

Returning recordings of songs that persist: The Anmatyerr traditions of *akiw* and *anmanty*

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Abstract

Digitisation has made the return of recordings made by researchers in the past far more achievable than ever before. This technological advance, combined with the ethical and political imperative towards decolonising methodologies in Indigenous research, has resulted in considerable interest in ensuring that recordings of cultural value be returned to Indigenous communities. In this chapter, I reflect upon the fieldwork experience of returning archival song recordings concerning public aspects of male initiation ceremonies, known as *akiw* and *anmanty*, to Anmatyerr-speaking communities in the Northern Territory of Australia. Despite attenuation of song knowledge across the region, these songs continue to be sung at annual ritual events. Once these recordings were returned to these communities, Anmatyerr people quickly received them as important reiterations of their present-day socio-cultural expression. Evidently imbricated in a complex, ritually based form of complementary filiation and knowledge dissemination, these songs are shared and taught in a fragile and changing context of ceremonial practice. The account provided here offers insights into songs associated with arguably the most persistent and significant form of ceremonial practice in Central Australia, although sparsely documented in the Anmatyerr region. I also highlight the relational properties of song via their connections to place, *Anengkerr* 'Dreaming' and people and provide important insights into how these communities perceive the archiving and preservation of this material.

Keywords: Anmatyerr, ethnomusicology, ceremony, Aboriginal history, repatriation

Introduction¹

A decade ago the Australian musicologist Allan Marett (2010: 253) ruminated on the future of Australian Aboriginal song traditions. He concluded that “what survives today, mainly in the remote northern and central parts of Australia, represents only a tiny fraction of what was, at the time of first European contact, a vast, rich and dynamic ceremonial complex that reached into every corner of the continent.” But even these remaining traditions, he observed, are so critically endangered that they are unlikely to “survive for more than another generation or two” (Marett 2010: 253). Such gloomy predictions have been reinforced in recent statements from the International Council for Traditional Music estimating that approximately 98 per cent of Indigenous Australian musical traditions have been lost.² It is this record of cultural loss and decline that has inspired a range of initiatives to return archival recordings of song to Aboriginal communities (Treloyn & Emberly 2013; Treloyn, Martin & Charles 2016; Turpin 2017; Bracknell 2017). As with similar initiatives found across the globe (Gunderson, Lancefield & Woods 2018), these projects are often driven by a desire to see defunct songs revived or to have song performance as a form of community practice or tradition maintained and supported.

In this chapter, I discuss the return of archival recordings of song to remote communities in Central Australia where singing continues to play an important part in social and cultural life. This return was part of a much larger Australian Research Council funded project concerned with finding ways of improving Aboriginal access to cultural heritage collections either held by museums, Aboriginal organisations, or by individual researchers.³ Specifically focused on the needs of Aboriginal people living in remote communities in the Northern Territory of Australia, where access to cultural heritage and information technology services is poor, the project aimed to find effective and ‘culturally appropriate’ ways of mobilising archival materials. While the scope of the project included attention to the infrastructure and resourcing needs of these communities, it was far more concerned with finding ways of enabling archival access without violating cultural protocols, eroding traditional rights, or upsetting local rules around the dissemination of cultural information. My own particular interest was in the ways in which recordings of song were currently being returned, how the arrival of this material was being managed at the local level and how these recordings were being reintegrated into people’s lives. The repatriation of this ‘sonic heritage’ is now more achievable than ever before

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 - 2 <http://www.ictmusic.org/sites/default/files/ICTM%20Statement%20on%20Indigenous%20Music%26Dance.pdf> (Accessed 12 December 2018.)
 - 3 The ARC Linkage Project ‘Re-integrating Central Australian community cultural collections’ (LP140100806) is a partnership between the Central Land Council (CLC), the peak Indigenous representative body covering the southern half of the Northern Territory, the University of Sydney, and the University of Melbourne. I was employed by the project to carry out this research.

(largely thanks to technologies of digitisation) but questions remain over the impact these archival returns are having on communities and cultural practices.

The account below describes the process of returning recordings of songs that are still in use among various Anmatyerr-speaking communities today. The content of these songs relates to the crucially important young men's initiation ceremonies that occur annually in most Anmatyerr communities and have an equivalence across many other Central Australian communities. The song and ceremonial traditions of Anmatyerr people have nonetheless received far less scholarly attention than that of their Warlpiri (Meggitt 1966; Peterson 1997; Curran 2010, 2011) and Arrernte neighbours (Strehlow 1971), and anthropological research into Central Australian ritual life has been on the wane for some time. The last in-depth ethnographic exposition of Arandic ceremonial practice was undertaken by Moyle (1986), although Turpin has produced some highly significant ethnomusicological research (for example, Turpin 2013; Turpin & Green 2018). As such, considerably more ethnographic work needs to be carried out before a more complete picture of these traditions can be ascertained. Among the repatriated materials discussed here are a suite of recordings made by contemporary researchers Jennifer Green, Myfany Turpin, and Margaret Carew and an earlier recording made by the pioneering Arandic ethnographer TGH Strehlow. Strehlow's recording was made in 1949 and the more recent recordings of Green and Turpin in 2007 and Green and Carew in 2012. The songs captured on these recordings are sung by Anmatyerr men and are used during two regionally distinct Anmatyerr ceremonies, *akiw* and *anmanty*. *Akiw/akew* refers to the 'bush camp' where male initiates reside during their initiation rites but also to the suite of songs sung while the young men are under instruction from their male elders. *Anmanty*, on the other hand, refers to the set of songs used by Western and Central Anmatyerr men during the public aspects of initiation ceremonies (known as *apwelh* elsewhere in the Arandic region). They sing *anmanty* as the women perform *anthep*, the distinctive women's dance used during these ceremonies.⁴ Both the songs associated with *akiw* and *anmanty* continue to be regularly sung at these annual ritual events; however, as is shown below, they have suffered considerable attenuation in recent decades.

The recording and preservation of traditional Aboriginal song has its beginnings in early anthropological practice in Australia. Recordings were first made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a document of 'primitive' 'verse' or 'chants' and at this time Aboriginal singing was regarded as a relic of 'stone age' culture. Later in the 20th century, however, while the conception of Aboriginal people as 'primitive' weakened under new non-evolutionary anthropological models (Gray 2007), the desire to 'salvage' threatened traditions intensified (Gruber 1970). TGH Strehlow's recordings were, for example, made with the explicit intention of seeing that Central Australian songs would be 'preserved' for 'eternity' (Gibson 2017), and similar objectives continued to drive ethnographic work elsewhere in Australia, particularly among ethnomusicologists and linguists who are keenly aware of the decline of global linguistic diversity. Contemporary work in these fields maintains an urgent need to record, document, and archive threatened forms of linguistic and cultural expression. The aforementioned Green

4 Men at Napperby noted that they used *apwelh* to specifically refer to the cleared space utilised as a ceremonial ground and *anmanty* was used to refer to the songs sung by the men, as well as the ceremony in general.

and Turpin recordings were indeed funded under a Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project with precisely these objectives in mind.⁵

Understanding what informants, singers, and community members make of these recordings, however, requires its own form of ethnographic and historical enquiry. Strehlow's informants, for example, participated in the documentation of their songs amid conditions of considerable inequity and an unusually lengthy and entangled relationship with TGH Strehlow, a highly singular and 'possessive' ethnographer (Hill 2003). His various performers and informants did nonetheless communicate their own interests in having their song expertise recorded and sought greater recognition of their complex and diverse ceremonial practices (Gibson in press). During the making of the more contemporary recordings Green, Turpin, and Carew produced, senior singer Jack Cook Ngal expressed similar aspirations. He wanted future generations of Anmatyerr people to have access to these recordings so that they might be used for revivification, but also so that others might come to understand the full importance of these repertoires as critical to Aboriginal identity.

This song here *anwern impem* [we leave behind], *ilernakarl alyek anmanty* [the *anmanty* songs that we sang], so that they can carry [this tradition] on when we are gone ... They can teach them themselves ... That why we are here today, *inang ntwerreketyeh* [so they can hold on to this] Anmatyerr side. *Mer nhenh* [This country], this Australia here, this belongs to Aboriginal people. They've got to be strong, hold the country. (Jack Cook, pers. comm. to Jennifer Green, 7 June 2007)

The return of archival recordings of *akiw* and *anmanty* to Anmatyerr communities today has produced different responses. These recordings were revered less for their historical or heritage value and more for their capacity to reiterate and uphold present-day socio-cultural practices associated with the initiation ceremonies. As I explain below, *akiw* and *anmanty* continue to be known and sung by a small group of men who practise and teach these songs during ceremonial gatherings involving men across the generations. Despite a noticeable decline in the number of expert singers and an attenuation of song knowledge for other genres of traditional song, Anmatyerr people have maintained the importance of *akiw* and *anmanty*. Learnt entirely within an Anmatyerr domain of ceremonial practice, ritually based knowledge dissemination and the dictates of appropriate kin relations, these songs persist and remain crucial to the work of 'making men' (rites designed to mark entrance into the world of adulthood).

The growing influence of post-colonial politics and decolonising methodologies combined with the portability of digital objects in recent decades has meant that song recordings are now being returned to Indigenous communities with great regularity. Given the vulnerability of Aboriginal song traditions in Australia discussed earlier, it is understandable that this return is generally carried out with the intention of assisting revival, reconstruction, or reinvention. In communities where song persists, though, the return of recordings that still hold currency and are still performed produces different responses. These responses outlined below give us an indication of how Anmatyerr communities continue to manage, integrate, and deal with the return of recorded song.

5 Grant id: IPF0100, SG0048.

The return

I took the recordings of *akiw* and *anmanty* with me to the communities of Engawala (Alcoota) and Laramba (Napperby) on repeated field trips between 2015 and 2017. The more recent recordings had been made by female linguist/ethnomusicologists working with men, so it was considered appropriate that a male researcher should also investigate the significance and meaning of these songs. While women are permitted to listen to *anmanty* and *akiw* songs and have some understanding of their significance, they are only ever sung by men. Used to induct younger males into manhood, their full significance is the domain of men. As Michaels put it, women might know some of the details but they are generally not permitted to speak of these things in public or exchange them in any economic sense (Michaels 1985: 508). Thus, even though it was entirely permissible that female researchers could make these original recordings – in fact Green, Turpin, and Carew were urged to make these recordings – it was considered that further prompting about the contemporary significance of these archival materials might best be done by a male. Such discussions might also elicit new perspectives.

The other recording reviewed during the course of this research was made by the somewhat controversial ethnographer TGH Strehlow. Strehlow worked almost entirely with Aboriginal men throughout the course of his four-decade-long career and came under fire for his revelation of secret men's rituals (Morton 1995; Hill 2003). I had serendipitously discovered Strehlow's recording of *anmanty* during the course of my dissertation research. Strehlow had recorded a suite of songs with a Western Arrernte man (Nathanael Rauwiraka) whose conception site lay within the Anmatyerr territory of Ilewerr (Lake Lewis) and which he titled the *ahenenh* 'woma python' song of Ilewerr. It was while these songs were being played back to Anmatyerr men at Napperby that the men identified the *anmanty* song set among them, despite Strehlow having made no specific reference to *anmanty* in his documentation. Included in the Strehlow recordings were additional songs referring to other ancestral stories in the Ilewerr estate region, including many men-only, restricted songs relating to the *ahenenh* and other songs which the Napperby men had not learnt.

The methodology used to review the various song recordings involved playing these recorded materials to well-known song experts (many of them the original singers) and then inviting them to provide commentary. The men were also asked to advise on any cultural restrictions that might apply to the materials, discuss their status as cultural property and provide further instructions on how the recordings might be distributed and accessed in the future. This often involved consultations with senior men, in the presence of one or two younger men who oversaw discussions and provided support for their elders. Once the cultural status of the materials had been ascertained, however, subsequent listening sessions became more relaxed and the men would begin to call over others in the community to share in the songs, and engage in further deliberations. Participation in the listening sessions was also seen as a way of having Anmatyerr views documented, seeing the expertise of senior singers recognised and ensuring that the future use of the material would be based upon their specialist recommendations.

The *akiw* ‘bush camp’

Very little has been written about the meaning or significance of *akiw*. Speakers of the mutually intelligible Arandic languages, Eastern and Central Arrernte and Anmatyerr, use the term to denote a men’s ceremonial camp, also known in English as a ‘bush camp’ (Dobson & Henderson 1994: 68; Green 2010: 22; Turpin & Ross 2012: 55). *Akiw* is thus both a place and an event where men, specifically young male initiates, are exposed to various ceremonial traditions including songs, mythologies, body paint designs, and other ritual practices. First noted by Strehlow in his fieldwork notes with Arrernte speakers, the term evokes a male-only ceremonial camp where cultural and religious instruction takes place.⁶ These ‘bush camps’ are still spoken of as less colonised spaces, often located on the edges of community settlements, where the full vitality and regenerative energies of traditional culture can be displayed and shared.

Akiw is not just a space or place, as it equally refers to the songs and stories recounted during these ‘bush camp’ events. What is remarkable, though, is that despite considerable work on Arrernte ritual, song, and mythology over many years (Spencer & Gillen 1899, 1904; Strehlow 1907; Strehlow 1947, 1971), there is no published ethnographic record of *akiw*. The Anmatyerr dictionary notes that the term *akiw* (or *akew*) is used for the camp where male initiates congregate during young men’s initiation ceremonies and also refers to the songs sung at this gathering (Green 2010: 22). The recordings of *akiw* songs that Green and Turpin made at Mulga Bore in 2007 therefore add new information on a little-documented Arandic cultural practice. The recordings were made over two days and each session was filmed and audio recorded with the three expert singers of *akiw*: Harold Payne Mpetyan, Lindsay Bird Mpetyan, and Ken Tilmouth Penangk (Figure 1). Green and Turpin were camped at Mulga Bore for several days, recording women’s *awely* songs and women’s sand-drawing narratives. The *akiw* songs were recorded on the verandah of a house in the community and women and children were well within earshot.

Harold’s son, Joseph Ngai, sat nearby to learn from the experience. After discussing these recordings with the three original singers, I came to realise that while *akiw* may be used as a generic term, the suite of songs was of particular local significance.

Singers of this particular suite of *akiw* primarily speak and identify with the Eastern Anmatyerr language. They and their families nonetheless possess close personal and cultural ties to the speakers of Eastern Arrernte and Alyawarr. Ceremonies will also often involve people from across the wider Arandic cultural-linguistic region and include speakers of Anmatyerr, Arrernte, and Alyawarr. The people that sing and use these *akiw* songs mostly reside in the communities of Engawala (Alcoota) and Mulga Bore. While the principal singers of *akiw* generally reside in Eastern Anmatyerr communities, they are also highly mobile and will often spend time in the township of Alice Springs and other Aboriginal communities in the region. I found it very difficult to meet up with Harold Payne, for example, due to his frequent movement between the communities of Mulga Bore, Engawala, Adelaide Bore, Arlparra (New Store), and Ti Tree.

6 Strehlow’s Field Diary (1953: 50), Strehlow Research Centre, Alice Springs.



Figure 1. A young boy, Joseph Payne, sits with Lindsay Bird and Harold Payne as they listen back to their recording of *akiw*, with Myfany Turpin in the foreground (left–right), Mulga Bore, 7 June 2007 (photo: Jennifer Green)

Returning *akiw*

I began consultations with people at Engawala in September 2017. A decade had elapsed since the Turpin and Green recordings were made, and Ken Tilmouth, one of the most well-respected elders from the northeastern Arrernte and Anmatyerr regions, was eager to review them again. Green and Turpin had returned copies of these recordings on DVD soon after they were made, but being susceptible to damage (particularly in harsh desert climes and amid overcrowded dwellings) these copies were not dependable in the long term. Ken and I had already spent considerable time together discussing other recordings and artefacts Strehlow collected in the 1960s, so my interest in *akiw* – which, being a more open tradition, is less fiercely guarded than a person’s own cultural inheritance is – was treated with a degree of ease. These songs, he explained, belonged to his country (father’s father’s estate) of Atwel but they were known widely by many men and could be sung by a larger cohort of people than his own sacred songs. Although *akiw* is still part of the general “revelatory regime of value” (Myers 2014: 80) in these desert societies – where the fundamental concern is to limit the dispersal of highly valued forms of cultural property and knowledge – it was less circumscribed. *Akiw* was not a form of cultural property governed by particularly high levels of exclusivity and secrecy, but something more liberally managed and shared among men.

How each of the original singers was personally responsible for *akiw* became a theme of our discussions. However, in the intervening years the three men had aged considerably

and sadly Harold's son had passed away. The loss of this young man was a cruel reminder of the high mortality rates among impoverished Australian Aboriginal communities and the subsequent impacts that this has on cultural transmission. In small communities like these, where there are limited numbers of people to take on roles as active performers of particular ceremonial traditions, the death of one or two people can have serious consequences. One of my key inquiries became ascertaining just how vulnerable *akiw* was: did the reality of what Jackson (2007) refers to as "cultural endangerment" influence people's attitude towards these recordings or would they respond in other ways? As *akiw* had received so little attention in the previous literature, it would also be hard to assess cultural change or attenuation over time.

As soon as my consultations began in earnest, though, it was clear that *akiw* not only persists but remains critical to the education of young men. At Engawala, Harold Payne briefly listened to the first 10 seconds of the recording before shifting his focus to an explanation of the song. While the recording was the catalyst, his primary interest was in describing the various totemic sites and topography that featured in *akiw*. The songs principally referred to the estate of Atwel, a large area to the west of Alcoota Station which takes in parts of the Mount Riddock, Bushy Park Station, and Delny cattle station leases (Gray 2007: 138), and in particular the site of Awerr-pwenty (lit. *awerr* 'boy'; *pwenty* 'ceremony'), also known as Mount Bleechmore. While Tilmouth was repeatedly acknowledged as a senior *merek-artwey* 'owner', 'boss', or 'custodian' for this estate and therefore its associated song/ceremonial traditions, Harold and his classificatory brother Lindsay Bird (the other two singers on the recordings) were described as *kwertengerl* 'guardians', 'managers', or 'offsiders', who work with him in tandem. These men belonged to the neighbouring estate of Ilkewartn and thus shared the responsibility of maintaining *akiw* for the 'owners' from Atwel.⁷

The term *kwertengerl*, and its equivalent in other Australian Aboriginal languages, has been the subject of considerable attention in the anthropological literature for some time (Pink 1936). The idea of a *kwertengerl* denotes an important social role often found in many parts of Australia (Young 1981; Nash 1982, 1984; Morphy & Morphy 1984; Keen 1997).⁸ For Sutton, the dual roles of the 'manager' and 'owner' are a "ritual based system of formalised complementary filiation" (Sutton 2003: 194) whereby (using the Arandic terminology) the *kwertengerl* – who are related to the *merek-artwey* via their mother's and their mother's brother's country – manage, advise, and protect the ritual knowledge and sites possessed by the *merek-artwey*. Anthropological sources from across Australia suggest that these types of rights and duties vary in character and intensity but were present among most Aboriginal groups (Morton 2017: 63). In the Anmatyerr context, the *kwertengerl* will, for example, play an important role in helping the *merek-artwey* maintain the integrity and long-term transmission of their estate-based

7 While there was an expectation that men from across the generations from both of these estates (Atwel and Ilkewartn) would respect and carry out these obligations, key individuals were often singled out as being 'number one' (foremost) *kwertengerl* or *merek-artwey* due to their inherited rights in the material as well as their seniority, social standing, and cultural expertise.

8 In other parts of Australia equivalent groups are known as *kirda* (Warlpiri), *mangaya* (Warumungu), *gidjan* (Jawoyn), *ngimirringki* (Yanyuwa), etc.

(place-based) rituals, songs, dances, and so on.⁹ Likened to a ‘governance structure’ by some Warlpiri people (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes & Box 2008), these complementary tasks ensure that everyone within this network of relatedness has a role to play. As I have argued elsewhere (Gibson 2018), this system of complementary filiation could be better understood and incorporated into the management of Central Australian archival collections.

As *kwertengerl* for the *akiw* songs, both Harold Payne and Lindsay Bird were obliged to know the repertoire and the associated mythic traditions in fine detail. Evidencing deep intimacy with the material, both men described these songs as Apwert-urrperl-areny (songs belonging to the site of Apwert-urrperl ‘black hill’) and specifically referred to important associations with the sites of Kwepal and Awerr-pwenty (both within the larger Atwel estate region). It was at Kwepal that two ancestral women who permanently resided in this area (*mer akweteth*) observed the *away-map*, a group of young boys, travelling from the far south (perhaps from as far away as Port Augusta in South Australia) and being led by a man known as Kwekaty through Alice Springs and further north. As we listened to the recordings, Harold would point out various aspects of the song’s contents. For example, there were references to *alpeyt* ‘the white tail tips of the bilby’ (*Macrotis lagotis*) that were worn by the female ancestors, the ‘smell’ of *ahakey* ‘native currants’ (*Psydrax latifolia*), and other landscape features, such as *utnathat* ‘mulga flowers’ and a non-edible grass or a plant with ‘red’ seed heads.¹⁰ Although extremely brief, the various explanations Harold and others gave suggest that translations of these song texts could be developed if sufficient time was allocated for in-depth linguistic and ethnomusicological analysis.

At the very heart of this song tradition was a Dreaming narrative involving travelling *awerr* ‘boys’ that has already been partially noted in the literature for the Alice Springs region (Spencer & Gillen 1899; Gunn 2000: 114–115; Gray 2007: 139; Kimber 2011: 29–30). In these particular *akiw* songs the narrative (songline) begins where these ancestral figures move northwards, beyond Arrernte territory and into the Anmatyerr-speaking area. Each of the three singers explained that the ancestral women of Atwel watched the group of boys as they arrived at a rockhole on the western side of Mueller Creek before the boys move through Atwel and to the next estate of Ilkewartn, Harold and Lindsay’s patrilineal country. From this point on in the narrative, Harold, as an owner for the Ilkewartn estate, gave the names of the numerous geographical sites where the boys travelled across Ilkewartn country but it was only by working together that these three singers (one *merək-artwey* and two *kwertengerl*) were able to legitimately discuss and share their profound knowledge of the material.

Managing *akiw*

The complementary relationship referred to earlier underscored the importance of highly localised but also interpersonal processes of sharing knowledge of songs, not only as

9 *Kwertengerl* may also be recruited from classificatory kin from the opposite moiety with appropriate subsections and knowledge or seniority to fulfil these roles. For example, the *kwertengerl* for people of the Pwerrerl subsection are Ngwarray.

10 My audio recorder failed when recording this information and I have been unable to follow up the Anmatyerr name for this species of grass.

performance, but as markers of landscape, story, and social relations. These songs continue to be circulated among men according to these present and ongoing social relationships, and thus any present and future management of recordings of *akiw* needs to be handled in the same way. They were, as Bird explained it, *tywerreng anyent-areny* ‘sacra from one area or region’, and needed to be understood as bound to relationships that emanate from specific estates. As ceremonial knowledge is highly valued, and vital to socio-cultural reproduction in these communities, men seek to gain and be associated with its presentation and transmission. The norms of kinship, reciprocity, compassion, and the need to “always ask,” as Myers (1982) notes in respect to the utilisation of material resources, equally apply to the use and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage.

For Anmatyerr people today, the recordings of *akiw* need to be managed with contemporary ceremonial and social lives in mind. *Akiw* continues to be sung in the ceremonial camps for young men and, as one man put it, the song series is used to “*angkety mpwarem*” – to raise speech bans or restrictions on the young men. At this juncture they are permitted to talk and socialise again after a period of seclusion. As noted above, senior men and women still know and understand the mythic content of these songs. But, even though many remain familiar with *akiw*, the fact that these songs refer to specific places and Dreamings, and belong to certain families, means that senior custodians should first give approval prior to their use or dissemination. Those with rights in the material therefore include ‘owners’ and ‘managers’ but also others with links via Dreaming. It was explained, for example, that one Eastern Arrernte man had rights in *akiw* because an ancestral *amwang* ‘snake’ had travelled through his country and then on to Atwel, and others were said to have responsibilities due to the fact that the song was used so widely in ceremonial gatherings. While primary ownership and rights in the material were underlined by the dyadic system of complementary filiation and the focus on estates, *akiw* was important to an expanded network of people via these relationships. The senior *merek-artwey* and *kwertengerl* were responsible for leading and instructing in these song traditions but others could know and perform them.

The return of these recordings thus sparked a deep sense of pride among those community members who had maintained their essential ceremonial practices. In every consultation, younger men were brought along to participate in the listening sessions. This was done not so that they could learn from the recorded material, but to hear the elders explaining the song content and its significance. They were encouraged to join in on the conversations with me and assist with explanations. The manner in which this was done left me with little doubt that comprehension and aptitude in ceremonial matters, although possessed by a small cohort, was present across the generations. Keenly aware that in other parts of Australia these traditions had waned, senior Anmatyerr men would often turn our conversations towards the issue of ongoing ceremonial practice. In demonstrating their knowledge of this material and their ability to ‘sing along’ with recordings, each of the men involved felt significant pride and enjoyed social prestige. Indeed, on other occasions where contemporary singers have not recognised songs from the archive, their responses have often been a mixture of sadness and shame (Gibson in press). Some of the songs associated with the Ilewer estate that Strehlow recorded, for example, were completely unknown to the elders at Napperby. Upon listening to these recordings people looked to the ground, shook their heads in disbelief and explained

that the socio-economic realities of stockwork and labouring on cattle stations when they were young men meant that they had missed the opportunity to learn 'everything'. The return of archival recordings can therefore produce uncomfortable responses. In this case it exposed previously unrecognised areas of cultural loss. Prior to the return of this material these men were unaware of what they did not know.

What was critical about these discussions though was the manner in which the recordings should be treated. They were not something to be relied upon or used in a way that might circumvent the interpersonal, oral, and observational basis of cultural exchange in these small communities. Quite different from the discourse of 'cultural transmission', where it is assumed that ideas, information, or skills might be 'transmitted' from person to person, for these Anmatyerr men the emphasis was on the importance of immersion in social action. Rather than understanding song knowledge as something that eventuates following directed instruction, careful listening, or persistent practice (although it does involve all of these things), their sentiment suggested something more holistic. The type of intergenerational 'transmission' of tacit knowledge that these Anmatyerr men discussed was more akin to the idea that capabilities and understandings are, as Ingold puts it, 'grown' and 'regrown' in each generation via personal interactions, social movement, and long-term exposure and participation (Ingold 2000: 356). To know how a song ought to be sung certainly requires observation and listening, but to know the various sites that a song refers to, its mythico-religious connotations, and the embodiment of these relations in contemporary and past generations of people requires lengthy germination. As Povinelli (2016: 157) has observed in northern Australian Aboriginal communities, the process of 'learning' involves a 'refashioning' of the self that cannot be separated from an entire host of relations and interactions with place, in-place beings, and kin. Intensely located cultural skills such as the singing of *akiw* are intertwined in this nexus and cannot simply be 'added on' to one's person. Such knowledges and skills are 'grown' within people via social interaction and interactions with country. This is precisely why these Anmatyerr men, although happy for recordings of song to act as a supportive resource, remained focused on song genres that were present and in use. The recordings of *akiw* were seen as useful as a form of cultural security, but secondary to the more immediate forms of interpersonal, oral, and observational learning within the contexts of social and ceremonial life.

While all were adamant that *akiw* was still being heard, learnt, and sung during the annual ceremonial gatherings, there was a recognition that these recordings might assist future generations. Fully aware of the history of song loss across much of Australia, some younger Anmatyerr men expressed a degree of anxiety about their cultural future and therefore were more open to the opportunities offered by recording technologies. For the moment, though, the pedagogical practices modelled by their fathers and grandfathers – careful observation, participation, listening, and deference to seniority and expertise – held precedence. The older men repeatedly shirked any offer of digital copies of the material, as they clearly did not need the resource themselves and did not see recordings as a required resource for the education of young men at this point in time. Some younger men, however, did see the potential in having access to recordings but appeared unsure about how to handle these resources among their generally low-tech, impoverished, and poorly serviced communities. Those who did ask for

copies of *akiw* commented that they would be able to play the recordings via the USB input on their car stereos during the male activities such as hunting trips. The songs could then be played during recreation, used as a catalyst for further discussion and ensure a limited circulation among a local cohort of related families.

Anmanty as a regional tradition

In Anmatyerr communities to the west, including Laramba (Napperby), Yuelamu (Mount Allan), Ti Tree, and Aileron, a different song tradition, known as *anmanty*, is associated with male initiations. Apparently equivalent to what Anmatyerr speakers term *apwelh* (Green 2010: 117), this tradition concerns the public aspects of a young man's initiation and is sung by groups of men during these ceremonies. As indicated earlier, I first learnt of this tradition from its present-day 'owner', the senior Anmatyerr custodian of the Ilewerr region, Huckitta Lynch, in 2016 while working with him on the song recordings of TGH Strehlow. It is possible that certain *anmanty* songs can be used in multiple genres, and Lynch commented that some of these songs, in addition to being used during *anmanty* ceremonies, could be used to heal the sick. While the songs referring to the *ahenenh* were considered secret-sacred, the *anmanty* songs were identified as public repertoires open for discussion. Soon other Anmatyerr men had gathered around to listen to the recording and quickly joined in with the singing. Collectively they explained how many of these songs were still performed at 'anmanty-time', during the annual initiation gatherings.

While the terms *anmanty* and *apwelh* were used interchangeably by some of the men, it appears that *anmanty* is the specific name given to the earliest stage of the initiation ceremonies in the Western and Central Anmatyerr area. Men sing the *anmanty* songs as the women perform *antheb*, 'a women's dance', across the *apwelh* 'cleared ceremonial ground'. The *anmanty* songs are highly particular to the mythological activity of the Ilewerr estate. *Anmanty* is therefore related to, but not the same as, the *apwelh* ceremonies conducted elsewhere in the Arandic region, where different songs are apparently sung during these public aspects of the ceremony. Far greater ethnographic and ethnomusicological research is certainly required into the specific content of these ceremonies; however, *anmanty* was described as consisting of different 'parts'. The first 'part' of the *anmanty* performance was referred to as *mwerlkenty*. This is the first dance performed in the early morning when a man will stand at the edge of the *arnkenty* 'men's camp' on one side of an *apwelh* and signal over to the women's camp located at the other side of a cleared performance space. This man will hold aloft a *terekerr* 'corella' feather and twirl it in the air to signal to the women to begin dancing towards 'boys' who are to be initiated.

When I returned to Laramba with other recordings of *anmanty*, there was immediate interest. These songs had been recorded with Jack Cook Ngal and Benny Nolan Kemarr at Yuelamu (Mount Allan) in 2007 by Green and Turpin (Figure 2). Following a request from Cook, further recordings were made in 2012 by Green and Carew. Cook clearly possessed the cultural rights to sing *anmanty*; however, some important questions remained about how access and use of the recordings might be handled. As the songs related specifically to the single estate of Ilewerr, it was considered that the senior 'owner' for that country needed to be

consulted. Green and Turpin thus made various attempts to include Lynch in this process and were ultimately able to play the Cook recordings to him. His response at the time was that the singing voices sounded as if they were “in a cave,” and suggested that new recordings could be made with a large cohort of singers in situ. According to both Lynch and Cook, *anmanty* was a highly local affair, centred upon the happenings of ancestors within the margins of the Ilewerr estate and with significant yet tangential links to travelling dancing women ancestors from the west.



Figure 2. Jack Cook listening to playback of recordings of *anmanty* made by Jennifer Green and Myfany Turpin with Cook and Nolan in 2007 (photo: Jennifer Green)

Anmanty was identified as a distinctly Anmatyerr song set from and about Ilewerr and men from a range of different estates sang it. Most Anmatyerr songs are the personal heritage of family groups and the principal means by which people demonstrate their patrilineal clan identity, as belonging to a defined clan estate. These estate groups are responsible for tracts of land, associated *Anengkerr* ‘Dreamings’, and related ceremonial practices and it is up to the more senior and ritually expert members of the group to decide when, how, and where songs can be performed. This relationship to song is quite different to the popular conception of a

‘songline’ where people will sing of ancestors as they journey across multiple sites and estates and travel considerable distances. As a distinctly local song tradition, featuring local ancestors, *anmanty* fits with the previously observed Arandic stress on defined clan estates (Strehlow 1965), although admittedly this can be over-emphasised (Keen 1997; Morton 1997).

The return of these recordings, however, revealed an interesting ethnographic paradox of sorts. Even though *anmanty* is regarded as the personal heritage of large family groups, it appears to be quite distinctive in the manner in which it is shared. Quite unlike most other estate-based song repertoires in the Arandic region, *anmanty* is known by men from many different communities and the song is used in initiation ceremonies in multiple communities. Numerous men commented that *anmanty* was primarily sung in the Anmatyerr-speaking communities of Laramba (Napperby), Alyuen (Aileron), Aleyaw (Ti Tree), and Pmara Jutunta (6 Mile), but was also used in the communities of Willowra, Yuelamu (Mount Allan), and Yuendumu, where the use of the Warlpiri language is more predominant. Use of these songs was also spreading southwards into the Arrernte-speaking region, where a different young men’s initiation song set used to be sung. In recent years, however, the decreasing number of senior male Arrernte singers had led to the enlistment of Anmatyerr elders to perform the necessary ceremonies for making young men. Close kin, and linguistically and culturally very similar, to the Arrernte, these ritual experts have stepped in to fill the breach.

There was little doubt, however, that *anmanty* was not only Irewerr-centric but that it was considered distinctive to the Anmatyerr people. As one elder described it:

Anmanty is really for Anmatyerr people, not for Luritja people, Pitjantjatjara, Pintupi, or Warlpiri people. They have their own culture. Their ceremony is ‘self-again’ [independent]. They don’t know this *anmanty* law ... Some other people come in to learn. They want to learn with Anmatyerr people because they can’t use their songs from somewhere else. They have to come here to learn. (Jack Cook, pers. comm. to J Green, 7 June 2007)

The regional variation in the song and ceremonial content of young men’s initiation repertoires has been noted elsewhere in the literature (Strehlow 1968, 1978). Recent research by Georgia Curran (2010: 94) has revealed, for example, that the Warlpiri communities to the west of the Anmatyerr continue to sing a set of songs during their *Kurdi* (initiation ceremonies) that reference sites across large swathes of Warlpiri territory before terminating at Nyepwat, a site within the Irewerr estate region (Curran uses the Warlpiri cognates for these Anmatyerr site names: Yunyupardi for Nyepwat and Yuluwurru for Irewerr). The dancing women songline referenced in Curran’s thesis passes by Nyepwat and continues eastwards to Pwely, Alhanker and then into Alyawarr country. Among the Western and Central Anmatyerr, however, the *anmanty* song set references local ancestors that travelled between sites such as Nyepwat, Alparr, Tyelemepelemp, and Kwamparr, all within the Irewerr estate.

Putting *anmanty* in place

The recordings made by Strehlow, Green and Turpin, and Green and Carew inspired the senior singers of *anmanty* not only to demonstrate their knowledge and use of the songs

today, but to make the song's relationship to the landscape explicit. Lynch explained that it was necessary to travel to and see the sites referred to in the songs (Figure 3). At the site of Kwamparr (Claypan Bore), for example, *Anengkerr* ancestors had gathered for an initiation ceremony and made *arreyet* 'long dancing sticks/poles'. At Alparr (lit. 'coolamon') a sole female ancestor named Arlerl-arlerl Penangk had left her baby behind in a coolamon as she travelled along Artety Ulpay (Napperby Creek) and down towards the salt lake of Ilewerr in search of firewood and food. This ancestor had last *angan-irrek* 'been spiritually conceived' in Lynch's older sister, Mampey Penangk. According to family history, Mampey would listen closely to the singing of *anmanty* during these ceremonies and ensure that all the men correctly recited 'her' verses. And at Nyepwat, the site was marked by a complex stone arrangement representing the ancestors who had gathered for the first initiation ceremonies. The description of this site and the ceremony it represented had clear equivalences with the mythological origins of young men's initiation ceremonies that Spencer and Gillen (1899: 394–402) had recorded more than a century earlier. Nyepwat, the Laramba men claimed, was so significant to this initiation mythology that it was once well known to Arrernte and Anmatyerr men everywhere.

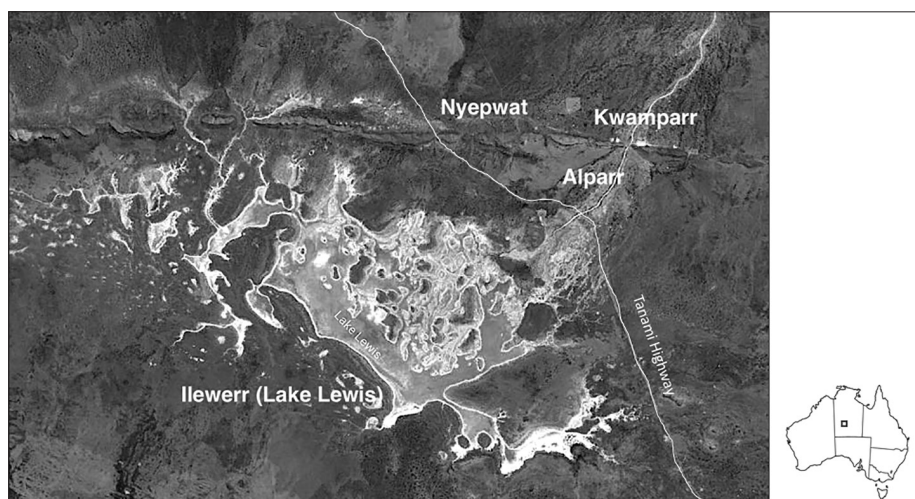


Figure 3. Approximate locations of some of the sites associated with *anmanty* in the Ilewerr estate

The response to this material highlighted not just the opportunities that collaborative research might offer scholarship, but just how important the performative aspects of people's engagement with sonic heritage can be. During a third visit to the community in October of 2016, Lynch and his *kwertengerl* insisted upon producing another recording of *anmanty* that could be archived alongside those made by Nathaniel Rauwiraka with Strehlow in 1949 and by Cook in the 2000s (Figure 4). In making these recordings Lynch was reaffirming his status as the *merek-artwey* for Ilewerr. While not discounting the rights of others, such as those spiritually conceived in the Ilewerr estate or related to it as *kwertengerl*, he and his cohort of senior singers at Laramba were keen to have their important links to this ceremony recognised. The point being made was that although others can sing *anmanty*, they would not necessarily have the right to visit these related sites within the Ilewerr estate without

permissions from Lynch and his *kwertengerl*. Few others would have the intricate knowledge of these places and their related stories.

A journey to the site of Nyepwat in October 2016 with two younger men from the community in tow was a particularly vivid example of just how eager these men were to demonstrate their expertise. Wanting to emphasise the relationship of this tradition to the landscape of Ilewerr, we travelled to a number of sites where relevant small songs from the *anmanty* repertoire were sung in situ.¹¹ Upon arriving at Nyepwat, Lynch and three of his *kwertengerl* sang small songs from the *anmanty* series that related to specific natural features – a tree, two standing stones, and other geological formations – each representing the figures of various ancestors. In addition, we were taken to sites associated with the travelling dancing women songline that travels from the west and continues east.¹² One elder described the stone arrangement, and the story it represented, as being so integral to Anmatyerr people that it was “like a sacred site, but not a sacred site,” meaning that the site and the *anmanty* performances were not exclusive to an audience of initiated men, as in the case of secret-sacred men’s rituals, but something fundamentally important to all Anmatyerr people.¹³ As Ronnie McNamara put it, “It is important for ceremony. The centre is there. It is the main one for everybody.”¹⁴ *Anmanty* is spoken of as a highly significant, community-held tradition, lacking the exclusivity, gender restrictions and, thus, dangers associated with other, more closely guarded religious ceremonies.

This was also an opportunity to reveal to the younger men present just how important it was to learn songs within the context of a totemic landscape. The only way that the full significance of these songs could be properly grasped would be via the careful tutelage of ceremonial experts who could point out particular trees, claypans, and rock formations. To do this required excellent geographical and cultural knowledge. In this case, the returned recordings served as a catalyst for senior men to take younger men with them to sites that had not been visited for decades. Lynch spoke of how he had been shown these places by the men who had also taught him to sing *anmanty* (past *merek-artwey* for Ilewerr, Dick Utyew and Charlie Artetyerwenguny) and he observed how only a handful of men now knew the locations and details of all of these sites.¹⁵ During this same fieldwork trip, a group of Anmatyerr men consisting of two younger men and four elders camped in the bed of the Napperby Creek and spent each afternoon listening to archival recordings of *anmanty* and other Anmatyerr songs. In the early mornings and evenings, the senior men would spend their time clarifying songs and singing, while during the day we would visit sites and discuss the interconnectedness of song, place, mythology, and person.

As with the discussions of *akiw* in the east, what was clear from these discussions was just how secure *anmanty* was when compared with other genres of male song. The public male ceremonial genre, referred to as *althart*, and the more private and gender-restricted songs

11 In a song series, a ‘small song’ is defined as a sequence of songs that have the same verse (see Ellis & Barwick 1987).

12 This connection with the dancing women mythology in *anmanty* needs to be explored in later research.

13 Ronnie McNamara, pers. comm. to Jason Gibson at Laramba, 1 November 2016.

14 Ronnie McNamara, pers. comm. to Jason Gibson at Laramba, 1 November 2016.

15 Artetyerwenguny was an informant to TGH Strehlow during a fieldwork visit to Aileron in 1968.

associated with particular estates were far more vulnerable, for they were not used in these large initiation gatherings, and only a handful of men knew them. In some cases, entire song sets for particular estates had fallen out of usage. However, numerous men of middle and older generations from across the region knew *anmanty* and most felt confident that they could keep the tradition going. In fact, there is evidence among the Anmatyerr (Gibson in press), and further published evidence from the neighbouring Warlpiri, that participation in these types of young men's initiation ceremonies is growing (Peterson 2000; Curran 2011). So crucial are these ceremonies to the functioning of Central Australian Aboriginal cultural and social life that the very suggestion that *anmanty* (and the various other songs sung during the different open and closed aspects of these ceremonies) might cease to be known was an almost unbearable thought to all concerned. These ceremonies constitute entry into adulthood, ensure inclusion in local, cultural, and religious instruction, and act as a sign of wider Central Australian Aboriginal solidarity. Despite Cook's aforementioned consideration that the recordings of *anmanty* might one day be necessary for the continuation of this tradition, it was clear that all was being done to prevent this becoming a reality.

In the mid to late 20th century, initiation ceremonies were generally held at numerous locations and would feature only two or three initiates. In recent years, however, with a decrease in expert singers across the Anmatyerr and Arrernte regions, initiation ceremonies are taking place at fewer locations and the number of initiates attending ceremonies is growing. Many men describe the increase in the number of initiates (to as many as 19 in recent ceremonies) as being *mamety*, meaning socially unacceptable and likely to bring bad luck. There is also a growing feeling that considerable pressure is being put on a small number of singers to sustain these all-important ceremonies.¹⁶ The aforementioned reliance on senior Anmatyerr to sing at Eastern Arrernte initiation ceremonies, for example, demonstrates this general trend towards cultural attenuation in the Arandic region. Yet, while the Arrernte have only partial recordings of their public initiation songs, the Anmatyerr are fortunate to have these numerous and detailed recordings of *anmanty*.¹⁷ If required or desired, they will be able to turn to the archive to revive this distinct tradition.

16 There is also some concern about the time of year when these ceremonies are held. In the past, initiation ceremonies were reputedly held at any time of the year, but as people became more and more integral to the pastoral economy the European 'Christmas' or 'holiday' period became the only 'free' time available for extended ceremonies. With a warming climate, however, many are now wondering if it might be better to return to a flexible regime and provide some relief to elderly singers. This seems unlikely, though, as the association between these ceremonies and 'Christmas time' has become a key part of the tradition.

17 TGH Strehlow mostly concentrated on estate-based, restricted male songs; however, he did make recordings of what he labelled *ndapa* 'dancing women songs' that were sung in the Western Arrernte region (see Strehlow 1971: 393–417).



Figure 4. Huckitta Lynch in the foreground with Peter Cole (left) and Lesley Stafford (right) at Artety Ulpay (Napperby Creek) during an *anmanty* recording session on 3 November 2016 (photo: Ben Deacon)

Archives and access

At present these communities view all of the recordings, whether made in the mid 20th century or in recent decades, as confirmation of present and enduring cultural practices. They remind people of the presence of ancestors in the landscape as well as personal and kin ties to these ancestors and their *Anengkerr* stories. In this sense, the recordings of both *anmanty* and *akiw* are welcomed as sources of pride and yet at the same time they remind people of the need to grow and regrow song traditions across the generations. Rather than turning to issues of archival management and preservation, my discussions with Anmatyerr men almost always veered towards the importance of knowing song in its context. They emphasised the importance of hearing and singing songs as lived expressions, produced amid a complex milieu of reflection, sociality, and relationships, but also bolstered by a depth of knowledge in ritual and *Anengkerr* that makes them so traditionally affective.

The threat of cultural endangerment has not yet reached the threshold where archival recordings of *akiw* or *anmanty* are required for the purposes of revivification and reimagining. The relatively small cohort of men that knows *akiw*, and the larger group that knows *anmanty*, intend to rely upon their ongoing knowledge and use of these traditions rather than seek out clarification or authorisation from the archive. Younger men across the Anmatyerr region do nonetheless speak of an obvious decline in the number of senior men available to teach these fundamental ceremonies. The passing of each elder is often likened to the demise of entire ‘libraries’ or ‘archives’ of cultural knowledge, but men across the generations agree that, as fascinating and edifying as these recordings may be, their contents can never replace the

performativity and tacit knowledge at the heart of song and ceremony. As John Bradley, an anthropologist working on Yanyuwa song in the Gulf of Carpentaria, has noted, recordings like these will only ever work as “aspirational motivators” towards song performance, and their potential will always be mediated by larger social factors (Bradley 2011: 9). The Anmatyerr emphasis on the grounded, personal, and experiential basis of ceremony thus acknowledges this perspective.

This is not to say that preserving and accessing these recordings is not a future concern. When it came to discussions of access and preservation copies, the men agreed that AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) was a suitable repository, although only if Anmatyerr families had ready access. Suggestions for local archiving solutions in Central Australia were less forthcoming, however. While Cook and Lynch, for example, considered the *anmanty* recordings to be ‘free’ for anybody to hear and that they should be made available to anyone who was interested, they pointed out clearly that the relevant owners and managers of Iwerr needed to oversee the provision of copies. The senior singers of *akiw* gave similar advice. The 2007 recordings were archived at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) with instructions that Iwerr families be consulted before the recordings are used in any way.¹⁸ Subsequent recordings of *anmanty* made by Green and Carew with Cook in 2012 and then by Angeles, Deacon, and Gibson with Lynch during 2016 were to be lodged with the Strehlow Research Centre. As is explained below, although the Strehlow Research Centre may be deemed a suitable place for these recordings, as it contains an extensive collection of Arandic song, the reasons for archiving *anmanty* had more to do with personal relationships with staff at the centre.

Objects and relationships

A key observation made during this research was the importance that Anmatyerr men placed on their personal relationships with researchers, recordists, and collections staff. Anmatyerr people foregrounded these personal relationships as being inherently critical to the present and future management of archival recordings. Rather than wanting to replace personal ties and responsibilities of care with impartial, standardised, and institutional models of management, Anmatyerr men often looked for personal or kinship ties to ground the handling of their recordings. Researchers, on the other hand, although respectful of and keen to cultivate these relationships, were often focused on establishing distinct rules and guidelines for future access and dissemination. Those making recordings today are eager to ensure that there are processes and agreements in place for use of this material in the long term. Without such agreements, researchers/recordists will not only be open to accusations of ‘gatekeeping’ but will have to field access requests and play an ongoing role in management of the material. If they pass away, or are no longer active in the field, what happens then?

With these issues at the forefront of their minds, contemporary researchers are now often searching for technical, institutional, or non-personal solutions that might enable access without the requirement of their personal involvement. In a recent paper on the repatriation

18 <https://elar.soas.ac.uk>

of song recordings to Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, for example, Treloyn, Martin & Charles (2016) discuss ways of using digital technologies to tag and archive recordings without the need for a researcher to act as a conduit to archival discovery and exploration. The ideal here is that Indigenous peoples will be able to do all this themselves and have uninhibited access to their cultural heritage. While the objective of improved access and greater Indigenous control over cultural and historical materials should be unquestioned, the collaborative nature of these recordings ought to receive greater consideration. Writing of ethnographic collections in North America, Aaron Glass (2015) has, for example, argued that this type of material is most often ‘co-constructed’ and emergent “from social encounter and interaction based on relations of consultation and complicity between scholars and research associates” (2015: 19–20). Factoring in the intercultural origins of this material, while elevating Indigenous control over these archives, may not always be a straightforward exercise.

Part of the issue here is that the practices, policies, and procedures of researchers and collecting institutions do not fit easily with cultural practice. In the museum domain, for example, performative aspects of local practice such as songs, dances, and rituals have come to be institutionalised as new categories of ‘object’ alongside more conventional museum pieces (Geismar & Tilley 2003: 170). Song recordings in the digital age therefore become ephemeral, intangible, and endlessly reproducible ‘files’. The transformation of ephemeral events and practices into ‘archival objects’ has, in this context, profoundly changed the scope of what can be construed as a cultural object. From an Anmatyerr point of view, the creation of any archival object will entail relationships among and between people. There is now a growing body of literature demonstrating that Aboriginal people regard the act of sharing cultural knowledge, be it in the form of acrylic painting (Myers 2002), other forms of Indigenous art (Morphy 1992), or in the making of ethnographic collections (Gibson in press), as integral to the establishment of a significant relationship. If we accept that these relationships are also often essential to the co-production of an ethnographic record, in this case a song recording, then it would be imprudent to try and circumvent them. Any researcher interested in decolonising methodologies or wanting to acknowledge the intercultural nature of their work would do well to honour and respect these relationships. While the establishment of better systems of access, preservation, and use ought to be instituted, personal relationships need not be displaced. Many Indigenous communities will, for example, expect a long-term researcher to return to their communities, to provide copies of their materials, and, in some cases, to assist communities in reconnecting with failing or lost traditions.

When discussing archiving and preservation protocols, for example, most men pointed out that they were unaware of any of the archival institutions or their staff. They were, however, familiar with the relatively small number of researchers who had collaborated with them in the recording of their songs and felt comfortable simply contacting the relevant researchers for copies. While this of course does not solve issues of long-term accessibility and preservation, it should be noted that men like Cook place their trust not in institutions but in people.

If these young fellas don’t carry on the *anmanty* song, well they can get the story from you or Jenny Green. And they can go on and on, all the way then. When we’re all gone, you

and Jenny can tell the story, “Well Jack Cook told me that if you fellas don’t understand the *anmanty* song he told us, to tell you mob the story so you can carry on.” *Alakenh* [just like that]. (Jack Cook, pers. comm. to Jason Gibson, 1 November 2016)

When asked where copies of the *anmanty* recordings should be kept, Lynch also quickly gestured towards his classificatory grandson, an Arrernte man who works at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs. This person could be trusted because he understood the ways in which song was tied to estates and Dreamings and, as he lived locally, could be called upon if copies were required. While we might critique Cook and Lynch’s responses as deficient in regards to concerns about long-term management, on the other hand they also speak to an antagonism towards objectification, particularly as the song traditions in question continue to have existential and pragmatic value. These song collections constitute a modern genre of material culture, drawn out of traditional practice, mediated by interpersonal exchanges with researchers, and incorporated into collecting regimes and institutions. Without the type of local Indigenous-run collecting institutions that have emerged, for example, in parts of Melanesia (Geismar & Tilley 2003; Stanley 2007), Anmatyerr communities in Central Australia continue to emphasise the interpersonal and relational as a means of caring for intangible cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The return of these recordings triggered a range of responses from Anmatyerr men and brought up significant questions about cultural endangerment and the processes of cultural transmission. It is evident that considerably more research needs to be conducted before a better description of *anmanty* and *akiw*, in ethnomusicological, linguistic, and anthropological terms, can be developed. Comparative investigations into the similarities and differences of contemporary young men’s initiation ceremonies across the Western and Central Anmatyerr, Warlpiri, and Arrernte communities could illuminate much about the processes of cultural transmission and change across cultural and linguistic blocs.¹⁹ At any rate, the recordings discussed here provide us with an excellent starting point for future research into the public aspects of these ongoing ceremonies.

Any archival objects of cultural significance to Anmatyerr people circulate in ways that produce relationships among and between people. In the study presented above, the return of recordings of *akiw* and *anmanty* were received as reiterations of connections with eternal Dreamings, ongoing cultural performances, personal roles and responsibilities, and the systems of complementary filiation. Anmatyerr people looked to their own networks of relationship, and their own ongoing cultural gatherings and performances as the primary means through which traditions like *akiw* and *anmanty* will find future expression. In Anmatyerr society this type of cultural property is not self-made but extends outward from an identity derived from the pre-existing *Anengkerr*. This fundamentally spiritual or mythic grounding of ceremonial performance asserts a relationship between objects, places, and people. Rights to the cultural

19 For example, the absence of Warlpiri cognates for some of the key terms associated with these ceremonies – *akiw*, *apwelh*, *antheh*, and *anmanty* – suggests that there may be something distinctive about these ceremonies in the Arandic region.

heritage expressed in the recordings of *akiw* and *anmanty* are thus conceived as a bundle of socio-moral entitlements and obligations.

Archiving was thus not seen as a means of maintaining or sustaining *akiw* or *anmanty*, but as a last resort if cultural reproduction failed. The spectre of cultural endangerment has been with Anmatyerr people for decades and with significant social changes in the mid 20th century, ceremonial and religious practice has undergone significant change. People are nevertheless reluctant to treat traditions like these as thing-like entities or texts that can be repurposed or reimagined outside of, or even alien to, the nexus of the geographic, mythic, and relational. As expressions of Dreamings, these songs are regarded as embodying extremely potent properties that only ritual experts who stand in appropriate relationships to land and ancestors can deal with. For Anmatyerr and Arrernte people who have witnessed ceremonial practices disappear from their lives at a rapid pace – since the mid 20th century – archiving of this type of material is a secondary measure. What is foremost in people’s minds is the safeguarding of song via the retention of cultural practice.

This does not mean, however, that where song knowledge persists, recordings become insignificant. As is shown here, the return of recordings can act as a catalyst to performativity and reiterate people’s own pedagogies of orality and listening. Furthermore, the process of returning archival materials can enlighten the research community and collecting institutions about their own responsibilities – personal and institutional – and present opportunities for cultural change within these spheres (see Gibson 2018). While listening to the recordings the senior men would speak over the audio, make gestures to indicate the direction of particular sites, draw ceremonial designs in the sand, and discuss the location of ancestors in the local geography. Repatriation of sonic heritage, therefore, need not be predicated on the idea that it is most valuable when songs are severely threatened or defunct. These recordings can offer a great deal, even where song persists.

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