials. While it would be too early to label the creation of new ritual forms as a cultural renaissance, the new burial elements demonstrate the vitality and flexibility of Indigenous culture, its ability to change and adapt to the circumstances of the present day.

5.3 Colonialism Now

It should be noted that the imposition of colonial forms is not just an historical fact, an unfortunate period of time to read about in history books. Colonialism is an ongoing force in the present day, with the European elite still using their control over the political-legal institutions of society to conform traditional Indigenous burial practices to the colonial norm.

This was brought to the fore with the recent introduction in the Northern Territory of a new Burial and Cremation Bill (2019). This Bill would have criminalised the traditional burial practices of the Yolngu. Preventing them from burying their loved ones close to their home, instead of in a colonial cemetery (Barber 2008). Punishment for the offence would have been up to $31,000 or two years in prison (Gray 2020; Murphy 2019). This law could equally have been applied to Barunga residents who practice a Return to Country burial on ancestral lands, as described in Section 4.7 above. Concerns were actively raised by Indigenous groups, they organised themselves politically, exercised agency or praxis within the political domain, and the Bill was defeated.

Another attempt to control Indigenous burial practices is the colonial government's approach to Sorry Business, the period of grieving an individual or community goes through after the death of a family member or friend. In an interview, Barunga Elder Luke relates (App. II, Int. 21:30) that in the olden days, sorry business lasted for, 'maybe days or weeks you know, dance, dance, dance'. This is a problem for today's business community, who need a reliable workforce. Therefore, the government, the Elite's department for managing the economy, suggests, 'one continuous period of two days' (Fair Work Ombudsman 2024). This seems to be an attempt to conform the grieving period for Indigenous people to the allotted weekend of the colonial workforce, reducing disruption to the Elite's business interests to a minimum.

These two instances drive home the fact that colonialism, the physical and cultural invasion of Indigenous Australia by Europeans, is still an ongoing event. Indigenous burial traditions are still not understood, or are ignored, in favour of colonial interests, i.e. the bottom line. While the political dialectic has undergone rebalancing since the repression of the initial contact period, the struggle is ongoing, with each generation having a battle to win, or lose.

5.4 An Everchanging Ceremony

The results indicate that Indigenous burial practices in southern Arnhem Land have undergone considerable loss and change since Colonisation. Many traditional practices are now neglected and many Christian ones have been adopted. To many this seems like a great loss, not only to the people of southern Arnhem Land, but humanity in general. However, it is possible that Indigenous cultures were much more open to change and underwent it more often than we commonly realise. While western culture may have a built-in bias against change within its religious-spiritual institutions that makes us erroneously view change in Indigenous cultures negatively.

Within western cultures the idea of change within our foundational religious-spiritual institutions is not welcome. They are bastions of conservatism, where deviations from the orthodox view are labelled laziness, or, heresy and ironed out. One of the main pillars of this conservatism is literacy. The use of writing and books has allowed religious rituals to be recorded in detail, and so be repeated, unchanged from generation to generation, century to century, creating an accurate intergenerational memory. Societies without this form of literacy may not have an inter-generational memory as accurate, such as the oral histories of Indigenous Australians, and so may be more open to change. In northern Australia there are many suggestions that Indigenous ceremonial life was influenced by outside cultures, changing it, and changing it often.

It is probable that several burial practices observed in Arnhem Land have been adopted from Island South East Asia (ISEA). Two of these elements are the use of tree platforms for flesh decomposition and the subsequent use of burial caves to inter the bones retrieved from these platforms. These were observations made by Frazer (1936) on the Island of Misol, north west of Arnhem Land and considered by Mountford (1956:312), as the possible source of the similar Arnhem Land practices. Here the vexing question is, in which direction did the cultural influence flow? Did it originate in ISEA and flow with the north-west Monsoon to Arnhem Land, like, or with, the Macassans, or did the customs originate in Arnhem Land and flow to the islands courtesy of the south-east monsoon? Similarly, Warner (1937:466) describes a close correspondence between the *lorrkon* burial ceremony practiced by Indigenous groups in north-east Arnhem Land, and the farewell ceremonies that the

Macassans performed when the winds changed to the north west, and the time had come for them to leave Arnhem Land for their homes in ISEA.

The adoption of spiritual practices not directly associated with burials has also been noted. Thomson (1949:89-90) observed that a square face glass bottle that washed ashore on a beach, had been raised to the level of ceremonial totem by an Arnhem Land tribe (Figure 45).

Figure 45: A replica of a square faced glass bottle carved from ironwood (Thomson 1949:58).

Elkin (1961a:270) too, noted that while attending a *Maraian* Ceremony near Mainoru Station, the dancers that faithfully reproduced the behaviours of sacred Dreaming animals also faithfully reproduced the behaviour of an aeroplane. Elkin also comments on the mobility of ceremonies, stating of one important ceremony, 'The *Kunapipi* is an outside cult which came into Australia by way of the Victoria or Roper River.' (Elkin 1952:251). Although he gives no reason or justification for this statement. While Berndt and Berndt (1970:124) also comment on the mobility of the *Kunapipi* ceremony, stating that they were told that the first *Kunapipi* ceremony performed in Gunbalanya was in 1950. Interestingly, they add that within

the *Ubar* ceremony, another 'Big Sunday' ceremony, its main character came from Macassar. With an Australia wide perspective, Roth states:

> Corroborees may be taught and conveyed from one tribe to another. Like articles of exchange and barter, corroborees may travel in various directions and along identical trade routes and markets. (1897:117)

These instances point towards the nature of ceremonial life in Arnhem Land being more flexible and dynamic than is usually thought. There appears to be a willingness and openness to adopting novel elements as well as complete ceremonies from outside the territory of the group. The constant change in ceremonies and corroborees may be a sign of people's curiosity, a way of learning the dance-story-beliefs of distant people. Also, within the performance of these ceremonies, the aspects of theatre and entertainment cannot be ignored. With many elements, such as, make-up, costume, music, dance and storytelling present, as in western entertainment and storytelling formats. The adoption of new ceremonies and corroborees can then be seen as one side of a coin, with the other being a boredom with the old ceremonies and corroborees. As with western music and dance forms; classical, jazz, rock and roll, disco and punk, new forms replace the old, while novel approaches, such as salsa or mambo, are adopted as much for their exotic nature as a contempt for the familiar.

If ceremonial life in Indigenous societies was dynamic and constantly undergoing change, then the adoption of Christian forms may be seen as just another change in ceremonies. Although the adoption of Christian forms was likely to have been made under more duress, than other adoptions. The constant turn over in ceremony also means that the first endeavour of this paper, the listing of the traditional burial practices present at the time of European contact, cannot be anything more than a snapshot, representing practices that existed only in that brief moment of time. With those present unlikely to be an accurate representation of burial practices that existed long before that.

5.5 The Journey of the *Lorrkon*

As the results show, except for a few rare exceptions, Colonialism destroyed all of the archaeological features and artefacts used in traditional burial practices. Message sticks, tree platforms and earth burials as the first stage of burial, armbands of grieving, ochred bones,

the bundling of bones in paperbark parcels, the use of *lorrkons,* and the use of burial caves to hold the remains of the dead. All have been extinguished or replaced by colonial culture and its Christian methods for processing the dead. Interestingly, one of these burial artefacts has re-emerged, gaining a revered place in the eyes and halls of the colonial establishment.

Bark paintings and rock art have long been collected and appreciated as forms of Indigenous art. In recent years the *lorrkon,* in its modern manifestation divorced of spiritual potency, the Memorial Pole, has positioned itself as a third form. Like the previous two, the *Lorrkon* was never made to be a piece of 'art', rather, a vessel to hold the bones of the deceased and aid in the spirit's journey to the afterlife. However, unlike the first two art forms, the Memorial Pole carries with it a message of political resistance. They have become a symbol of all the Indigenous people who died defending their homes and families against the European invasion and colonial repression (Figure 46).

Figure 46: *The Aboriginal Memorial*, 1987–88, Ramingining artists, Djon Mundine, Bandjalung people (Photograph, with permission of the NGA 2023).

Although the representativeness of the Memorial Poles can be brought into question, as they are a burial feature of the Indigenous people of northern Australia, and so may not be culturally appropriate to Indigenous people from the rest of Australia. The use of 200 poles, and their presentation date of 1988, places them as an historical statement about the European

invasion. A war memorial to those who died defending their way of life and homelands, and a symbol of the resilience of all Indigenous people nationwide (NGA 2023).

The historical journey that the *lorrkon* has taken can be viewed through a critical lens and also as a heroic journey. Its origin is unclear, but likely began in ISEA, with the concept of placing the dead within the trunk of a tree transmitted to Northern Australia by Macassans. Here it became an item intrinsic to an individual's relationship to Country. A potent vessel of tribal spirituality that identified their spirit to their ancestral Dreaming beings, ensuring safe passage to the source of spiritual regeneration. With the Colonial invasion, many Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their land by its new owners, the pastoralists. This alienated them from their means of spiritual production and regeneration, their sacred Dreaming sites. With colonialism also came Christianity, creating a spiritual dialectic, a struggle for the belief systems of the Indigenous population. Its poles being the traditional ancestral ways, and the Christianity promoted by the Church, who quite literally demonised the use of *lorrkons,* labelling them as the work of savages.

From this low point of physical and spiritual alienation from their land, Indigenous people gradually found a voice, their praxis or agency within the colonial regime. In a slow political snowballing incorporating: the gaining of citizenship, the right to vote, recognition of land rights and native title, Indigenous people increased their power in society. This rise in political power was paralleled by the recognition of the unique qualities of Indigenous art and culture. The reincarnation of the *Lorrkon,* from a burial item used by 'savages', to the Memorial Pole, a piece of high art and a symbol of political resistance to colonial repression, is an artistic manifestation of this shift in power relations, a rebalancing of the political dialectic between the Indigenous and Colonial communities. For Indigenous people, the Memorial Pole is not just a symbol of successful political resistance, but a vessel for political regeneration, 200 of which are planted in the heart of the colonial capital, Canberra.

5.6 Reflections, Achievements and Future Directions

This section comments on the theoretical frameworks used, the achievements of the paper and future directions for research.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks were utilized in this paper, decolonising research methodologies for data collection and Marxist archaeology for political and social analysis.

Decolonising research methodologies, and the attitudes that it fosters, was a useful ethical guideline. It moved research practice towards a more explicit enactment of the Golden Rule, which in a Christian framework is, do to others as you would have them do to you. This *ethic of reciprocity* was useful when observing and photographing emotionally sensitive aspects of the burial process. It is a concept that should be made more explicit in the 'guidelines for ethical research' literature.

Marxist political theory, with its focus on class conflict presented a template of an uneducated industrial working class in conflict with an aristocratic upper class. This translated well into an outback setting, with an Aboriginal under-class in conflict with the station owning bosses over the use of the land. The concepts of alienation from the means of production, the land, and the dialectic struggle for control over the use of the land, are useful in viewing the political history of Aboriginal-European relations. However, it was harder to apply them specifically to burial practices and Indigenous acculturation to the Colonial norm.

One theoretical approach that could potentially yield valuable insights into indigenous burial practices is that of Landscape archaeology. Its focus is on the meanings that people derive from, or attribute to, their surrounding landscape. With Indigenous culture saturated with meanings associated with the landscape: from cosmological origin stories, the adventures of ancestral Dreaming beings, sacred sites and conception beliefs, this approach could be a fertile one for understanding the spiritual meanings behind burial practices.

Achievements

This paper has three main achievements. The first is that, as far as I am aware, it is the first to set down the complete burial sequence, from death to final ceremonies and sorry business, of the Indigenous people of southern Arnhem Land. While most of this list came from the established literature, original contributions were extracted from interviews with Elders living in Barunga. This list is not definitive. As an outsider I am aware that there are aspects to this

sequence that I was not privy to. However, it does establish a base to which other researchers, ideally Indigenous ones, could contribute more nuanced understandings to. The paper's first half is a collection of traditional lore, it is a time capsule of knowledge that can be repatriated to future generations if they wish to revive aspects of their traditional burial practices.

The paper's second achievement is that it explicitly quantifies the impact that colonisation has had upon traditional burial practices. The impact has been severe, with a significant degree of cultural loss occurring, but accompanied by cultural change and cultural reinvention. Much like the traditional languages of the Jawoyn, Dalabon and Maielli, which are fading from use and will soon be extinct, the less apparent traditional burial practices of these groups are also atrophying. While occasional traditional burials still take place, it is hard to determine if these are a cultural death throw or the revival of traditional practices. Thus, this study of burial rituals can be seen as a microcosm for the impact that colonialism has had upon every feature of traditional Indigenous life. From language, social organisation, and the production of material goods to belief systems and burial practices, Colonialism has been profoundly negative, severely destructive, but not completely so, with green shoots of cultural regeneration visible.

The paper's third achievement has been in its explicit presentation of ethical procedures. The inclusion of signatures tied to photographs, indicating the granting of permission by Indigenous people for their use, is just one small step in the ethical journey of a researcher. If it were to become the norm, it would also be a giant leap for a discipline, and a nation, with a history of abuse and exploitation of its Indigenous inhabitants.

Future Directions

One future path is a more practical, direct-action approach to reversing the acculturation and colonialisation of Indigenous burial practices. It will do this by providing people with the option of replacing the usual headstone and crucifix at a gravesite with a traditional looking, but concrete, *lorrkon*. Thus, re-Indigenising their burial practices (Figures 47, 48).

These *lorrkons* would come in two sizes, short and wide or tall and thin, reflecting the moiety of the deceased, *Dua* or *Yirritja* respectively. The family of the deceased could choose to

have them painted traditionally, reflecting the Dreaming of the deceased. This would have a follow through effect of encouraging local Indigenous painters. The *lorrkons* would be planted on the gravesite like a traditional *lorrkon*, perhaps in a separate ceremony after the grave was infilled. With time the cemetery would become a field of *lorrkons*, whose paintings would reflect the Dreamings of the community.

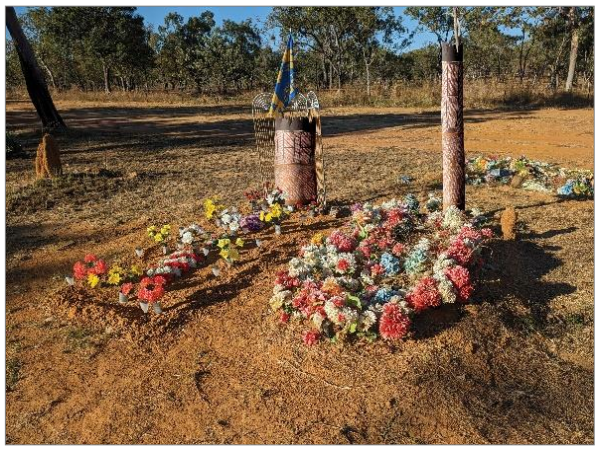

Figure 47: Left, gravesites with crucifixes in the Barunga Community cemetery.
Figure 48: Right, the same gravesites with an artist's Memorial Pole replacing the crucifixes (Photograph of cemetery by author, photograph of artist's Memorial Pole by permission NGA 2023, composite work by Cheryl Orsini.).

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7. Appendix I

Burial Records, Sources and Page References

Table 6: Showing Individual Burial Records in the Historical Literature Reviewed.

Researcher Record		Elkin 1979	Maddock 1982	Gunn 2021	Jelinek 1979	Mount Ford V.1 1956 V.2 1960	Morphy 1991	Spencer 1914	Base Dow 1907	Bernd t. Bernd t 1970	May 2005	Thom As 2018
First Burial												
1	Loud mourning and grieving by women and men.					p.311		p.241	p.6	p. 93, 134b		
2	Self harm to the head with tools during grieving by the women.					p.311		p.241	p.6	p. 93b		
3	Self-harm to thighs with tools during grieving by the men.							p.241	p.6	p. 93b		
4	Taboo against naming the dead.	p. 343	p.153					pp. 245-246				
5	Taboo against using the deceased's name.	p. 343										
6	Painting the deceased's body with ochre and/or Dreaming specific designs.	p. 340				p.311 V.1	p.109		p.6			
7	Men carry the body to the tree platform or burial place.							p.240		p. 92b		
8	Use of a tree platform as the first stage in the burial process.	p. 346	p.153			p.311 V.1		p.249	p.6	p. 92b	p.111	TC. 9:50

Researcher Record		Elkin 1979	Maddock 1982	Gunn 2021	Jelinek 1979	Mount Ford V.1 1956 V.2 1960	Morphy 1991	Spencer 1914	Base Dow 1907	Bernd t. Bernd t 1970	May 2005	Thom As 2018
9	Use of earth burial as first stage in the burial process.	p. 340	p.153				p.109	p.240		p. 92b		
10	Women perform rites/dance at the burial spot.							p.240 - 241				
11	Men build the tree platform or dig the grave.					p.311 V.1		p.240		p. 92b		
12	Men lift the body up to platform, or, place body in grave.							p.241				
13	Women collect grass/leaves to line the grave.							p.241				
14	Mourners paint their bodies with ash or pipclay.							p.245	p.6			TC. 52:11
15	Women wear grieving armbands.							pp.244 -245				
16	Food was prepared by women for the older men conducting ceremonies.						p.1	p.244				
17	Musicians playing didgeridoo + clap sticks					p.313 V.1						TC. 52:25
18	Assumption of supernatural murder.	p. 341 p. 344	p.142				p.107	pp.37-38 pp.246 -247				
19	Old men, old women and children are treated differently.		p. 150, 155, 156					p.241	p.6			
20	Camp is moved soon after a death.	p. 343	p.153							p. 165b		

Researcher Record		Elkin 1979	Maddock 1982	Gunn 2021	Jelinek 1979	Mount Ford V.1 1956 V.2 1960	Morphy 1991	Spencer 1914	Base Dow 1907	Bernd t. Bernd t 1970	May 2005	Thom As 2018
Second Burial												
21	Messengers sent to tell relatives and call for assistance									p.116, 134b		
22	*Junggayi* of the opposite moiety and same gender	Described by Elder Lachlan Jumbiri in an interview (App. II, Int. 2, 33:55).										
23	Painting of bones with red/yellow ochre by the men/women.				p. 159	p.312 V.1 p.270 V.2				p.134b	p.111	TC. 9:50
24	Memento bone taken from the deceased.							p.248				
25	Bundling of the bones in paperbark.			p.39	p. 159		p.109	p.249	p.6	p.134b		TC. 9:45
26	Paperbark bone bundle placed in a crevice.		p.153	p.39	p. 159	p.255					p.117	
27	Paperbark bone bundle buried in the ground.					p.263			p.6			TC. 59:10
28	Painting of the *lorrkon* with designs of the deceased's Dreaming.					p.313 V.1	p.109	p.252				
29	Deposit of the bones into a *lorrkon*.	p. 354	p.153, 156			p.313 V.1	p.109	p.251		p.134b	p.117	
30	Waak Waak (Black Crow) Men's Dance at *Lorrkon* ceremony.	Described by Elder Lachlan Jumbiri in an interview (App. II, Int. 4, 20:30).										
31	Women dance around spot for the *lorrkon*, dig its hole, then dance around it.					p.313 V.1		p.252		p.134b		

Researcher Record		Elkin 1979	Maddock 1982	Gunn 2021	Jelinek 1979	Mount Ford V.1 1956 V.2 1960	Morphy 1991	Spencer 1914	Base Dow 1907	Berndt. Berndt 1970	May 2005	Thom As 2018
32	Singing a song cycle specific to the Dreaming of the deceased.	p. 340					p.1					
33	Exchange of goods.							p.247-8		p.135b		
34	*Lorrkon* left to decay in the bush naturally.					p.317 V.1	pp.21-22					
35	*Lorrkon* is hidden away.							p.252-3				
36	The grouping of burials.				p. 159	p.267						
37	Grave goods.				p. 159							
38	Attendees throw earth into grave.	Only Warner (1937:432), made this observation, historically.										
39	Final purification by smoking.	p. 343						p.243				TC. 50:20
40	Final purification by water pouring.							p.243				
41	Burial rituals extended over months, years.									p. 174a		
42	Sorry Business lasted for days or weeks.	Described by Elder Luke Papyrus in an interview (App. II, Int. 5, 7.40).