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DEATH AND THE PERSON
Reflections on mortuary rituals, transformation and ontology in an Aboriginal society*

Katie Glaskin

Introduction

We all know that death is part of the ebb and flow of human existence, an unalterable condition of being-in-the-world. Yet, as Roy Wagner (1989:267) has said, 'it is not so simple as to say that death is "for the living", although that truism holds'. Bronislaw Malinowski described death as 'the gateway to the other world in more than the literal sense'.[1] Death focuses life, making visible those things that might ordinarily be concealed, and, as Malinowski suggested, it provides a gateway for our understanding of other world-views.

This article is concerned with the extent to which the material transformation of mortuary rituals among the Bardi Aborigines of north-west Australia is reflected ontologically. My focus in this respect is on Bardi conceptualisations of self and personhood as expressed in their views concerning pre-existing spirit beings, human incarnation, and the fate of the deceased. From the late nineteenth century, missionaries sought to transform Bardi belief and practice, and tree stage burial has long since been replaced by burial in the ground. Yet, as Bardi would say, today their 'law and culture' remain 'strong', despite substantial missionary intervention. Mortuary rituals, along with objects of the deceased kept as relics and heirlooms, provide an important gateway to explore the extent to which concepts of personhood are transformed amidst evident material and cultural change. Given the centrality of death to life, death and burial have long been significant subjects of anthropological attention,[2] and the exploration of the relationship between concepts of death and the person can reflect more broadly on how cultural change is understood (e.g. Lock 2004).

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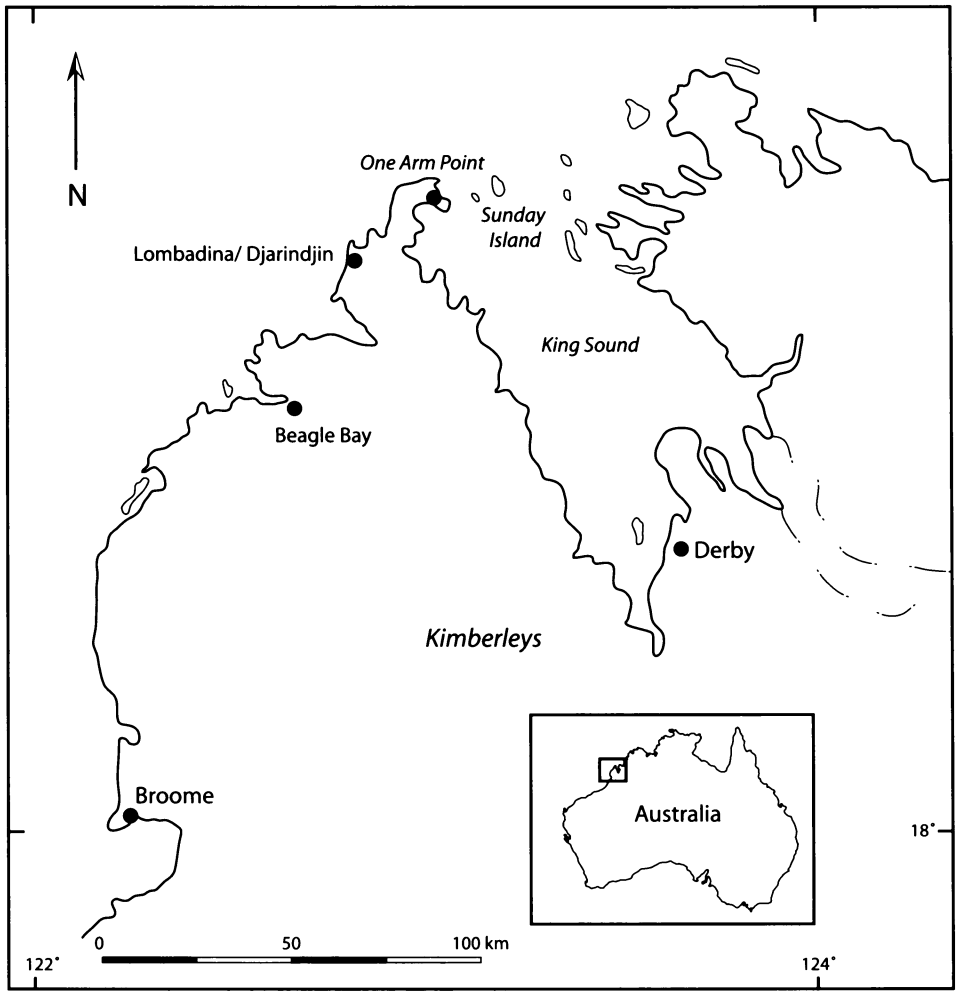
1 Cited in Goody (1962:13).

2 E.g. Robben (2004), Damon and Wagner (1989), Goody 1962).



Kimberley region (Map: G. Hampel).

Bardi and Jawi

Bardi are a 'saltwater' Aboriginal people whose country lies at the northern tip of the Dampierland Peninsula in north-west Western Australia and includes nearby offshore islands. Jawi country, composed of islands and associated marine features of the Buccaneer Archipelago, lies to their immediate east.[3] Bardi and Jawi are connected by ter-

[3] I have worked with Bardi and Jawi people on their native title claim since 1994, as well as conducting fieldwork with them specifically for my doctoral research during the years 1997 and 1998, and for postdoctoral research in 2003.

ritorial proximity, shared cosmology, mythological narratives, ritual, a long history of intermarriage (genealogies indicate that this preceded the colonial period), the same local and social organisation, and a shared history of colonisation. All Aboriginal terms given here are in Bardi unless otherwise stated, and while I refer mostly to Bardi, comments made concerning Bardi can equally be applied to Jawi.

This article concerns those Bardi and Jawi (roughly two-thirds or more of their estimated population) who live in their country in one of the many outstations or one of the three main communities.[4] Lombadina, the oldest of these communities, was originally founded by the Pallottine order of the Catholic Church in 1910. Immediately adjacent to Lombadina is Djarindjin, a community that separated from Lombadina in the mid-1970s. Although residence tends to be localised in one or the other, people wander freely between these two communities, and most middle-aged and older people at Djarindjin grew up under the Pallottine order at Lombadina. One cemetery, located at Lombadina, serves them both. With the exception of some graves with engraved headstones, the cemetery consists of a series of white wooden crosses on which the details of the deceased are painted in black. Some crosses appear to be unmarked, though these may have faded over time.[5]

Most of the residents of the One Arm Point community, the third of the major communities in Bardi country, lived at the Sunday Island mission or are descendants of those who lived there. The mission, in Jawi country, attracted significant numbers of Bardi, who became the numerically (and linguistically) dominant group on the island. When the mission closed in 1962, the majority of Bardi and Jawi from the mission shifted to Derby, where their children were required to attend school. The One Arm Point community, founded on the mainland in Bardi country in 1972, represents the success of Bardi initiatives and their determination to return to their own country. In contrast to Lombadina, where the cemetery is in the central part of the old community (near to the church and rectory), the One Arm Point cemetery is set apart from the community. As at Lombadina, people tend graves, pulling out encroaching weeds, decorating them with shells, and adorning them with plastic flowers. Tending the graves provides a locus for grief and shows respect for the deceased.

Conceptions of personhood

Bardi understandings of the forms in which persons exist before birth and after death are intrinsic to their concepts of personhood. In relation to the Saulteaux, Irving A.

4 In 2001, there were at least 33 outstations in Bardi country.

5 In 1998, a number of names had been touched up since 1994 when I first examined them, while others had significantly faded.

Hallowell (1955:171) has referred to the 'shadowy' line 'between "humanness" and the essentially animate qualities of other orders of being'. This is similarly evident in Bardi ontology, where humans may be consubstantial with place, terrestrial or marine features, or a species of animal, and pre-exist and outlive their human incarnations as 'other-than-human entities' (Hallowell 1955:179). The boundaries between persons and spirit beings, and between persons, place, geographical features and natural species, are, in this world-view, inherently permeable.

Prior to birth, persons are considered to exist as spirit-children called *raya* (or *rayi*), who inhabit particular locations within named estates.[6] A *raya* discloses to a man that he has been chosen to be its human father by revealing this in dreams, or by appearing in the form of a natural species that the man spears or kills while in this phenomenal form. When his wife subsequently gives birth, her child is considered to be the instantiation of this *raya* in human form (Bagshaw 1999:37). Where the *raya* has appeared to the man as a natural species, it will be considered consubstantial with that species, which is referred to as that individual's *jarlng* or *jarlnga*.[7] A person's *jarlng* may also be an estate-based totemic entity inherited and shared by patrifiliates. In this respect, persons can have more than one *jarlng*, one (or more) that are inherited and one that is associated with their conception (Glaskin 2005:303). Helmut Petri (1939:227) refers to 'djalne' (*jarlng*) as 'a soul substance which enters the human through rai [i.e. *raya*]', suggesting that it might be 'understood as a continuance of rai inside the physically alive human being'.[8] A.P. Elkin (1927/28a:9) describes the *raya* as a kind of 'spirit-double', although his understanding, recorded in 1928, is not commonly articulated today.

Humans also possess *nimanggar*, literally meaning 'shadow', which 'is identified with the visible shadow of a person' (Petri 1939:227). Petri's (1939:227) understanding was that *nimanggar* (his 'nimerai') was the 'part of the soul which leaves the body in a dream with the help of djalne' (*jarlng*). This contrasts with contemporary information suggesting that *nimanggar* is understood as that part of a person which does not take part in dream travel (Glaskin 2005:311). There is one ritual context (that I am aware of) when *nimanggar* is symbolically (and, it is believed, actually) temporarily separated from the human's body, but any separation of *nimanggar* (a person's 'shadow') from his or her body represents a state approaching, or analogous to, death. This aspect of the ritual, a public component of initiation, thus underscores the seriousness of the transition that has been made.[9] When a person is critically ill, at the brink of death, their *nimanggar* begins to leave their body, but this is averted when the person is cured. A person's *nimanggar* is only permanently separated from the body upon their death. According to

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6 See Petri (1939:226).

7 It is also referred to as *barnman*, or in English 'totem', often referred to in the anthropological literature as a 'conception totem'.

8 All translations from Petri were made by Christiane Fennell for the Kimberley Land Council.

9 The link between death and initiation has been made by a number of writers, e.g. Hertz (1960), Glowczewski (1983:233), Munn (1970:153).

Petri (1939:227), the *nimanggar* then travels to Luman, 'the Western part of the ocean, the realm of shadows', elsewhere described by E.A. Worms and Petri (1998:197) as 'an island of the dead, washed by the waves of the Indian Ocean, that is "a cool hunting ground of old friends"'. In contrast, Worms also (1952:548) describes 'the realm of the dead' as being in that part of the heavens where Galalung, the most significant public ancestral figure amongst Bardi, is now believed to reside. The notion of Luman as a place where the deceased go is not commonly articulated today, although the idea of a 'final resting place' where the spirits of the deceased continue to exist remains.

Upon the death of the person, his or her *raya* returns to its place of origin, usually that person's own and father's country, in accordance with the Bardi ideology of patrifiliation. It is afterwards possible for the same *raya* to be re-instantiated (Glaskin 2005:303). Although this is not common, I am aware of a few individuals who are believed to have the same *raya* as that of a deceased person and are therefore considered to have been returned (in human form) to the living.

As rendered in English, the 'spirits' (or sometimes 'ghosts') of those who have been deceased for some time, who are therefore further removed from the living, are less threatening to human beings than the spirits of the recently deceased. All the spirits of all Bardi persons who have passed away are said to be 'in' the country and are deserving of respect.[10] As such, people may address these spirits (frequently referred to as the 'old people') when visiting the country, especially if they take strangers along with them. The old people are addressed in familiar (and familial) terms, often in Bardi and sometimes in English, in terms that recognise their presence and acknowledge that they are to be respected. These spirits may visit and communicate with humans in dreams: such communications are not feared. As a senior Bardi woman told me after I relayed a dream to her concerning deceased persons, 'You shouldn't be afraid when dead people come to visit'.

However, spirits of the recently deceased appear to pose a greater risk to the living.[11] When Bardi first saw white men, they referred to them as *ngaarri*.[12] Bardi usually translate the word *ngaarri* into English as 'devil-devil', generally connoting a malevolent spirit being, but the term is also used to refer to spirits of the deceased, and, it would seem, of those who are recently deceased rather than of those who have been dead for some time.[13] One particular *ilma* (a public performance comprised of dance, song and totem), called 'Ngaarri', represents this to some extent, which Bardi have explained as follows:

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10 Speaking of the reintegration of deceased Pitjantjatjara persons into the country, Munn (1970:150) says that 'on this view all generations of the dead are successively transformed into the country'.

11 Fear of spirits of the recently deceased is documented in one of the earliest published accounts of traditional burial practices among Bardi and Jawi at Sunday Island (Bird 1911:178).

12 Dampier (1998:221–222), Metcalfe (1979:197)

> The boys who dance first waving leaves are the dead. They have been dead for a while. The young boy who is painted white has recently died and he is trying to learn the dances of the dead. The boys with leaves are trying to teach him, but he has too many teachers and he slips and fails to dance properly (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre 1996:10).

In this *ilma*, the boy painted white is referred to as *ngaarri*, the recently deceased. This is a humorous performance in which his attempts to learn the dances of the deceased are greeted with a great deal of laughter. But what it does signify in Bardi thought is a distinction between those persons who are recently deceased, who have not yet been fully integrated into the realm of the dead (in this instance, represented by having to learn their dances), and those who have. Elsewhere, another Bardi description of this *ilma* provides that 'the boy who's painted up all white, he's the spirit come back from the dead in that spirit dance. That's when he goes back to his final resting place and everyone welcomes him' (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre n.d.).

The apparent distinction between the recently deceased and the long-deceased, then, is that the former have not yet reached their final resting place. This makes them inherently unstable and hence dangerous: as one woman described this to me, 'spirits of people that you know can come back and turn themselves into different things'.[14] They are not long departed from the living, and have not yet assumed their place with the dead.[15] As many writers have commented, mortuary rituals are fundamentally concerned with facilitating this transition between life and death (e.g. Damon 1989:15). The immediate prohibition on speaking the name of the deceased is also reflective of this transitional phase. The prohibition extends to the totem with which that person was associated, and to homonyms of both that person's name (personal and 'bush' names) and of their totem.[16] It is not possible to know how long such prohibitions lasted in pre-colonial times, but today, there is no prescribed period for which the prohibition on speaking the name of the deceased must be observed. Typically, it goes on for many years: I know of families who lost people ten or more years ago who still will not say the name.[17] Speaking the dead person's name hurts the bereaved, who continue to feel

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13 The term *ngaarri* can be applied to various classes of spirit beings (Nilili, personal communication, 4 March 1997).

14 Nilili, personal communication, 17 November 1994

15 In his study of the double burial, Hertz (1960:36) argued that the period during which a person's 'soul' was dangerous corresponded to the intermediate period between the first and second (final) burials, after which the deceased enters 'the land of the dead' (1960:34).

16 Unlike some other Aboriginal groups, who use particular designations to refer to this person or to others of that name, Bardi do not have a specific term that is applied in place of the individual's name. Rather, that individual is identified by their relationship to other kin: 'wife belong x' or '*nyami* (MF) for y'. The deceased individual might simply be referred to as 'old man', it being evident who is being referred to on the basis of who is speaking.

17 There are some exceptions to this. I have occasionally heard the deceased's name whispered, even within days of the death, sometimes positively to identify the individual concerned to someone who is sociologically distant from the deceased.

the grief associated with their loss (cf. Myers 1986a:117), while avoiding their name serves to make people 'acutely aware' of the person whose name is being avoided.[18] The prohibition is also frequently related to a fear that, by speaking the dead person's name, their spirit, at this stage deemed harmful, would be attracted back to the living.[19] In both senses, a conceptual equivalence is drawn between persons and their names, such that names 'stand for', and indeed in a vital sense 'are', the persons they connote: persons and their names are intrinsically connected. This is apparent in other spheres of social life. For example, the Bardi term *gumbali*, meaning 'namesake', refers to persons sharing the same name, who are thereby regarded as having a social equivalence to each other in important respects. As Laurent Dousset (2005:25) has observed regarding the *kalyartu* (namesake) relationship among Ngaatjatjarra peoples of the Western Desert, 'being namesake alone implies an identity that is not only social, but also personal and essential'. Among the Yolngu, Ian Keen (in press) also speaks of 'an intrinsic connection between a person and a separated part of a person', including 'between a person and an image or name of the person'.

Mortuary practices

The death of a person requires at least three things from the living: the disposal of the corpse, the redistribution of the deceased's property, and the performance of certain rituals marking the separation of the dead from the living. As a number of writers have commented, such rituals serve a social function in assisting the living to separate themselves from the deceased, though their overt purpose may be to assist the deceased to depart from the living.[20] In his study of the double funeral, R. Hertz (1960:69) maintained that it was only at the final ceremony that 'the separation of the deceased from the living' was completed, thus ensuring 'his entry into the community of sacred ancestors', and that this correlated with the decomposition of the body.

Martin Heidegger has written that '[i]n feeling oneself to be, the body is already contained in advance in that self [...]. We do not "have" a body, rather we "are" bodily' (cited in Weiner 2001:56). Expressions concerning how humans a r e bodily, like 'meaning in human cultures' more generally, is 'contingent upon symbolic, or representational, forms and can only be invoked or dealt with through symbols [...] [which] "stand for",

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18 Musharbash, personal communication, 1 April 2005

19 McDonald (2001:146–147) similarly writes that, for Halls Creek Aboriginal people, one way of avoiding the spirit of the recently deceased was through 'avoiding using the name of the dead'. Goody (1962:21) writes that Frazer examined 'the very widespread precautions taken to prevent the return of the dead to this world, and the actions adopted to protect the survivors from the hostility of the departed should they succeed in their efforts to come back'.

20 E.g. Goody (1962:26), Wagner (1989:266–267).

"denote", or "designate" some other element' (Wagner 1972:4). Speaking of Yolngu ancestral doctrines and related practices, and those of '"sorcery" and "magic"', Keen (2005:1) observes that 'both living people and the *wangarr* ancestors leave (and left) detached but inherently connected parts and images of themselves in the landscape', linking this with 'the extension of persons, especially their bodily substances, in time and space'.[21] The spatio-temporal extension of persons that Keen identifies is similarly evident in Bardi cosmology (in which ancestral beings left traces of themselves in the landscape) and ontology.[22] This extension of persons is also reflected in Bardi conceptualisations of bodies and component parts of bodies, of what it is t o b e in bodily form.

The substance of a person's body has been described to me as being 'place, bones, flesh, blood and hair'.[23] Of these, 'place' – a person's metaphysical and consubstantial identification with their estate (such that one name that persons can be called by is the name of their estate) and with totemic species or features associated with that estate or their conception – has already been briefly discussed above. If a species, place or elements of place that is a person's *jarlng* (or *barnman*) are damaged or destroyed, a person would be hurt, fall sick or die. Similarly, when a person dies, 'place' registers and reflects this: a tree will lose branches or die, or water from a particular estate will be drawn into clouds to fall later as rain.

The other intrinsic elements of persons' bodies, as described to me, are bones, flesh, blood and hair: all are inscribed in traditional burial practices. Formerly, Bardi and Jawi practised a tree-stage burial (*nganyjin*).[24] Upon death, the deceased person's corpse (*jiwarra*) was placed in the fork of a tree 'until it dried up'.[25] G. McDonald (2001:21) has said that 'bodily fluids are important in Aboriginal ontologies and cosmologies', and this is evidenced in Bardi attitudes linking blood, flesh and death. Those who obeyed 'the Law'[26] during their lives were said to have 'good blood and firm hard flesh', and their corpses would 'dry immediately on the platform' (Petri 1939:226). Conversely, if a person persistently offended 'the Law' during their lifetime and did not '"make it clear"', his or her blood was said to go 'bad and watery', so that his or her mortal remains would be 'soft' and 'sponge like', with the consequence that the corpse would 'stink very badly' (Petri 1939:226). The inference here is that people could evaluate a person's actions

21 See also Keen (in press).

22 Here, for example, *raya* pre-exist human incarnation and *nimanggar* can be detached in a particular ritual context, as well as, finally, at death.

23 Nilili, personal communication, 30 October 1995. Keen (in press) identifies a very similar set of components in relation to 'beliefs about the inherent powers of parts of the body' among the Yolngu, including 'blood, flesh, fat and bone, and *mali* ("spirits", "images")'.

24 Petri's (1939:226) 'nandjen'.

25 Cf. Hertz (1960:41).

26 Bardi and Jawi use the term 'the Law' to refer to the corpus of rituals, customs and laws (including prescriptive marriage rules, food taboos and so on) that the ancestral beings, whose activities gave form to country during the creative epoch generally referred to in much of the literature as 'the Dreaming', 'gave' them to 'follow'.

retrospectively on the basis of the decomposition of the corpse. One elderly woman told me that the body would be wrapped naked in paper bark, and that sticks would be laid across it.[27] People would take turns climbing up the tree to view the body (perhaps assessing the rate of decomposition). I was told that corpses were always placed in different trees, never in the same ones.

The hair of the deceased would be cut prior to the body being left in the tree. Hair cutting in the context of death (whether of the deceased person's hair or of living kin) can be seen as having 'an analogy with the separation of the dead from the living group' (Glowczewski 1983:238). Detached from persons, whether living or deceased, hair is not only 'valuable' and 'a special case of property', as Odermann (1957:58) described it, it can also play an important role in social relations among the living, as well as between them and the deceased.[28] With respect to Warlpiri, Kaitish and Aranda, Glowczewski (1983:238) says that the circulation and exchange of hair strings 'symbolizes alliances and economic exchanges', maintaining certain categories of kin as 'symbolically alive, whether they are living or dead'. This is also evident among Bardi, where close kin who kept the hair of the deceased wrapped it up in paper bark and treated it 'like a baby', though more recently carrying it in an envelope (Glaskin 2005:308). Such hair relics (*ginyinggi muwarn*) may be used to evoke and invoke the deceased person. The equivalence between a person and his or her hair arises since hair remains intrinsically connected to a person as an extension of the person, even when it is detached from the head. Human hair may be used to represent and invoke an individual in sorcery attacks, and people today still look after their hair (and indeed, loose hairs) for this reason.[29]

Hair could also be used to divine the identity of the person responsible for the sorcery that led to the death, since, in the 'old days' (and often still today), death was considered to be a consequence of some malevolent human intervention. Elkin (1961:306) says that the hair was 'woven on a spindle into a string' and used in an inquest to determine the murderer of the deceased. This differs from the method of inquest relayed to me, in which inquest stones (*ijidurl*) were used to determine the *mundumund*, the person responsible for causing a death.[30] These were placed under the body once it was in the tree, each representing a person potentially accountable for the death. The bodily 'exudations dropping or running towards' the stones (or sticks) indicated the person responsible (Elkin 1961:305).

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27 Manung, personal communication, 17 November 1994

28 It is evident from a number of ethnographic contexts that, traditionally, it was not uncommon for a deceased person's hair to be used for making hairbelts (Odermann1957:58–59). Many Aboriginal groups, including Bardi, still use hairbelts as part of their ritual attire.

29 In addition to sorcery, hair can be used to 'sing' a person to gain their romantic involvement (Nilili, personal communication, 27 October 1997).

30 In contrast to this meaning of *mundumund*, Worms and Petri (1998:198) say that the term *mundu mundu* means 'property of a dead person' and was used to refer to dogs who belonged to deceased persons (rather than using the dog's name). – Elkin (1961:305) and Gibson (1951:19) also report the use of sticks for inquest among Bardi.

In the second stage, which occurred, I was told, after approximately a year (when the flesh had dried up), the bodily remains were removed from the tree. All the joints of the body, including the fingers, would be broken and laid side by side, along with the skull, and wrapped in paper bark. The head would be placed on one side. An elderly Bardi woman explicitly linked the breaking of all a person's bones at this stage with the notion that they are intrinsic to a person, explaining that this was why spearing, aimed at breaking a thigh bone, was a penalty for transgressions in the 'old days'.[31] The breaking up of all a person's bones at this stage, then, represents the finality of their incarnation in that bodily form, in readiness for their interment. Following this, there would be a big ceremony, which children were prohibited from attending. Elkin (1961:305) also refers to a 'big mourning ceremony', but further details are unclear. After the ceremony the bones were taken to the 'special graveyard areas' and placed either on top of the ground and covered over by rocks or in caves. Participants in the ceremony were required to 'smoke' themselves afterwards, for purposes of purification.

Formerly, close kin of the deceased cut off their hair upon a person's death. Failure to do so was evidently seen as a breach of 'tribal law' and indicated that 'all was not right' (Gibson 1951:79). I was also told of mourning practices where one category of relatives would put charcoal (*rirrga*) in their hair, and another red ochre (*bidamarr*). These substances were mixed with 'oil', such as stingray fat or sometimes turtle or dugong fat, to make them stick together, so that the hair to which this was applied would form dreadlocks. The Bardi alternate generational moiety system is evident in these mourning practices: on the basis of his 1928 fieldwork, Elkin (1961:298) wrote that 'black is the mourning colour for members of one's own generation line which includes grandparents and grandchildren, and such like, while red is the colour for persons of the parent's and children's generation'. It is no longer customary for Bardi to cut their hair in mourning, or to place these substances in their hair. Similarly, in the 'old days', the bereaved were not allowed to eat 'fatty foods, mostly flesh foods' for sometime afterwards, but these food taboos are no longer observed.

Mission influence, material transformation, and the contemporary context

Although there is little information concerning the rate of material change in the realm of mortuary ritual at Lombadina, certain inferences can be made on the basis of the information that is available for the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Sunday Island.

[31] Nilili, personal communication, 30 October 1995. – Cf. Hertz (1907:66), who talks about the 'close connection which is thought to exist' between the radius bone and 'the soul of an individual' among the Warramunga (Waramangu).

Mission residents continued to intermarry, to practise Law together, and to consider themselves a community of kin. While the missions had been established some considerable time beforehand, my own fieldwork corroborates M.V. Robinson's (1973:175) view that it was not until the end of World War Two that 'the bulk of the Bardi and Djawi population became associated with Lombadina or the Island'. The available evidence suggests that mortuary rituals had, by this time, been significantly transformed. On the basis of legible dates and the Lombadina Mission Cemetery Index, the earliest dates that I have been able to obtain for Lombadina graves (and therefore for burial in the ground rather than tree-stage burial) is 1940.[32] At Sunday Island, the evidence that tree-stage burial had been replaced by burial in the ground by the late 1940s is clearer. E.G. Gibson carried out fieldwork for his Master's dissertation on Sunday Island in the late 1940s, and records the change in mortuary rituals that had occurred by this time. Men were being buried in wooden coffins, women 'more often' in 'simply a blanket' (1951:19). Inquests, in the form of placing sticks around the grave, were conducted 'often, but not always, when a man dies', and fires were lit 'at places along the path of the procession to the graveside' (Gibson 1951:19).

Some traditional graves still survive. An elderly Bardi woman told me that one of these, located on Sunday Island, was the last 'traditional' grave, and that it was made in 1962.[33] This seems quite late and may have been unusual for its time. Today, Bardi people who are buried in their own country are buried in the community cemeteries at Lombadina and One Arm Point. One family group has obtained permission from the relevant government authorities to bury members of their family on their own outstation, and they have accordingly established a small cemetery in the vicinity where a number of people have been interred.

The grieving for the dead, as well as a person's death itself, is referred to as 'sorry business'. Ritual wailing accompanies the immediate news of a death and it is customary for women, upon first meeting the bereaved after the news of that person's death, to wail in this manner. It is usual for men and women to shake hands with the bereaved upon their first encounter with them. E.A. Povinelli (1993), Keen (in press) and others have commented on the relationship between a person and his or her sweat (or smell): the country is said to 'recognise' those with whom it shares substance by their smell, and sweat is often used in introducing strangers to the country, or in intentionally communicating one's own presence to ancestral and other spirit beings. The exchange of sweat in a handshake of condolence is, in these terms, an intentional act of sharing substance with the bereaved. Bardi at One Arm Point say that it is customary to light

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32 The oldest marked grave at Lombadina is that of Father Nicholas Emo, one of the earliest parish priests, who died in 1915, five years after the mission begun; the next oldest graves are dated 1940, thirty years after the founding of the mission.

33 Girrigwarr, personal communication, 29 November 1994. – In 1962 Sunday Island mission closed down and people shifted to Derby.

a camp fire on the day of a person's death.[34] Gibson observed this practice on Sunday Island in the late 1940s, writing that fire was said to 'secure a safe departure of the dead man's spirit', in order to reduce 'the amount of interference possible in the affairs of the living by the spirit of the now dead man' (1951:18), and it seems that lighting fires following a person's death has similar meanings today. In one instance that I am aware of, though, where the deceased person's body was removed by plane to a distant town for a post-mortem, it was also said that these actions were aimed at guiding the spirit of the deceased in travelling home.

F. Myers (1986b:434) argues that, for Pintupi, 'relatedness is the ontologically primary value', in which initiations reproduce 'relatedness as a component of the regional system' (1986b:436). Funerals and mortuary rituals similarly reproduce such relatedness among kin, who themselves must renegotiate the 'dialectic between relatedness and differentiation' (1986b:434) with the deceased, who, upon death, undergo a conceptual as well as corporeal transformation.

In common with other Aboriginal groups, funerals in Bardi society occur on a more regular basis than their populations and demographics might seem to warrant. Funeral arrangements take considerable time: funerals usually occur weeks after the death. There is an onus on those arranging the funeral to ensure that all those who should be present have been informed about the event. Given the obligation upon kin, however distantly related, to attend the funerals, they are attended by large numbers of people, not just from within the immediate community of the deceased, but also from throughout the region and beyond it as well. Although Bardi continue to practise their Law and its associated rituals, funerals today are the most frequent ritual activity in which people participate, bringing together the larger group of socially related persons who are obliged to attend by virtue of that relatedness. Consequently, funerals represent one of the most visible contemporary expressions of wider kinship and its attendant obligations, in which the 'social person of the deceased' is expanded to 'the limits of his or her social circle' (Wagner 1989:269).

Although different Christian traditions are associated with Lombadina/Djarindjin and One Arm Point, funeral rites conducted for people from these communities have a number of similarities. At Lombadina a priest officiates, while at One Arm Point a UAM minister, one of the last missionaries at Sunday Island before its closure in 1962, carries out the rite. Within the formal church service associated with funerals, people conform to the particular rituals associated with their denominations. Men dress in black trousers and white shirts, the women in their most formal clothes. The officiating minister of either denomination usually gives some form of eulogy for the deceased, but while the UAM minister speaks the name, the Catholic priests avoid doing so. The UAM minister will also give a sermon about the need to repent from sin in order to be saved. Hymns are sung in both services. At Catholic funerals, it has been usual for some time for a simple

[34] I have seen this done once.

brochure to be given to all the participants. Those I have seen give the deceased's name, bushname and dates of birth and death, often with a dedication composed by the family, on the cover. Inside the pamphlet, the order of the funeral service (including speeches and eulogies by family members or friends, hymns, and information on whether to sit or stand) is given. It has not been as common for such brochures to accompany UAM-style funerals, but I return to this below.

Following the service, the coffin-bearers, comprising close male kin, carry the coffin to the cemetery. The presiding minister says some additional words, and the coffin is lowered into the ground. At both Catholic and UAM funerals, members of the assembly come forward, one by one, to place handfuls of dirt on the coffin. Further wailing (and crying) accompanies this process. When all those who are in attendance and who wished to place some dirt on the coffin have done so, the grave is filled in completely.

Ontological transformation

In his fieldnotes of 1927/28, Elkin wrote that reincarnated children could be recognised 'by the marks on their bodies', which were 'especially thought to be the marks made on the dead body by its bark and stick wrappings' (1927/28b:35). In the intervening 77 years, much of the material world, for humans everywhere, Bardi included, has changed considerably. Today, Bardi drive Toyotas and motorised boats, have satellite phones and watch Foxtel at their remote outstations, form corporations, and travel the world, just to name some of the more immediate technical and material transformations. The influence of Christianity, whether in the form of Catholicism or the UAM, has changed the way Bardi do such things as attending church, conducting funerals and burying their dead.

Notwithstanding this, Bardi still believe that *raya* may be re-instantiated in human form, and that these persons can be recognised either by birthmarks (*lanbirr*) or by an acute physical similarity (face, movement, mannerisms) with someone who has passed away. Birthmarks are no longer associated with tree-stage burial, but are interpreted as evidence of a person's *jarlng* (or *barnman*). For example, a man who has encountered his unborn child's *raya* as a turtle that he speared will interpret a birthmark on the child's shoulder as the place where his spear entered the *raya* while in its turtle form. People still talk of *raya*, *jarlng* (or *barnman*), *nimanggar* and *ngaarri*, and receive communications from deceased persons in dreams. Ideas concerning personhood in these terms do not, therefore, appear to have undergone significant transformations. When I first began working with Bardi in 1994, Luman, as a place where the dead go, was a hazy concept in the minds of some older people, many of whom have now passed away. But perhaps it was no hazier than in 1911, when W.H. Bird wrote that 'the natives have a vague idea of the hereafter and tell of a place called Loomurn [sic], but plead that the lack of a written

language is responsible for the meagre details' (1911:178). And while the word 'heaven' has been translated into Bardi[35] and is incorporated into Christian songs and hymns, I have not yet heard someone say that this is where they expect to go when they die. Although the idea of the dead being in an interstitial place of 'torment' (akin to purgatory) has surfaced among some Lombadina and Djarindjin residents (Glaskin 2005), in both communities the deceased are generally spoken of as returning to their own country.[36]

I now return to the notion that in the 'old days', the substance of persons was considered to be composed of place, bones, flesh, blood and hair. All these elements have an intrinsic connection with persons and extend them both temporally and spatially (Keen in press). With the exception of place (which itself registers death because of the consubstantiation of person and place), they were all explicitly represented (or attended to) in tree-stage burial, Hertz's 'double funeral' (Goody 1962:26). This is not the case with modern mortuary rituals in which the deceased are buried, although locks of the deceased person's hair may still be kept. As I have outlined elsewhere, these hair relics may be carried into card games to invoke the presence of the deceased in order to have 'luck' (Glaskin 2005). Photographs of the deceased, kept as heirlooms, may also be used in card games to invoke their presence for the same purpose, indicating that photographs have taken on an analogous role to that of human hair as 'standing for' (or having an imputed consubstantiality with) persons, at least in this realm. For if both hair and photographs are used in similar ways to invoke persons, then they both 'stand for' (or are considered extensions of) persons in similar ways. The capturing and retention of a person's image in a given moment of time is not the same as the partibility of persons suggested by hair which, 'excised or secreted from the body', becomes a 'freestanding' entity (Strathern 2002:64). A photograph, being an external product, is less obviously 'part' of a person, but it clearly retains its relationship to the person whose image it displays. So here I can only hypothesise regarding the equivalence made between persons and photographs in terms of invoking deceased relatives to ensure one luck in card games. Such equivalence may be made possible by an ontological framework that understands persons as possessing *nimanggar*, the visible shadow or outline of a person, which also 'stands for' the invisible substance of the person, that photographs, by metaphorical extension, may represent. Like 'the transaction of recognized ceremonial valuables' that '"stand for" parts of persons' identified by Marilyn Strathern in Melanesia, photographs of the deceased in card games are similarly used as objects to 'exert [invisible] social leverage on each other' (Weiner 2001:76) by recourse to the mediation of the deceased.

When I first began working with Bardi in 1994, photographs of the recently deceased were treated in an analogous fashion to the names of the deceased.[37] Names were

35 *Garndayun* (from above)

36 Myrna Tonkinson (personal communication, 1 April 2005) similarly says that 'the notion of the deceased returning to their own country is strong among Mardu, even those professing Christianity'.

37 Cf. Venbrux (1995:170).

not spoken and photographs of the recently deceased were not shown: doing either could cause offence. Photographs therefore 'stood for' persons and had equivalence with them, much as their name does, and much as their hair may do (in sorcery and divination). Bardi are avid collectors of photographs and many are keen photographers, but seeing photographs of those who recently died would make people feel 'sorry'.[38] More recently, however, some bereaved families have begun to compile photographs of the deceased at various stages of their lives. The photographs are printed in pamphlets or booklets, accompanied by written eulogies, tributes and hymns, for distribution at UAM funeral services. The memorialisation of persons as represented in some of the publications now accompanying funeral services demonstrates the current technological possibilities, but I suspect that this also indicates something more than this.

Here, it is instructive to consider G. Macdonald's (2003) view concerning the value of photographs to Wiradjuri people of New South Wales. She says that, for them, 'the value of these photos [...] stems from the fact that, in Gell's terms, they are "person-like", they are "sources of, and targets for, social agency (1998:96), apprehended as social others"' (MacDonald 2003:233). She argues that, for Wiradjuri, photographs have the characteristics of 'representing animation (almost "being") and of relatedness'. Her argument that 'photos have the capacity to extend the face-to-face nature of kin-relatedness through time and space' (Macdonald 2003:225) is a useful way to think about Bardi use of photographs in contemporary funerals, in which this extension occurs at the very moment in which the deceased are buried (i.e. hidden from view). This is not limited by, for example, the finite quantity of hair that can be distributed. The use of photographs in the funeral context affirms a 'temporal continuity' (Weiner 2001:46) with the deceased, and seems to signify some conceptual transition in terms of a fear of their immediate post-mortem spirit. I would therefore suggest that there is some ontological transformation occurring concerning the nature of persons at this time, but that the transformation is of a subtle character. For, despite the prohibitions on speaking the name of the deceased, the dead have long been kept alive by the living. They remain sentient, other-than-human persons who interact with the living through dreams and through their presence in the country. They are memorialised in narratives for the activities and events of their corporeal lives in the past, but also with respect to the activities of their continuing (albeit spatially altered) being in the present.

The possibility that, more simply, the use of photographs in funeral services reflects a transformation in some of the techniques used to memorialise individuals does, of course, remain. Yet the shift I am attempting to identify here is also, I would argue,

38 This reaction is sufficiently widespread in Australia for television documentaries concerning Aboriginal people routinely to contain explicit warnings to Aboriginal viewers that the footage contains the images of deceased persons. Myrna Tonkinson (personal communication, 1 April 2005) says that among the Mardu, while some people 'still do not wish to see photos of dead close relatives, others seek them out, especially to show their children what dead family members looked like'. This possibility would not, of course, have existed prior to the invention of photography.

reflected in some of the objects of the deceased that are now kept as relics and heirlooms. For example, one grieving widow told me that, nearly a year after her husband's death, she was unable to throw away any of the numerous medications that he took as an ill man prior to his death. At the time she told me this, these had remained untouched in the bathroom where he had left them. This is in significant contrast to the kinds of avoidance towards the deceased person's personal possessions reported by Myers (1986a:134) and others, in which these possessions are distributed to certain distant kin so that the bereaved are not continually being reminded of the dead. Among Bardi, I have not found an emphasis on the distribution of the deceased person's possessions for this reason, as in some other Aboriginal societies. Nevertheless, it was apparent that reminders of the deceased person were to be avoided. Based on their experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, Worms and Petri (1998:198) recorded that 'it is strictly forbidden to mention the name of a dead person; even the name of a dog which he left behind will be changed'.

Conclusion

I have argued elsewhere that one effect of the Pallottine approach to evangelism at Lombadina is the emergence of a greater degree of syncretism between Catholic precepts and Bardi cosmology than is in evidence at One Arm Point. There, the less tolerant UAM missionary attitude towards indigenous cosmology seems to have produced a greater conceptual separation between the two (Glaskin 2002, 2005). At Lombadina, there is some evidence to suggest that Catholic ideas concerning the fate of the deceased are now beginning to permeate into the consciousness of some individuals, surfacing in dreams (Glaskin 2005). Notwithstanding this, wholesale transformations in concepts of self and personhood do not seem to have occurred either there or at One Arm Point.

Writing of the encounter between Aborigines and missionaries in Halls Creek, McDonald says that there has been some change in Aboriginal notions of 'life-force or spirit'. Despite this, such changes have not 'transformed the human body into a site for the operation of a Pythagorean-Platonic spirit/matter dualism in which body and soul exist as ontologically separate and mutually antagonistic forces' (2001:177). This also holds true for Bardi, for whom persons are still understood as being entities that exist in various forms prior to and after human incarnation, continue to inhabit the landscape after death, and communicate with the living. Nevertheless, I have argued that some sort of transformation, represented by the use of photographs as objects that 'stand for' (or represent extensions of) deceased persons (used in card games to invoke their presence for luck, and more recently, in funerals), may now be taking place.

Hertz saw the 'double funeral' as involving changes of status in which each change 'involves profound modification of attitude towards the person concerned, modifica-

tions that are only accomplished gradually, with the passage of time' (Goody 1962:26). The partial exclusion of the bereaved from social life during the first stage marked the period of mourning in which the deceased occupied an 'intermediary station between this world and the next', joining their 'forebears in the Land of the Dead' upon the conclusion of the second ceremony (Goody 1962:26–27). Among Bardi, the collapsing of the period of time before which a deceased person's photograph might be viewed without causing offence – indeed, the distribution of such photographs in funeral services – perhaps represents a more significant shift than the transition from tree-stage burial to burial in the ground.

The use of photographs has only begun to occur recently in some Bardi funeral services, and is not, as I write, a widespread practice, though it is one that has also been reported in recent times in other remote areas, where formerly such images would also have been avoided.[39] It may be that the sheer number of images that Aboriginal people in remote communities are now exposed to via television, video and DVD has had implications for how people have come to view and accommodate images of persons, including those of the recently deceased. Equally spirits of the recently deceased may now be conceptualised as less dangerous than they once were. But I have also argued that the use and distribution of photographs in funeral services is analogous to the distribution of human hair in mortuary rituals, since it similarly serves to extend the deceased spatially and temporally during the collective ritual that marks their separation from the world of the living. This highlights the dynamic of tradition and innovation, of continuity and change. As I have argued elsewhere (Glaskin 2005), how these matters are understood has implications in legal contexts (such as in Australian native title cases), where indigenous property rights are evaluated on the basis of a supposed continuity of tradition.

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39 Myrna Tonkinson and Yasmine Musharbash, personal communication, May 2005

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