

Ford, Payi Linda, Linda Barwick, and Allan Marett. "Mirrwana and Wurrkama: Applying an Indigenous Knowledge Framework to Collaborative Research on Ceremonies." In *Collaborative Ethnomusicology*, edited by Katelyn Barney, 43–62. Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, 2014.

This is a postprint version (author's accepted manuscript), with page numbers altered to match the published version.

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Mirrwana and *wurrkama*: applying an Indigenous Knowledge framework to collaborative research on ceremonies

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1. Introduction

This chapter outlines how we have collaborated to develop, implement, and critically evaluate a research project that integrates and remains true to both Indigenous knowledge systems and to those of the academy. The context is the ceremonies of the Tyikim people from remote, rural and urban areas in the Wagait-Daly region of the Top End of Northern Territory, and in particular, the series of ceremonies that followed the death of Ford's mother in 2007. We² will outline the processes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaboration that underpinned the performance and documentation of the ceremonies and, more specifically, how this process can be seen through the Indigenous knowledge framework *mirrwana-wurrkama*, developed by Ford and based on her family's traditional cycad nut processing practices (see section 2 below).³ In our experiences collaboration in ceremony is founded on longstanding relationships (things that people share) rather than on any attempt to cover differing social categories (things that separate people by highlighting differences). To show how the collaborative research process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work in ethnomusicological research practice, we will go into some detail about the nature of the work that was undertaken to support this series of ceremonies.

The story of our collaboration has unfolded over time. We have been drawn together by our overlapping but nonetheless diverse interests and activities in

¹ The ceremonies were made possible by contributions of time and finances by many people. All the families contributed their time. Members of the Daiyi family (Payi Ford, Richard Daiyi, Margaret Daiyi, Kath Deveraux and their families) contributed personal funds. Twin Hill Aboriginal Corporation, White Eagle Aboriginal Corporation, along with Mum Yilngi Atie and family, Les Waters and family, Andrew Djekaboi and family also contributed to the success of the occasion. This research was supported financially by the Australian Research Council grants DP0450131 "Preserving Australia's endangered heritages: Murrinhpatha song at Wadeye" and DI0775813 "Bringing Indigenous Knowledge into early childhood settings", and by a Charles Darwin University small grant "Caring about Ceremony: Indigenous Knowledge across Boundaries of Time, Space and Society" Charles Darwin University Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts, 2012–2013. We are also grateful to Dr Ian Green (University of Adelaide), who assisted with various linguistic questions about Marrithiyel language.

² Throughout this paper, we have adopted the use the first-person pronoun 'we' when referring to actions all three of us have undertaken jointly, and the third-person pronouns when discussing actions undertaken by only one or two of us.

³ Linda Mae Ford, "Narratives and landscapes: Their capacity to serve Indigenous knowledge interests" (Deakin University, 2005); Linda Ford, *Aboriginal Knowledge & Country: Marri Kunkimba Putj Putj Marrideyan* (Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2010).

relation to language, culture, song and ceremony in the northwest Top End. As an Indigenous woman educated in mainstream institutions as well as through undertaking her cultural responsibilities to country and kin, Ford's research has developed original and insightful approaches for bringing together higher education in both realms through her *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework. Below, she will explain how not only her relationship to the Wagait-Daly region ceremonies, but also her research approach to them, are embedded in her traditional country and its associated kinship systems. Barwick and Marett⁴ are non-Indigenous Australians whose musicological research has been driven by a passion for understanding the power of song and ceremony to generate coordinated action and to structure understanding of the world. As non-Indigenous Australians, their perspective on these ceremonies rests both on the personal relationships they have forged with the owners of these traditions over many years and on the analytical research that they have conducted over several decades into the song and dance associated with these ceremonies.

In the following section (section 2) Ford will outline the *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework that she has developed in order to integrate research based in her relationships with country and kin with research that conforms to the norms of the academy. Section 3 will discuss the ceremonies themselves, examining the structures of authority that regulated the ceremonies, and then showing how each of these were applied in practice for each ceremony in turn. In Section 4, we will discuss the process of recording and documenting the ceremonies, and the various ways in which collaboration was achieved within the Indigenous structures of authority. In the final section (Section 5) we will reflect on how the *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework continues to facilitate our collaborative approach to performing, recording, documenting, and disseminating records of the ceremonies.

2. The *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework

The *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework developed by Ford is derived from collaborative practices handed down through Ford's family for processing the poisonous nuts of the cycad palm (*mirrwana*) in order to make them palatable for people visiting her country for ceremonies through human action (*wurrkama*—borrowed from the English 'work'). In the Marrithiyel language, one of several spoken within Ford's Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu clan, the expression *wurrkama nidin kan-gu* (literally, 'work for this country') signifies more pragmatically, "We work together on this country or place that is here (where we are standing and looking at as a suitable location to harvest the cycad nuts (*mirrwana*) for the upcoming ceremony)." ⁵

Working together is a fundamental value that underlies human ways of being in the world. Without working together, we would be lost to each other and from the world. The *mirrwana-wurrkama* framework, developed by Ford to model higher Indigenist research education, depends on constellations of social networks of relationships, both close and distant. The kinship connections are threaded through songs, performances and country. *Mirrwana* is the cycad that nourishes the landscape of Mak Mak knowledge creation, a nourishment that crystallises at ceremonial times. *Wurrkama* is the work done in the preparation of the plants and its food source. *Wurrkama* involves caring for the landscape and preparing the fruits or *pelunggu* of the *Mirrwana* for baking and consumption at the time of those special events where closure is required along with an opening to move into the next phase of the learning journey.⁶ *Wurrkama* happens through-

⁴ Marett and Barwick are personal as well as professional partners.

⁵ We are grateful for advice from Dr Ian Green (University of Adelaide) on Marrithiyel language. In the paper we refer to genres of song and ceremony originating in several different language groups, and use the orthographic conventions of the relevant language, or the name established in the literature (e.g. 'wangga'). Marrithiyel expressions provided by Mum Yilngi Atie use a practical orthography for Marrithiyel developed in consultation with Dr Green.

⁶ Ford, *Aboriginal Knowledge & Country: Marri Kunkimba Putj Putj Marrideyan* 68; Deborah Bird Rose et al., *Country of the Heart: An Australian Indigenous Homeland*, 2nd ed. (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011) 28.

out a lengthy process that begins with planning the right time to burn the country to bring on the harvest of *mirrwana* in time for the ceremony, then gathering and breaking up the nuts, steeping them in running water to remove the poisonous cyanide, then finally grinding them up, cooking and serving as *lawa*⁷ (sweet flatbread), which is distributed to those attending the ceremony.

Ford has elsewhere used this process metaphor as a central Indigenous knowledge analogy to frame the process of making a space for Indigenous knowledge in the landscape of the higher education curriculum⁸ and for writing a doctoral thesis.⁹ It is particularly appropriate to use *mirrwana-wurrkama* as a conceptual framework for our present discussion of ceremonial collaboration because of the centrality of ceremony in Indigenous life;¹⁰ because of certain ceremonial associations of the *mirrwana* itself;¹¹ and because the processual orientation of *wurrkama* corresponds well with this chapter's attention to the details of the collaborative acts undertaken in planning and carrying out a particular series of ceremonies associated with the death of Ford's mother.

The research we conducted in relation to the ceremonies was sensitive to insider perspectives, emphasising the links between country, kin and knowledge that are empowered through ceremonial action. Collaborative research drew on the expertise of the researchers, the deep knowledge and authority of senior Tyikim (Aboriginal) people, and the work of younger ceremonial owners who, in future, will not only have the responsibility of carrying on the ceremonies, but will also take part in research through the processes of documentation, transcription, translation and interpretation, as well as in developing their own ways of ensuring the intergenerational transmission of ceremonial practices.

In the following section, we will outline the roles of the various parties who collaborated to bring about the series of ceremonial performances associated with the death of Ford's mother. We will outline some of the ways in which the authors of this paper acted in concert with family, with local ceremonial experts and with those responsible for recording and documenting the performance. As daughter of the deceased and one of the principal organizers of the ceremony, Ford's role was naturally much more central, while Barwick's and Maret's roles were directed to facilitating the participation of some of the external supporting groups as well as participating in the ceremonies themselves.

3. The ceremonies

Before Ford's mother passed away in April 2007 she had instructed Ford and her siblings to conduct a full-scale funeral in the old style, partly, Ford now believes,

⁷ From the English 'flour'.

⁸ Ford, *Aboriginal Knowledge & Country: Marri Kunkimba Putj Putj MARRIDEYAN*.

⁹ Linda Ford, "Reflecting upon doctoral candidature experiences as an Indigenous Australian", in *Doctorates Downunder*, ed. Carey Denholm and Terry Evans (Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press, 2012).. Other Indigenous groups, such as the Yolngu, have developed their own analogies and metaphors for educational and research processes, such as the Garnggulk hunting metaphor for the research process developed by Yolngu researchers at Charles Darwin University (see http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/yolngustudies/docs/Garnggulk_methodology_for_Yolngu_research.pdf).

¹⁰ The centrality of ceremony in Indigenous views of the world is widely discussed in Australian Indigenous studies. See Catherine Ellis, *Aboriginal music: education for living* (St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1985); T.G.H. Strehlow, *Songs of Central Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971); Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *The world of the first Australians* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1964); William E.H. Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, Oceania monograph 11 (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1963 (1989)); Françoise Dussart, *The politics of ritual in an Aboriginal settlement: kinship, gender, and the currency of knowledge* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000).

¹¹ *Walakandha* (ancestral spirits) can manifest as *mirrwana* (cycad palms).

as a way of completing their ceremonial instruction by entrusting them with a powerful organizational role that would activate and cement ceremonial relationships with family and other connections in the region. Following her death, her body was formally placed on a *mitharr* tree platform at Kalngarriny, a major sacred site for Ford's Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu clan. For various reasons, including difficulty of access to traditional country and government and church control of procedures for disposal of bodies, it had been four decades since the full traditional rituals for *mitharr* had been carried out in this region. Finally, in July 2009, the families that owned and performed the three genres of song and dance of her country—*wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba*¹²—were summoned to perform these ancestral songs and dances in order to complete Ford's mother's interment on country and then to perform a series of ceremonies that would place her with her *walakandha* ancestors.¹³ Ford's mother now rests in peace with "her siblings and ancestors in the country they had loved and fought for."¹⁴

Because this series of ceremonies incorporated the rare *mitharr* practice and all three regional ceremonial traditions (*wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba*), unusually complex regional co-ordination and participation was required to bring them about. The three public ceremonial dance-songs of the Daly-Wagait region had been systematically recorded and documented by Barwick, Marett, Lysbeth Ford¹⁵ and their collaborators over the past twenty years, but they have been rarely performed together in the context of the ceremonies associated with death (though they are regularly performed together at circumcision ceremonies).¹⁶ As a consequence, these ceremonies represented a significant learning opportunity for all participants, and especially for the younger generations of those who (following traditional practice) were drawn in from the wider Daly-Wagait region.

¹² We adopt the orthography established in the literature for these ceremony names.

¹³ Like various other groups in the Wagait-Daly region, Tyikim people refer to their deceased ancestors as *walakandha*. In some varieties of Marrithiyel, *walhakanhdha* is pronounced with an interdental 'l'). Here we adopt the Marri Tjavin spelling, as widely discussed in the literature including various previous works by Marett.

¹⁴ Rose et al., *Country of the Heart: An Australian Indigenous Homeland* ix.

¹⁵ The linguist Lysbeth Ford is unrelated to Payi Linda Ford, but they know each other quite well, and Lysbeth Ford was also invited to participate in the burnrag ceremony for Payi Linda Ford's mother.

¹⁶ Allan Marett, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts: the Wangga of North Australia* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); Linda Barwick, "Marri Ngarr lirrga songs: a musicological analysis of song pairs in performance", *Musicology Australia* 28 (2005-2006)(2006); Lysbeth Ford, "Marri Ngarr lirrga songs: a linguistic analysis", *Musicology Australia* 28 (2005-2006)(2006); Linda Barwick, "Musical form and style in Murriny Patha djanba songs at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)", in *Analytical and cross-cultural studies in world music*, ed. Michael Tenzer and John Roeder (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Linda Barwick et al., "Arriving, digging, performing, returning: an exercise in rich interpretation of a *djanba* song text in the sound archive of the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, Northern Territory of Australia", in *Oceanic Music Encounters: The Print Resource and the Human Resource. Essays in Honour of Mervyn McLean*, ed. Richard M. Moyle (Auckland: University of Auckland, 2007); Linda Barwick et al., "Wadeye Song Database" (University of Sydney, 2010), <http://sydney.edu.au/wadeyesong/> (17 January 2011).

Marett and Barwick have longstanding relationships with the families associated with *wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba*, including Ford's family, and with the collaboration of linguist colleagues have published extensively on these genres of song and dance.¹⁷ They were invited to attend the key ceremonies both in their capacity of researchers—to assist Ford and her family to record and document the ceremonies for the benefit of future generations—and as people with longstanding relationships with the family, to perform in the ceremonies as a mark of respect.

Overview of the ceremonies

Table 1 presents a summary of the ceremonies performed for Ford's mother over the period 2007–2009. Not all ritual actions were accompanied by music. Following F. Dumoo's instructions, the ceremonial actions surrounding the placement of the deceased's remains on the *mitharr* and later interment on country were performed without musical accompaniment.

As previously noted, at the request of Ford's mother, *wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba* were all incorporated in the final ceremony. *Wangga* is the most widespread public dance-song genre of the Daly region, performed by various coastal groups including the Wadjiginy (now mainly based at Belyuen, represented here by the Nyindiyindi repertory¹⁸ performed at the funeral in 2007 by K. Burrenjuck (d. 2008)) and the Marri Tjavin (now mainly based at Wadeye, represented here by the Walakandha *wangga* repertory performed at the various 2009 ceremonies by Charles Kunglung). The ceremonial leader, F. Dumoo (d. 2012), was himself a Marri Tjavin man recognized throughout the region as the boss for *wangga*. *Lirrga* is a relatively new genre, having been created as recently as the 1960s by a number of inland groups including the Marri Ngarr (now mainly based in Nganmariyanga and other outstations, represented here by the Muyil *lirrga* songs performed in 2007 by R. Wodidj (deceased) and in 2009 by Captain Wodidj). *Djanba* is another relatively new genre created in Murriny Patha language by various Wadeye-based singers (although the main *djanba* group was unable to attend, songs were performed on this occasion by the daughter of one of the senior song-leaders).

As shown in Table 4.1, at the final *kapuk* ('burnrag' or 'ragburning') ceremony to dispose of the belongings of the deceased, the three repertories were performed in alternation, each accompanying a different stage of the ceremonial action. The songs were selected to highlight certain themes. For example, some of the *lirrga* songs selected referred to *pulimi* (Marri Ngarr language for 'white-breasted

¹⁷ Marett, *Songs, dreamings and ghosts*; Barwick, "Marri Ngarr *lirrga* songs: a musicological analysis of song pairs in performance"; Barwick et al., "Wadeye Song Database"; Barwick, "Musical form and style in Murriny Patha *djanba* songs at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)"; Allan Marett, Linda Barwick, and Lysbeth Ford, *For the Sake of a Song: Wangga Songmen and their Repertories* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013)..

¹⁸ In southern Marrithiyel, the repertory is known as *ngindingindi*.

Date	Place	Song set	Leaders [L]/ Singers [S]/Key participants [P]	Actions
April 2007	Batch elor	Muyil Lirrga	R. Wodidj [L]	<i>tyamu kangipupa</i> 'I smoked it' ¹⁹ - smoking ceremony
May 2007	Nund jurr	Nyindiyindi Wangga; Church songs	K. Burrenjuck & A. Marett [S]	funeral
May 2007	Pand ayal	[no songs]	F. Dumoo & R. Daiyi [L] A. Djekaboi, L. Waters, D. Atie [P]	<i>mitharr</i> preparation <i>kidin.gipityiya</i> 'he rolled/wrapped it' - wrapping deceased in paperbark
May 2007	Kaln garri ny	[calling out to country, no singing]	F. Dumoo [L] Y. Atie & Ford [L] K. Deveraux & R. Jones [L] Y. Atie & Ford [L]	ngundakap kingiputa lifting up onto <i>mitharr</i> prayers <i>kugarra</i> & <i>tyukpiyi tyangi</i> - applying <i>kugarra</i> (red ochre) to site
31 July 2009	Pand ayal	Walakandha Wangga	C. Kungiung [S]	family introduction
31 July 2009	Kaln garri ny	Walakandha wangga	C Kungiung & A. Marett [S]	<i>tyukpiyi</i> (cleansing), <i>mitharr</i> preparation
31 July 2009		[calling out to country, no singing]	F. Dumoo [L] R. Daiyi [L] Ford & Dumoo [L]	<i>kidin.gipityiya</i> children of deceased wrapping remains <i>kidin.gi-tyit-a balkum waki</i> <i>balkum kidin.githita milnginj nganga waki</i> interment of remains <i>kingipukamardi karrala nganga</i> applying <i>wunumbuk</i> (white ochre) hand prints to entrance of rock (<i>mitharr</i> completion)

¹⁹ Marrithiyel language terms supplied courtesy of Mum Yilgni Atie, personal communication, 14 May 2014, glossed with the assistance of Dr Ian Green.

1 August 2009	Mene linj	various	F. Dumoo [L]	<i>kapuk</i> ²⁰ (burnrag) ceremony kidin.giya piya
	Wangga (2 items)	(2)	C. Kungiung & Marett [S]	A. <i>pulunburr miri kumba winya</i> family arriving, painting up
	Lirrga (6 items)	(6)	C. Wodidj [S]	family dancing
	Wangga (5 items)	(5)	C. Kungiung & Marett [S]	A. <i>kingingyi kuditya piluk</i> placing objects in pit
	Lirrga (5 items)	(5)	C. Wodidj [S]	muzrung kidin.giputya tyamu kangipupa burning material and objects
	Wangga (5 items)	(5)	C. Kungiung & Marett [S]	A. <i>kingingyi kuditya piluk</i> family dancing around pit
	Djanba (14 items)	(14)	P. Bunduck & Barwick [S]	L. <i>kidin.giputya muzrung nganga</i> filling in and covering pit
	Wangga (8 items)	(8)	C. Kungiung & Marett [S]	A. <i>ku wila piluk</i> Family dancing on covered pit <i>tyukpiyi</i> washing

Table 1. Sequence of ceremonies performed for Ford's mother, 2007–2009.

sea-eagle', the clan totem of the deceased) and to *tjendji* 'fire'²¹ (sung at the time the belongings were being burned in a pit dug on the dance-ground).

Structures of authority

Prior to her death, Ford's mother had already instructed Ford, her youngest daughter, on such matters as how to organize the ceremonial leaders for her funeral and for the later ceremonies such as the *mitharr* and *kapuk* ceremonies. She had also stressed the importance of contacting senior family members prior to making any of these arrangements and of correctly following the Tyikim

²⁰ *Kapuk* 'he washes' is the term used for burnrag ceremonies in Batjamalh language.

²¹ 'Tjendji' is transcribed using standard Marri Ngarr orthography.

structures of authority. In the case of business as serious as this, involving the spiritual journey of the deceased, it is essential that the ceremonial arrangements, and in particular the decisions about which ceremonial traditions to invite, is overseen by people with the correct degree of authority. Arranging all this took a considerable amount of time.

Following the death of Ford's mother in 2007, her four children and other senior members of the family invited F. Dumoo, the master of *wangga*, to give instruction for each phase of the ceremony. These phases included actions taken immediately following death, house warming, house cleansing, the memorial service, the funeral, the *mitharr* ceremony followed by the interment of the deceased's remains on her country, and finally the *kapuk* (or burnrag) ceremony for disposal of her belongings and for providing closure to the period of mourning.

Even after the ceremonial arrangements had been settled, unforeseen circumstances beyond anyone's control arose. For example, due to other events taking place in the region the senior custodian (F. Dumoo) insisted that the *kapuk* ceremony originally planned for 2008 be delayed until the following year, a decision conveyed to Ford via her husband. Ford's responsibility was then to inform her family and to continue to look after the *mitharr* site until F. Dumoo returned in 2009 and told her to prepare for the next phase of the ceremony.

Although planning responsibilities fell mainly to Ford and her family, Marett had a limited role, having previously formed a close father-son relationship with F. Dumoo (who had overseen Marett's study of *wangga* over the course of many years). In 2007, Marett was instructed by Dumoo and Ford to assemble the singers and dancers for the funeral ceremony, and in 2009 he was invited to attend some of the meetings when F. Dumoo gave his instructions for the conduct of the ceremonies, in particular the final sections of the *mitharr* and *kapuk* ceremonies. Since Marett and Barwick already had separate relationships of long standing with many of the other people who would be summoned to perform at the ceremonies, they also acted to assist the family in practical arrangements around the ceremonies. As will be discussed further in section 4 below, both Barwick and Marett were also invited by the family to arrange for the final series of ceremonies to be recorded and documented.

The process required to obtain this level of access and immersion into Tyikim life was complex, and based on relationships that were both deep and long-standing. These roles rested on a long association with Ford's family, in Marett's case stretching as far back as the late 1980s, when he had recorded a previous *kapuk* ceremony at Menelinj. For Marett, being invited by the family and authorized by F. Dumoo to participate in these ceremonies for Ford's mother was particularly poignant, because in 2001 it had been Ford's mother who had stood up and danced on the occasion of Marett's first public performance of *wangga* songs, thereby formally sanctioning his right to perform these songs (a photograph taken by Barwick on this occasion forms the frontispiece of Ford's 2010 book).

Marett and Barwick were not the only non-Indigenous performers in the ceremony. Performance in the ceremony was not decided on the basis of whether or not one had Indigenous ancestry, but rather on the basis of one's having been invited to attend through connection to the deceased and her family. Participation in the dancing was open to everyone invited, whether family or visitors, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous—but anyone who did not feel confident in their performance abilities could elect to participate in other ways (by clapping along, being a supportive audience, providing food and drink for the performers, or helping with the documentation of the ceremonies). Singing in the ceremony (as both Marett and Barwick did at various stages) was at the behest of the ceremonial leaders concerned (with the agreement of the family). These invitations were extended to Marett and Barwick by F. Dumoo and the *wangga* and *djanba* leaders because they knew that both had thorough knowledge of the songs concerned and were thus able to help the lead singers to create a strong sound to encourage the dancers and to move the ceremony forward.²²

The authors' academic relationships as colleagues associated with the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia were also important, because at that time we were colleagues, friends and neighbours within the same corridor at the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Charles Darwin University. The fact that Barwick and Ford share the same personal name had also led us to form a close personal friendship structured in part around a traditional *ngirrwat* (name exchange) relationship, which has deepened and strengthened over the years.

We will now give further detail on the various ceremonial activities that took place following the death of Ford's mother in April 2007 at Darwin Hospital.

April 2007: The memorial service and smoking ceremony

A memorial service was held at a small church in Batchelor a week after Ford's mother passed away in April 2007, and this was immediately followed by a smoking ceremony. Due to other pressing matters in the region, F. Dumoo was unable to attend these ceremonies. Ford's siblings and *wangga* families of the deceased therefore decided to invite Uncle R. Wodidj (now deceased) from Palumpa to come to Batchelor to perform *lirrga* at the smoking ceremonies, which were held to cleanse Ford's mother's apartment, the White Eagle Aboriginal Corporation building (offices of the principle Mak Mak Marranunggu association) and the homes and cars of all close family members.

²² The invitation to perform was taken very seriously by all concerned (including Marett and Barwick and the ceremonial leaders as well as Ford and her family) and depended on a reciprocal respect and trust that can only be earned through longstanding and ongoing commitment and engagement. See Catherine Ellis, "Living preservation: problems of cultural exchange with central Australian traditional performers", in *Music and dance in Aboriginal Australia and the South Pacific: the effects of documentation on the living tradition*, ed. Alice M. Moyle (Sydney: Oceania Publications, 1992).

May 2007: Ford's mother's funeral

After the memorial service and smoking ceremonies, the four children of the deceased held a meeting to plan their mother's funeral arrangements. When Ford's brother suggested inviting Uncle R. Wodidj again, Ford said, "No, Uncle is not allowed to do this because Mum's his sister! Mum instructed me to get F. Dumoo, so that's what I'm going to do!" The *wangga* families agreed to this, and authorized Ford and her family to make all the preparations, including the engagement—according to the instructions of most senior ranking *wangga* leader, F. Dumoo—of appropriate ceremonial performers. While Ford continued to execute her family's broader responsibilities with regard to the funeral, her siblings and other *wangga* families prepared the Kalngarriny site and constructed the *mitharr* platform on which the deceased would be placed immediately following the funeral.

Prior to the funeral Ford negotiated with the Senior Ranger of the Litchfield National Parks, who had spent a lot of time with the Mak Mak Marranunggu family over the years, about closing Nundjurr (Wangi Falls) for the deceased's funeral service. He agreed to speak to the Minister for Environment, who then authorized the closure of the site for the funeral service. This was a fitting site for the deceased's funeral service not just because it was her country, but also because she was the last woman to have had her *purrum* young-girl ceremony at this site. Prior to her death Ford's mother had provided clear instructions for Ford on how to do the ceremonies for her granddaughters and other family members in the future.

Following F. Dumoo's instructions, Ford went and told the *wangga* men to put the word out to other family groups and clans that had cultural responsibilities, so that they could attend the funeral. Allan Marett and Linda Barwick were visiting F. Dumoo at Knuckey's Lagoon Community at the time, so Dumoo took the opportunity to ask Marett to help with the funeral arrangements. On the day of the funeral, Marett and Barwick went to Bagot Community to pick up the main singers, K. Burrenjuck (now deceased) and Colin Worumbu Ferguson, as well as some dancers. Unfortunately Ferguson was nowhere to be found and K. proved typically elusive, appearing only when Marett and Barwick had almost given up on him. Because Worumbu was unavailable, K. told Marett that he would have to back him up as a singer.²³ When the party arrived at Nundjurr, Ford noticed that there were also some dancers that she didn't know getting painted up.²⁴ The main singers were Burrenjuck and Marett. In addition the family had arranged for a *wangga* man to be escorted from the Berrimah jail to play *kanbi* (didjeridu). The Morgan sisters from Balgal offered to sing, and the Daly River ladies sang church songs.

²³ As part of Marett's previous research at Belyuen with K. Burrenjuck and his family, he had been taught to sing these songs, though he had never previously done so in ceremony.

²⁴ These were the dancers brought from Bagot by K. Burrenjuck. Thus Ford's observing that there were unknown dancers being painted up was a sign that the visiting performance group had arrived.

Ford painted people up for the funeral, but by the end of this task she was sick and had asthma. Other extended family—mothers, aunts and senior women—were all sitting around the coffin wailing the women’s songs for the deceased’s genealogy and Ford joined them. Old man Daddy J. Number Two came up from Daly River with the Catholic Father and danced and played *kanbi* (didjeridu) for Ford’s mother. Because Ford had asthma and the other family members were “too sorry” (too sad and grieving), a Deakin University colleague and friend of Ford and her mother offered to officiate in Ford’s place at the proceedings. The Catholic Father performed a Catholic service and Ford’s sisters said Seventh Day Adventist prayers.

May 2007: Placement of the deceased on the *mitharr* platform

Immediately after the funeral, the Mak Mak Marranunggu clan held a private ceremony at Kalngarriny for Ford’s mother. Anthropologist Deborah Rose and Daryl Lewis, with whom the Mak Mak Marranunggu family had a long relationship, came up from Sydney for the funeral and then camped out at Kalngarriny with them. This is when the Mak Mak Marranunggu family lifted up Ford’s mother on her *mitharr* (tree platform), which was to be her place of rest until some 27 months later. Since no songs were required for the ceremony at Kalngarriny on the day of the funeral, Marett drove Burrenjuck and the other *wangga* performers back to Darwin.

F. Dumoo had already confirmed that instructions left by Ford’s mother concerning the smoking and *tyukpiyi* ceremonies (spraying water over the paperbark bed and on the posts of the *mitharr* platform) were correct, as were her instructions for the collecting of red ochre to put on the legs of the *mitharr* poles and surrounding area. The family duly carried out these ceremonial acts.

During the period between May 2007 and July 2009 when the final interment took place, Ford regularly visited the Kalngarriny site. Finally in July 2009 F. Dumoo announced that he had arranged for Ford to pick up the ceremonial leaders and for the family to take the deceased off her *mitharr* and wrap her in paper bark and place her in her final resting place.

July 2009 Planning and notification of final ceremonies

Although decision-making about the final series of ceremonies—the removal of Ford’s mother from her *mitharr* platform, the interment of her remains at Kalngarriny and the *kapuk* (burnrag) ceremony at Menelinj—was collaborative in that it required the work of many people and groups, F. Dumoo was clearly in charge of the proceedings. It was he who decided where the burnrag should take place; this location (Menelinj) is where many of the Mak Mak Marranunggu family ancestors are buried.

F. Dumoo also gave clear specific instructions about times, dates and who ought to be present. Dumoo was the boss: “The burnrag at Menelinj will be on Saturday (1 August, 2009), all day! Each cere-

mony should take one day each including travel. Pandayal, Kalngarriny and Menelinj. *Ma!* [Do it!]" (F. Dumoo personal communication).

31 July 2009: Completion of the mitharr ceremony

By the time everything was ready to take Ford's mother down from her platform it had been 27 months that she had been waiting for us. F. Dumoo had successfully brought together the *wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba* ceremony groups and the appropriate ceremonial leaders for this and the subsequent ceremonies.

This cultural exchange, where one ceremonial group works for another, is one of the treasures of Australia's First Nation peoples. All those that have participated in this process hold it close to their hearts forever. The closure that the performances associated with the final rites bring for the family and friends of the deceased is very powerful. It is incredibly spiritually uplifting for those who participate. The progress of this extraordinary journey has a sense of melancholy but one that enriches the cultural understanding of diversity in our evolving nation.

Ford and her brother had travelled to Peppimenarti the day before the first ceremonies to pick up the ceremonial leaders who had agreed to perform. They started discussing the ceremonial songs that would be performed on the following day. As they drove across country the singers began to practice the songs. The journey was three hours and singing continued after the party arrived at Pandayal at the Twin Hill Station manager's house. Singing and dancing continued all night.

Early in the morning family members and invited visitors (including Barwick and Marett and their team) started arriving in readiness for the *mitharr* ceremony. F. Dumoo summoned everyone to gather on the verandah. From this point onwards he led the ceremonial proceedings. Songs for *wangga* were sung at Pandayal.

Songs continued as we all climbed into our vehicles, and travelled to Kalngarriny an hour away on bush tracks. Once we arrived at Kalngarriny, the host families cooked up bush food: barramundi, black bream, longneck turtle, shortneck turtle, lily seeds and rib bones. The significance of the bush food and sharing in the ceremony lies in eating the fat from the ceremony country. The bigger and fatter the animal, the more significant it is for the ceremony. After eating, *wangga* dancing and singing started by the water's edge, under the *muluk* 'Leichhardt tree' and banyan tree. The men were dancing to the right of F. Dumoo, while the women dancers were gathered to his left. During the *wangga*, F. Dumoo performed his inspirational *wangga* movements for his mother²⁵ and our *walakandha* (the deceased). His wife Rosie had informed Ford that he had not performed in ceremonies for many years but for his mother he would do this one last time as a mark of respect for her and what she had stood for and trusted in

²⁵ F. Dumoo called Ford's mother *ahla* 'mother' and Ford and her siblings called him *mana* 'brother'.

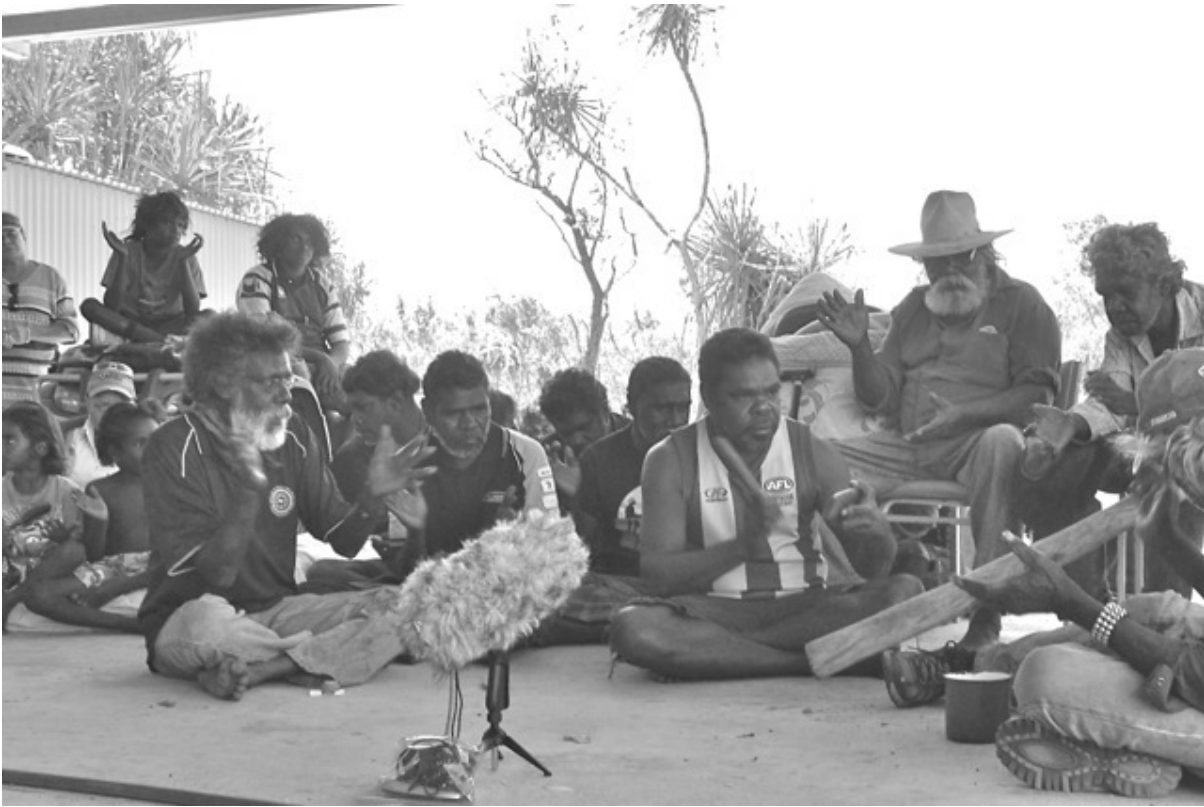


Figure 4.1. Ceremony leaders singing with the family at Pandayal. Photo by Julie Fairless.



Figure 4.2. Family including the grandsons of the deceased dancing by the billabong at Kalngarriny. Photo by Julie Fairless.

the old ways. As each set of *wangga* was sung, the dancers performed to each of the songs until the end, where the women and men joined in the central area of the dancing (see Figure 4.2).

F. Dumoo ceased the songs and drew everyone's attention to the serious nature of the next phase, which was to walk up the hill to the *mitharr* to conduct the interment. The sobriety of the occasion transfixed us, as it flowed up through the country itself and through our beings as we moved together as one. The procession of ceremonial leaders and family members waited at the actual interment site chosen by Ford's mother herself several years earlier. Once we all reached the open space of the *mitharr*, family members were instructed by F. Dumoo to take Ford's mother's wrapped remains down to prepare for her final resting place. The close family members prepared the *balkum* 'remains' and placed new paperbark down to rewrap their mother's *balkum* along with hair offered by her children and other close family members. This signified the unity of the dead with the living and vice versa. The offering of hair from the living provided significant cultural capital for the *walakandha* in the world of her ancestors.

After the final *balkum* bundle had been wrapped, Ford's brother carried their mother to place her in country. F. Dumoo spoke gently to the *walakandha* and to those that had come to visit and make us welcome in placing their youngest sister with them. The group moved closer to the entrance as if converging on the *walakandha*, waiting until we had secured the entrance, which was sealed with white ochre handprints of F. Dumoo and Ford.

Everyone said the final farewell and returned to the dancing site at the waterhole at the bottom of the hill. The paperbark materials from the *mitharr* were kept to be burned at the *kapuk* 'burnrag' ceremony the following day. Everything was gathered up (cups, billycans, etc.), and everyone returned to Pandayal to camp, where the singing and dancing continued into the night until the early hours of the morning.

1 August 2009: Kapuk (Burnrag) at Menelinj

As the sun came up the next day, everyone gathered at the front of the house to make the hour-long journey from Pandayal to Menelinj, near Batchelor. F. Dumoo instructed everyone about the *kapuk* 'burnrag' ceremony, which was open to close family members. Family from Peppimenarti, Woodycapuldiya, Acacia, Wadeye and Wagait had also arrived. When we got to Menelinj burial ground, cloth given by family and friends was hung up around the trees to form a large circle for the ceremony. The weekend before, Ford and her brother had had the *gamba* grass cleared and a pit had been dug in which to burn the belongings of their mother (the deceased). Ford's sister had also arranged for a load of sand to be left at the site.

On the morning of the *kapuk* several trips were made to Batchelor to collect the deceased's belongings for burning, and items identified to be kept, previously authorised by F. Dumoo, were placed aside to be smoked. Meanwhile



Figure 4.3. Singers including Captain Wodidj, Charles Kungiung and Allan Marett singing while preparations for the ceremony were taking place. Photo by Julie Fairless.

various other activities were being organised. The men painted themselves, while the women sat under the shady lean-to and painted each other up with the body design of the native honeybee from Wadeye. Women of the deceased's family wore yellow skirts, while visiting women wore red skirts to differentiate between families and their relative places in the structures of authority. All the men wore red *nagas* 'loincloths' and the ceremony men wore their hair belts. Everyone wore *wunumbuk* 'white ochre' paint to conceal our identity from the spirits gathered within the enclosure.

F. Dumoo commenced the proceedings by calling on the *walakandha* (the deceased) and the ceremony continued with the visitors dancing and singing *wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba*, their ancient songs for the ancestral dead. Each song was repeated several times. We started with taking turns in dancing *wangga* and *lirrga*: the lead dancers were Auntie Mary Wodidj (for the visitors) and Mum Yilngi Atie (for the family, see figure 4.4).

F. Dumoo then ceased the dancing, ordering the family to begin to gather around the belongings of the deceased. The materials for burning were placed in the pit, and the burning commenced. F. Dumoo instructed the men to dance and sing *wangga* and *lirrga* again while the women and children stood in the smoke. Once they were smoked, the women danced as the men were smoked. Then women and men all joined together to dance *djanba* while the ashes cooled. The pit was covered in and the men shovelled the *muniyirr* 'sand' onto



Figure 4.4. Family including Payi Linda Ford and her sister Margaret Daiyi dancing for their mother's *kapuk* 'burnrag' ceremony. Photo by Mark Ford.

the fresh dirt. The *munyirr* lay golden over the site, concealing the earth below. Women and men gathered where the earth was burning hot underfoot and danced as the *wangga* ceremonies were sung once more.

F. Dumoo performed his amazing *wangga* dancing for the last time, demonstrating extraordinary skills and agility despite his age and health. He'd always been admired for this agility, flexibility and endurance in his spectacular performances. At the same time he had ensured that all the other performers kept focus on their tasks.

F. Dumoo called for the dancing and singing to stop and explained that there should now be no more sorrow, but gaiety and laughter. The ceremony drew to a close with the last task: the *tyukpiyi* 'washing' ceremony. This was carried out as directed by F. Dumoo. He washed himself and then he called the two *kunikuni* ('senior women'; Mum Yilngi Atie— now recognised as the matriarch—and Ford) to perform the *tyukpiyi* ceremony, first on the family and then the visitors. Many of the *kuri* 'spears' and *menjbuk* 'throwing sticks' that the deceased and Ford had made together were gifted to F. Dumoo and senior ceremony leaders. Both women and men performers were also authorised to identify items to keep.

The songs and dancing had gone on all day. The *kapuk* ceremony is an important process to bring closure to the life of the deceased and for the family. While Ford was growing up at Menelinj many ceremonies, including *wangga*, *lirrga*



Figure 4.5. Men including the son and grandsons of the deceased dance (*kangipurpurra*) in the smoke of the burning materials and objects. Women stand around and clap to the song being sung: on the left of picture are women from the family and on the right stand visitors (including Linda Barwick and Lysbeth Ford). Photo by Mark Ford.

and *djanba*, were performed there by her family, so it was fitting for them to be performed together again for this particular ceremony in such an important place. Over thirty years had passed since these ceremonies were all performed together for the one occasion.

4. Recording and documenting the ceremonies.

During the years prior to Ford's mother's passing, her instructions authorising the recording of her mortuary rites had been given to Ford. Before preparing the ceremonies, Ford conferred with her siblings, *wangga* family members and Mum Yilngi Atie to obtain agreement to record the process of the mortuary rites from 2007–2009. Ford had previously discussed with her siblings and the *wangga* families the possibility of Barwick and Marett and their team recording the ceremonies, and they had all agreed. This arrangement was based on the previously outlined longstanding relationships between Ford and her family, F. Dumoo, Marett and Barwick. F. Dumoo, as boss of *wangga*, had supported Marett's research into this corpus. He had mentored him, authorized his research and participation in ceremony, corrected his errors and adopted him

as his son. He had also encouraged Barwick, as Marett's partner, to dance for his singing.

Once the family agreed, Dumoo then authorized the recording of the ceremonies and all the ceremonial leaders understood and accepted his authorization. Authorization from the university side was also necessary, and so all the ceremonial leaders and participants signed Ford's Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Consent Form authorizing the recording by the research team. As researchers, we were privileged to be included in the spiritual journey of this amazing Tyikim Australian ancient cultural practice in modern society.

At the time of these ceremonies, Ford was a member of the steering committee of the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance, which was based at Charles Darwin University.²⁶ At the time of writing she is now one of the two Co-Directors of the project. In 2009, Marett was a Co-Director of the project, and was based at CDU together with the Secretary of the project, Sally Treloyn, a highly experienced fieldworker and researcher. From his conversations with F. Dumoo and Ford, it was clear to Marett that his primary engagement with the ceremonial process would be as a singer, rather than as part of the recording team. Because of her relationship to the family, Barwick too was expected to have to dance on certain occasions (and as it happened, she also joined the *djanba* singing group at times). For this reason, Mark Ford (Payi's husband), Treloyn and another CDU colleague with a specialization in video, Julie Fairless, were asked to take responsibility for operating recording equipment throughout the proceedings (at times Barwick also assisted). Throughout proceedings, Ford and F. Dumoo were the pivotal reference points for the recording team. They authorized the placement of cameras and microphones and directed the teams at crucial moments to ensure that all key aspects of the ceremony were recorded.

As a result a body of recordings was generated, which the family and community hope to preserve for the benefit of future generations. Ceremonial performance is always a key process for integrating Indigenous knowledge from many different domains. It is a socially powerful site of exchange, transmission and transformation of relationship to country and kin. But it can also be a site for integrating Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. Through the authorized research recordings of these ceremonial events the songs, dance and rituals are now preserved and extend the power of the ceremony into the future.

Since these events, Ford, Barwick and Marett have continued to work together to preserve our recordings and knowledge for future generations of Indigenous people across the region, and this process will continue in coming years. This work has become a record that will be vital to the maintenance and survival of

²⁶ The National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance is a project that was initiated at the 2002 Garma Festival, which aims to record, document and archive public performances of Aboriginal song and dance, to ensure both safe preservation of these recordings and access to the recordings for the relevant communities.

these ceremonies as a form of cultural identity now and into the future. Ford plans to deposit the recordings at the PARADISEC repository at the University of Sydney, where Barwick is the Director, so that the recordings will be safely preserved for future generations. This will enable Indigenous people from these areas of the Wagait and Daly River region to always have a set of recordings at their disposal. Through the generation of digital audio and multimedia objects, these records can become accessible to more people. It is hoped that the materials can act as a force for social cohesion to continue the ancient traditions of ceremony associated with the special relationships of *wangga*, *lirrga* and *djanba*. In the meantime, the recordings are being preserved in the personal collections of family members and in storage. We are pursuing any opportunities that arise to continue the *wurrkama* by processing and preserving the materials through translation, transcription, interpretation and organization of the data into datasets.

Working into the future, the project has a three-step plan. The initial step of documenting the existing corpus (recordings of the original ceremonies, together with subsequent responses and teachings from the senior ceremonial leaders recorded by Ford in 2012) is well underway. A second phase will gather new layers of interpretation through further interviews and discussions with the remaining ceremonial participants (singers, dancers and Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu clan members and family). The third step involves facilitation of an interactive archival process through which senior ceremonial leaders and the younger generation together can understand and make use of the digital resource, transforming it into a living archive that bridges past and future, country and kin.

We have made a start on the latter two steps through a Tyikim language revitalization project carried out by Ford through Charles Darwin University in 2013. As part of this, Marett worked with community members to review some historical recordings and to workshop new songs that have recently been composed by younger performers.

5. Some observations about collaboration

In this chapter we have talked about collaboration in relation to ceremonies held for Ford's mother. Such large-scale ceremonies always require collaboration, which is established through drawing on relationships of one sort or another with particular people and groups. The ceremonies that form the basis of this study were the work of many people. They were designed and carried out following instructions from senior ceremonial leaders F. Dumoo, Uncle C. Wodidj and from Ford's mother herself, as well as all ceremonial leaders from the *wangga*, *djanba* and *lirrga* ceremonial traditions of the Wagait-Daly region. The body of recordings (film, audio and photos), created for the family by Barwick, Marett, Treloyn and Fairless, documents the ceremonies performed through song, dance and other ritual actions at various places in Ford's traditional country Kurrindju in the Wagait area, and at Menelinj burial ground near Batchelor (Northern Territory).

We have already stated that from the *mirrwana-wurrkama* perspective, collaboration emphasises relationships (things that people share) rather than social categories (things that separate people by highlighting differences). Thus this chapter has focused on how a range of relationships and connections were activated through the ceremonies. In the case of the funeral, *mitharr* and *kapuk* ceremonies for Ford's mother, these relationships were made through family, neighbours, friendships, work and prior obligations between individuals and groups. Everyone was working together to make the event happen, and as pivotal organisers Ford and F. Dumoo had to balance many possible relationships to ensure that the right pathways were followed to achieve the aim of the events. Like other people who contributed, Marett and Barwick were friends, neighbours (at CDU), and shared relevant and longstanding knowledge and connections with the other key players in the ceremony. Other non-Indigenous people with family and friendship links with Ford's mother also participated. It is our aim to continue to work together to look after ceremony and country in academic research and to share the results on country, to make sure the recorded materials are managed, and to plan for the next lot of flowering of *mirrwana* both metaphorically speaking and in reality. Management of people and other natural resources is just as important as keeping the academy abreast of the work that is being carried out on country. It was the combination of longstanding personal relationships between the three authors—together with our overlapping and complementary interests in ceremonial song and dance—that allowed our cross-cultural collaboration to emerge. By continually reflecting on our practices and interests, we have been able to combine our research understandings and to adopt an approach that allowed us to work in a cross-cultural and transdisciplinary research-space. It is a measure of how close our perspectives have become that all three authors concur with Ford's statement that the new approach to music research outlined here, "can be attributed to the *walakandha*"—that is, to the song-giving and ceremony-giving ancestors of Ford's country, whom her mother has now joined through these ceremonies.

This chapter has attempted to show that the combination of an Indigenous knowledge framework such as Ford's *mirrwana-wurrkama* with academic work on the part of all three authors as educationalists and music researchers within academic institutions can enhance the preservation, interpretation and dissemination of recordings of ceremonial performances. The integration of our interests within a shared culturally meaningful framework has offered us new ways to engage with each other, and in turn created new research pathways of knowing, being and doing.

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