Convenient Canvasses

An archaeology of social identity and contemporary graffiti in Jawoyn country, Northern Territory, Australia

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Final text approved by Rachael Willika of Manyallaluk
Abstract

This collaborative project with the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation entails research into the contemporary graffiti and oral histories of three Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The Jawoyn communities of Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk provide the setting for this research into cross-cultural exchange in post-colonial Aboriginal Australia. The focus of this archaeological study is to explore the role that governmental policy and social strategy has played in contemporary human behaviour, with a focus on intra-group versus inter-group messaging in place-marking and mark-making practices. The statistical analysis of contemporary graffiti in Jawoyn country shows that graffiti serves the intra-group purpose of communication between community members, rather than the inter-group purpose of propagating political and social messages. This study demonstrates that the purpose of graffiti as it is practiced in Jawoyn communities is more closely aligned to an ongoing cultural tradition of rock-art production and landscape-marking than it is to the contemporary graffiti expressions often found in urban settings. These results demonstrate the strength of cultural continuity in Jawoyn country, even during a period of major government intervention.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

___________________
I am submitting this thesis a few days after the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2012 was debated by the Australian Senate. This bill passed with bipartisan support. The new legislation extends the Federal Government’s Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 for a further ten years. Some of the measures will continue to stigmatise Indigenous cultures and undermine Indigenous rights to self-determination. The reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians requires that basic human rights be restored in the Northern Territory.

I dedicate this thesis to the people of Jawoyn country, past, present and future.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wanted to thank my supervisors, Claire Smith and Ursula Frederick for supporting me throughout my research. Claire’s motivation and passion for teaching is highly contagious. Ursula’s vast knowledge of visual cultures and mark-making practices was of great benefit to my research, thanks to Ursula for all of her help.

Many people helped me throughout the data recording process, such as the students of the 2011 Flinders University Rock Art Field School (ARCH3307), Andrew Crisp, Natalie Bittner and Rebekah-Christine Leonardos. I thank them for putting the time into collecting the data for this project. Without the many hands to record all of those road signs, I would still be there.

Thanks to Alice Gorman, Nessa Beasley and Matthew Harris for commenting on drafts of thesis. A special thank you goes to Antoinette Hennessy who not only commented on my drafts, but also helped me to draw up the site plans and illustrate them.

Finally, a huge thank you goes to my family, particularly my mum and dad, who have given me unwavering support throughout this project.

I have worked closely with people from Jawoyn communities throughout this project, such as Sybil Ranch, Margaret Katherine, Peter Lindsey and Rachael Willika (and family). At times, I have found their experiences in the face of government sanctioned racism distressing and difficult to comprehend. However, their perseverance and determination to achieve social justice, independence and survival of their culture has been the inspiration and motivation behind this thesis. I am eternally grateful for the relationships I have formed throughout this research and thank every member of Jawoyn communities for hosting me. There was once a time where my education was nothing more to me than a series of stepping-stones to a career; this research and these people have helped me understand that there are more practical uses for my education. The moment you understand that Indigenous archaeology is about people, rather than ‘things’, is the moment you understand Indigenous archaeology.
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“You can come back here, that’s alright”

I visited Jawoyn country for the first time in July 2010. During this visit, I sought permission from Gitjan (owner) Sybil Ranch to return the following year and research contemporary graffiti in and around the Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk communities. Sybil (pictured below) was very welcoming. She said, “Yes Jordan, you can come back here, that’s alright. You can look at that graffiti”.

Next, I needed to seek permission from that Old Kotjok, Junggayi (custodian) of Jawoyn country. I refer to this man by his ‘skin-name’, Kotjok, rather than his Christian name out of respect as he passed away at the end of 2011.

I visited Kotjok at the Beswick nursing home with Claire Smith and Gary Jackson. Kotjok was very frail and lying in a bed with his wife, Glen. The old men and women spoke for a while and reminisced about the past. The strong love, admiration and respect between these four was obvious: “I’ve travelled the world with this man”, Claire announced to me with her arm around Kotjok’s shoulder. Claire explained to Kotjok in the local Kriol that I wanted to research Jawoyn graffiti. Kotjok accepted me and told me my skin-name, ‘Bulain’. This situated me in the Jawoyn kinship system and determined how I communicate with different members of the Jawoyn community. This was the only time I met Kotjok. He was too ill to take visitors upon my return the following July. He passed away in November.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Questions

Humans have expressed their social identity through landscape-marking or ‘rock-art’ behaviours for around 40,000 years worldwide (Clottes 1998:120-1; McDonald 2012; Morwood 2002:37-8; Pike et al. 2012). These landscape-marking and mark-making behaviours are, for many societies and peoples, material manifestations of their belief systems. In Aboriginal Australia, landscape-marking behaviours have been practiced for at least 30,000 years (Langley and Taçon 2010; Morwood 2002:37). Most recently a carbon date of 28,000 years was directly attributed to charcoal motifs from northern Australia (The Australian 2012). This ancient landscape-marking practice forms part of traditional Indigenous Australian visual culture and survives into contemporary Aboriginal societies as a continuation of cultural communication (Smith 1992a). Contemporary marking is more than simple messaging since it is imbued with identity that relates to membership both within and between groups, much like the practice of rock-art (Sanz et al. 2008; Nicholls 2000).

This thesis investigates representations of social identity from the perspective of contemporary landscape-markings at a time of major government intervention in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, Australia. The focus of the research is how people use contemporary landscape-markings, or ‘graffiti’ as a medium to express attachments to places and associations with kinship and family groups. The specific question addressed by this study is:

- What can the study of contemporary Indigenous graffiti reveal about social identity in an Aboriginal community?

The secondary aims of this research are to understand:

- the role graffiti plays in marking individual and group identities in the landscape;
• the impact of the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* on the production and content of expressions of social identity;
• the role that creation techniques and the spatial layout of graffiti play in communication through landscape-marking; and
• the value of ethnographic data in interpreting the archaeology of contemporary landscape-marking.

The research question and aims are addressed through the statistical analysis of graffiti collected during two data collection field surveys. Ethnographic information is used in the interpretation of graffiti.
1.2. Study Area

The research was undertaken in Jawoyn country in the Northern Territory, Australia (Figure 1.1). Jawoyn country is home to approximately 1000 Aboriginal people of differing language groups and cultural backgrounds. Kriol is the main language spoken in this region. The larger Jawoyn communities are Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk, while smaller outstations and town camps include areas known as Jodetluk, Kalano, Kybrook, Rockhole and Werenbun. The township of Katherine is located on the border of Jawoyn country.

Since July 2007, these communities have been among 73 Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory to be subjected to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), commonly known as the ‘Intervention’. The legislation of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 has infiltrated every aspect of contemporary Indigenous culture in the Northern Territory and as such plays a large role in this study.

Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk were chosen as the focus of this study as they are the three highest populated Jawoyn communities. These communities are
relatively close to each other and are connected by corridors, the Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road. At the time of the 2011 Census, the population of Barunga was 312; Beswick was 509; and Manyallaluk was 105 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). The majority of these people identify as being of Aboriginal descent.

Jawoyn country has been the focus of many archaeological investigations for at least twenty years, with much of this research centring on landscape-markings and art systems (David et al. 2011; Elkin 1952; Gunn et al. 2011; Macintosh 1951, 1952, 1977; Slizankiewicz 2012; Smith 1992a, 1994, 2008), while other projects include archaeobotany (Barker 2000), hand stencils in rock art (Damhuis 2003) and ethics in archaeology (Brett 2001). Each of these projects incorporated an ethnoarchaeological approach in which ethnographic information was used to interpret archaeological patterning.
1.3. Significance

The archaeological significance of this study is threefold:

1. It re-evaluates our understanding of the term ‘graffiti’.
2. It uses archaeological techniques to provide new insights into contemporary human behaviours.
3. It is one of the first archaeological investigations into contemporary Australian Aboriginal graffiti.

1.3.1. Defining Graffiti

In mainstream society, graffiti is widely perceived as an undesirable act of vandalism (Macdonald 2001:2-3). While this is correct for some examples of graffiti, academic research into this landscape-marking visual culture has the potential to extract uncensored, uninstitutionalised information about attitudes towards social, political, religious and ideological issues in the wider community (Chaffee 1993; Cocroft et al. 2006; Crisp 2010; Field 2009; Frederick 2009; Frederick and O’Connor 2009; Macdonald 2001; May 2008; Oliver and Neal 2010; Schofield 2010; Scholten 2003 and Silva 2010). Thus, graffiti is more than just vandalism. It is an important source of material evidence for archaeologists to understand the communication of social identity.

The term ‘graffiti’ comes from the Italian word graffiare meaning ‘to scratch’ and is used to refer to human-made markings in the public domain. The Australian Oxford Dictionary defines graffiti, the plural of graffito, as ‘writing or drawing scribbled, scratched, or sprayed on a surface’ (2007:460). Archaeological researchers of graffiti agree that the term is too broad to be encompassed by a single definition (Chaffee 1993:4; Cocroft 2006:6; Schofield 2010:78; Scholten 2003). The definitions outlined above say nothing about the ambiguities that emerge in the classification of graffiti. For example, is all graffiti illicit? What is the difference between an image pasted on a billboard and the same image inscribed on a building? Is advertising graffiti? Are murals graffiti? What role does the author play in the categorisation of legal versus illegal public art? The term graffiti is often conceived in contemporary society as vandalism and labels such as ‘antisocial behaviour’, ‘senseless’ and ‘meaningless’
are attributed to the practice (Macdonald 2001:2-3). However recent debate argues otherwise (Blake 1981; Chaffee 1993; Cocroft 2006; Crisp 2010; Field 2009; Frederick 2009; Macdonald 2001; Scholten 2003; Schofield 2010). Macdonald (2001:2-3) illustrates the current academic perception of graffiti as ‘far from mindless or senseless and that there is always a purpose behind [its] production’. Frederick (2009:212) agrees in saying that graffiti is ‘a mode of expression and communication which comprises a vast array of media, technique, subject matter, form and meanings’. A common feature of most graffiti is that it is ‘text and/or images that [are] made in shared spaces where it is viewed publicly, be that a privately owned building, public transport, or an alleyway’ (Frederick, 2009:212).

David and Wilson (2002) base their definition of graffiti on the term’s original Italian meaning and the meaning outlined in the *Oxford Dictionary* to arrive at an understanding that graffiti:

> has a more pointed definition, referring to unsolicited inscriptions in public spaces. As a form of inscription usually practiced outside the censoring arm of the power elite, graffiti confronts and contradicts the ordered and ordering space of institutionalized life. Thus by definition, graffiti is imbued with a polluting and vandalistic quality irrespective of its decorative potential. It threatens the status quo not just because of the words or images written, but by the fact that its execution in public spaces lies outside the control of existing social forces (2002:43)

David and Wilson also base this definition on Douglas’s (1966) concept of pollution and taboo, and claim that ‘when inscriptions cease to be seen as polluting, they cease to be graffiti, instead becoming public art or street decoration in the eyes of the controlling institutions’ (2002:43). However, David and Wilson’s definition assumes that spectators interpret graffiti equally, and fails to explain the role of intentionality in the process of production. In saying this, public art, road signage and even advertising can be polluting, and therefore, can be classified as graffiti.

In the context of this study, graffiti is defined as:

* A form of visual communication and intended human-made marking that occurs publicly on any fixed surface in the natural and built landscapes.

Graffiti is the overarching term I use for all public visual communication, regardless of authorship, form, material, technique, legality and social and cultural acceptances.
The term graffiti has been subject to numerous applications and is widely used to describe an act of expression that is unauthorised or illegal. It can include artistic expression of both two- and three-dimensions, however in the context of this research, the focus is on two-dimensional graffiti. In this thesis, I adopt a definition of the term that is less concerned with any specific legal issues. Certainly, graffiti is generally conceived as illegal behaviour; however, not all types of graffiti are illegal. Graffiti becomes illegal and/or vandalism when the author does not have a legal right to be making their mark on the surface they are marking. Section 2.4 offers a detailed explanation of the theoretical model on which the above definition is based.

1.3.2. An Archaeology of the Contemporary Past

In terms of archaeological research, modern society and researchers across the globe have tended to prioritise research on the ancient world while reducing emphasis on the recent and contemporary past. However, there has been an emergence of archaeological research into the contemporary past and modern material culture over the last thirty years, from Rathje (1979), Gould and Schiffer (1981), Shanks and Tilley (1987) to Graves-Brown (2000), Buchli and Lucas (2001), Holtorf (2005) and Harrison and Schofield (2009). Today, archaeologies of the contemporary past, or simply ‘contemporary archaeology’ is an established field of archaeology globally (Buchli 2007; Fisher 2012; Graves-Brown 2007; Hall 2006; Harrison 2009; Harrison and Schofield 2010; Holtorf 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009; Holtorf and Piccini 2009; Schofield 2000, 2005, 2009) and the basis of significant archaeological scholarship in Australia (Barker and Lamb 2009; Beck et al. 2002; Beck and Sommerville 2005; Brown 2010, 2012; Crisp 2010; Frederick 2009; Gorman 2009a, 2009b; Gorman and O’Leary 2007; Smith 2006; Smith and Beck 2003).

Analysis of modern material culture has the ability to play a significant role in understanding the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Indigenous societies. In many societies, including those of Indigenous Australia, not only the past is of significance; the present and indeed the future are of equal importance. Applications of contemporary archaeology have the potential to help move from a focus on the past to support the cultural practices and beliefs of contemporary peoples.
Furthermore, because contemporary archaeology is often community-based (Harrison and Schofield 2009:189), it empowers community members to direct and control their cultural heritage research and management (Stapp and Longenecker 2005:179).

**1.3.3. An Archaeology of Contemporary Graffiti**

In the Australian context ancient and pre-colonial landscape-markings are commonly referred to as ‘rock-art’, while contemporary markings are known as ‘graffiti’. Contemporary graffiti, within Aboriginal communities, are an example of a cultural practice that has survived European contact and the subsequent attempts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into European society. Contemporary Aboriginal visual cultures are therefore able to reveal similar information to their ancient counterparts (Frederick 2009; Frederick and O’Connor 2009; May 2008).

There is evidence to suggest that landscape-marking behaviours have been practiced in Jawoyn country for at least 28,000 years (The Australian 2012). Traditional landscape-markings, including ochre motifs on rock surfaces, are still practiced in contemporary Jawoyn society (e.g. Smith 1992a). A relatively new genre of contemporary landscape-marking, known as ‘graffiti’, is also practiced in Jawoyn country in both the natural and built environments.

Archaeological investigations into contemporary landscape-markings and art systems are gaining esteem in academic literature, both globally (Blake 1981; Chaffee 1993; Cocroft et al. 2006; Oliver and Neal 2010; Schofield 2010; Silva 2010) and locally (Clegg 1998; Crisp 2010; Field 2009; Frederick 2009; Scholten 2003). Yet there are few archaeological studies that focus on contemporary visual cultures of Indigenous Australian societies (Frederick and O’Connor 2009; May 2008; Smith 1994). While there has been linguistic and sociological studies into contemporary Indigenous graffiti (Nicholls 2000), no comprehensive archaeological study into this visual culture has taken place. This thesis offers an important contribution to the emerging field of the archaeology of contemporary visual cultures and undertakes an ethnographically-informed approach to data collection, interpretation and analysis.
1.4. Ethics and Terminology

In this thesis, cultural sensitivity is of extreme importance. There are protocols that researchers must adhere to when working with Indigenous groups. All research undertaken in these communities has the potential to undo delicate researcher-community relationships that have taken years to establish.

1.4.1. Ethics

Each aspect of this study was undertaken according to the research ethics defined by several Jawoyn elders in Wiynjoroc et al. (2005:316-327). This thesis abides by the Australian Heritage Commission’s *Ask First* guidelines (2012), the AIATSIS guidelines and the Codes of Ethics of the Australian Archaeological Association (2011) and the World Archaeological Congress (1991). The ethnographies recorded as part of this study have approval from the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of Flinders University under project 2563, ‘Indigenous arrival and lifestyles in southern Arnhem Land, N.T.’ of Professor Claire Smith, Department of Archaeology, Flinders University.

1.4.2. Terminology

In communicating the results of my research I do not strive to be politically correct with the terms and capitalisations that I use; I strive only to be accurate. When speaking generally and in a global context, I use the terms ‘Indigenous peoples’ and ‘First Nation peoples’ to refer to the original inhabitants of colonised areas and this approach is informed by research into the ethics of working with Indigenous peoples, such as Smith (1991) and Smith and Burke (2003:194). When referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, I use a capitalised ‘Indigenous’ to acknowledge that I am referring to a specific, collective group of peoples. Upon using the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’, I acknowledge that these are not one people, but an interconnected network of diverse culture and language
groups. Where possible, I refer to specific language groups by their appropriate name, such as ‘Jawoyn’.

In Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory it is acceptable to refer to Indigenous people as ‘blackfellas’ and non-Indigenous as ‘whitefellas’, or the Kriol *mununga* (Wiynjorroc et al. 2005). While these terms may be considered racist in non-Indigenous societies, this is far from the truth in Jawoyn communities. Nonetheless, I only use the terms ‘blackfella’, ‘whitefella’ and ‘*mununga*’ in relation to the ethnographies collected for this research.

Throughout this research, I use the term ‘landscape-markings’ to denote traditional Australian Aboriginal visual cultures. I do this in order to emphasise the relationship that these visual cultures have with the landscape (Taçon 1994). While I realise that ‘rock-art’ is the conventional term (Chippendale and Taçon 1998) I believe that it relies too heavily on a single method and surface type. The term ‘landscape-markings’ includes a range of production methods and types of surface. This term does not use the type of surface to draw distinctions between mark-making behaviours that could, in fact, be related in terms of social purpose.

Archaeologists use the term ‘contact’ to describe the relationship and exchange of materials and ideology between different cultures. I acknowledge that many cultures have come into contact with Indigenous groups, such as Macassan, Chinese and Japanese people (Clarke 1994; Clarke and Frederick; Mitchell 1994). However, in the context of this study, I use the term ‘contact’ to refer specifically to the relationship between Indigenous groups, European colonisers and the subsequent Australian federal government. The term ‘contact’ has come under scrutiny for various reasons, including the implication that the relationship between the relevant cultures has ended. Considering this, the term ‘cross-cultural exchange’ is gaining esteem in academia as the preferred term (Clarke and Torrence 2000), in part because it implies that there is an ongoing relationship (Turgeon 2004:21). However, to be consistent with current scholarship, I continue to use the term ‘contact’ and in doing so, recognise that contact was not a single event, but an ongoing process of relationships (Silliman 2005).
1.5. Thesis Outline

This chapter has introduced the questions, aims, issues and themes that this study addresses. It has set the foundation for the following chapters by outlining the study area, the significance of the study, the relevant ethical guidelines to which the research adheres and the various terms used within the thesis. Chapter Two situates this study in global and local terms and in relation to the relevant literature concerning contact archaeology and the archaeology of art. It provides the theoretical background to the study, the theoretical framework that shaped the methods undertaken in this research. It also provides a background to previous archaeological research undertaken in Jawoyn country. Chapter Three describes the methods used in data collection and analysis, the definition and identification of graffiti and the recording techniques undertaken during the field survey. The analytical and statistical methods used in this study are discussed in this chapter before an overview of the limitations of the data and the limitations of the study. Chapter Four presents the results of the data collected in Jawoyn country during the two field surveys that were undertaken in July and September 2011. Chapter Five interprets the data presented in Chapter Four and analyses the results in terms of the research aims.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter situates the study within the global and local contexts of archaeological literature. It outlines the background of the study area; evaluates the literature relative to social identity and traditional and contemporary landscape-markings; and constructs the theoretical frameworks on which this study is based.

2.1. Background to the Study Area

As outlined in Section 1.1, Jawoyn country is an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory and is home to approximately 1000 Indigenous people of various language groups and racial backgrounds. The political past of Jawoyn country has been less than ideal since colonisation; however, Jawoyn people have a rich cultural past, which is evident in their contemporary society and archaeological material.

2.1.1. Social and Cultural Background

Table 2.1 presents the populations of communities in the study area in terms of racial background according to the data from the 2011 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). This table does not represent the population of Jawoyn country in its entirety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Barunga</th>
<th>Beswick</th>
<th>Manyallaluk</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Aboriginal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Torres Strait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Populations of Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk according to racial background. Data from the 2011 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).
Table 2.2 (reproduced from Smith 2004:151) summarises the cultural descent of people from the Beswick community according to language group. While the data for this table was collected in 1999, it is nonetheless relevant to the current diversity of people from the Beswick community. As Table 2.2 demonstrates, when this thesis discusses people from Jawoyn country, it is referring to a diverse, interconnected group of people from at least 11 Aboriginal language groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jawoyn</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngalkpon</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rembarrnga</td>
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<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mielli</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Rithangu</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudburra</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingli</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woyala</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangurai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walpiri</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Beswick community profile according to language group. Reproduced from Smith (2004:151).

2.1.2. Political Background

During the 19th and 20th Centuries, Indigenous Australians, including people from Jawoyn communities, were subjected to the race-based and paternal policies of the Australian Federal Government, including protectionism and assimilation. These policies, which included legislative intervention into Indigenous culture and life-ways, were informed by the antiquated European view that Indigenous Australians were a homogenous, ‘simple’ and ‘child-like’ people (Lydon 2009:1-2; Smith
Although these particular policies have since lapsed, people from Jawoyn communities and indeed other Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory have been subjected to further race-based and paternal policies of a similar attitude, such as the NTER and its soon-to-be imposed successor, the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012*. Legislation such as the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* has imposed in every aspect of Aboriginal culture in the Northern Territory and intervened on their right to self-determination. The main policies of the Northern Territory Emergency Response include:

- blanket bans on alcohol and pornography;
- reduction and quarantining of welfare payments;
- removal of customary law and cultural practice considerations from bail applications and sentencing within criminal proceedings;
- removal of the permit system which stopped non-Indigenous people entering Indigenous land; and
- abolishing the Community Development Employment Project, which gave hundreds of Indigenous people paid employment throughout the Northern Territory.

One of the more invasive measures of the NTER was the erection of large blue road signs on the boundaries of each community and township (Figure 2.1). These signs interpret some aspects of the NTER and outline the penalties for not complying.

*Figure 2.1 NTER sign on the border of Jawoyn country, near the Stuart Highway.*
In terms of archaeological approaches to the paradigm of domination and resistance, Tilley (1995:46) argues that discourse is one way to obtain power. Discourse in the form of graffiti on the signs pictured in Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 is an illustration of resistance to the policies of the dominating NTER. Examples of this resistance can be found 1000 km south of the study area at the Yuendumu community, as well as other Central Australian communities.

![Figure 2.2 NTER graffiti at Yuendumu. Reproduced from Tracker (2011).](image)

![Figure 2.3 NTER graffiti from Central Australia. ‘Kuna Rurrpa’ roughly translates to ‘busted asshole’. Reproduced from NT News (2011).](image)

This thesis does not discuss the new Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012 because it was not legislation during the time of the data collection. Instead, this thesis centres on the NTER.
2.1.3. Archaeological Background

This study joins a network of archaeological investigations in Jawoyn country that have taken place over the last sixty years. Beginning with Macintosh in the 1940s and 50s (1951, 1952, 1977), Jawoyn people saw the first archaeological investigations into their traditional landscape-markings at the Tanandjal Cave and Beswick Creek Cave. Macintosh was aware in the late 1940s of the value of involving Aboriginal people in archaeological research (1952:256). Elkin (1952) conducted similar investigations during the 1940s and 50s.

More recently, Smith has worked closely with members of Jawoyn communities since 1990, and this collaboration continues today. This relationship has been the basis for Smith’s doctoral thesis into the role of style in Aboriginal art systems (1994); Smith has also produced several historical and archaeological publications from this research (1992b, 1993, 2004, 2008). Informed by researcher-community relationships and experiences in community-based collaboration, Smith and her colleagues have contributed to the academic debate of ethics in archaeological research (Burke and Smith 2008; Jackson and Smith 2005; Smith and Burke 2003; Smith and Jackson 2008; Smith and Wobst 2005; Wiynjorroc et al. 2005).

Since 2010, David has been conducting fieldwork in Jawoyn country under the Jawoyn Homeland Project (Caring for Country 2012). This projects seeks to ‘address [the] gap in our knowledge, [and] aims to date the rock art and understand its past social and environmental contexts through archaeological, geomorphological and biogeographic methods’ (Caring for Country 2012). Major discoveries have been made under this project, including the earliest relative dates for traditional landscape-markings in the area, which may be as early as 40,000BP (Gunn 2011). The motif bears much resemblance to the Genyornis newtoni which became extinct at least 40,000BP, however, a definitive association is unproven. At the Australian Archaeological Association Annual Conference 2011, David et al. (2011) reported that the team were awaiting results from radiocarbon dating of charcoal motifs at the Nawarla Gabarnmang rock shelter. In June 2012, a newspaper article (The Australian 2012) reported that the results of the radiocarbon dating found that the motifs are approximately 28,000BP, which is amongst the oldest dates for rock-art in Australia.
Research for many archaeological Honours theses have been undertaken in Jawoyn country for the last decade. These include Barker’s (2000) post-excavation study into archaeobotany at a rock shelter, Brett’s (2001) study into a nexus of community education and Indigenous archaeology, Damhuis’ (2003) study of hand stencils in landscape-markings, Slizankiewicz’s (2012) study of depictions of feet in landscape-markings and indeed this thesis. Most of the aforementioned studies involved research into social identity.
2.2. Landscape-Markings and Social Identity

Burke (1999:25) argues that traces of one’s identity and ideology can be found in the archaeological record as they are ‘expressed, sometimes deliberately, mostly unknowingly and often materially. Studies into Indigenous art systems demonstrate that identity is instilled in the form, material and content of visual cultures (Sanz et al. 2008; Smith 1994, 2008). The following section examines how identity is communicated through landscape-markings and art systems.

2.2.1. Ancient Indigenous Australian Landscape-Markings and Art Systems

Ancient Indigenous Australian landscape-markings are a form of intended ‘style as communication’ (Wobst 1977). One reason why Australian archaeologists engage with ancient landscape-markings is because they are a record of past human behaviour fixed in the landscape. Landscape-markings have received much academic interest in Australia due both to their abundance (c. 125,000 sites across Australia: Taçon et al. 2008:195) and their ability to reveal information about social identity through the depiction of past social activities, economies, material culture and ideologies (McDonald 2012; Morwood 2002:148). This landscape-marking practice was utilised by ancient Aboriginal cultures to communicate time, place and identity and should not be considered ‘art for art’s sake’ (Sanz et al. 2008:15). While I do not want to undermine the role that aesthetics may play in landscape-marking production and the communication of ideas (Heyd and Clegg 2005), this is not the focus of my research; I am looking at Indigenous visual culture as a form of cultural communication rather than a form of creative endeavour.

May’s (2008:192-193) research into contemporary commercial art in Arnhem Land reveals that the ‘subject matter of paintings are influenced by one’s teacher, clan, age, individual artistic flair, [and] canvas’ and that the images have different meanings to people of different standings within the community. Considering these issues, the complexities and subjectivities involved in ancient landscape-marking interpretation become apparent. Graffiti research, similar to May’s (2008) and Smith’s (1994 2008) research into contemporary Indigenous mobile art, has the
ability to avoid these problems because archaeologists can interact with artists to identify information about intentionality and identity. This ethnographically-informed approach can expose much more detailed information about individuality (Macdonald 2001), political and social ideology, and the ‘presence of the past in the present’ (Frederick 2009) than the study of landscape-markings from the distant past.

2.2.2. Contemporary Graffiti in a Global Context

Popular culture has helped to consolidate the view that the practice of graffiti is a relatively new phenomenon, and that it ‘begins in the battered subways and urine-stained alleys of New York and Philadelphia’ (Oliver and Neal 2010:1). This is not altogether true; graffiti has been practiced for generations by many different cultures and civilizations (Baird and Taylor 2011). Although the majority of contemporary graffiti is considered illegal it is practiced by a variety of authors of different ages, genders and backgrounds (Macdonald 2001).

Silva (2010:81) argues that graffiti is a powerful tool to communicate and propagate identity, ideas and opinions. Graffiti and ‘clandestine mural paintings’ were used as a political weapon in Portugal during the civil unrest in the 1960s and 1970s. Silva argues that individuals used graffiti as an avenue to propagate their opinions as an act of resistance to the governmental control they opposed. Style and form was not important in this instance; but the content of the message was because it was occasionally the only medium people had to argue for their beliefs. The availability of new technology and techniques such as spray cans increased the presence of graffiti in the street (Silva 2010:84). This expression was far from considered art. Being caught writing anti-fascist and anti-colonialist graffiti in Portugal at the time held with it the punishment of military conscription and direct placement on the front line of one of Portugal’s African skirmishes.

Chaffee (1993:3) argues that people use the method of communication they consider the most effective, and this depends upon historical and cultural circumstances. Chaffee (1993:4) further argues that people write graffiti as a form of protest and
resistance. Simpler than this, people write it because of a lack of access to other forms of media due to financial and/or physical boundaries.

### 2.2.3. Contemporary Graffiti in a Local Context

Scholten’s (2003) research examines the role that visual cultures played in expressing emotion and identity in the mark-making behaviour of Australian convicts. Scholten (2003:63) argues that a person’s past, present and culture directly influences what they write. Oliver and Neal (2010:2) agree, by saying that graffiti ‘operate as signifiers of memory and identity, acknowledging a wider range of actors, times, spaces and concerns’. Oliver and Neal (2010) also argue that the information found in graffiti may not be available in any other dialogue or media. There is no authority regulating, or indeed censoring the content, which makes graffiti an ideal avenue through which researchers can learn about subjects that are foreign, private, taboo or simply not spoken about. Frederick (2009:229) argues further that graffiti is effective for researchers because it has a certain rawness and legitimacy into the thoughts of individuals due to the lack of censorship and control.

### 2.2.4. Contemporary Graffiti in an Indigenous Australian Context

At the Nawarla Gabarnmang shelter in Jawoyn country, the most recent dates of traditional landscape-markings are believed to be as recent as 400-100BP (1600-1900). Paintings at this shelter are believed to be so recent, in part, because of the possible depiction of introduced pastoral animals (Gunn 2011). Initial European settlement in Australia occurred less than 230BP (1788) however, colonial expansion into the Katherine region of the Northern Territory was not established until 1913-1926, 40 years after the settlement of Darwin. We know that traditional landscape-marking is still practiced in Jawoyn country on the basis of the video-recording Jungayi: caring for country (Smith 1992a). Colonial expansion caused very rapid changes in the way Indigenous Australians, including Jawoyn, lived and affected diet, health, welfare, language and technology. These changes are evident in all aspects of contemporary Indigenous material culture and landscape-markings. While
Indigenous material culture and landscape-markings have changed and adapted to European colonisation, intangible culture and relationships with country have continued and survived into the contemporary world (Smith 2004).

The factors that determine the spatial distribution of graffiti are a major theme in this research and analysis. The content, form, style, technique, method, material, message and indeed every aspect of graffiti is determined by its location. Surveillance, access, prospective audience and the author’s relationship with the site are all factors that contribute to the location of graffiti (Blake 1981; Cocroft 2006; Crisp 2010; Frederick 2009; Frederick and O’Connor 2009; Schofield 2010:71).

Nicholls (2000) conducted a comparative analysis of contemporary graffiti in Lajamanu, a Warlpiri community in central Australia and the graffiti of young, white, middle-class Australians at Adelaide universities. This sociological and linguistic study identified the most common types of Warlpiri graffiti as individual tags, such as:

MARY SIMPSON NAKAMARRA
ONE AND ONLY (Nicholls 2000:84).

Other individual tags featured only the author’s initials. Nicholls explains that an extension of this graffiti type is to make a declaration, such as:

JNJ
RNJ
WE ARE THE BEST
GOT THAT SUCKERS (Nicholls 2000:85).

Furthermore, associations with family and kin groups feature prominently in Warlpiri graffiti, such as the below list of initials and accompanying statement:

JRJ
PPJ
NPJ
RDJ
LMJ
Only Five Best Brothers in Yuendumu (Nicholls 2000:86).

Nicholls (2000:88) concludes from this research that non-Indigenous graffiti authors ‘locate themselves as existing outside of the parameters of established kinship
structures’, whereas this was the direct opposite for Warlpiri graffiti. Nicholls (2000:90) explains further that the ‘graffiti of young Warlpiri Australians is not opinionated… aggressive perhaps, but not characterised by personal opinion’. Nicholls’ study highlights that graffiti as it is practiced in Warlpiri communities is more concerned with establishing one’s existence and one’s associations with family groups. The findings of Nicholls’ study inform the graffiti classifications used in this research.
2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. Decolonising Archaeology

Research into decolonising archaeology and contact archaeology inform the theoretical and methodological approaches undertaken in this study. Over the last few decades the archaeological discipline has witnessed a shift from research about Indigenous cultures to research with, for and by Indigenous cultures. There has been much academic debate on this issue recently (Hemming and Trevorrow 2005; Smith 1991: Jackson and Smith 2005; Ouzman 2005; Smith and Wobst 2005; Wiynjorroc et al. 2005; Wobst 2005). Highlighted in this debate are the rights of Indigenous peoples to seek ownership over their intellectual and cultural property and direct its management (Smith and Wobst 2005). This approach is not only expected, required or encouraged in archaeological research with Indigenous groups: it is now the ethical and professional norm. This decolonising archaeology attitude uses ethnographic sources to inform an archaeological approach to the interpretation of unfamiliar artefacts and practices from a cultural perspective (David and Kramer 2001:2) and to understand material patterning in relation to attachments to place (Beck et al. 2002; Beck and Sommerville 2005; Byrne 1996). Although it is impossible to remove a researcher’s bias from archaeological interpretations, simply being aware of the issues raised in the decolonising archaeology debate allows the Indigenous voice to be heard, for a more ‘socially responsible’ archaeology (Smith and Wobst 2005: 394).

This study takes an ethnographically-informed approach as part of the decolonising archaeology framework to address the research question and aims. An ethnographically-informed approach offers two distinct advantages for this study. Firstly, it is widely used out of respect to the Traditional Owners, and to acknowledge their ownership over their ancestral cultural and intellectual property. This reasoning forms part of the theory of decolonising archaeology that gives control over archaeological research to community elders (Smith and Wobst 2005:7). As an indication of the strength of this approach to Indigenous archaeologies, one only need examine the presence of ethnographically-informed archaeological research in recent publications in Indigenous archaeology (including, but not limited
to, Beck et al. 2002; Beck and Sommerville 2005; Lydon 2009; Sanz, Fiore and May 2008; Smith 1992, 2004, 2008; Smith and Jackson 2010). The second advantage to an ethnographically-informed approach lies with the interpretation of cultural material. For the successful interpretation of artefacts, an archaeologist/researcher must employ inference and analogy (David and Kramer 2001:1). An ethnographically-informed approach provides the means through which a researcher can interpret the practices and artefacts of a different culture. In the interpretation of contemporary Aboriginal graffiti, it is useful to draw insights from members of the community and the authors of the graffiti themselves.

**2.3.2. Contact Archaeology**

While Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory have come into contact with different cultures, this research focuses on contact between Aboriginal groups and the Europeans that colonised Australia. Archaeological and historical researchers of colonial contact agree that in each settler society, there are multiple versions of the histories of these societies (Meskell 1998). These opposing perspectives derive from the differing beliefs and agendas of European colonisers and First Nation peoples. The histories of First Nation peoples, mainly from North America, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand is generally invalidated and dismissed by members of Western society, while Western colonial history is intensely propagated, drowning out the Indigenous voice. Lynn Meskell (1998) argues that academic archaeological research has the potential to contribute to a more informed understanding of the past; one that does justice to both Indigenous and Western peoples and that can assist in cultural reconciliation.

Lydon’s research (2009) into the archaeology of contact at an Aboriginal mission near Warracknabeal in Victoria argues that Indigenous and European Australians have different attitudes towards material culture. European Australians tend to relate quality and quantity of material goods to a higher social standing; the distribution of clothing and other items to Indigenous Australians was a strategy for assimilation (Lydon 2009:149). Lydon highlights the failure of European Australians, particularly Victorian missionaries in the late 19th Century, to understand or even acknowledge
the significance of complex Indigenous kinship systems and other intangible cultures (2009:45). Lydon’s research illustrates the issues that surface in contact archaeology, particularly when the researcher is of a different cultural background to the people of the focus area. This study seeks to use a decolonising approach to the data in order to reconcile the issues outlined by Lydon while maintaining the ethical basis of decolonising archaeology.
2.4. Theoretical Model

2.4.1. Actor-Network Theory and Intentionality

A theoretical model was developed in order to obtain a nuanced understanding of contemporary landscape-markings in the study area (Figure 2.4). This involved a redevelopment of popular conceptions towards the classification of graffiti and draws upon actor-network theory, in which a ‘disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods for analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located’ (Law 2007:2). The application of actor-network theory to this study interprets communication through landscape-marking as existing in a web of interdependent relationships which are embedded in empirical, materially-grounded practices (Callon 2006). In terms of this study, actors in this web include governments, communities and individuals who communicate their own experiences and agendas through the action of landscape-marking. As Couldry (2004:1) points out, both human and non-human entities within these webs ‘acquire power through the number, extensiveness and stability of the connections routed through them’.

Figure 2.4 - Theoretical model according to authorship.
The theoretical model used in this study also draws upon Smith’s (1994) research into style and intentionality in Indigenous art systems. Smith argues that the intentions of the author are rarely reflected in the audience’s interpretation (Figure 2.5). Furthermore, the presentation/interpretation of visual cultures are influenced by the author’s/audience’s identity (Smith 1994:31). Actor-network theory and intentionality are an ideal basis for the model pictured in Figure 2.4 as they assist in understanding the network of contemporary landscape-markings and the intentions of its actors.

As outlined in Section 1.3.1, graffiti is defined as an intended human-made marking that occurs publicly in the natural and built landscapes. Graffiti is used in this study as an overarching term for all public visual communication, regardless of authorship, form, material, technique, message, legality and social and cultural acceptances. In saying that, graffiti can be classified into three groups: ‘uncommissioned’, ‘commissioned’ and ‘official’. These classifications are based on the permissions, or
lack thereof, that legalise or indeed criminalise the practice, rather than the core social attitudes that are attached to it. The theoretical model illustrated in Figure 2.4 demonstrates how graffiti classifications may differ, and how they may intersect. The model used in this thesis works on the basis of a new understanding of the term ‘graffiti’: one that is less concerned with contemporary social attitudes.

2.4.2. Official Graffiti

Official graffiti is defined as markings made to govern, inform, instruct and control. Joe Hermer and Alan Hunt define this classification in the article ‘Official Graffiti of the Everyday’ as:

… the ubiquitous road traffic signs, the signs displayed on buildings of public access, Entry and Exit (or In and Out), and those that have more recently invaded the private sphere with the mushrooming of that most invasive and emblematic piece of official graffiti, the prohibition circle with its diagonal red slash across the circle warning, for example, No Smoking. (1996:455-456).

Institutions including businesses, local councils, government departments and other organisations predominantly author these inter-group messages in the form of official graffiti. In addition to the examples typified by Hermer and Hunt (1996), official graffiti includes everything from the white lines and arrows painted on road surfaces to geodetic survey markers. While official graffiti is legal, commissioned, regulated and institutionalised, it is an unnegotiated government action, and can be offensive to and unsanctioned by individuals from the wider community (Figure 2.6).
Commissioned graffiti is defined as public art and advertising such as authorised murals, sculptures, statues, billboards and posters. This is a negotiated community action involving intra-group and inter-group messaging. Prior permission is sought for commissioned graffiti in the form of verbal or written contracts, often with an exchange of capital. There is a fine line between what constitutes commissioned and uncommissioned graffiti. The two classifications are so closely linked that authors, styles, forms, materials, techniques and messages of commissioned graffiti are frequently interchangeable with those of uncommissioned graffiti.
2.4.4. Uncommissioned Graffiti

Uncommissioned graffiti is defined as markings that do not have appropriate permissions. These are the uncensored and uninstitutionalised markings made by individuals as intra-group and inter-group messages, often in the form of, but in no way limited to, the ‘tags’ one would find spray-painted on a wall or train. Much of the graffiti in this classification can be construed as vandalism. However Macdonald (2001) argues that there is still a purpose behind the practice. Practitioners of this landscape-marking behaviour do so to associate and communicate with other members of a group, to propagate personal ideals or even to demarcate boundaries and eternalise their presence.

![An example of uncommissioned graffiti superimposed on official graffiti.](image)

The tripartite classificatory system developed for this study is important for understanding the nature of graffiti in Jawoyn country as well as the actors and agents involved in its production and reception. The focus of this research is the uncommissioned graffiti present in the study area, that is, the apparently illegitimate markings that are commonly used to express identity. However, instances of commissioned and official graffiti play a large role in the graffiti analysis, particularly in cases where cultural identity is impacted (Figure 2.6).
2.5. Discussion

The archaeological literature examined above outlines the key themes in current archaeology that shaped the theory and methods employed in this thesis. The frameworks of decolonising and contact archaeology have informed my understanding of the historical and contemporary circumstances in which Indigenous archaeologies are constructed. Together with the archaeology of the contemporary past, they frame how power and discourse are central to the understanding of graffiti as a landscape-marking in Indigenous society. They also demonstrate the advantages of using a collaborative community approach. An awareness of other graffiti research has alerted me to the potential for contemporary landscape-marking to reveal information about social identity. Research into actor-network theory and intentionality has assisted in developing a theoretical model that informs and directs the methods taken to record and analyse contemporary landscape-markings in this study.
Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter describes the methods used in data collection and analysis; the definition and identification of graffiti; recording techniques; analytical and statistical methods that address the number, extensiveness and stability of graffiti in order to assess the realms of power within which they exist; the limitations of the data; and the limitations of the study.

3.1. Defining Graffiti

As outlined in Sections 1.3.1 and 2.4, this study is based on a broad understanding of the term ‘graffiti’, which is inclusive of a wide range of communication devices such as legal, regulated traffic signs, public murals and illegal urban tags. To reiterate, this study defines graffiti as follows:

_A form of visual communication and an intended human-made marking that occurs publicly on any fixed surface in the natural and built landscapes._

This definition, in conjunction with the theoretical model (Figure 2.4) maintains a degree of fluidity and flexibility, as demonstrated by the different levels of graffiti classification. This approach is consistent with archaeological approaches to style as communication (Wobst 1977; McDonald 2012; Ouzman 2007).
3.2. Selection of Sites

As noted in Section 1.1, the data for this project was collected from the Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk communities in Jawoyn country, Northern Territory, Australia. Sites for this study are separated into two categories: aggregation and corridor. Aggregation sites are areas where people meet, such as road intersections, signboard shelters and other meeting places. Aggregation sites have specific material signatures (Conkey 1998) that suggest they are commonly used by a number of people, such as high-density of graffiti, and diverse material objects. Corridor sites are the pathways people use to access aggregation sites. In this study, the Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road are identified as corridors, while the associated road signs act as supports for uncommissioned graffiti.

All road signs in the study area were deemed to be official graffiti. These sites were surveyed and recorded. They include 237 signs from the Central Arnhem Road and 40 signs from the Manyallaluk Road. Incorporating such official graffiti within the survey allowed for insight into the relative power relations between community and government. It also provided an opportunity to assess place-based relationships in terms of the juxtaposition between the official graffiti signage and the uncommissioned graffiti markings.

Road signs were divided into two categories: government-authored and community-authored (Table 3.1). Government-authored signs consist of signs that have been erected by State and Federal Governments and are typified as general information signs, government policy signs or road information signs. Community-authored signs are signs that are either part of the natural landscape or have been erected for the community and are categorised as community business signs, cultural awareness signs, environmental signs, landscape graffiti or painted barrel. Specific information on individual signs within each of the categories displayed below was also recorded and some of these include chevrons, floodway, and welcome signs. This was done to understand the role that canvas content plays in graffiti production. These categories are based on the content and/or the physical appearance of the sign.
As well as road signs, three signboard shelters were recorded in this survey (Figure 3.1). These shelters have a direct relationship with associated road signs. For example, the shelters are located on the boundaries of liquor restriction areas, demarcated by signs such as the blue NTER sign. These shelters are aggregation sites and they are located between eight and thirty kilometres outside of each township. The shelters are named according to the closest township, except for the Jawoyn shelter. The Jawoyn shelter is named as such because it is the only one in use today and accommodates people from the three communities. The Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk shelters were erected over a period of 30 years and have been decommissioned over the last ten years. The Beswick and Manyallaluk shelters have been decommissioned since 2005, leaving the Barunga shelter as the only active shelter between 2005 and 2007. Since the introduction of the NTER in 2007, the Barunga shelter has been demolished and the Jawoyn shelter was erected.

There are two reasons why the survey focussed on sites outside of community townships. Firstly, and most importantly, I did not want to interfere or intrude on the lives of Jawoyn people. I felt that examining graffiti in the interior of community townships might be perceived as an invasion of privacy. Secondly, I wanted to explore the ways in which people respond to the governmental policy under the NTER and the most direct way to achieve this was to survey sites that had a direct relationship to the NTER, such as the blue signboards and the signboard shelters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Community-authored</th>
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</thead>
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<td>General Information</td>
<td>Community Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Policy</td>
<td>Cultural/Environmental Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Information</td>
<td>Landscape Graffiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Painted Barrel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1 Classifications of road signs**
Figure 3.1 Signboard shelters.
A: Barunga shelter.
B: Beswick shelter.
C: Manyallaluk (Eva Valley) shelter. D. Jawoyn shelter.
3.3. Field Surveys

Two data collection field surveys were undertaken for this study. The first field survey occurred over four days in July 2011 with assistance from ten students enrolled in the Flinders University Rock Art Field School (ARCH3307). The second survey occurred over ten days in September 2011 with assistance from Natalie Bittner, Andrew Crisp and Rebekah-Christine Leonardos. Both surveys were based in Barunga and we commuted to relevant sites each morning. The survey strategy followed that of Crisp (2010) Scholten (2003), Field (2009) and O’Regan (2007), which was to record instances of graffiti found on identified graffiti supports within the study area.

3.3.1. Recording Techniques

To begin, the uncommissioned graffiti on each of the road signs along the Central Arnhem and Manyallaluk Roads was recorded. Starting from the Stuart Highway and travelling towards the township of Beswick, every road sign along the Central Arnhem Road was surveyed until we reached Beswick, regardless of whether it featured graffiti or not. The data was recorded onto a pro-forma (Appendix 2). After surveying 237 road signs along the Central Arnhem Road, 40 road signs were surveyed along the Manyallaluk Road, travelling from south to north until we reached Manyallaluk.

Each of the signboard shelters was surveyed for graffiti and the data was documented onto a pro-forma specifically formulated for these shelters. An example pro-forma can be found in Appendix 3. Site plans were produced of each shelter using two methods: baseline-offset and dumpy level survey. The main reason why alternate methods were used to produce site plans is that in the first field trip, we only had access to equipment for a baseline offset. The time-consuming nature of the baseline-offset technique was the reasoning behind bringing a dumpy level on the second field trip.

A community representative was present while conducting the surveys; if no one was available we conducted our survey according to Wiynjorroc et al.’s (2005)
recommendations and sought permission from *Gitjan* (owner), Sybil Ranch, before proceeding. Every aspect of the field survey and indeed after-hours activities were done with the approval and oversight of community Elders. Jawoyn people that assisted in the field surveys were Rachael Willika, Sybil Ranch, Aileen, Peter Lindsay and Old Gela man. Community representatives were paid for their time and assistance according to the guidelines set out by Burke and Smith of $25 per hour (2004:13).
3.4. Recording Techniques

3.4.1. Material Data

The recording form used to document the graffiti data can be found in Appendix 3. One form per road sign was used to document individual graffiti motifs. These motifs were then classified into motif type and production technique categories as outlined in Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2. Motifs were also logged onto the recording form. A similar recording form was used for boundary shelters, an example of which can be found in Appendix 3. One form per shelter was used, with an accompanying list that logged each of the motifs found at the sites. The data from these recording forms was then entered into a Microsoft Excel® spread sheet. Along with the pro-formas, graffiti was photographed with a Canon SLR digital camera.

Site plans of each of the shelters were produced during the field surveys. This process was carried out using the baseline-offset survey and dumpy level survey, following the methods outlined in Burke and Smith (2004). This allowed us to gather a comprehensive inventory of the material culture associated with each site, which in turn facilitated a better understanding of how people had used these sites.

3.4.2. Ethnographic Data

As outlined in Section 2.3.1, this study takes an ethnographically-informed approach to the research questions and aims as part of a decolonising archaeology framework. Ethnographic data was collected during the field surveys to complement and inform the material data. This data was collected through informal, opportunistic conversations rather than structured interviews. Initially, electronic recording equipment was used. However it became clear that this approach was ineffective as people were visibly uncomfortable and less forthcoming with information when the voice recorder was turned on. In order to impede any intimidation or mistrust, ethnographies were recorded using pen and paper. At the end of each day, ethnographies were shown to participants to ensure accuracy and consent. Ethnographies were collected from Old Gela, Peter Lindsay and Rachael Willika in
the form of unstructured interviews, using the methods outlined by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). Transcripts of ethnographies can be found in Appendix 1.
3.5. Classification Methods

3.5.1. Motif Types

The survey revealed that instances of uncommissioned graffiti were made by both the addition and subtraction (erasure) of marks. These graffiti take the form of text and illustration and both are referred to here as motifs. Uncommissioned graffiti motifs were recorded and classified according to the seven content categories listed below. These categories are aimed at distinguishing individual and group messaging and identifying the relationship between them. Nicholls’ (2000) study of Warlpiri graffiti assisted in forming these categories, more categories were added as they were identified.

**Individual tag:** The names or initials of an individual, occasionally followed by a version of the phrase ‘was here’ or simply ‘W-H’. An individual tag may also include aliases. It is possible that individual tags have a relationship with hand stencils and depictions of hand prints in traditional landscape-marking as Rosenfeld (1999:30) explains ‘hand stencils are perceived and commented on as evidence of the former presence of individuals, sometimes known and named individuals, at other times the 'old people', but still as individual persons’.

**Group tag:** The names or initials of a group/s of people. Includes references to kinship groups and sports teams. It should be noted that when a motif had five or more letters and was not considered an English or Kriol word, this was classified as a group tag in the form of people’s initials.

**Individual declaration:** A statement or question from an individual.

**Group declaration:** A statement or question from a group. Note: when individual or group authorship is not evident, the motif was categorised as an individual declaration.

**Erasure:** An erased or buffed motif.

**Illustration:** A drawing, image or symbol i.e. not a word, name or letter. Includes stickers and temporary tattoos.
Indistinct: A motif that was illegible for reasons including poor technique and superimposition.

3.5.2. Creation Techniques

Graffiti creation techniques were recorded according to the categories defined below. The categories of technique identify how the graffiti was made by suggesting the kinds of tools that were likely used and how the tool was applied as well as any specific mediums that may have been incorporated (eg. charcoal or permanent ink).

**Metal engraving:** A motif that was carved/engraved using a manufactured metal object (keys, knives etc.). These are characterised by deep, fine, precise lines in the motif.

**Stone engraving:** A motif that was carved/engraved using a stone or rock. These are characterised by multiple parallel lines that are shallow, rough, thick and ill-defined.

**Natural pigment:** A motif that was produced by applying dirt, mud or charcoal to the support.

**Marker:** A motif produced using marker pens, pencils, paint or correction fluid.

**Sticker:** A motif produced by applying a self-adhesive sticker or temporary tattoo to the graffiti support.

**Aerosol:** A motif produced by applying the contents of a spray-paint can to the graffiti support.
3.6. Analysis of Data

3.6.1. Statistical Methods

Information on the content and production characteristics of each graffiti motif was recorded from the field survey recording forms directly into a spread sheet on the Microsoft Excel® computer program for statistical analysis. Using the Excel program, the data was interpreted into column graphs that offer a visual representation of the data. The statistical methods are informed by actor-network theory, in particular, Couldry’s (2004:1) assertion that both human and non-human entities within these networks ‘acquire power through the number, extensiveness and stability of the connections routed through them’. Accordingly, the statistical analysis evaluates the number, extensiveness and stability of markings, in order to assess their power as a form of communication and the realms of power within which they operate.
3.7. Limitations of the Data

It is possible that some instances of graffiti were missed in the survey, as some signs have been removed or are only partially there (e.g. Figure 4.4). However, the methods in terms of site selection were designed to counter this possibility, and while some specific information may not have been located, it is unlikely that this would change the overall patterning. Furthermore, graffiti is an ephemeral visual culture; due to its conceived vandalistic nature, graffiti tends to be erased quite quickly (Crisp 2010:8). However, there were only a few circumstances of ‘official’ graffiti removal; individuals enacted all other graffiti removal.

My approach to ethnographic data was constrained by my racial and cultural background. In many Aboriginal cultures, including Jawoyn, rights to knowledge depend on your age, gender and standing in the community. My age, gender and race may have impacted on the knowledge provided to me during field-work. I found that the more time I spent with people, the greater the level of trust between us and that this invited a comfortable exchange of information.
3.8. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by four principal factors. Firstly, this study is constrained by my lack of knowledge of the Kriol language as this impacted on my interpretation of many of the graffiti motifs. This was overcome, however, through the use of ethnographic data. This study, as far as I know, does not deal with any secret or sacred information; however, some of the motifs contained sensitive information as they involved explicit and offensive words or sexually graphic images. Secondly, the data for this study was collected for a specific group in a particular time and place. The specificity of this study inhibits the degree to which the study can be generalised to other places or times—though it may suggest areas of inquiry. Thirdly, three forms of graffiti were identified in the theoretical model for this study. As two of the three types were found in the areas surveyed, so the analysis presented in this thesis concentrates on the categories of official and uncommissioned graffiti. Finally, in many ways, this is a pilot study that researches new ground in Australian archaeology. However, a synthesis of research into contemporary urban graffiti and traditional Indigenous landscape marking assisted in forming the theoretical and methodological frameworks on which this study is grounded.
3.9. Discussion

This chapter has outlined the methods used in the data collection and analysis. It also demonstrates the site selection process, of which there are two reasons. Firstly, the sites examined in this study are located outside of community townships and, secondly, these sites have a direct relationship with the NTER, which is one of the focusses of this study. This chapter also outlines and explains the field surveys, recording techniques and graffiti classifications, which are based on other archaeological research into graffiti and landscape-markings such as Crisp (2010) Scholten (2003), Field (2009) and O’Regan (2007). The limitations of the data and of the study are highlighted in this chapter, and include the removal or absence of sites, the ephemeral nature of graffiti. Furthermore, my identity impacted on the study, as did the specificity of the study area and the absence of commissioned graffiti. The lack of existing literature regarding contemporary Indigenous graffiti also impacted on this study. The following chapter applies the methods outlined in this chapter in terms of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the results of the field surveys conducted for this research and highlights how social identity is conveyed through contemporary landscape-marking behaviours in Jawoyn country. The data presented in this chapter demonstrates how members of Jawoyn communities inscribe their identities in the landscape. The roles that governmental policy and social strategy have played in communication through landscape-marking are major themes of this analysis.

The results reveal information about the landscape-markings at corridors and aggregation sites outside of community townships. Section 4.1 outlines the motifs recorded on 277 road signs along corridors, the Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road. Section 4.2 introduces aggregation sites, the Barunga, Beswick, Manyallaluk and Jawoyn shelters. This section demonstrates how trends in motif types and creation techniques differ between shelters. Sections 4.3 to 4.6 present the data collected at each of the shelters and discusses the material culture associated with each site. These sections offer a more detailed examination of graffiti motif types and creation techniques at each of the shelters.
4.1. Corridors: Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road

4.1.1. Overview

This section examines the results of the field survey that recorded 277 potential graffiti supports along 96 km of the Central Arnhem and Manyallaluk Roads. These roads are the main highways linking the three Jawoyn communities of the study area. Members of these communities use the roads as corridors to conduct community business, access meeting shelters and utilise the resources of nearby Katherine. The majority of the 277 sites are road signs. The data also includes a graffitied rock, tree and a painted barrel, however, I will also refer to these as signs. This section identifies the preferred road sign for graffiti production as well as the preferred motif type and creation techniques.

4.1.2. Sign Authorship

Figure 4.1 indicates that out of 277 road signs, 95% are government-authored while only 5% are community-authored. This demonstrates the relative agency of each group through formal signage.
Figure 4.2 demonstrates that graffiti was found on 53% of 262 government-authored signs and 67% of 15 community-authored signs; overall, 54% of 277 signs contain graffiti (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Signs with graffiti versus signs without graffiti.

Road signs contain a total of 1401 motifs; 1238 (88%) occur on government-authored signs while 163 (12%) occur on community-authored signs. Figure 4.3 records the occurrence of motifs in relation to the authorship of signs. Community-authored signs represent 5% of the sign population; however, they contain almost three times the percentage of graffiti motifs at 12%. The majority of graffiti motifs occur on government-authored signs. This is due to the relevant prevalence of this sign type, as shown in Figure 4.1. Sign authorship evidently plays a significant role in the choice of canvas for graffiti production. Authorship groups are separated into more specific categories as identified in Table 4.1.

Figure 4.3 Percentage of motifs according to sign authorship.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Individual Type (n=number of signs)</th>
<th>Total Sites</th>
<th>Total Motifs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government-authored</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| General Information              | • Community Area (3)  
• Creek/River Name (8)  
• Directional/Distance Marker (9)  
• Don’t Drink and Drive (8)  
• Landfill (4)  
• Look For People (3)  
• Police Station (1)  
• Underground Cable/Gas (5)  
• Wear Your Seatbelt (7) | 48          | 120          |
| Government Policy                | • Aboriginal Land Permit Zone (1)  
• Liquor Act Warning (3)  
• NTIER Sign (4) | 8           | 168          |
| Road Information                 | • Chevron (4)  
• Crest (3)  
• Flood Height Marker (8)  
• Floodway (86)  
• Gravel Road (1)  
• Grid Sign (2)  
• Guiderail (7)  
• No Overtaking (2)  
• One Lane (2)  
• Pedestrians (9)  
• Reduce Speed (13)  
• Road Closed (9)  
• Road Curvature (7)  
• Road Narrows (5)  
• Rough Surface (4)  
• Small Chevron (6)  
• Speed Limit (20)  
• Steep Ascent/Descent (6)  
• T Junction (5)  
• Warning (5)  
• Weight Limit (1)  
• Miscellaneous (1) | 206 | 950 |
| **TOTAL**                        |                                                                                                 | 262         | 1238         |
| **Community-authored**          |                                                                                                 |             |              |
| Community Business               | • Beswick Art Centre (1)  
• Manyallaluk “The Dreaming Place” (1)  
• Barunga Community Map( 1)  
• Welcome to Barunga (1)  
• Welcome to Manyallaluk (4)  
• Welcome to Wugullar (1) | 9           | 159          |
| Cultural/Environmental Awareness | • Respect Our Community (with Kriol Translation) (1)  
• Bushfire Warning (1)  
• Weed Aware (with Kriol Translation) (1) | 3           | 1            |
| Landscape Graffiti               | • Graffitied Rock (1)  
• Graffitied Tree (1) | 2           | 2            |
| Painted Barrel                   | • Demarcates Offshoot Road (1) | 1           | 1            |
| **TOTAL**                        |                                                                                                 | 15          | 163          |
| **TOTAL (Overall)**              |                                                                                                 | 277         | 1401         |

Table 4.1 Graffiti according to sign categories.
4.1.3. Material Parameters: Road Signs as Aggregation Sites

Material parameters affect the production and density of graffiti in Jawoyn Country. Aggregation sites and corridors are areas that have consistently high human traffic and contain convenient graffiti canvasses, such as the walls of shelters and surfaces of road signs.

The results of the survey reveal that signs surrounding aggregation sites have a higher density of graffiti than more isolated signs. Many of the signs outlined in Table 4.1, such as chevrons, Liquor Act warning, NTER and welcome signs demarcate aggregation sites or are intentionally erected in close proximity to such sites.

The combined total of motifs on the chevrons from the intersection of the Central Arnhem and Manyallaluk roads (Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5) and the discarded chevron (Figure 4.6) represents a quarter of the total graffiti data on all road signs. Chevrons (n=4) have the highest graffiti density of any other sign type and are intentionally erected adjacent to T-intersections; 371 motifs were recorded on chevrons ($\bar{x} = 92.75$). Although half of the chevron pictured in Figure 4.4 is missing, it nonetheless contains 195 motifs.

Figure 4.4 Partially damaged chevron at intersection of Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road. This sign contained 195 instances of graffiti.
A complete chevron was found discarded on the roadside, 2km west of Barunga (Figure 4.6); the discarded chevron contained 109 motifs. Attempts were made to locate the original site of the discarded chevron, however it was concluded that it had likely been replaced. The site of the existing Barunga chevron (Figure 4.7) is likely the original location of the discarded chevron due both to its proximity and that it was evidently a new sign because of the lack of obvious signs of wear.
The chevron adjacent to the Maranboy Police Station on the Central Arnhem Road contained only 16 motifs (Figure 4.8). Both surveillance by police and distance from aggregation sites are possible contributing factors to the abnormally low number of motifs for this type of sign.
In some cases the quantity of graffiti is related to geographic location rather than the content of the sign per se. Liquor Act warning signs (n=3) contained 120 motifs ($\bar{x} = 40$). One of the three Liquor Act warning signs demarcates where the consumption of liquor is legal and, subsequently, determined the location of the Barunga boundary shelter (Figure 4.9). This sign, pictured in Figure 4.9, is heavily damaged and contained 91 graffiti motifs. Without the presence of this irregular, high-density graffiti, the remnants of the demolished Barunga boundary shelter would have been overlooked. One of the remaining two Liquor Act warning signs contained 13 motifs and is located near the intersection of Central Arnhem Road and Stuart Highway, away from community aggregation sites. The final Liquor Act warning sign is located 2km from the Barunga boundary shelter and contains 16 motifs.

Figure 4.9 Liquor Act warning sign adjacent to the Barunga Shelter
A similar pattern is evident in NTER signs. NTER signs (n=4) serve much the same purpose as Liquor Act warning signs as they demarcate alcohol restriction boundaries. Overall, only 34 motifs were recorded on these signs (̅ = 8.5). The NTER sign with the most graffiti was adjacent to the Jawoyn Intervention shelter and contained 20 motifs; the others are located on the boundary of each of the three community townships. The NTER sign outside of Barunga (Figure 4.10) contained only nine motifs; two motifs were recorded on the Beswick NTER sign; and three were found on the Manyallaluk NTER sign.

![Figure 4.10 NTER sign on the boundary of the Barunga township. This sign contained nine motifs.](image)

Based on the survey results, it seems graffiti is much more likely to occur on signs located at aggregation sites outside of communities than on signs near community perimeters. Welcome signs (n=6) are located both at the Central Arnhem/Manyallaluk Road intersection and on the boundaries of community townships. There are four ‘Welcome to Manyallaluk’ signs, three of which are located near a highway intersection and contain between 19 and 81 motifs. The fourth, and closest to Manyallaluk, is graffiti-free. The ‘Welcome to Barunga’ and ‘Welcome to Wugullar’ signs are also free of graffiti.
The results also reveal a pattern in graffiti distribution and density within aggregation sites in terms of the number of signs present. An abundance of signs surrounding an aggregation area means the less graffiti there is on individual signs, but the more graffiti there is in the area overall. Signposts are more abundant around the Jawoyn Intervention Shelter, giving potential graffiti authors a greater choice of canvas, whereas, near the Barunga Shelter, there is only one sign. This may explain why there are only 20 motifs on the NTER sign closest to the Jawoyn Intervention Shelter and 91 motifs on the Liquor Act warning sign near the Barunga Shelter.

Signs located further from aggregation sites contain less graffiti. No motifs were recorded on underground cable/gas signs because these inconvenient graffiti canvasses were always at least 40m away from the roadside and never near aggregation sites.

4.1.4. Material Parameters: Cultural and Environmental Factors

The survey indicates that cultural and environmental circumstances might also contribute to the presence or absence of graffiti. Three signs are categorised in Table 4.1 as cultural/environmental awareness signs and while they exist close to aggregation sites, there is only one graffiti motif between them. The ‘weed aware’ and ‘respect our community’ signs feature Kriol translations of the main English text and are situated near aggregation sites. The surface of the bushfire warning sign was out of reach for many people at 2.5 m from the ground. The ‘respect our community’ sign attracted the sole motif; this sign is on the boundary of the Barunga Township, adjacent to the Barunga NTER sign that contained nine motifs.

One might expect that sign types that occur in abundance would contain a higher number of motifs, simply because more signs allow for more canvas on which authors can inscribe their graffiti. Surprisingly, this is not always the case. For example, floodway signs are the most common road information sign (n=86), however, they contain only 194 motifs. The total graffiti on floodway signs is only one motif less than the graffiti found on a single chevron at the intersection of the Central Arnhem and Manyallaluk Roads.
Floodway signs are indicative of environmental obstacles in the landscape. They demarcate where the highway is prone to flooding and, subsequently where motorists and pedestrians are likely to be stranded. Most of the recorded floodway signs contain between zero and ten motifs while the two floodway signs with the most graffiti contain between 27 and 57 motifs. The floodway sign with 27 motifs is located at the western boundary of the Beswick township, on a popular community walking route. The sign with 57 motifs is the only sign in close proximity to the Beswick Shelter, an aggregation site.

4.1.5. Material Parameters: Landscape Graffiti and Makeshift Signs

Two examples of landscape graffiti were uncovered during the field surveys. These sites are natural surfaces that have been appropriated by community members as a communicatory surface. A graffitied rock and tree were next to each other along the Central Arnhem Road close to Barunga. Although efforts were made to ensure that every potential graffiti surface along the two highways was recorded, no other sites such as these were located during the survey.

The painted barrel is the most unique graffiti site because it is not fixed to the landscape and does not contain any writing, directional or otherwise; its purpose is as a makeshift sign to demarcate an offshoot road by means of its position and bright powder-blue colour. The graffiti motif has been spray-painted over the entire surface of this 44-gallon drum (Figure 4.11), and is transparent enough to read that it had once been used as a container for aviation fuel.

![Figure 4.11 Painted barrel on Manyallaluk Road.](image)
4.1.6. Social Parameters: Social Messages

Figure 4.12 presents the road sign graffiti data according to motif. Many of these community messages are tags and declarations written by individuals, often on behalf of a group, or groups. Much of the graffiti (1249 motifs) are written messages, consisting of letters and numbers from the English alphabet. These often stylised symbols represent initials, names and declarations of love or loathing through words and phrases from the English and Kriol languages. Only 152 of the motifs were not numerals or alphabetic symbols; 24 were illustrations 41 were attempts at erasure and 87 were indistinct.

![Instances of Graffiti according to Motif Type](image)

Individual messages are the most abundant motif types. There were 867 individual tags and 105 individual declarations. Individual tags include the initials, names or ‘was-heres’ of individual persons. Individual declarations include messages pertaining to individuals; many of these motifs included the phrase ‘you big hold’ (Figure 4.) after a person’s name and, subsequently, have been subject to erasure. Group messages also represent a considerable part of the data with 260 group tags and 16 group declarations.
There were only two possible instances of graffiti control whereby an authoritative group has attempted to erase the graffiti by spray-painting over the top. The remaining 39 instances of erasure are produced by scribbling or scratching over motif. This method of erasure is likely to have been committed by individuals that have an apparent distaste for the information displayed in the original graffiti, rather than ‘official’ graffiti removalists. The number of indistinct motifs is likely due to the high-density and superimposition of the graffiti on the four chevrons; 62 indistinct motifs were recorded on chevrons.

4.1.7. Social Parameters: Opportunism

![Instances of Graffiti according to Creation Technique](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation Technique</th>
<th>Number of Motifs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metal Engraving</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Engraving</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Pigment</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticker</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerosol</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.13 Graffiti on road signs according to creation technique.*

It is evident that graffiti authors prefer natural and readily available implements to write graffiti instead of the commercial, manufactured graffiti toolkit. Figure 4.13 displays the road sign graffiti data according to creation technique. Metal engraving is the most popular method with 562 motifs being produced in this manner. The next most popular method is stone engravings with 382 motifs, followed by marker (275 motifs), natural pigment (160 motifs), sticker (15 motifs) and aerosol (7 motifs). Opportunistic creation techniques include metal engravings, stone engravings and
natural pigment because the implements used in the production of these motifs are commonplace and serve primary functions that are not necessarily involved in the creation of visual representations. Keys, blades, stones, dirt-clods and charcoal are some of the implements involved in this opportunistic graffiti of which collectively total 1104 motifs.

The remaining 297 motifs were produced using manufactured, saleable items that have a sole purpose of assisting in the creation of visual markings. Paint, spray-paint, pencil, pen, permanent marker, stickers and temporary tattoos are some of these manufactured items. Marker is the most common manufactured creation technique at 275 motifs, while there are 15 sticker and 7 aerosol motifs. Paint, spray-paint, pencil, pen, permanent marker, stickers and temporary tattoos are some of these manufactured items. Metal engravings, made by objects such as keys, pins and knives, while manufactured implements, are not included in this category because they have an alternate primary function.
4.2. Aggregation Sites: Overview

This section provides a comparative analysis of the total 359 instances of graffiti found at shelters (Figure 3.1). Total instances of graffiti differ between each shelter. Figure 4.14 compares the graffiti totals from each shelter. The Barunga shelter has been demolished and as such, there is only one motif at this site. This shelter will not be used in the following comparative analysis because it is not comparable to the other sites. The Beswick shelter features the highest number of individual motifs with 205 recorded instances of graffiti. The Manyallaluk shelter features less than half of that number with 101 motifs and the Jawoyn shelter features only 52.

![Total Motifs at each Shelter](image)

*Figure 4.14 Total graffiti according to shelter.*
4.2.1. Motif Types

As the data in Figure 4.15 demonstrates, individual tags are consistently the most popular motif type at the Beswick, Manyallaluk and Jawoyn shelters, while group tags and individual declarations tend to be the next most favourable. Group declarations, erasure and illustrations are the least common. There are between four and eight indistinct motifs at each of the shelters.

![Instances of Graffiti according to Motif Type](image)

*Figure 4.15 Comparison of motif types at each shelter.*
4.2.2. Creation Techniques

The preferred creation technique differed between shelters as displayed in Figure 4.16, and at each shelter, the frequency of the preferred method was undoubtedly and obviously higher than others utilised at that site. The most frequent creation technique at a particular shelter was consistently the highest without doubt at that shelter. However, in comparing the most popular techniques between the three shelters, there is considerable variation. Natural pigment is the most frequent technique at the Beswick shelter with 191 motifs created in this manner. A significantly smaller number of motifs were produced with natural pigment at Manyallaluk shelter, which had featured four motifs and the Jawoyn shelter, which featured only one natural pigment motif. At the Manyallaluk shelter, 72 motifs were created by marker, while only seven and five instances of this technique were recorded at the Beswick and Jawoyn shelters respectively. The technique used most frequently at the Jawoyn shelter was metal engraving with 31 motifs, compared to four at the Beswick shelter and 13 at the Manyallaluk shelter.

![Figure 4.16 Comparison of creation techniques at each shelter.](image_url)
4.3. Aggregation Sites: Barunga Shelter

4.3.1. Overview

The Barunga shelter was located approximately 16km west of Barunga and 50 m from the northern edge of the Central Arnhem Road. All that remains of the original structure is two post fragments (Figure 4.17) and five piles of concrete, which are remnants of the foundation (Figure 4.18). It was originally thought that once the Barunga shelter was decommissioned in 2007, the structure was moved to the site of the Jawoyn shelter. Upon comparing the widths of the post fragments at the Barunga shelter with the posts at the Jawoyn shelter, it was discovered that the latter were two cm too wide and, therefore, the Jawoyn shelter is a new structure. This has further implications for the graffiti data recorded; it can be concluded that the graffiti found at the Jawoyn shelter has been there only as long as the shelter has existed.

Figure 4.17 Fragment of a post from the demolished Barunga shelter.
Figure 4.18 One of five concrete piles. These were once the foundation of the Barunga shelter. The post fragments fit into the post imprints in the cement.

The graffiti record from the Barunga Shelter was lost with the removal of the shelter, but it is considered likely that the original shelter featured some graffiti. Figure 4.13 is a plan of the site as it exists today. Only one motif was recorded at the Barunga Shelter: an individual declaration produced with an aerosol spray-can. The motif, as pictured in Figure 4.10, was sprayed onto a tree and reads “JK ♥s FD”.

4.3.2. Material Culture

The concrete piles pictured in Figure 4.18 once held the poles of the structure into the ground; the concrete was exposed when it was demolished, leaving the piles next to depressions in the earth and in a geometric arrangement that could not be random (Figure 4.19). Measurements of the concrete arrangement revealed that the structure was once oblong-shaped, 10.5 m x 6 m. These are similar dimensions to the Beswick and Manyallaluk shelter.

Pedestrian surveys of the Barunga shelter revealed many examples of material culture. Due to the shelter’s proximity to the road, it is possible that much of this
material is rubbish discarded from passing vehicles or blown there by the wind, and has no relationship with past uses of the site. However, due to the abundance of food and drink containers, it is likely that the majority are evidence of past human activity. Table 2.1 outlines the diversity and number of material culture found at the Barunga shelter, in an area spanning 48 m x 35 m. As well as the material displayed below, a vehicle has been abandoned and vandalised in the middle of this site; there is no graffiti on the vehicle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beer cans</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer bottles</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine bottle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bottle</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic cup</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass bottle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco tin</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully beef tin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden hose</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car service book</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2 Diversity of material found at the Barunga shelter.*
Figure 4.19 Baseline-offset plan of the demolished Barunga shelter.
4.4. Aggregation Sites: Beswick Shelter

4.4.1. Overview

The Beswick shelter is located 8km west of the Beswick Township and 21km east of Barunga. Like the Barunga shelter, this is 50 m from the northern edge of the Central Arnhem Road. Pictured in Figure 4.20, this site is made up of a 10 m x 5 m corrugated iron structure. There are six steel posts supporting the roof and walls, while a concrete slab covers approximately half of the floor, leaving the other half as bare earth. Figure 4.21 is an overhead plan of this site. Surrounding the shelter are seventeen sheets of corrugated iron that either were most likely intended to form the walls of the shelter.

![Figure 4.20 Beswick shelter during the survey, looking south east.](image)

After a close examination, no graffiti was found on any of the loose iron sheeting, yet 205 motifs were recorded on the standing structure. The number of motifs may indicate the number of regular visitors to the site; this is relative to the population of Beswick, which is 509 according to the 2011 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).
4.4.2. Material Culture

Figure 4.21 Dumpy survey of the Beswick shelter.

Figure 4.21 illustrates the material culture found at the site. Aluminium beer cans were the most plentiful material and include 37 Victoria Bitter cans and 14 West End cans. The green areas on the site plan represent scatters of cans; the smaller green
areas represent three-four cans while the larger areas represent seven-ten. There is a length of plumbers pipe next to the shelter that was evidently once attached to a tree. Due to bushfire, the tree has collapsed and the pipe with it. A similar pipe was located at the Manyallaluk shelter, as well as in the public toilets in the Barunga township. These pipes, pictured in Figure 4.22 are makeshift condom dispensers, dispersed by employees of the local Sunrise Health Service.

Figure 4.22 Condom dispenser similar to those found at the Beswick and Manyallaluk shelters.
4.4.3. Motif Types

Of the 205 motifs recorded at the Beswick shelter, recorded in Figure 4.23, higher instances of individual tags occurred than any other motif type, with 117 motifs. Individual declarations are the next most frequent motif type, with 35 motifs being recorded as such, followed by group tags and declarations with 25 and 15 motifs respectively. Only 3 erasure, 6 illustration and 4 indistinct motifs were located at this shelter.

![Figure 4.23 Graffiti motif types at the Beswick shelter.](image)

4.4.4. Creation Techniques

Creation techniques at the Beswick shelter, recorded in Figure 4.24 do not conform to the techniques used on community road signs or indeed the other shelters. While the majority of motifs from other sites were produced using manufactured implements, all but 14 of the 205 motifs from this site were produced with natural pigment. In this case, charcoal was used as the tool of choice. Very few instances of marker, stone engravings and metal engravings were recorded at this site. This suggests the possibility of a community style in graffiti which is consistent with
Smith’s (1999) observation that the identities of the Barunga, Beswick and Manyallaluk communities can be communicated through art styles that are specific to each community.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 4.24** Graffiti at the Beswick shelter according to creation technique.
4.5. Aggregation Sites: Manyallaluk Shelter

4.5.1. Overview

The Manyallaluk shelter, pictured in Figure 4.25 is located 8km south west of the Manyallaluk township. This is equal to the distance from the Beswick shelter to the Beswick township. The shelter is only 10m from the edge of the road. There are three main features to this site; a 6 m x 4 m corrugated iron shelter; a 1 m x 1.5 m corrugated iron toilet and a rubbish pit (Figure 4.26). The privy is 100 m from the main shelter on the opposite side of the road and consists of three iron walls, a ceiling, lockable door and an open 44-gallon drum with a toilet seat.

Figure 4.25 Manyallaluk shelter, looking south east.

Figure 4.26 Looking north from the rubbish pit towards the toilet.
4.5.2. Material Culture

The rubbish pit, pictured in Figure 4.26 was 7 m x 4 m and consisted mainly of alcoholic beverage containers. Because the midden was full to overflowing, we could not identify the depth and so it is impossible to determine the correct number of artefacts. On observing the arrangement it was estimated that around 55% were Victoria Bitter aluminium cans, 20% were West End aluminium cans, 15% Victoria Bitter glass bottles, 5% Bundaberg Rum aluminium cans, with the remaining 5% made up of wine and spirit bottles.
Figure 4.27 Dumpy survey of the Manyallaluk shelter.
Other than the material discovered in the rubbish pit, the Manyallaluk featured much less material culture, as is evident in Figure 4.27. Another condom dispenser, pictured in Figure 4.28, was located at this shelter. As is evident in the below image, the dispenser was once attached to the tree. The condoms that were once inside this dispenser are melted into the earth underneath the leaf litter; the presence of the melted condoms enlightened the surveyors as to the function of the pipes.

Figure 4.28 Condom dispenser and the hook that used to connect it to the tree.
4.5.3. Motif Types

A total of 101 motifs were recorded at this site; 76 of these were on the shelter itself and 25 were from the toilet. There is a lower number of motifs at this site than the Beswick shelter, however, the population of Manyallaluk (105) and thus, the number of potential visitors may explain this difference.

The trends in preferred motif types encountered at the aforementioned sites, for the most part, continue at the Manyallaluk shelter; these are displayed in Figure 4.29. Individual tags are the most frequent motif types at 40 motifs, with 17 and 12 of motifs being recorded as individual declarations and group tags. The Manyallaluk shelter contains an inconstantly higher number of erasure, illustration and indistinct motifs at this site.

![Manyallaluk Shelter: Instances of Graffiti according to Motif Type]

Figure 4.29 Graffiti motif types at the Manyallaluk shelter.
4.5.4. Creation Techniques

Preferred creation techniques differ at the Manyallaluk shelter to the other sites, because at this site, marker motifs represent the majority. As displayed in Figure 4.30, almost three-quarters of motifs at this site are produced using markers. Other manufactured implements, such as those in the metal engraving and sticker categories are the next highest occurring creation techniques. Natural techniques, such as stone engravings and natural pigment feature less frequently here than at the Beswick shelter.

Figure 4.30 Graffiti creation techniques at the Manyallaluk shelter.
4.6. Aggregation Sites: Jawoyn Shelter

4.6.1. Overview

The Jawoyn Shelter, pictured in Figure 4.31, is located 26km west of Barunga, outside of the NTER restriction zone and approximately 40m from the southern edge of the Central Arnhem Road. A steel shelter is the main feature of this site. There is no doubt that this shelter is at this location as a response to the NTER, due to its proximity to the Intervention sign (Figure 4.32) and the fact that it has only been there since the introduction of the NTER. This shelter is unlike the other three shelters in that it only has four posts and a roof; there are no walls and therefore, contains less graffiti supports. The dimensions are also different at this shelter, which measures, 6m wide, 6.2m long and 2.5m high.

Figure 4.31 The Jawoyn shelter looking south east.
4.6.2. Material Culture

Material culture at the Jawoyn shelter includes items of clothing, bedding, food and drink containers, a table, bedframe, piece of corrugated iron and a 44-gallon drum. Instead of a rubbish pit, there is a steel-mesh bin. The majority of artefacts outside of the bin were aluminium cans (n=947) and glass bottles (n=280). See Table 4.3 for a breakdown of the container types found at the Jawoyn shelter. Along with the abundance of drinking containers, there were also four tobacco tins, two rubber thongs, three articles of clothing and an asthma ventilator. Food containers were present, but not plentiful with only three baked bean tins, four spaghetti tins and one spam tin. Three firepits were also recorded at this shelter. See the site plan for this shelter in Figure 4.33.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aluminium can (alcohol)</td>
<td>823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluminium can (non-alcoholic)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass bottle (alcohol)</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bottle (non-alcoholic)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,261</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Container types at the Jawoyn shelter.

Figure 4.33 Dumpy survey of the Jawoyn shelter.
4.6.3. Motif Types

Only 52 motifs were recorded at the Jawoyn shelter. This may be attributable to the lack of canvas available at the site. The other shelters had walls which contained the vast majority of motifs. Relative age of the site (four years opposed to c. thirty at other shelters) should also be considered for the low-density of motifs.

Figure 4.34 displays the graffiti at the Jawoyn shelter according to motif type. Again, individual tags feature most frequently at this shelter, representing 31 motifs. Group tags are the next most frequent with 12 motifs being recorded as such. Unlike the other shelters, no individual or group declarations featured at this site. Few instances of erasure, illustration and indistinct motifs were recorded at the Jawoyn shelter.

![Jawoyn Shelter: Instances of Graffiti according to Motif Type](image)

**Figure 4.34** Graffiti motif types at the Jawoyn shelter.
4.6.4. Creation Techniques

Similar to the Beswick shelter, which featured mainly natural pigment motifs and the Manyallaluk shelter, which featured mainly marker motifs, the Jawoyn shelter has a different preferred creation technique: metal engraving. Metal engravings account for 31 of the 52 motifs recorded at this shelter, 15 stone engravings, 5 marker motifs and 1 natural pigment motif.

![Figure 4.35 Graffiti creation techniques at the Jawoyn shelter.](image)
4.7. Discussion

The data demonstrates how graffiti authors use this visual culture to communicate individual and group identities and the role that the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* has played in the production and content of intra-group and inter-group messages. Materials and techniques used in the creation of graffiti demonstrate that graffiti writing is more opportunistic than planned. The opportunism versus planned debate is upheld through the high-density of motifs at aggregation sites.

The results of this study demonstrate the expression of community identities through graffiti. The Beswick and Manyallaluk each emphasise a particular creation technique (natural pigments versus a marker pen), while the Jawoyn shelter emphasises a third technique, that of metal engraving. Though this will have been influenced by the availability of materials, all of these materials are readily available, so such availability is not sufficient to explain this patterning. The ethnographies that associated with the results that are presented in this chapter are used to inform the more detailed discussion that is presented Chapter Five.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This research investigates representations of social identity in terms of contemporary landscape-markings at a time of major government intervention in Jawoyn country in the Northern Territory, Australia. The focus of the research is how people use graffiti to express attachments to places and associations with kinship and family groups. This approach escapes the social prejudices that out arise out of popular conceptions of graffiti as illegitimate vandalism. The specific question addressed by this study is:

- What can the study of contemporary Indigenous graffiti reveal about social identity in an Aboriginal community?

The secondary aims of this research are to understand:

- the role graffiti plays in marking individual and group identities in the landscape;
- the impact of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 on the production and content of expressions of social identity;
- the role that creation techniques and the spatial layout of graffiti play in communication through landscape-marking; and
- the value of ethnographic data in interpreting the archaeology of contemporary landscape-marking.

This study uses actor-network theory, as outlined by Callon (2006), Couldry (2004) and Law (2007) to assist in understanding the network of contemporary landscape-markings and the intentions of its actors. Actors in this web include governments, communities and individuals who communicate their experiences and agendas through landscape-marking. As Couldry (2004:1) states, both human and non-human entities ‘acquire power through the number, extensiveness and stability of the connections routed through them’.

This study shows that contemporary graffiti of Jawoyn country is a legitimate, significant practice that exists within a network of visual cultures that include both continuing traditional practices and contemporary communication through
landscape-marking. This chapter provides a deepened interpretation of the data presented in Chapter Four. It begins with an explanation of the underlying material and social motivators behind the trends in graffiti motif types and creation techniques. Following this is a discussion on the absence of NTER graffiti in the study area, which is interpreted in relation to the presence of anti-NTER graffiti in surrounding communities. The chapter ends with re-visiting the theoretical framework developed for this study and a discussion on the subjectivities involved in interpreting material culture. The ethnographies collected throughout this study are used in this chapter to assist in the interpretation of the data.
5.1. Subjectivities of Material

In keeping with the approach to graffiti as an artefact of value rather than a simple manifestation of anti-social behaviour, each of the shelters were surveyed as though they were a rock shelter featuring ancient and traditional landscape-markings. The graffiti, then, was recorded and analysed in an approach that was similar to one that would be undertaken to understand ancient landscape-markings. The temporary nature of the graffiti sites and artefacts does not detract from their overall significance. The importance of graffiti to members of the Jawoyn community is highlighted in a conversation between Gela, from Barunga, and myself that took place at the Jawoyn shelter during the road sign survey. Gela said:

You’re not going to remove it [the graffiti] are you… Yeah, I like it, when I look [at] it, [it] tells me who’s been here, what they’ve been doing. (Gela pers. comm. 2011).

I then asked Gela what he thought about the differences between the ancient and contemporary landscape markings; I wanted to determine whether people from Jawoyn communities saw graffiti as a continuation of the ancient visual culture. Gela said:

It’s like rock-art, but they’re different. Rock-art tells stories, this is just names. It’s like when you go into Beswick and you sign that visitor book, it’s like that. (Gela pers. comm. 2011).

Furthermore, when speaking with Rachael Willika, I was informed that graffiti has its place in Jawoyn spirituality as she says:

You gotta be careful writing that graffiti. Them Old people say if you leave your name, the spirits can control you. You gotta do it the right way, with them moieties. (Willika pers. comm. 2011).

Upon showing Peter Lindsay, of Beswick, an image of the NTER graffiti at Yuendumu, he explained that graffiti is similar to rock-art because:

Yeah, it’s what’s in their mind when they do it. That one you just showed me (Yuendumu) he obviously angry, really angry, so he expressed it just like rock art. I’m a bit disappointed that there is not much of that here to show you. People here are angry too. (Lindsay pers. comm. 2011).
To gain an informed understanding of Jawoyn graffiti, modern material culture from the signboard shelters was also recorded. The majority of material found at these sites was alcoholic beverage containers. This is not surprising considering that the purpose for which these shelters exist is as a place where community members can consume liquor, legally and without harassment. Even though the material from signboard shelters indicates that the only occurrences at these sites are consuming alcohol and writing graffiti, this does not address the activities that do not leave an archaeological signature. Peter Lindsay explains that when the Beswick shelter was still being used, people from the Beswick township:

Walked out to the shelter and stayed there with family. They [the shelters] used to be a good place for family. Especially the old people. People could go out there to get away from the city. But now people have to go out to that other [Jawoyn] shelter. People don’t do that, now they drive and they drive into Katherine. What them Intervention mob don’t say is how many people have died or been hurt from having those shelters so far away. (Lindsay pers. comm. 2011).

Gela agrees with this statement by saying that he has been coming out to the site of the Jawoyn shelter since he was a child (pers. comm. 2011). He goes there to fish in the Roper Creek and goes to a nearby campsite which is a pre-existing community meeting area that long outdates the existence of liquor restrictions in communities.
5.2. Material Motivators

5.2.1. Convenient Canvasses

The most common trend in the data is that members of Jawoyn communities write graffiti at places where they aggregate. In saying this, it is unlikely that people attend sites such as signboard shelters for the sole purpose of writing graffiti. A more likely explanation is that people inhabit these places for other purposes and write graffiti as an outcome of the aggregation. The archaeological signature at sites such as highway intersections and signboard shelters is the basis for this interpretation. Thus, graffiti is more likely to be authored at sites attended by other members of the community. This is highlighted in Section 4.1.3, which explains that high-density graffiti occurs more frequently on road signs located in close proximity to aggregation sites, such as chevrons, Liquor Act warning and NTER signs.

When graffiti features on signs away from aggregation sites there is generally only one-three motifs per sign. An explanation for this is provided by Rachael Willika, of Manyallaluk, who says:

If people’s car breaks down, they might stop and get out and write that graffiti. Even some people, they walkin’ out here for taxi or to that drinking place (Willika pers. comm. 2011).

The idea of walking along the highways for a taxi is highlighted in the individual declaration recorded on the chevron at the intersection of the Central Arnhem Road and Manyallaluk Road (please note the original name has been changed):

JOHN SMITH WROTE HEYA WAITING FOR TAXI ON 30/06/95

It is clear that there is little point in writing on inconvenient graffiti canvasses when others from the community are not likely to read it. This is highlighted in the absence of graffiti on underground cable/gas signs as these signs were generally 40m from the roadside and never near aggregation sites.
5.3. Welcome to Yuendumu - If You Want Porn Go To Canberra

Prior to conducting the field surveys for this study, it was considered likely that the data would include anti-NTER motifs similar to those found at Yuendumu. This was supported by the abundance of NTER related graffiti that appear on NTER signs surrounding the study area, such as the example pictured in Figure 5.1.

Moreover, academic scholarship supports this idea because part of the nature of contemporary graffiti is as a mode of resistance (Crisp 2010; Frederick 2009; Macdonald 2001). However, the results indicate that graffiti was not used as a form of resisting the NTER. The relationship between sign types and the number and content of motifs was tested during the field surveys. The results suggest that graffiti was more likely to be written on community-authored signs than those that were government-authored. This may be due to the physical location of community-authored signs because they are usually located in close proximity to aggregation sites. In fact, the only broad, political statement in the study area appeared on a Liquor Act warning sign on the Central Arnhem Road, near the Stuart Highway. This motif reads:

 THIS MEANS NIGGERS TOO

Figure 5.1 Intervention graffiti at Yuendumu. Reproduced from Tracker (2011)
According to people from Jawoyn communities, the above motif was written by a non-Indigenous person (Gela pers. comm. 2011; Lindsay pers. comm. 2011; Willika pers. comm. 2011). This example, being the only one of its kind in Jawoyn country indicates that the NTER graffiti from other communities may also have been written by non-Indigenous people. This view is supported by Nicholls’ (2000) research that found that ‘white’ Australians were more likely to write about political or social issues in their graffiti as opposed to Indigenous Australians, from a central Australian Aboriginal community, who are more likely to use graffiti as a means to eternalise one’s existence and communicate membership in kinship groups. Gela agrees with this interpretation, as he says:

I seen that Yuendumu graffiti. That one about Canberra and that one about Rudd. Why would they do that? Why would people write that? I’d never write that. I’ve never been to Canberra. And Rudd, I don’t know him, he’s never been here, so I can’t talk. (Gela pers. comm. 2011).

These results indicate that graffiti is not used as a form of direct resistance in Jawoyn country, but as a medium for communication between community members.
5.4. Social Motivators:

5.4.1. Inter-group messages

There is no significant difference in motif type and creation technique choices between corridor sites and aggregation sites. Marking associations with the landscape through individual tags is the preferred motif type across all sites in the study area. Correlations between contemporary individual tags and depictions of handprints in traditional landscape-marking can be drawn from this data, as ‘hand stencils are perceived and commented on as evidence of the former presence of individuals, sometimes known and named individuals, at other times the 'old people', but still as individual persons’ (Rosenfeld 1999:30). Therefore, individual tags can be interpreted as a contemporary representation of a traditional, ancient landscape-marking behaviour. Moreover, the number of individual tags relates to its role as an agent of asserting power; much like traditional handprint motifs, individual tags are used as an indicator of custodianship and territory.

Communicating membership to groups is also of great importance in Jawoyn country. Clear representative examples of this behaviour are pictured in Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3. Group tags, such as the motif pictured in Figure 5.2, commonly depict the initials of several community members (Willika pers. comm. 2011), which are written equally, and in unity; there is no division or individuality.

Figure 5.2 A group tag on a floodway sign along the Central Arnhem Road.
It is clear that Jawoyn graffiti is a continuation of traditional landscape-marking behaviours. Further indications of this appear in group tags, such as the motif pictured in Figure 5.3. ‘Wamutjan’ is one of the skin names of the *Dhuwa* moiety in the Ngalkpon kinship system. Representations of *Dhuwa* moiety in traditional landscape-markings feature dark red or black motifs on lighter yellow or white surfaces. The motif pictured in Figure 5.3 shows the union of *Dhuwa* and *Yirritja* and is a clear representation of an ancient cultural practice continued in the present.

![Figure 5.3 Another example of a group tag.](image)

In this sense, the active role that graffiti plays in Jawoyn country is as a community-based landscape-marking communication. Gela, from Barunga, explains his interpretation of graffiti on road signs:

> It’s like a message board… [It] tells me who’s been here, what they’ve been doing… It’s like when you go into Beswick and you sign that visitor book, it’s like that (Gela pers. comm. 2011).

An explanation for the absence of individual and group declarations at the Jawoyn shelter, opposed to higher instances of these motif types at the Beswick and Manyallaluk shelters indicates a changing role of graffiti. Now that the only shelter in operation is the Jawoyn shelter, unprecedented numbers of people from all three communities are converging on this shelter. Previously, each shelter had only to support the population of the closest township, however, now in order for people to
conduct their business, people from the three communities have to share this shelter. Peter Lindsay explains that this aggravates community tensions because some family groups do not get along, especially when drinking at the shelter (Lindsay pers. comm. 2011). Thus, it is more important than ever to maintain one’s dominance and power in the landscape, as well as the power that comes from family membership. The higher frequencies of individual and group tags at the Jawoyn shelter, coupled with the juxtaposition of higher attendance rates and lack of other motif types indicate that the active role of graffiti at this shelter is to assert dominance and ownership over place.

5.4.2. Opportunism

It is unusual that in a study of contemporary graffiti that records 1760 graffiti motifs, only 8 of these were produced using spray-paint. Had this study taken place in an urban centre, this result would have been different. Instead, the data reflects that Jawoyn graffiti is mainly produced using natural items and items that are handy to the graffiti author, such as keys, blades, dirt clods, stones and charcoal. Motifs produced using manufactured, saleable items that are commonly used in urban graffiti, such as marker, stickers and spray cans are relatively lacking.

An interesting trend in the data is that preferred creation techniques differ between each of the shelters. At the Beswick shelter, most of the motifs were created using charcoal, while the Manyallaluk shelter featured mainly marker motifs, and motifs at the Jawoyn shelter were mostly produced by metal engraving. There are infinite variables involved in trying to interpret the reasoning behind the inconsistent creation technique trends as this involves knowing the cognition of contemporary individuals. One explanation might be that there is an abundance of natural materials at the Beswick shelter, and thus this is the material of choice; the opposite can be said of the Jawoyn and Manyallaluk shelters. However, it is also likely that this behaviour is influenced by social factors.
5.5. Discussion

This thesis has investigated representations of social identity through contemporary graffiti in Jawoyn country. The research has shown that graffiti plays a role in marking individual and group identities in the landscape; that creation techniques and the spatial layout of graffiti also have a communicative role; and ethnographic data is highly valuable in interpreting the archaeology of contemporary landscape-marking. Surprisingly, the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* has had little impact on the production and content of social identity as expressed through graffiti.

Figure 5.4 describes the theoretical framework for this study in terms of the systems of power that are reinforced through graffiti in Jawoyn country. As only two of the three types of graffiti were found in the areas surveyed, the analysis in this thesis concentrates on the categories of official and uncommissioned graffiti. Couldry (2004:1) states that entities acquire power through the number, extensiveness and stability of the connections that are routed through them. This study records the co-
occurrence of three systems of signage, and three systems of power. While the official graffiti might be expected to be the most powerful signage, there is also a parallel system of power expressed in unofficial graffiti. The power of this system is demonstrated in the number, extensiveness and stability of the connections that are routed through unofficial graffiti.

This contemporary behaviour has developed as a cultural practice from traditional Indigenous Australian visual culture and survives into contemporary Aboriginal societies as a continuation of cultural communication. Graffiti in Jawoyn country is more than simple messaging because it is imbued with identity that relates to membership both within and between groups, much like the practice of ancient landscape-marking, or ‘rock-art’. This study has re-evaluated our understanding of the term graffiti as communication through landscape-marking and situates the practice as existing in a web of visual cultures that comprise a variety of actors and agents, such as individuals, communities and governments.

This study joins an extensive list of archaeologies that focus on Jawoyn country, however, other than the work of Smith (1994), it is the only study that focusses on the material and visual cultures of the Jawoyn contemporary past. Applying an ethnographically-informed approach to the interpreting the contemporary past has actively involved Jawoyn people in this project. This approach has shifted the archaeological focus from the past to support the cultural practices and beliefs of contemporary Jawoyn people. While this study focusses on only one Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, it has the ability to apply to other communities due, in part, to the relationship and similarities shared with this study and the findings of Nicholls’ (2000) research.

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 did not affect the content of graffiti in the study area. This is unusual compared with the presence of anti-NTER motifs in surrounding communities. Peter Lindsay provides a reason for this:

We’ve got better things to do than worry about whitefella politics.
(Lindsay pers.comm. 2011).

The only way in which the NTER affects the data that was collected in this study is that it determined the location of the Jawoyn shelter. Without the NTER, there would be much less graffiti on community road signs.
The results of this study show that graffiti plays an active role in the communication of individual identities through the declaration of dominance, power and control over place. The number and extensiveness of individual tags indicate this. Group identities are communicated in Jawoyn graffiti by forming associations between family and skin groups. It is possible that this aspect of Jawoyn graffiti is a continuation of cultural communication due to the incorporation of kinship systems and the protocols of moiety union as outlined by Smith (2004:7). The prevalence of opportunistic modes of production as well as the spatial layout of graffiti indicates that this is a practice of convenience and an outcome of daily life and routine. It is possible that due to the signature of traditional landscape-markings found in contemporary Jawoyn graffiti, this study could be used to inform future approaches to the interpretation and analysis of ancient Indigenous motifs.

This research contributes to a growing body of work that studies the contemporary past, both internationally (Buchli 2007; Fisher 2012; Graves-Brown 2007; Hall 2006; Harrison 2009; Harrison and Schofield 2010; Holtof 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009; Holtof and Piccini 2009; Schofield 2000, 2005, 2009) and in Australia (Barker and Lamb 2009; Byrne 1996; Beck et al. 2002; Beck and Sommerville 2005; Brown 2012; Crisp 2010; Frederick 2009; Gorman 2009a, 2009b; Gorman and O’Leary 2007; Smith 2006; Smith and Beck 2003). As one of the few studies to address the archaeology of contemporary Aboriginal communities, this research provides important new insights into Aboriginal use of modern material culture and continuities in cultural practices.

The results of this study shows that graffiti serves the intra-group purpose of communication between community members, rather than the inter-group purpose of propagating political and social messages. This study demonstrates that the purpose of graffiti as it is practiced in Jawoyn communities is more closely aligned to an ongoing cultural tradition of rock-art production and landscape-marking than it is to the contemporary graffiti expressions often found in urban settings. These results demonstrate the strength of cultural continuity in Jawoyn country, even during a period of major government intervention.
Sociality in Science

From my first trip to Jawoyn country in July 2010 to today, my role as a student archaeologist has gone above and beyond what one would normally expect. Rachael Willika, three of her children and three of her grandchildren (pictured below) moved to Adelaide from Jawoyn country at the beginning of 2011. I see this family almost every day and I look upon them as my own family and mentors. I see the relationship I have with this family in similar ways to my biological family and I forget, sometimes, that they are not blood related.

The relationship that we share is mutually beneficial as they help me navigate social and cultural taboos in Indigenous culture and I help them with the transition to a city lifestyle. The younger children call me ‘Jordan-Bordan’ and love nothing more than using me as a ladder.

I remember witnessing the dynamics of the relationship between Claire, Jacko, Kotjok and Glen during my first visit to Jawoyn country. It is only now after spending a majority of my time with the Willika family that I understand the relationship between the older researchers and the community Elders. These relationships and these children are more important to me than any material artefact.

The Willika family and Jordan Ralph at AAMI Stadium in Adelaide.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcripts of Unstructured Interviews

Interview with Gela 23/07/2011

Gela: What you mob up to?

Jordan: We’re here to have a look at the graffiti on these signs. We’re archaeology students from Adelaide.

Gela: You’re not going to remove it [the graffiti] are you?

Jordan: No, no, we’re just looking at it and taking photos.

Gela: Ok… What you doing that for?

Jordan: Just looking to see what it can tell us, sort of like rock-art.

Gela: Not like rock-art, it’s different. It’s like a message board.

Jordan: Yeah?

Gela: Yeah, I like it, when I look [at] it, [it] tells me who’s been here, what they’ve been doing.

Jordan: Ok. So you don’t think it’s like rock-art?

Gela: It’s like rock-art, but they’re different. Rock-art tells stories, this is just names. It’s like when you go into Beswick and you sign that visitor book, it’s like that.

Jordan: Oh, right.

Gela: Anyway, I just came to check you weren’t taking them signs. You can take that blue [NTER] sign though. It’s a bad sign. I seen that Yuendumu graffiti. That one about Canberra and that one about Rudd. Why would they do that? Why would people write that? I’d never write that. I’ve never been to Canberra. And Rudd, I don’t know him, he’s never been here, so I can’t talk.

Jordan: I’m not sure, maybe they’re just angry with the Intervention?

Gela: I don’t know. But they made the drinking spot here after that Intervention. I used to come here with my family when I was little for fishing in the creek.
Interview with Peter Lindsay on 27/09/2011

Jordan: What happens are those shelters for, outside of the communities?

Peter: They’re the drinking spots. We used to have one per community, but now we gotta use the same one.

Jordan: Is it better now?

Peter: No. Separate drinking camps are better. Families who don’t like each other are forced to share one drinking camp and they fight often. Sports teams, families. Nearly always someone has to go to hospital. People been killed. Or, husband goes to Katherine drinking, and wife gets upset, jealous, thinking that he has some girlfriend in town. Then there’s more fights and more people getting divorced. I come from Bulman, 200kms away. They have to use same drinking camp. Then someone has to drive. With four other people drinking or drunk in the backseat. They used to be a good place for family. Especially the old people. I used to walk out there with my family. People could go out there to get away from the city. But now people have to go out to that other shelter. People don’t do that, now they drive and they drive into Katherine. What them Intervention mob don’t say is how many people have died or been hurt from having those shelters so far away.

Jordan: That’s no good.

Peter: Nah. See all these new big houses? They all look really nice from the outside. They’re all built on the floodplain, and they’re all identical so when the wet starts, the living rooms in all of them flood! (chuckling) We could have told that Intervention mob that, but they never asked!

Jordan: Do you think there are many similarities between rock art and graffiti?

Peter: Yeah, it’s what’s in their mind when the do it. That one you just showed me (Yuendumu) he obviously angry, really angry, so he expressed it just like rock art. I’m a bit disappointed that there is not much of that here to show you. People here are angry too. But I guess we’ve got better things to do than worry about whitefella politics.

Jordan: And we saw at the shelter people write what they are doing at that particular time, waiting for someone to bring a carton, stuff like that. What do you think about the intervention?

Peter: Used to be worse here. Used to get pay weekly, now fortnightly so they just go to town for a few days and drink. Take off with pay and drink as much as possible- spend two weeks pay on grog or gunja instead of one week. Lots of people died on that road, all the way to Mataranka with people drinking and
driving home, or trying to walk it. One fella died here, crashed but no one saw him till that night. He died in the morning. Some people think the intervention bought more racism, with those porn signs especially. Some people think tensions getting high again. You can’t have one drink without people thinking you’re a drunk. It’s hard, just to get a drink. Those clubs check me out every time. It’s hard to get a membership to go in! No one likes those signs. The first thing we argued about was those signs. And it’s not like the signs are stopping anything! They get on mobiles or internet!

**Jordan:** When did people stop using that drinking camp 8kms out of town?

**Peter:** This Lazy Cop, I think his name was Angelo, he decided that drinking camp should be near where coppers patrol, so they moved, then intervention started so they move further. Used to be, old friends in the camp near each town, and any fights were fixed. Now it’s all families that don’t like each other, and bad stuff happens. When that bonus came out, from Alice (springs) to Darwin all cells were overcrowded with Aboriginal people. I don’t know. I’ve talked with a lot of educated people, they all agree. We’re going backwards, not forwards. Sad, I was really close with my grandfather. Couldn’t understand why he never taught us stockman stuff. Working all day, every day for a bit of sugar, some tobacco and a blanket? That’s no life.
Interview with Rachael Willika 28/10/2011

Jordan: Rachael, what do you think about that graffiti?

Rachael: Good one hey? You gotta be careful writing that graffiti. Them Old people say if you leave your name, the spirits can control you. You gotta do it the right way, with them moieties.

Jordan: Why do people write graffiti on those road signs?

Rachael: If people’s car breaks down, they might stop and get out and write that graffiti. Even some people, they walkin’ out here for taxi or to that drinking place.

Jordan: Ok. Rachael, there is some graffiti that’s like a long word and it has a lot of capital letters in it, but doesn’t look like a word/anything I know. Could you look at this and tell me what it is?

Rachael: That’s the first letters of people’s names, maybe eight or nine people.
## Appendix 2: Pro Forma used to Record Graffiti on Road Signs

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<th># Creation Technique</th>
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<td>Group Tag</td>
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<td>Group Declaration</td>
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<td>Sticker</td>
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<td>Aerosol</td>
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## Appendix 3: Pro-Forma used to Record Graffiti at Shelters

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### Associated Material Culture

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