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Chapter 5
Central Australian Women’s Traditional Songs
Keeping Yawulyu/Awelye Strong

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Australia’s Indigenous people produce and participate in many varieties of music, from opera to hip-hop to performance poetry to traditional ritual performance. This chapter concerns just one of many traditional ritual genres, the yawulyu/awelye ceremonial genre performed by women from various country-based groups in central Australia.¹ Music is only one (albeit essential) aspect of this ritual complex. In most languages of the area, there is no one word for music or even song; rather, such terms as inma (in the Pitjantjatjara language) cover the whole gamut of intertwined music, ceremonial action (including dance), body painting, and ritual objects (Ellis, Ellis, Tur, & McCardell, 1978). Sustaining the musical future of yawulyu/awelye cannot therefore be separated from maintaining all the other social practices that surround its performance.

In July 2010, the authors, together with linguist Mary Laughren, interviewed some of our long-time friends and research collaborators in central Australia about how they see the future of their ceremonies. We asked both older people (60+) and younger people (30+) about how they learned yawulyu/awelye; what, if any, hurdles they see to sustaining the genre; and what they see as the way forward. We used a semistructured interview technique, whereby we

¹ Awelye is the spelling of this genre name in Arrernte and Kaytetye; it is spelt awely in the Anmatyerr and Alyawarr languages.
aimed to garner responses to these key questions but allowed the participants to direct the
topic and course of the interviews, which were conducted in the women’s preferred
language and in a setting where they felt comfortable. Selected portions of the interviews
were later selected for transcription and, if needed, translation into English. Some of the
matters discussed here have also been presented in a different framework in a published
article (Barwick, Laughren, & Turpin, 2013).

The women we consulted are affiliated with eight different yawulyu/awelye
repertories in five different languages: Warlpiri, Warumungu, Kaytetye, Anmatyerr, and
Arrernte. Women now in their 70s and 80s are senior “law women” (women with
responsibility to uphold and teach traditional culture, codified as “law”; Glowczewski,
1991, 1999), while younger women in their 30s and 40s are keen to learn yawulyu/awelye
to assume the cultural responsibility of passing law on to the succeeding generations.

Background
Yawulyu and awelye are cognate names for women’s country-based ceremonies in central
Australia. The term yawulyu is a genre name for land-based women’s ceremonies in the
Warlpiri (Ngumpin-yapa) and neighboring Pintupi and Warumungu areas, while the
cognate word awelye (Arrernte and Kaytetye; spelled awely in Anmatjerr and Alyawarr)
is used for the genre among speakers of Arandic languages. (In the Eastern and Central
Arrernte areas, awelye refers to a genre of healing ceremonies that can be performed by
both men and women.)

Yawulyu/awelye is not the only ceremonial genre performed by women in these
areas: women may also perform alongside men in other public performance genres (such
as Warlpiri purlapa or the Arandic angkwerre) and in other sacred/secret genres of
women-only ceremonies such as yilpinji/ilpentye “love songs,” or jarrarta, some of
which can be sold or traded between neighboring groups along traditional exchange
routes (Poirier, 1992). In the Western Desert area, which has a different social
organization including relations to land, the several women-only songlines do not have a
collective genre name but rather are classified along with other sorts of song as inma;
nevertheless, there are clear parallels in music, dance, and text construction to
yawulyu/awelye. Yawulyu/awelye and related women’s ceremonial genres among
neighboring language groups (such as the Pintupi, Western Desert, and Warumungu)
have been discussed very widely in the literature (e.g., Barwick, 2005; Berndt, 1950;
Dussart, 2000; R. M. Moyle, 1986, 1997; Poirier, 1992; Turpin, 2011; Turpin & Ross,
2013).
The pervasiveness and lifelong significance of *yawulyu* and other ceremonial genres of the Warlpiri are encapsulated in Françoise Dussart’s observation: “Long before they are born and long after they die, the Warlpiri of Yuendumu are directly and inexorably implicated in a complex repertoire of ceremonial activity” (Dussart, 2000, p. 47).

*Yawulyu/awelye* is the principal means by which women demonstrate their patrilineal clan identity, as belonging to a defined clan estate (Peterson & Long, 1986). As suggested in Figure 5.1, a map of the Anmatyerr estate groups produced by April Campbell for the Ti-Tree School Language and Culture program, each language area includes multiple clan estates. Each clan estate has one main *yawulyu/awelye*, usually named by the principal Dreaming (totem) of the estate (country). For example, *awelye akwelye* (water/rain) is the main *awelye* for Arnerre, a country belonging to one of the Kaytetye-speaking patrilineal clans (Turpin, 2005, 2007b). A Dreaming may cross more than one country, in which case two estates may own it (such is the case for *yawulyu ngurlu* “seed,” owned by two Warlpiri-speaking clans). In such cases, however, only those segments of the Dreaming’s travels that pass through their own country (equating to a sequence of song items naming places and activities of the Dreaming) are owned by clanswomen of the relevant estate.

The songs, dances, and associated stories, objects, designs, and ceremonial actions for each *yawulyu/awelye* are handed down within the clan from women to
their brother’s daughters (since the rights to the country and songs are inherited patrilineally, through the father’s line). The songs come from eternal Dreaming law (wirnkarrpa in Warumungu; jukurrpa in Warlpiri; altyerre in Arandic languages), a time out of time in which Dreaming ancestors laid down the laws for humankind and formed the country and all beings that live upon it.

Most individual songs within a yawulyu/awelye series are of unknown origin, though it is clear that others have come into the repertoire in living memory, usually through revelatory dreams in which songs (and associated dances, body designs, and so on) are revealed to the dreamer by an ancestral being (Barwick, 2000; Payne, 1992). Even in such cases, the songs are regarded as having always existed and are attributed to the Dreaming ancestors rather than human agency, although those who receive the songs in dream may derive social prestige through their composition (Dussart, 2000, 2004; Wild, 1987).

Among the social functions of yawulyu/awelye are expression of group solidarity and identity; healing of the ill; celebration of the unique features of the relevant country; and instruction to younger generations of women about their sites, history, and cultural practices, and Aboriginal law more generally (Myers, 1986, p. 112). The use of yawulyu/awelye to create positive emotions to defuse conflict and build social cohesion is highlighted by the remarks of Pwerrerle, an Arrernte songwoman:

*Wele utnenge atyenhe, wele nhakwe apeke-arle, nhakwele-arle\ alhemeh, you know, utnenge nhakwele aneme. Funny you know I feel just like I’m singing out there when I sing. When you sing that song you feel real good you know, utnwenhe ngkwenhe you awerle-arle mwerre-arle when you sing.*

When I sing, it’s as if my spirit traveled over there [Therrirrerte] It’s strange, but I feel like I am at that place. . . . When you sing that song you feel happy, your spirit feels happy when you sing. (interview, March 16, 2010)

Originally performed by women for women only, yawulyu/awelye ceremonies are now performed by women on a range of different public and private occasions. To mount a performance, the presence of leaders (“bosses”—i.e., women who are owners of a particular yawulyu/awelye) is absolutely essential, with the participation of “managers” (i.e., women who are the daughters of female owners) being highly desirable. The “boss” role is called kirda in Warlpiri or apmerew-artweye in Kaytetye, while “managers” are called kurdungurlu in Warlpiri or kwertengerle in Arandic languages. Others may join in both singing and dancing, but only bosses can explain the songs and their significance, hold custody of the ceremonial
objects, direct the body painting, and decide the sequence of activities in the performance:


We went out bush again and my mother and older sister said, “You must remember these songs forever, don’t forget them.” They explained how this ceremony was from my father’s father’s country, and that it goes all the way to Santa Teresa. In the Dreamtime the women traveled all the way to where Santa Teresa mission is. That’s when I really started to learn about ceremony. That’s when we started doing lots of singing and teaching the children. (Pwerrerle, interview, March 16, 2010)

Performances may last for many hours, or even days. A performance consists of a number of discrete song items (typically lasting from 30 seconds to 1 minute). The singing is performed by a group of women led by one or more bosses, with body percussion accompaniment (either handclapping or lap slapping by the singers). There is no limit on the size of the singing group. Yawulyu/awelye performances are multimodal, communicating the topics of the songs in multiple dimensions, including language, rhythm, melody, movement, and iconography (body painting, ground designs, and ceremonial objects). Each repertory has a different characteristic melodic contour, which is repeated for each item in the performance, expanding and contracting to accommodate the song texts.

Song texts are isorhythmic (i.e., they set the same text to the same rhythmic pattern, with regular beating accompaniment always aligned with the same text syllables) and are repeated strictly throughout the song item. Most texts consist of couplets (pairs of lines), frequently occurring in the repetition pattern AABB, with the string repeated over and over again throughout the item (e.g., AABBAABBAA; a characteristic often referred to as “cyclic repetition”). The song leader fits the text to the melody in the moment of performance, meaning that rather than learning songs as a rhythmic/melodic unit, the learner initially needs to follow the leader (Ellis & Barwick, 1989; Turpin, 2007a).

The song texts are typically quite cryptic and contain words difficult to discern due to modification of vowels and consonants and the use of words from different
languages or registers, as well as vocables (Turpin, 2007a, 2007b, 2011). The songs are regarded as the utterances of the Dreaming ancestors concerned, and they often refer to particular places or incidents in the ancestral episodes. This is why the authoritative interpretation of the senior owners of the yawulyu/awelye is necessary.

For a danced performance, the sequence begins with songs performed while the dancers are being painted up with traditional designs under the direction of the bosses. Between the performance of individual songs and their accompanying dances, participants including dancers and singers may discuss the meanings of the song texts and details of the myths that are told in the song texts and re-enacted by the dancers. The body designs of the dancers and the decorations on the ceremonial objects are also related to aspects of the Dreaming ancestors being celebrated in the performance (Ellis, 1970). Some dances are for just one or two dancers, while others involve larger groups dancing in a line (usually organized on the dance ground according to their relationship to the Dreaming/ceremony in question).

**Systems of Learning Music**
Traditionally, learning of yawulyu/awelye songs takes place informally, through progressive immersion in performances and ongoing contact with the country and stories to which they relate. Learning the songs, dances, paintings, and meanings mostly occurs in performances, through constant repetition and (initially) imitation (see also Ellis, 1985, p. 112). There is no formal institution for instruction or named stages of learning. The teaching of songs, as with language, is primarily oral and holistic.

Learning primarily comes from paying attention and participating in the ceremonies. Learners would traditionally join in by clapping the rhythm, dancing, and humming the tune before being expected to join in the singing. The onus of learning ceremonies is very much on the learner (Hale, 1984). In Kaytetye, the verb arit-arenke (to pay attention to something to learn how to do it, a compound based on the verb “to see”) describes specifically how ceremonies and other aspects of Aboriginal law are learned:


People learn women’s ceremonies by paying careful attention at performances; that’s how ceremonies are taught. A person watches carefully in order to learn. Someone might learn how to do something by watching
me (do it), they might be staring and paying close attention (to what I am doing). A person pays close attention during a ceremony if they don’t know it. (Ampetyane, interview, November 23, 2011)

Catherine Ellis conducted much research on how ceremonies are learned in the neighboring Western Desert regions of central Australia, and some of her findings apply to traditional learning throughout central Australia. In her book *Aboriginal Music: Education for Living* (1985), Ellis reported the following instructions to urban students at the University of Adelaide’s Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) by Pitjantjatjara teachers:

You can only master a tune by listening very carefully and concentrating while we sing for you. Then you can join in, softly at first, gradually louder. Close your eyes and do not look at the others. Your concentration will then not be distracted and you can listen more intently. You must be patient and not expect to learn a great deal in a short time. Think of learning a little properly rather than half-learning a great deal. (Ellis, 1985, p. 126)

Ellis describes how the holistic approach to learning begins with confusion (Ellis, 1985, p. 125). It is usually at a much later stage that the learner discovers how to unravel the words and structures that underlie the songs and, later still, becomes a “boss” who can lead the performance. Teaching doesn’t occur unless a student “sees the need to learn and expresses interest in being taught” (p. 112). Ellis states that a “student shows his or her readiness to learn by being prepared to follow the model of the master teacher and seeking him out for help” (p. 120). Learning is at first done through imitation of a respected person and able performer (p. 123). To support holistic learning “not only were they [the Aboriginal elders] patient in repeating material as often as necessary, but they were ever ready to praise and encourage no matter how small an improvement had been made” (p. 127). We too have found that elders generally commend learners on their involvement. At CASM, Pitjantjatjara teachers stopped the lesson when learners asked questions, because this was regarded as questioning the authority and skills of the teacher. Although Ellis found that teachers do not emphasize mistakes but wait for the students themselves to observe what was wrong (p. 127), we have occasionally observed singers verbally correcting errors made by other singers, possibly after the singer fails to correct herself.

Traditionally, the individuals that one spends time with and observes to learn from them are specific categories of kin. For women’s yawulyw/awelye songs, these are usually a woman’s father’s sister(s) and father’s father’s sister(s). Elders we consulted recalled these categories of kin as the people from whom they learned.
This is because ownership of ceremonies, like country and totems, is passed on patrilineally through one’s father’s father. While people own the ceremonies belonging to their father’s father, people also have a relationship to the ceremonies belonging to their mother’s father. This relationship is one of caretaker or manager. “Managers” are responsible for correct running of ceremonies, for placing the ritual paraphernalia in place, and for putting it away at the end of a performance (Peterson & Long, 1986). A person is expected to be able to partake in the ceremonies of their mother’s father’s country, though not make decisions or explain the meanings of these ceremonies, which they simply manage rather than own. People generally learn the ceremonies for which they are managers from their mother, her sister(s), and their mother’s father’s sister(s). Understandably, most people we spoke to talked only about the ceremonies that they own, not those that they manage.

The excerpt that follows, from an interview by linguist Mary Laughren, shows how the current generation of Yawulyu custodians at Willowra learned yawulyu:

ML: How did you learn yawulyu songs? Who taught you?
K. Nampijinpa: I was taught the songs for my Dreaming by my aunt (father’s sister), Nangala (now deceased). Only one Nangala for that Dreaming is left now who knows those songs; (she is) KS Nangala. She is a younger Nangala than those old aunties who taught me the songs.
ML: Where were you living when you started learning yawulyu?
Nangala and Nampijinpa: Right here at Willowra, before there was any station here or buildings.
Nangala: We would go to Pawu (Mt. Barkly) and then come back this way.
K. Nampijinpa: Our mothers and grandmothers would take us around with them. We grew up here; we didn’t grow up in some other far away place.
Nangala: We were children here and we have grown old here. . . .
K. Nampijinpa: The Dreamings for Pawu are ngapa (water) and ngurlu (seeds.)
Nangala: We paint the designs and then we dance.
ML: Nangala, where did you learn the songs and dances for ngurlu?
Nangala: Here. I didn’t move around all over the place. I just lived around here.
ML: Who taught you?
Nangala: My elder sisters. (interview, July 13, 2010, translated from the original Warlpiri by Mary Laughren)

From this interchange, we get a picture of how yawulyu along with the associated knowledge of jukurrpa (Dreaming), country, and family relationships to country was passed on from one generation of women to the next as women went about
their lives in multigenerational groups of closely related kin, or extended families. As young girls moved around the country in the company of their mothers and grandmothers, they were shown how to live off their country and were told about people and events associated with specific sites, especially waters, in their country, and also about the creative period. As they got older they were taught the songs and dances for their own patriline (their father’s line) by the senior female members of that group, their paternal aunts, and their elder sisters.

In addition to the established rules of kin from whom one can learn, the skills of particular individuals no doubt also play a role in how successfully ceremonies are passed on. An aunt or grandmother who sings well, organizes performances frequently, and explains the songs in a skilled narrative fashion is likely to have more success in passing on her ceremonies than someone who does not have these skills, and the personal relationships between specific aunts and nieces no doubt further influence whether or not ceremonies are taken up.

It seems that the lack of availability of learners in the right kin category may affect the future sustainability of a repertory. Good singers and dancers are recognized as such by the community, and they are often called upon to be part of a performance, but this does not equate to them having rights to teach or make decisions about a ceremony for which they are not an owner. Two senior performers and owners of one particular song series that is very well known and relatively large (over 60 songs) are highly motivated and talented singers, equipped with detailed knowledge of the song’s meanings learned from their father’s sisters. Their daughters also live in the same community and as managers have learned and have rights to perform the songs, but there are no nieces (the kin category for future owners). It is unclear whether the daughters as managers will be able to pass on this ceremony in the future without the involvement of any senior owners, even though they may be the only ones still holding the knowledge of these songs.

Owners who for one reason or another do not know the songs themselves sometimes need such nonowners skilled in songs to help carry out a performance or to teach younger owners. A younger owner wishing to learn songs from a nonowner must first obtain permission from senior owners, who may deny this permission unless they have well-established relationships with the prospective teacher. Fortunately, in some cases the complex negotiations involved have been successful. Arranging such a context for learning involves great initiative, sensitivity, and negotiation skills.

Anmatyerr elder Pwerl recalls a childhood of constant exposure to her ceremonies, and this is how she learned them. As an 8- or 9-year-old, she would be painted up with her ceremonial designs by her aunts and grandmothers, thus
affirming her relationship to the ceremony, country, and totems with all the rights and responsibilities that go with it:


We used to go back out bush away from the station, to sing and paint up. The women used to go while the men worked. My mother used to take me. (Pwerl, interview, July 21, 2010)

Then, as a teenager, she gradually started joining in the singing of songs where she felt she knew the words. Crucially, her involvement was her own decision and it occurred at her own pace. Her mistaken belief that the older women were laughing at her when they were actually joking among themselves highlights the prevalent fear of making a mistake:


“You sing too,” the older women would say. My mother used to tell me, “You know the words now,” and I would be singing bit by bit. I used to be silent, but then I sang little by little. When they used to laugh amongst themselves I would go quiet [be embarrassed].

(Pwerle, interview, July 21, 2010)

People of all ages that we interviewed mentioned that as learners they were fearful of making a mistake, because elders might laugh at them. This is an issue in learning across all domains of traditional knowledge. While group participation may be an excellent strategy for minimizing mistakes and ensuring the accurate transmission of songs, one impact of this may be that only few people pluck up the courage to participate in the singing.

In Tennant Creek, Nappanangka and Napurrurla were concerned that nowadays younger women were singing too softly, perhaps for fear of making a mistake such as singing the wrong words, whereas traditional performance practice demanded that women sing loudly and in unison. This change in performance practice was evident already in 1996 when the first performances for the _Yawulyu mungamunga_ CD were recorded at the Mary Ann Dam north of
You can hear it on that record when we were singing at the dam; it’s important to sing properly. [You can’t hear anybody else singing on that recording,] only me. (Nappanangka, interview, July 15, 2010)

At Wirliyajarrayi, we also asked K. Nampijinpa and Nangala about whether the generation of women who attended school, now in their 40s and 50s, knew the yawulyu songs and were able to sing them:

ML: Do younger women know the yawulyu songs?
Nangala: No. They don’t know them. I’m the only Nangala who has these songs for Pawu (Mt. Barkly).
K. Nampijinpa: Pawu only has one Nangala (who knows its yawulyu) now. We have only one Nangala now.
Nangala: I know the Dreaming songs and dances for the Jangala from the west who comes to Pawu to steal the rain, that Brown Falcon (kirrkirlanjji) man.
ML: Are the young girls learning to sing the yawulyu songs?
Nangala and K. Nampijinpa: No.
ML: Do they know the dances?
Nangala: Not really. They only do little bits of dancing.
K. Nampijinpa: A few of the young ones dance well. One young one danced with us at the opening of the new Central Land Council building in Alice Springs. There’s one young Nakamarra who dances well.
[...]
ML: Do the young girls not like to dance?
K. Nampijinpa: They are too shy to dance. They feel shame. They don’t carry on the ceremonies and songs belonging to their maternal grandmothers (jaja, “mother’s mother”). Nor do they carry on the ceremonies for their paternal grandmothers (yapirliyi, “father’s mother”). (interview, July 13, 2010)

Shaming is one of the most important methods of social control in central Australian society (Myers, 1986, pp. 120–124). In saying that the young women “feel shame” to dance in public with their painted torsos exposed, K. Nampijinpa is touching on another theme often brought up by women of her generation: the changing sensibilities of a younger generation brought up under the influence of European mores (disseminated through their schooling, television, and travels beyond their community). Some elders complain that the motivation, self-discipline, and respect
for elders, all prerequisites for traditional holistic learning styles, are absent in the current generation. Although such complaints may be heard in many different contexts around the world, it should be noted that compared to previous generations, there is much more pressure on today’s younger generations living in remote communities to engage in mainstream majority culture. In the past 20 years, remote communities have seen the progressive introduction of television, video/DVDs, electronic games, the Internet, mobile phones, and, in recent years, smartphones, meaning that today’s younger generations have grown up with far greater engagement in mainstream culture than has ever before been possible.

Nevertheless, many younger people are highly motivated to learn about their ceremonies. At Alekarenge, M. Nampijinpa commented on the factors motivating her to document the songs known by her mother’s sister Nungarrayi:

I really want to learn that [awelye], keep it, because it’s my mother’s songs. I’ve always been interested in yawulyu. . . . These days everything is changing, some have lost their culture already, and by doing this [teaching and documenting awelye] we can keep it strong, our culture. . . . Because this old lady [Nungarrayi], she’s the last member of our family. As the elder in our family she’s the only one who knows the cultural ways, you know, our cultural knowledge. If she goes, all will be lost. (M. Nampijinpa, interview, July 18, 2010)

Many women in the older generation accept that younger generations may need the assistance of writing and audiovisual aids to learn songs (though nobody, as far as we know, uses music notation). Although literacy was first introduced in some parts of central Australia as early as the 1890s (Harris, 1990; Strehlow, 1915), widespread literacy in Aboriginal communities is relatively new and the older generation of singers tend not to use writing. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have written down yawulyu/awelye song texts for educational purposes in recent years. In Tennant Creek, B. Napurrurla suggested involving literate language workers from the Papulu Apparr Kari Language and Culture Centre in an effort to document her songs for teaching purposes: “But we [the older generation] can still do it [sing yawulyu]; the language center mob can write it down” (B. Napurrurla, interview, July 15, 2010). Although Ellis (1985) herself regarded literacy as eroding the traditional oral method of learning (p. 131), she reported that elders at CASM very quickly came to rely on written versions of the song texts to help their students’ learning, because this was how people who were experienced in literacy learned quickest (Ellis, 1985, p. 126), although the depth of this learning was not as great (as one student stated, “I have never forgotten what was learned when we worked without writing”) (Ellis, 1985, p. 127). In the current era, where the tide of literacy is everywhere—and most
Aboriginal people use it in at least some aspects of everyday life—to insist on purely oral learning might be akin to insist on hunting with a spear instead of a gun.

Audiovisual recordings of songs have been used for many years even by older generations as part of the teaching and learning process for yawulyu/awelye (Barwick, 2005, p. 7; Poirier, 1992, p. 774), although in the past this type of learning was more of an adjunct than the primary means. Recordings and other documentation of traditional knowledge may be treated with the same reverence as other ceremonial objects. For example, when we visited Tennant Creek, we were told that the booklet of song texts Barwick had assembled for Nappanangka in 1999 for approval before publication of the Yawulyu mungamunga CD was subsequently included in the bundle of ceremonial objects Nappanangka had recently handed over to the new owner of the yawulyu as part of the formal transmission process (Nappanangka, interview, July 15, 2010).

In recent years, DVDs, audio recordings, and written texts of ceremonial songs and their meanings have all been embraced by younger generations who experienced schooling (people who were born approximately post-1960). These younger people are comfortable with a more individual style of learning using books and audio and video recordings, which they can pick up and learn from at their own pace and in a more private space:

It’s hard to pick up the song unless we have it written on the paper. . .

. When you are telling a story it’s a bit slow, and there’s little spaces in the story. But when you are singing there’s those sentences all together, long sentences, and it’s really hard. (Pengart, interview, July 20, 2010).

For many younger people with multimedia skills, the creation of these resources offers them a chance to be meaningfully engaged during ceremonial performances without the pressure of being a learner and the responsibilities that entails. The pressure for younger women to learn in this way stems not only from a fear of making mistakes but also from greatly diminished opportunities for traditional situation-based learning.

All the older generations we consulted stressed the importance of learning “out bush,” away from the distractions of town and community, and preferably at the sites being sung about. The practice of holding land claim hearings “on country” (i.e., on the traditional estate of the landowning group) arose because it was found that Aboriginal people were better able to discuss totems, songs, and affiliations to land when physically at these sites. A number of elders we spoke to believed that one of the reasons young people are not able to learn their ceremonies in the traditional way is because these people are not familiar with the country to which the songs
refer, having grown up away from their own country. There is a strong relationship between knowledge of country and knowledge of songs. When singing, elders visualize the country to which the songs refer (see also Ellis, 1985, p. 130). Discussions during performances also show that the movement from site to site undertaken by the protagonists in the songs is at the forefront of the performers’ minds. New songs, too, are only received when out on country, not within a community or town.

Recognizing the importance of ceremonial performances in upholding Aboriginal law, some Aboriginal organizations have sponsored bush trips for learning of yawulyu/awelye at various times, and other bodies such as Aboriginal health centers, language centers, libraries, and other institutions (often government funded) may also contribute on an ad hoc basis, usually depending on staff with specific interests in this area. Traditional performances may be commissioned to mark significant occasions by organizations such as the Central Land Council, a body established to act in the interests of traditional owners in managing their rights to land. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) offers programs to disseminate knowledge about its collections and to promote community understanding of Indigenous culture, and mainstream educational institutions such as universities and schools may also create opportunities for elders to teach some traditional songs on country.

Implications for Sustainability
Yawulyu/awelye ceremonies are not explicitly taught, and there are no institutional places of learning. Learning mostly occurs holistically through participation in performance. Concern was expressed by all generations about the difficulties younger people experience in learning. Knowledge about their ceremonies can only be passed on to women by certain categories of kin (e.g., their father’s sisters). Another constraint on intergenerational transmission may be the learner’s shame and fear of making mistakes in this important domain of knowledge. While writing was not traditionally used, younger learners make use of written song texts in association with audio and video recordings to facilitate private study. Many elders believe that young people have difficulty in learning because they do not have regular access to the country to which the ceremonies relate.

Musicians and Communities
There is no differentiated category of musician or performer in central Australian Aboriginal society; all people are expected to be able to sing, dance, and paint their land-based ceremonies. Performing their clan’s yawulyu/awelye is expected of senior
women traditional owners, who usually also demonstrate their knowledge in other channels and media such as narratives, sand drawings, visual arts, dancing, and upholding their cultural knowledge and traditional values in appropriate domains of public life. The roles of singer, dancer, hunter, and so on only last for the moment of that activity, and they can be taken up by anyone with the necessary rights and skills.

Although there is no distinct profession of performer, some people are recognized as being particularly skilled at singing, dancing, or painting, just as others are recognized as being a good hunter, being an intellectual, or having a particular behavioral or personality trait. A person regarded as a good singer tends to be someone who knows lots of songs, has a strong voice, and likes singing. Individuals known as good singers are often recruited by families for initiation ceremonies and ilpentye in return for payment (tyenkarre [Kaytetye], ngijinkirri [Warumungu]), which nowadays takes the form of cash or consumable items such as food, although traditionally tyenkarre involved only food and tools. The tyenkarre paid to singers varies, depending on the relationship between people, the need for money at the time, and what else is on offer. Sometimes no tyenkarre is paid at all, especially if there are perceived favors owed. Although people recognized as good singers may get tyenkarre in this way, the prestige does not always cross over into other domains. That is, apart from tyenkarre, a good singer may not receive any additional benefits, privileges, or favorable treatment from other members of the community.

Just as there is no special social category of singer, traditionally there was no concept of a nonparticipatory audience. Ilpentye and healing ceremonies are always performed in private with the individuals concerned. Initiation ceremonies require the participation of everyone present (although children or the sick, injured, lazy, or infirm might not be expected to perform). In the past no one was allowed to remain in the community and not participate, but this law has now been relaxed somewhat to account for the now-complex patterns of non-Indigenous and Indigenous relations. Another traditional context for land-based ceremonies was exchange between different groups, either within a community or with visitors. In this context, one group would watch while the other group performed, and then the roles would be reversed. As discussed later, in recent years, land-based ceremonies have come to be performed at intercultural gatherings where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are present; in these cases a clear audience–performer distinction emerges: There is no expectation of non-Indigenous people to perform in exchange.

Traditionally, everyone was expected to be able to maintain her own ceremonial responsibilities, but for social and logistical reasons the performance of ceremony has become more difficult since colonization. A community was always made up of
people from several different clans (e.g., a woman’s clan is different from that of her children), but nowadays there is much greater mobility and consequent social diversity within communities compared to the precolonial era, when most people lived and traveled on or close to their own country. In the 1950s, many Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated to large communities sometimes quite distant from their own country, meaning that subsequent generations have grown up no longer familiar with their own country. Since the 1980s, greater access to vehicles and opportunities to study in capital cities have meant that social networks cover even greater distances. People now marry into communities far from those in which they grew up, sometimes into areas where the ceremonies and languages are vastly different from their own. Children from such marriages often grow up not knowing the language, ceremonies, and country of the “married in” parent.

For any performance it is necessary to gather particular people, namely, the most senior owners, and sometimes others who for one reason or another know the songs well. The logistics of this can be expensive and complicated if these people live far away from each other or from the performance location. Public transport is lacking in remote Australia, as is access to private vehicles, especially for older people (this is even more the case for women than for men). Distances are vast, up to 600 kilometers, and so travel can be very costly and logistics extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the commitment to continuing performance of yawulyu/awelye is strong.

Implications for Sustainability
There is no social category of specialist performers: Everyone is expected to be able to sing, dance, and paint her own land-based ceremonies. Mounting ceremonies is more difficult than in the past due to dislocation from home country and dispersion of the relevant people across wide areas. It is not uncommon for individuals to marry into communities far away, thus losing the opportunity for themselves and their children to participate regularly in learning through performance of their own ceremonies. Women’s knowledge transmission suffers particularly from lack of access to vehicles and resources to teach or to learn from the right kin in distant communities.

Contexts and Constructs
Yawulyu/awelye and other forms of ceremony have always served as a way of displaying and managing group identity within a complex social landscape involving diverse complementary groups and many gradations of social difference.
Australian Aboriginal societies display and recognize a huge range of linguistic and cultural diversity, and ceremony has always been a primary means of intergroup communication. Although a considerable proportion of Australia’s estimated 250 languages are no longer spoken, today most Aboriginal communities include people from a range of different language and culture groups. As Fred Myers (1986) observed of the Pintupi: “Singing provides a salient image of sociability. Whenever large groups came together in traditional times, they would sing together at night. Ceremony—song and dance—was the real content of most intergroup relations” (p. 112).

For example, describing yawulyu performances of the Warlpiri people who came to live on Kaytetye country at Alekarenge in the 1950s, F. Napurrurla highlighted the various clan estates, naming the Dreamings and skin groups of their owners:

The old people brought the songs and ceremonies for Miyikampi, Jiparanpa (ngurlu, “seed”), Pawurrinji (ngurlu), and Kulpurlunu (ngapa, “rain”). The Nangalas and Nampijinpas danced for Rain (ngapa). The Napanangkas and Napangardis danced for Miyikampi. The Nakamarras and Napurrurlas danced ngurlu for Jiparanpa (my side) and for Pawurrinji. Also the [Kaytetye] Jarrajarra groups (Napaljarri-Nungarrayi) had their business and the women would dance for their own father’s father’s country and Dreaming. (Edited translation from Warlpiri by Mary Laughren; F. Napurrurla, interview, July 18, 2010)

Although the dramatic social changes since colonization have had major effects on when, where, why, and how ceremonies occur, it is notable that they have had very little effect on their details. That is, there is very little cross-cultural influence in the actual music, dance, and visual designs in ceremonies. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that ceremonies are not simply entertainment, but expressions of Aboriginal law. The details of the music, song texts, dance, and body designs of each repertory form part of an integrated social mechanism for displaying and managing social difference and identity between groups. Stability in shared conventions in music, poetics, dance, body decoration, and song texts is needed to highlight the points of difference between repertoires, the markers of clan identity. Each individual yawulyu/awelye repertory emphasizes the particular features that distinguish it from its neighbors (e.g., body designs, place names, and mythological references that are tied to the particular country being celebrated; see Figure 5.2).

The traditional use of yawulyu/awelye and other ceremonial genres to show cultural identity has been extended over the previous 50 years or so to legal contexts where performance of songs naming places and Dreamings has been accepted as
evidence of traditional ownership. When we visited Tennant Creek in 2010, we interviewed Nampin, a community leader who has a long history of eloquent speech making and advocating for Warumungu interests. She has been a member of the Central Land Council and other community organizations and has participated in several land claims. At the time of our visit, she and other senior women were involved in various court hearings regarding potential government use of Aboriginal land. She regarded maintaining knowledge of *yawulyu* as essential for ensuring a continued voice for Aboriginal people in legal disputes:

> It’s important for language and *yawulyu* to be very strong. *Yawulyu* and *pujarli* [men’s public ceremony], they’re the main ones for anyone in the whole of this country. If you’ve got your cultural songs and your cultural dances and if you’ve got something coming up in whitefella way [i.e., a court hearing], you can break it up with your dancing. You can show them, you can do your challenging, and tell them what you’ve got for the ground.
That’s the main important thing I always say to my kids. Not only to my kids, to everyone else. I tell them, “That’s the main thing you have to hold, your cultural dancing, and your language.” There’s two kind[s] of things in your cultural way. You have to talk in language; then you have to translate it in English. Then you do your dancing; you tell them what you’re dancing for. That’s how you show these people, so they know, “Oh yeah, they’ve got the strongest ceremony,” you know, “and the cultural way of showing us.” (Nampin, interview, July 17, 2010).

Although the main focus of our interview was yawulyu, the main women’s land-based ceremonial tradition, Nampin broadens the frame of her remarks here to include pujjarli, the men’s public ceremony that is sometimes performed in similar public contexts, including land claims and native title hearings (there also exists another much larger body of men’s songs that are restricted and not suitable for public occasions). Throughout Aboriginal Australia, songs and ceremony are tied to particular places and often name them and recount aspects of their foundation myths (Ellis, 1992b). As such, ceremonial performances have been accepted in court hearings under both Land Rights and Native Title legislation as evidence of attachment to country (Bell, 1993; Koch, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2013)—“you can tell them what you’ve got for this ground.” Traditional knowledge management protocols dictate that only the senior owners of the country can elucidate their meanings, so Nampin regards the explanation of the performance in language and then translation into English as a guarantee of the authority of the owners and as an integral part of the “cultural way.”

Like Nampin, B. Napurrurla was concerned that in the future her descendants might be disadvantaged by not carrying on knowledge of their yawulyu:

But in the future, you know government people are going to ask young people, “Do you know your culture?” What are they going to say? Nothing, they can just look at it [not perform it]. That’s why I say to my family, “You’re going to have to learn your culture.” (B. Napurrurla, interview, July 15, 2010)

It is clear that many younger Indigenous people are not aware of the fragility of their traditions, nor of the role these ceremonies play as required evidence of Aboriginal authority and/or ownership in Aboriginal people’s legal claims to land in negotiations with government and the private sector. Young people may be unaware that their own grandparents were able to secure their land in part by singing their traditional songs, with all the knowledge that entails. More broadly, there
is a lack of knowledge of how traditional knowledge and practices have assisted Aboriginal people in negotiations relating to their land and culture.

Some communities that were originally established as Christian missions had a history of suppression of traditional ceremonial religious practices such as yawulyu/awelye, which were considered “satanic” (Carter, 1996; Harris, 1990), but in other instances Christian missions supported the continuation of traditional languages and ways of life. Today the main threats to yawulyu/awelye stem from disruption of traditional languages, lack of access to country, and lack of knowledgeable singers living, or able to get together, in one place. In addition, a number of government policies—such as the closure of bilingual programs in Northern Territory schools and an increased focus on mainstream employment under the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act (2007)—have had the possibly unintended effect of encouraging people to abandon traditional practices.

Implications for Sustainability
Despite extensive social changes in the ways and means by which ceremonies occur, there is remarkably little cross-cultural influence on the actual music, dance, and visual designs used in ceremony, which are consciously preserved and revered as originating in ancestral precedent. Shared conventions in music, poetics, dance, body decoration, and song subjects allow each repertory to highlight the Dreaming stories and places that are specific to that clan’s identity. This traditional use has extended in the last 40 years to legal contexts where performance of yawulyu/awelye has been accepted as demonstrating native title to land. Significant threats to sustainability of yawulyu/awelye today stem from loss of access to the traditional knowledge that lies at the heart of yawulyu/awelye (through disruption of traditional languages) and loss of access to the country to which songs relate, as well as from a public climate of neglect or even disrespect of traditional culture.

Infrastructure and Regulations
Yawulyu/awelye ceremonies have developed a remarkably flexible and resilient performance practice requiring little material infrastructure, but are heavily dependent on human infrastructure (knowledgeable elders and keen learners) and the resources to bring the right people together and support them during performance.

Yawulyu/awelye is a sung genre and does not normally employ musical instruments (though wooden clapsticks manufactured from readily available woods such as mulga are sometimes used for percussion alongside body percussion such as
handclapping and lap slapping). Clapsticks are sometimes made for sale to tourists. Materials for body painting (e.g., ochres) and decoration (e.g., feathers, cloth), as well as ritual paraphernalia such as *kuturu* (digging sticks, decorated and used to mark the ceremonial ground), were traditionally sourced from known sites on country and carefully looked after by senior owners (male relatives are sometimes involved in the manufacture of wooden objects). These days there is some use of modern materials such as acrylic paints instead of ochres or cardboard in place of bark, but generally traditional materials are preferred if available.

Because *yawulyu/awelye* performance (though not necessarily the audience) is restricted to women, the preferred location for performances is generally in a private location, preferably out bush, on country (within the estate of the relevant land-owning group). Dancing requires an open space, usually selected to have a windbreak provided by rocks or trees. Such bush trips require access to four-wheel-drive vehicles, firewood, food, and camping supplies.

The fundamental regulatory framework for *yawulyu/awelye* is Dreaming law (*jukurrpa* or *altjerre*), which established the precedents for human behavior, including ceremony, and which continues as the primary point of reference for ongoing replenishment of the practice through dreaming of new songs, dances, and stories and protection of the rights of the owners to display and make decisions about their *yawulyu/awelye*. Artists’ rights for published materials are covered under Australian copyright legislation, which now includes moral rights, as well as mechanical and authors’ copyrights. The Australia Council for the Arts has published a series of useful recommendations regarding copyright protection for traditional music (Australia Council for the Arts, 2008). The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies also covers relevant questions in their *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2011), which provides an excellent framework to guide researchers and Indigenous communities in setting up projects that enable ethical and effective research participation by tradition holders.

The costs involved with *yawulyu/awelye* performances principally concern the cost and logistics of bringing the necessary people together and feeding and housing them through the performance. Traditionally, some women’s ceremonies circulated as part of regional exchange networks, and passing on of a ceremony from one group to another was expected to be paid for in blankets and other goods (Berndt, 1950; Ellis, 1992a; Poirier, 1992). Today, costs may be covered either informally (e.g., through co-opting researchers and relevant bodies such as the land council, health center, or language center) or formally through grant applications such as those supporting Indigenous festivals in the region (Yeperenye,
DanceSite, Mbantua—see further later). *Yawulyu/awelye* performances may also be commissioned by government or commercial bodies for public events—such as art gallery openings, book launches, or the opening of new buildings—in which case performance fees are expected to be paid. Various short-lived and constantly changing Australian government schemes for supporting Indigenous culture (currently the Indigenous Languages and Arts Projects stream) have supported some groups in recent years, but the overall government budget available for support of Indigenous arts (or indeed, the arts in general) is diminishing.

**Implications for Sustainability**

Human and transport infrastructure are the main requirements for sustaining *yawulyu/awelye*. Material infrastructure surrounding *yawulyu/awelye* is minimal, and traditional regimes of knowledge management in combination with copyright protection and ethical guidelines developed by Australian government bodies provide adequate legal protection. Travel, food, and shelter are required to bring the right people together for performances and learning opportunities out bush and to provide access to traditional sites providing materials for ceremonial objects and body painting. Occasions for performance (and hence teaching and learning) are supported in an ad hoc way by a variety of government and commercial funding sources, but such funding is increasingly under threat from changing government policies.

**Media and the Music Industry**

*Yawulyu/awelye* is not a commercial music genre and thus has only an incidental presence in the broadcast media and little to no relevance to the music industry. The main occasions for appearance of *yawulyu/awelye* in the mainstream media concern incorporation of *yawulyu/awelye* into public events such as festivals, art openings, and other public events (see Figure 5.3). Usually there is little or no attempt to explain the significance for any outsiders, because traditionally *yawulyu/awelye* does not involve a passive audience. For today’s mainstream audiences, *yawulyu/awelye* performances become iconic, marking the respect of the commissioning group for Aboriginal culture in general. Such staging of public events may nevertheless enhance the maintenance of the tradition through widening the opportunities for performance-based learning. Furthermore, it is likely that by increasing the visibility of the tradition, public displays and consequent broader public awareness assist in persuading supporting and funding bodies of the need to keep the tradition viable.
In some cases, documentations of yawulyu/awelye for the purposes of teaching and learning have been published, mostly without commercial distribution and marketing (Harrison, O’Shannessy, & Turpin, 2011; Laughren, Turpin, Morton, & Willowra Community, 2010; Turpin & Ross, 2004, 2013; Watts, Campbell, & Turpin, 2009). In 2000, the Papulu Apparr-kari Language and Culture Center in Tennant Creek facilitated the publication of a CD, *Yawulyu mungamunga* (Papulu Apparr-kari Aboriginal Language and Culture Centre & Barwick, 2000), in a release timed to coincide with the Sydney Olympic Games (see also Barwick, 2005). One reason the publication was supported by the Warumungu women elders (some of whom also participated in the Olympic Games’ opening ceremony) was to raise the prestige of yawulyu among younger generations by demonstrating that it was valued in the commercial music market.

Some yawulyu/awelye recordings have also been published by ethnomusicologists in academic contexts: yawulyu/awelye tracks appear in published recording anthologies (A. M. Moyle, 1992), as well as in recordings published with books, such as Richard Moyle’s *Alyawarra music* (R. M. Moyle, 1986). Copies of these recordings circulate in the relevant communities and are also used in teaching and learning.
Implications for Sustainability
The sustainability of yawulyu/awelye is only incidentally affected by its occasional public emergence in performances and publications. When ceremonies appear in events open to the general public (such as arts festivals), performers are mainly interested in educating their own future tradition holders, while commissioning bodies often include the performances as indicators of a general respect for Indigenous culture without any real interest in their significance. Nevertheless, demand for public performances of yawulyu/awelye contributes to the frequency of otherwise rare occasions for learning through performance, and publications may raise the prestige of the genre and involvement of media-savvy younger generations. Raising the public profile of yawulyu/awelye through such means may also assist in persuading external funding bodies of the value of continuing to support the tradition.

Issues and Initiatives for Sustainability
The question of the overall vitality of yawulyu/awelye is much on the minds of present-day tradition holders, as it has indeed been for past generations. Cath Ellis, who worked with Aboriginal singers from the 1960s to the 1990s, was deeply concerned with the question of how to assist Aboriginal people in maintaining their traditional ceremonies. In reflecting on her fieldwork, she saw the main question for sustainability as

whether the means were available to these performers to preserve a living tradition that, although differing from their old one, was comparable to it in terms of the processes of creating, of controlling the world through song, and of stating identity through performance. How can they go on performing creatively while adapting their traditions to the circumstances in which they now live? This is a difficult transition, which may require some outside assistance, but it is not an impossibility. (Ellis, 1992a, p. 160)

The key issues around sustainability of yawulyu/awelye thus relate to support for the intergenerational transmission of the ceremonies. The right people need to be educated and trained to take charge of the future of their own yawulyu/awelye tradition. As identified in this chapter, some of the major factors affecting this situation concern much broader cultural questions and include the following:

- Knowledge of country, Dreamings, and language
- The ability to bring together the right people to perform, teach, and learn
The ability to access traditional country
Understanding of the historical importance of *yawulyu/awelye* in securing and demonstrating rights to land
Empowering younger generations to apply their own creativity and cultural understandings in adapting the *yawulyu/awelye* tradition to the modern world

While family-based learning continues, there are diminishing traditional opportunities to perform *yawulyu/awelye*, although some new avenues are emerging. Older people are anxious about the social consequences of not handing on *yawulyu/awelye* and are conscious of difficulties in gaining access to resources and time to allow learning to take place on country in the old way. Tradition holders have embraced many different opportunities for supporting intergenerational transmission of knowledge through projects that inspire people to learn, provide performance opportunities, and produce resources for learning. Projects to document *yawulyu/awelye* have been one important avenue.

Younger people desire written and recorded documentation of *yawulyu/awelye*, especially so that they can learn the difficult song words, which they find hard to pick up in the infrequent performances that take place these days. This is partly due to the difficulty of the song language itself and partly due to younger people’s relative lack of experience of the traditional knowledge and lifestyles referred to in songs (such as places, hunting techniques, and ecological knowledge). M. Nampijinpa commented:

> I’ve wanted everything to be recorded on tape or maybe write a book or something, DVD. We’ve got history stories, but we need to know Dreamtime stories and traditional songs. We don’t know about traditional songs. These are the ones that need to be recorded, traditional songs. (M. Nampijinpa, interview, July 18, 2010)

In addition to empowering younger people to create their own records of *yawulyu-awelye* for later private study, documentation sessions themselves can create an enjoyable social environment for both young and older people to interact around their cultural heritage. Ellis reports that documenting women’s songs in northern South Australia resulted in Aboriginal women there reviving ceremonies that had not been performed for years: “My requests for songs stimulated an interest in them, so traditions were again passed from one group to another, and children began to be taught long-neglected songs” (Ellis, 1992a, p. 156).
While the first users of recording technology for documenting traditional songs may have been outsiders, today it is commonly community members who record their own songs, which are then used for learning, enjoyment, health purposes, providing backup in performances, and so on. The ready availability of digital audiovisual devices for recording songs enables almost immediate access to listening and other uses. Recently, more and more younger Indigenous people are remixing song recordings in multimedia works (a good example is the works created in Yirrkala through the Mulka project; Kral, 2012).

Although some song documentation projects have previously been funded by various Australian government funding schemes to assist Aboriginal people in research and teaching projects on Aboriginal languages (e.g., Turpin & Ross, 2013), the current “Indigenous Languages and Arts” scheme does not specifically include song within its scope. Tying Indigenous traineeships to similar projects has proved successful in the past. In the 1980s, the Aboriginal Employment Development policy gave traineeships to Indigenous people across the media in both public and private sectors, leading to the creation of the Indigenous Unit at the national television broadcasters SBS and ABC, as well as to Aboriginal people employed in remote Indigenous media centers filming many traditional songs (Rachel Perkins, interview, June 25, 2010).

Increased opportunities for intergenerational learning through performance have been supported through the development of various Indigenous-led festivals in which many different Aboriginal groups participate. The emphasis on participation in such events is more conducive to supporting traditional learning modes than staged performances for passive predominantly non-Indigenous audiences in non-Indigenous art festivals.

For example, the Yeperenye festival held in Alice Springs in 2001 was possibly the largest-ever national event of Indigenous ceremonies and the biggest performance of traditional music in Alice Springs for 100 years (it also included many other arts). Such events can reassure younger Aboriginal people that traditional music is culturally acceptable and instill them with pride in their culture. Yeperenye has been cited by some as having triggered their own desire to learn yawulyu/awelye (Turpin, 2011, pp. 18–19). Festival co-organizer and Arrernte filmmaker Rachel Perkins believes that Indigenous traditional performance needs to be at the center of a festival, not just an added element:

I think you have to put Indigenous stuff at the center and build all your processes and protocols and outcomes around that. At Yeperenye . . . we had the right groups represented and consulted with them properly. (interview, June 25, 2010)
Perkins describes the first day of the Yeperenye festival:

When [Aboriginal] people realized what was going to happen, that everyone was going to dance and all these people were going to watch, . . . people became very proud and competitive. People started forming dance groups on the day, because I think they saw a demonstration of culture and pride, and the audience were really appreciative of it. (interview, June 25, 2010)

Describing the state-by-state showcase of ceremonies at Yeperenye, Rachel Perkins recalls the Tasmanian representatives coming on stage to say: “We don’t have any [songs and] dances and that’s because of our history; and we are not going to make them up, but we are proud to be here.” At that moment she understood how important these things are in fostering the solidarity among Aboriginal people that such a festival enables (interview, June 25, 2010).

Although calls from Aboriginal people to make Yeperenye a regular event were ultimately unsuccessful in attracting the necessary funding and support, the momentum the festival spurred no doubt inspired later events. A similar but much smaller festival, the Mbandua festival, was co-convened by Perkins and co-organizer Nigel Jamieson in Alice Springs in October 2013. Other festivals in the region influenced by Yeperenye at which yawulyu/awelye was performed include DanceSite (Tennant Creek, 2007–2012), Mobfest (Ti-Tree, 2008–2010), and Milpirri (Lajamanu, 2006–). It is worth noting that such initiatives require considerable funding, which is increasingly difficult to secure.

Because of the popularity of Alice Springs with tourists, performing regularly for tourists has been an opportunity for Arrernte people, but one they have never embraced (Rachel Perkins, interview, June 25, 2010). Perhaps Arrernte people think the economic benefits are too small or that the logistics of getting a performance group together are too great, or perhaps the main focus of tradition holders lies in educating their own future tradition holders rather than the general public. Similarly, at the Nyinkka Nyunyu culture center in Tennant Creek, which opened in 2002, while some Warumungu people supported the idea of performing for tourists, on the whole they did not find the enterprise worthwhile. The issues involved in developing the Nyinkka Nyunyu Tennant Creek culture center are discussed in detail by Christen (2007), who states: “Cultural centers are . . . sites of local and national desires for material and cultural success and historical redress” (p. 118). Despite the potential of a regional or national culture center to offer opportunities for showcasing songs, instilling cultural pride, and providing economic opportunities, there is no culture center in Alice...
Springs; and although there have been discussions among Indigenous people about establishing one, for a variety of economic and political reasons nothing as yet has got off the ground.

Intergenerational transmission of song knowledge on country has been enabled by a number of projects. Women’s Law and Culture meetings, held almost annually in various locations since the 1980s with support from the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council and the Central Land Council, have provided a valuable performance opportunity for women and inspired a number of younger people to learn their ceremonies (Turpin, 2011, p. 18). Although some note that there has been deterioration in the state of ceremonies over this time, it is not possible to identify the exact nature of any change because at the performers’ wishes the meetings are not recorded.

Since 2007, Dancesite Artback NT has run an Indigenous traditional dance program, which involves taking Aboriginal people back on country to learn the songs, experience the sites, and learn the stories. In 2003, the Arrernte healing center Akeyularre was established in Alice Springs to promote and support traditional healing in the Arrernte region (Abbott, 2004). A holistic learning program for traditional songs and ceremonies through organized trips on country is a major focus, which has empowered new generations of performers to perform for outside audiences at public events such as the DanceSite festival (A. A. Pwerrerle, interview, March 16, 2010).

There is little opportunity to support the intergenerational transmission of learning within a formal school context. Reasons include lack of funding to pay elders to teach, elders being uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the school environment, lack of logistical support to take learning on country, and lack of knowledge on the part of many non-Indigenous teachers about Indigenous teaching processes and how they can fit in with the education system outcomes, including assessment of student learning.

Nevertheless, some schools have incorporated the teaching and learning of traditional songs in their programs. At Tennant Creek, Warumungu cultural worker Narrurlu recounted an occasion when yawulyu mungamunga songs were integrated into a high school performance of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet:

When I was working at the high school we used one part of it [yawulyu mungamunga] for that Romeo and Juliet, because they were lovers. We spoke to that old Nappanangka, [to ask] which one we’re not allowed to use, so she told us which number to use. She said, “Nope, don’t use this one, don’t use that one, use this one!” (Narrurlu, interview, July 16, 2010)
In 2008, the Northern Territory (NT) government put an end to bilingual education that operated in some NT schools where English was not a first language, and insisted that the first 4 hours of all NT schools must consist of English only. At the same time, schools in New South Wales and Victoria were beginning to implement Aboriginal language programs and some sought permission to use NT language materials in their schools. Indigenous language teachers may have felt angered at requests to teach other children their language while the right for their own children to learn their language was being denied. In such a climate, it would not be conducive to intergenerational learning for a non-Indigenous person to have access to formalized learning of Indigenous traditions when Indigenous people could not. Any initiatives to teach songs should involve pathways for younger Aboriginal owners to access learning and ultimately teaching their traditions.

In 1992, Catherine Ellis (1992a) stated:

One of the most important things we can do . . . is to advise funding authorities of the importance of appointing traditional performers as the teachers of their own tradition to outsiders. In Australia in particular, there is enough money and person-power to appoint traditional performers [to teach] to every region of Australia, knowing that in doing so we are encouraging a strong sense of identity in the traditional performance (of whatever type) and are thereby encouraging the preservation of a living contemporary tradition. (p. 162)

CASM, established by Ellis at the University of Adelaide in the 1970s, was able to employ Pitjantjatjara elders as performance lecturers in an era of federal policies that recognized the importance of Aboriginal culture (e.g., NT Land Rights Act, bilingual education). In contrast, various current NT and Australian government policies seem to challenge the value of Indigenous culture. While CASM continues, at the time of writing (2015), Ellis’s dream of an Australia-wide network of traditional performers/teachers is very far from being realized, and it is difficult to conceive of the current Australian government agreeing with her assessment of the availability of funding for such a program. Nor have recent years seen a large increase in the pool of qualified Indigenous people interested in participating in such teaching to outsiders, though the numbers are growing. Sustained and coordinated efforts will be required to support education and training of upcoming generations of Aboriginal people in learning and practicing their own traditions before they can be expected to interpret them to outsiders.
Motivating younger people to take up their *yawulyu/awelye*, providing the source materials for learning in situations where performance traditions are under threat, and finding a place for ongoing creativity in expression of *yawulyu/awelye* knowledge were key issues addressed in an interview held on June 25, 2010, with Arrernte filmmaker Rachel Perkins.

To redress the widespread lack of knowledge of how traditional knowledge and practices have assisted Aboriginal people in negotiations relating to their land and culture, Perkins suggested a documentary film or book showcasing the Aboriginal people and the songs they sang in various legal, political, and intercultural settings and the beneficial outcomes they brought.

Intergenerational learning could be supported in a more systematic way through a program to provide Indigenous people access to digital recording equipment and remuneration to record their relatives’ songs, with the digital records created being housed in national collections to provide an ongoing resource for future generations. Similar ideas have been developed by the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance, which advocates a grant program to nominated Indigenous organizations that are best placed to identify the areas of greatest need (Marett et al., 2006; National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia, 2011, pp. 6–7).

In some cases, Aboriginal people have revived ceremonies from early records, but for many there are simply no records. As an Indigenous person with experience in areas where there has been much cultural loss, Perkins recognizes the urgency to work with singers now: “We’ve got to engage with these precious living things [songs] now somehow; otherwise they will be gone in 100 years like they are in New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania” (interview, June 25, 2010).

Perkins also advocates for the ongoing renewal of *yawulyu-awelye* knowledge through regular festivals, where Indigenous performers from different areas can also participate as active audiences supporting other traditions.

**Conclusion**

Although sustaining *yawulyu/awelye* continues to encounter significant challenges, the high esteem in which the genre is held by so many practitioners and learners across a large area gives reason for some optimism. The central issue is enabling support and motivation for intergenerational transmission of the ceremonies, with the right people being trained to take charge of the future of their own tradition, including interpreting it to outsiders. Past and
current initiatives that have met with success include song documentation and revitalization programs (including mobilizing younger people to participate in documentation), commissioning of performances for festivals, support for private performance events such as Women’s Law and Culture meetings, trips to country facilitated by arts and health organizations, and employing performers to teach about yawulyu/awelye in various education projects. For various reasons, other potential points of focus for teaching and learning activities, such as cultural centers and tourism, have not provided an appropriate context. Future or suggested initiatives supported by some of our interviewees include a government-supported digital recording and archiving program for Indigenous songs, research projects to document the songs in existing archives and collections and make them available to learners, regular performance festivals, and the creation of books and films to educate various audiences about the significance of yawulyu/awelye.

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