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***Sustaining women's Yawulyu/Awelye:  
some practitioners' and learners' perspectives***

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**Abstract**

In 2010 the authors visited various Central Australian communities including Willowra, Tennant Creek, Alekarenge, Barrow Creek and Ti Tree, to interview some of our research collaborators past and present about how they saw the present and future of their *yawulyu/awelye* traditions. *Yawulyu* (in Warlpiri and Warumungu) and *Awelye* (in Kaytetye and other Arandic languages) are cognate names for women's country-based rituals, including songs, dancing, ritual objects and knowledge surrounding particular country and Dreaming stories. In the course of our research we spoke to women from different communities, different age groups, different language groups, and different clans, seeking to open discussion about past and contemporary practices of learning, performing and teaching this performance-based knowledge, to help us to understand what the practitioners saw as the most fruitful ways of sustaining the traditions, as well as what difficulties they saw in their way. In this article we present statements from many of the women interviewed, highlighting the key issues that emerged and discussing the role of recordings and other documentation of performances for the future sustainability of the various *yawulyu/awelye* traditions discussed.

**Introduction**

*Yawulyu* (in Warlpiri and Warumungu) and *awelye* (in Arandic languages) are cognate names for women's country-based ceremonies in central Australia. Groups of people identify with particular country, Dreamings and associated *yawulyu/awelye* repertoires. Ceremonial performances constitute a collective expression of knowledge surrounding the particular country, lifestyles and Dreaming stories to which the ceremonies relate. This knowledge is presented in different modalities including song text, rhythm, melody, movement (gesture, dance), ritual designs, ritual objects, and spatial organisation and orientation (**Error! Reference source not found.**). There are differentiated individual roles and relationships to *yawulyu/awelye* within the complex whole, and formalised procedures for transmission and exchange of ownership.

*Yawulyu/awelye* was once an essential part of the social and economic fabric of Aboriginal life in Central Australia (Bell 1993; Glowczewski 1999; Dussart 2004; Turpin and Ross 2004). Although it is still actively performed today, its future role is uncertain in the light of the lifestyle changes wrought by colonisation and ensuing rapid changes in Central Australian society. This paper seeks to address the question: How is *yawulyu/awelye* faring in the modern world? In particular, what do custodians see as its role today? How frequently is it performed and where? To what extent is it being transmitted and how?

**Methodology**

In July 2010 the authors interviewed some of our long-time friends and research collaborators in central Australia about how they see the future of their



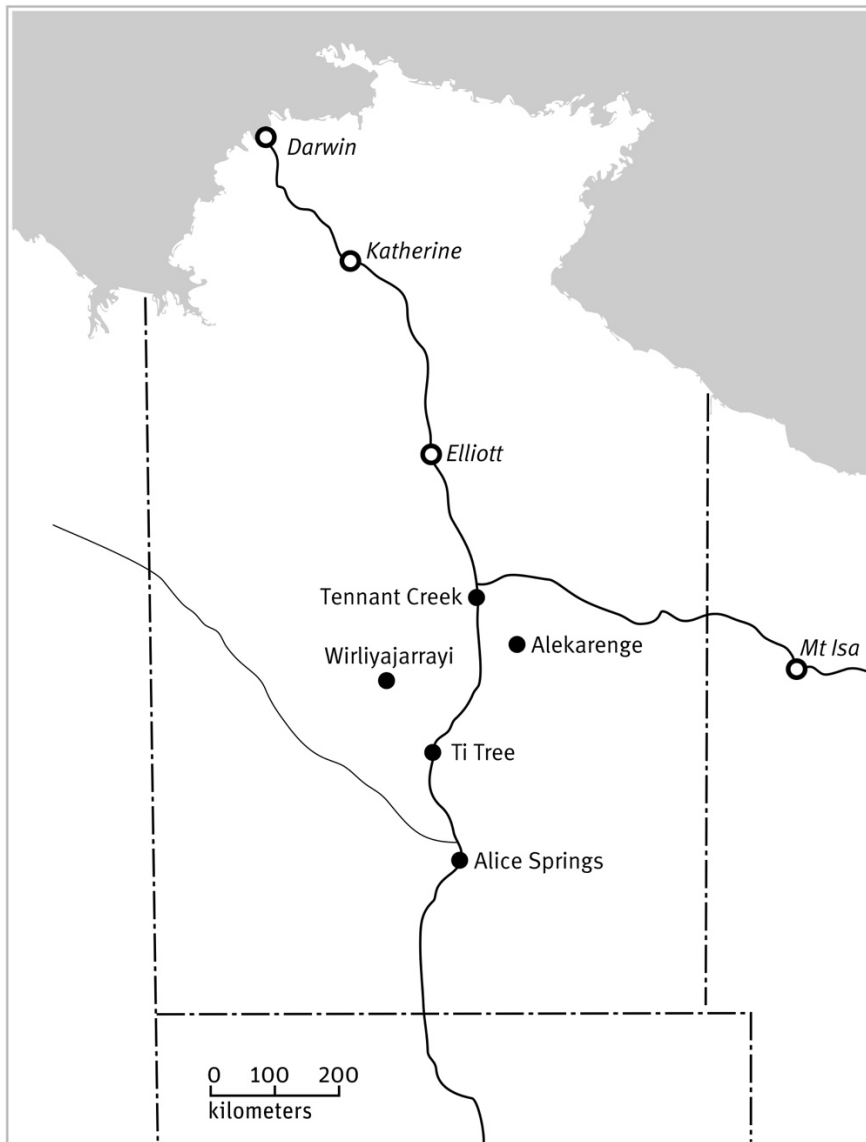
**Figure 1. Kathy Nangala Sampson from Willowra leads a *yawulyu* performance at the unveiling of the Coniston Massacre memorial plaque at Athimpelengkwe (Baxters Well), 2008 (photograph by Jane Hodson, copyright Central Land Council, used with permission).**

ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> We asked both older people (60+) and younger people (30+) about how they learnt *yawulyu/awelye*, what if any hurdles they see to sustaining the genre, and what they see as the way forward. We used a semi-structured interview technique, whereby we aimed to garner responses to these key questions, but allowed the participants to direct the topic and course of the interviews. By using this technique, we learned many unexpected details that have informed our own opinions and practices. The interviews 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.<sup>2</sup>

The women we consulted are affiliated with *yawulyu/awelye* repertoires in several different languages: Warlpiri, Warumungu, Kaytetye, Anmatyerr and Arrernte. Some of

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the ARC Linkage Project: Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: Towards an ecology of Musical diversity.

<sup>2</sup> We checked all statements reproduced here with the interviewees, and their families if appropriate. The body of data collected also forms the basis of the 2012 report (Barwick & Turpin 2012).



**Figure 2. Map of Central Australia, showing locations visited by our research team in July 2010.**

them are senior ‘law women’ (women with responsibility to uphold and teach traditional culture, codified as ‘law’) (Glowczewski 1991, 1999), now in their seventies and eighties, while others are younger women in their thirties and forties, who are keen to learn *yawulyu/awelye* in order to assume the cultural responsibility of passing Law on to the succeeding generations. We discussed eight different repertoires in the course of our trip.

The material presented in this paper is organised sequentially, in the order of our visits, and presents transcripts from our discussions, some translated and summarised from original interviews

conducted in Warlpiri, Anmatyerr, Arrernte and Kriol. The communities we visited (see

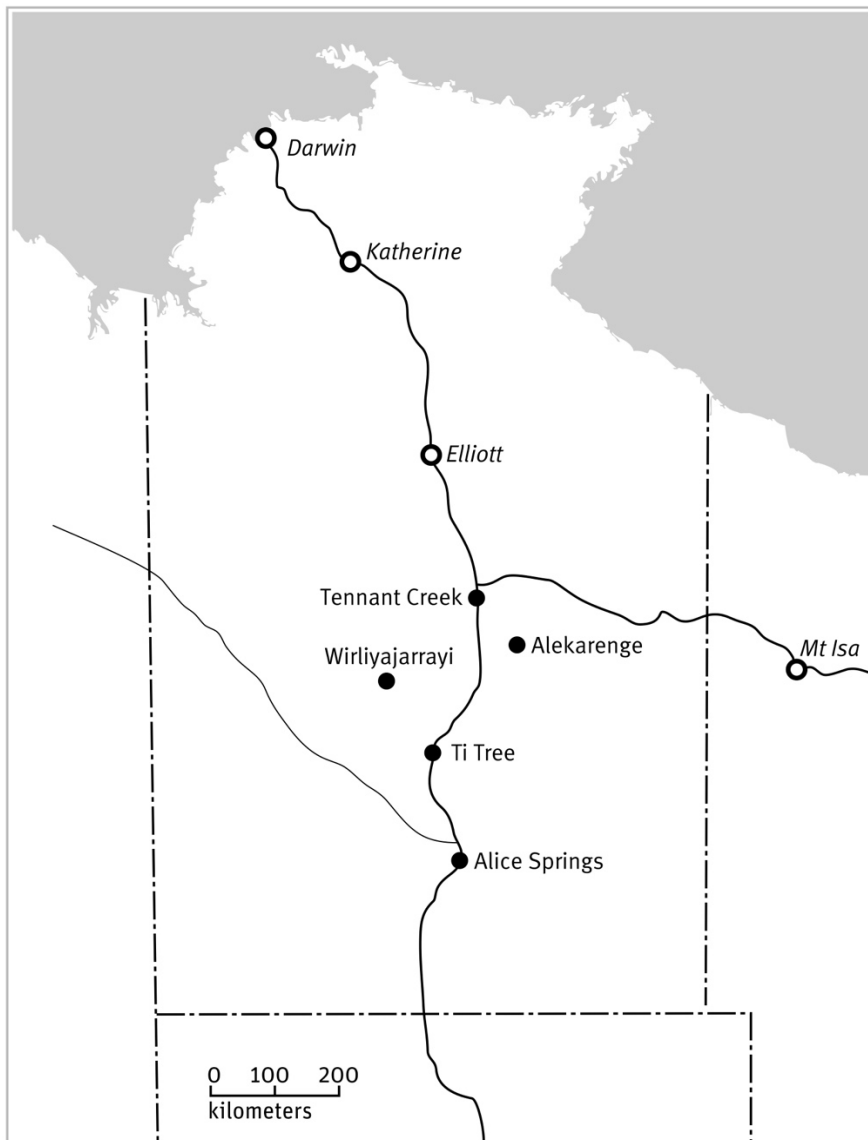


Figure 2) included: Wirliyajarrayi [Willowra] (Warlpiri), Tennant Creek (Warumungu), Alekarengge [Ali-Curung] (Warlpiri, Alyawarr and Kaytetye speakers), Ti Tree (Anmatyerr) and Alice Springs (Arrernte).<sup>3</sup> In the conclusion to this

<sup>3</sup> We had also planned to work in Barrow Creek but due to a death in the community were unable to do so.



**Figure 3. Kathy Sampson Nangala explaining meaning of a song text to linguist, Mary Laughren (photograph by Myfany Turpin).**

paper we draw together and discuss some of the overarching themes that emerged from the interviews.

### **Wirliyajarrayi (Willowra)**

The first women we visited (July 12-14, 2010) live at the Warlpiri community of Wirliyajarrayi on the banks of the Lander River.<sup>4</sup> Laughren has visited this community regularly since 1976 and worked with many of the middle-aged and elderly women, especially those with a deep knowledge of traditional *yawulyu* and also the middle-aged women with a long engagement in the local school. Laughren and Turpin had visited the community in 2009 to video and audio record performances of traditional ceremonies associated with the Wirliyajarrayi area, and had engaged in a series of conversations about the status of *yawulyu*, and about the efforts the women had made over many years to instruct young girls in their ceremonial practice. The women expressed their regret that they had come to feel excluded from the school over the few preceding years and were searching for new ways to pass on their knowledge. Out of our conversations came the project to create a DVD of their 2009 *yawulyu* performances along with their explanations of the songs and the

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<sup>4</sup> For information on the history of this community and its women through their own eyes, see Vaarzon-Morel (1995).



underlying themes illustrated through visits to the country celebrated in the songs.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 3 shows Kathy Sampson Nangala explaining song text meanings to linguist Mary Laughren.

On the 2010 visit we interviewed Lucy Martin Nampijinpa, the most senior Nampijinpa woman in the group of nine women who had performed the *yawulyu* we had videoed in 2009, and her younger ‘aunt,’ Kathy Sampson Nangala. Lucy is in her eighties, while Kathy is in her seventies. We conducted the interviews in Lucy’s camp shared with her younger sister, Leah, and their sister’s daughter, Kay. Both Leah and Kay were present for some of the interview. The interview was conducted in Warlpiri, and later transcribed

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<sup>5</sup> For details of the DVD see Laughren et al. (2010).

and translated into English. First we asked the women about how they had acquired their knowledge of *yawulyu*.

ML:<sup>6</sup> How did you learn *yawulyu* songs? Who taught you?

Lucy: 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) Kathy Nangala. She is a younger Nangala than those old aunties who taught me the songs. Topsy Nangala, who lives at Alekareng and who is suffering from kidney disease, is the only one from the older generation still alive.

ML: Where were you living when you started learning *yawulyu*?

Kathy & Lucy: Right here at Willowra, before there was any station here or buildings.<sup>7</sup>

[...]

Kathy: We would go to Pawu (Mt Barkly) and then come back this way.

Lucy: 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.

Kathy: We were children here and we have grown old here.

[...]

Lucy: The Dreamings for Pawu are *ngapa* 'water' and *ngurlu* 'seeds.'

Kathy: We paint the designs and then we dance.

ML: Nangala, where did you learn the songs and dances for *ngurlu*?

Kathy: Here. I didn't move around all over the place, I just lived around here.

ML: Who taught you?

Kathy: My elder sisters.

From this interchange, we get a picture of the fairly traditional life these women experienced in the early post-contact period before World War 2, and 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, 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, specifically their own patricouple, by the senior female members of that

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<sup>6</sup> ML = Mary Laughren.

<sup>7</sup> The station was established in the 1930s, but began to be developed more extensively after 1946 (see Vaarzon-Morel 1995).



group, their paternal aunts and elder sisters. Formal European schooling was only introduced to Willowra a decade or so after the end of World War 2 when it had become a pastoral station. None of the Willowra women who currently lead *yawulyu* ever attended school. Another important theme that emerged from our conversation was the continuity of residence in the Wirliyajarrayi area, and the authority that this gives to the women who live there to speak for it and to perform the ceremonies relating to it.

We also asked Lucy and Kathy about whether the generation of women who attended school, now in their forties and fifties, knew the *yawulyu* songs and were able to sing them.

ML: Do younger women like Kathy's daughter know the *yawulyu* songs?

Kathy: No. They don't know them.

Lucy: Only her mother here, Kathy, knows the songs.

Kathy: I'm the only Nangala who has these songs for Pawu (Mt Barkly).

Lucy: Pawu only has one Nangala (who knows its *yawulyu*) now. We have only one Nangala now.

Kathy: I know the Dreaming songs and dances for the Jangala from the west who comes to Pawu to steal the rain, that Brown Falcon (*kirrkirlanji*) man.

ML: Are the young girls learning to sing the *yawulyu* songs?

Kathy & Lucy: No.

ML: Do they know the dances?

Kathy: Not really. They only do little bits of dancing.

Lucy: 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?

Lucy: 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').

In this last reply, Lucy is referring to the role of *kurdungurlu* or 'policeman' in which members of the opposite patrimoiety to the patrilineal owners of a ceremony have the responsibility for the 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). In saying that the young women 'feel shame' to dance in public with their painted torsos exposed, Lucy is touching on a theme often brought up by women of her generation, that of the changing sensibilities of the younger generation brought up under the influence of European mores—disseminated through their schooling, television and travels beyond

their community—which has led to a heightened awareness of the values of the majority culture.

We also asked Lucy and Kathy about the ongoing role of *yawulyu* in ceremonies such as male initiation, and in other more public ‘profane’ performances, such as the opening of the new Central Land Council building in Alice Springs, which Lucy had mentioned.

Kathy: We have all these things for dancing because we regularly go around dancing—like it's our work. [...] We old women were also asked to come and dance at Pirdipirdi for the Jarrajarra memorial plaque ceremony. We danced in memory of the dead people, those who were killed in reprisals by Europeans. I wasn't alive then. My grandfather was killed, but I didn't know him. [...] <sup>8</sup>

Kathy: We went for women's business at Tennant Creek. It was good. We always perform *ngapa* dances and songs when we travel to other places.

ML: What about the *yawulyu* you perform at men-making ceremony times?

Kathy: They will be starting the *kurdiji* ceremonies for some young fellas. We will dance for them.

Lucy: When we initiate young men in the *kurdiji* ceremonies, we still use *ngapa* songs and dances. We use the songs that we inherit from our fathers and their fathers.

One of the findings that emerged from our discussion was that although some traditional contexts for *yawulyu* performances persist, such as male initiation,<sup>9</sup> new ones have emerged. In both, young women join with the senior women to be painted and also to dance, following the example and instructions of elders. It is also admitted that some young girls are very talented dancers. However, one aspect of performance that is not being passed on is knowledge of the songs; no song-leaders are emerging. This situation has arisen despite the sustained efforts of the senior women to instruct younger members of their community in *yawulyu* by painting them up and showing them how to dance the various stories relating to the country along the Lander River belonging to the families resident at Wirliyajarrayi, where Warlpiri is still the first language of community members and the main language of everyday communication between local people.

Intensely aware that they may be the last generation to be able to sing traditional *yawulyu*, the senior women from Warlpiri communities such as Wirliyajarrayi and Yuendumu have been extremely keen to participate in a variety of song preservation and dissemination efforts. Modern technology that allows for the simultaneous recording of the visual and audio aspects of ceremonies, as well as the subtitling of the song text and its translation and explanation, enables the production of pedagogic DVDs. In close collaboration with the women at Wirliyajarrayi, Turpin and Laughren have produced a pilot DVD aimed at the generation of younger Warlpiri women able to read both Warlpiri and English who want to understand and learn the songs for their mother's and father's country. The importance and urgency of recording traditional Warlpiri songs inspired the

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<sup>8</sup> Kathy is referring to the unveiling of the memorial plaque at Jarra-Jarra (north of Wirliyajarrayi, west of Alekarege) in 2008, built in remembrance of those killed in the 1928 Coniston massacre. See the Kaititj/Warlpiri traditional land claim hearing and television film about the Coniston killings (Plasto 1982). Figure 1 shows the *yawulyu* performance on this occasion, with the performers led by Kathy.

<sup>9</sup> In contrast, this is not a context for Arandic *awelye* ceremonies.

work of Georgia Curran who made over one hundred hours of audio recordings, mostly at Yuendumu, in 2006-8. Georgia has plans to make this material more accessible to the younger generations of Warlpiri people by publishing the song texts and the women's explanations alongside the recordings.<sup>10</sup> Access to the internet, although limited in Warlpiri communities, is increasing, with young people gaining knowledge of its use. Drawing on this, Barbara Glowczewski has made her audio and video recordings of *yawulyu* and other songs made at Lajamanu in the 1980s available to Warlpiri people via the internet. The song files are linked to the relevant field notes with texts and explanations (see Glowczewski 2000).

### **Tennant Creek**

Because of its strategic position at the crossroads of important pathways of exchange and communication (both traditional and modern), Tennant Creek has developed a strong and resilient Aboriginal culture, with surprisingly strong maintenance of traditional languages and ceremonies after more than 150 years of contact with Europeans in the area (Simpson 2002; Simpson & Wigglesworth 2008). As we saw in Wirliyajarrayi, knowledge of traditional languages and ceremonies is most strongly held by the older generations, many of whom grew up on cattle stations and remote areas but have since moved to Tennant Creek. Today their grandchildren and great-grandchildren are growing up in a very different environment, with increasing use of Wumpurrarni English, a dynamic variety of Aboriginal English that draws on Warumungu, Standard Australian English and northern creole (Disbray & Simpson 2005).

In the 1990s, Barwick worked with Warumungu women through Papulu Apparr-kari Language and Culture Centre to produce the first published CD entirely devoted to Central Australian women's songs: *Yawulyu Mungamunga* (Papulu Apparr-Kari Aboriginal Language and Culture Centre and Linda Barwick 2000). The recording of this CD was the idea of the senior women, who were concerned that the songs were not being learned by younger women. Hearing through Papulu Apparr-kari and the linguist Jane Simpson that Barwick was in town with a good quality tape recorder, the women recruited her to record their songs, and participated enthusiastically over the next few years in the process of compiling and checking the documentation to accompany the CD, as well as having a say in the design of the cover and layout, which were intended to prove to the younger generations of women the status and relevance of the songs through being released to national and international audiences (Figure 4). Not surprisingly, the CD was one of the topics of conversation raised in the discussions of *yawulyu* we recorded in 2010.

### **Dianne Stokes Nampin**

One woman Barwick encountered in the 1990s was Dianne Stokes 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 organisations and has participated in several land claims. When we visited in 2010, she and

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<sup>10</sup> Laughren and Curran's research was funded by ARC Linkage Grant 'Warlpiri Songlines' (LP0560567). DVD production costs were funded from Natural Resource Management Board N.T. Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Program (Central Land Council) and Endangered Languages Documentation Programme, Arcadia Trust.



**Figure 4. Ceremonial objects (coolamon and feathered sticks) used in danced performances of *yawulyu mungamunga*. The objects were arranged by the senior owners to be photographed for use in the CD package (photograph by Linda Barwick).**

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.

Dianne: It's important for language and *yawulyu* to be very strong. *Yawulyu* and *pujjarli* [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 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 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.' [T100717a-01 excerpt, 00:00–01:15].<sup>11</sup>

Although the main focus of our interview was *yawulyu*, the main women's ceremonial tradition, Nampin broadens the frame of her remarks here to include *pujjarli*, men's public ceremony that is sometimes performed in similar public contexts, including land claims and native title hearings.<sup>12</sup> Throughout Aboriginal Australia, songs and ceremony are tied to particular places, and often name them and recount aspects of their foundation myths (Strehlow 1971; Ellis 1992). As such, ceremonial performances have been accepted in

<sup>11</sup> Dianne Stokes Nampin talking to Linda Barwick, Tennant Creek (Nyinkka Nyunyu), 17 July 2010. Video recording by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed by Linda Barwick. All our 2010 recordings were made as part of the Australian Research Council Linkage project 'Sustainable futures for music cultures' LP0989243..

<sup>12</sup> There is a much larger body of men's songs that are restricted and not suitable for public occasions.

court hearings under both Land Rights and Native Title legislation as evidence of attachment to country ('you can tell them what you've got for this ground') (Bell 1993; Koch 1994, 1997, and 2004). Traditional knowledge management protocols dictate that only the senior owners of the country can elucidate their meanings, so Dianne Stokes 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.'

### ***Kathleen Fitz Nappanangka and Bunny Naburula***

The political importance of *yawulyu* as a way of demonstrating to wider society that the traditional owners are continuing to uphold their attachment to their country and their language was also acknowledged in an interview with Kathleen Fitz Nappanangka and Bunny Naburula, two of the most respected community elders and law women in Tennant Creek.<sup>13</sup> Both have been prominent *yawulyu* performers for many years, although health problems and family commitments have curtailed their ceremonial activities in recent years. They have actively participated in land claims, and in language and culture activities of various bodies in Tennant Creek, including the Papulu Apparr-kari Language and Culture Centre, the Nyinkka Nyunyu museum, and cultural activities of the Julalikari council.

Nappanangka's primary language affiliation by birth is Warlpiri, but she learned Warumungu language and culture as a result of growing up in Warumungu country. She was born at the old Telegraph Station north of Tennant Creek, and grew up on Banka Banka station, where she learned many songs in the traditional way, by 'listening to all the old people.'<sup>14</sup> Eventually she became the owner and main performer of *Yawulyu mungamunga*, and in the 1990s was the prime mover in the CD project, working closely with Barwick and others, including D. Dawson Nangali, E. Graham Nakkamarra and linguist Jane Simpson, to record and document the songs.

Bunny Naburula (BN)<sup>15</sup> is still an active and enthusiastic performer and cultural broker despite her advancing age. She knows and performs *yawulyu* in Warlpiri and Warlmanpa languages as well as Warumungu (the traditional language of Tennant Creek), and is a fluent English speaker.

Both women had previously participated in *yawulyu* performances accepted in court as evidence of continuing attachment to country in various land claims in the early 1980s (Aboriginal Land Commission 1982a, 1982b, 1988; Bell 1993). Since then, *yawulyu* performances have been regularly requested for official events in the Tennant Creek area, such as greeting visiting politicians and other dignitaries, the inauguration of buildings and the commemoration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Overland Telegraph Station near Tennant Creek.

Kathleen: [A politician said], nope, don't leave that *yawulyu*, you keep, you keep, you keep it that corroboree! [T100715a, 04:05–05:03]<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nappanangka's daughter Carol Fitz-Slade Nakkamarra (CFS), a friend of Barwick for many years, sat in on the interview and made occasional comments.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in the interview recorded on T100715a, discussed further below.

<sup>15</sup> Bunny signs herself thus. Her skin (subsection) name is Napurrurla (Warlpiri), equivalent to Narrurlu (Warumungu).

<sup>16</sup> This interview (T100715a) was recorded on 15 July 2010 by Myfany Turpin, was a conversation led by Barwick with KF, BN and CFS. It was conducted mainly in English (sometimes Aboriginal English) with a few segments in Warumungu.

Like Dianne Stokes Nampin, Bunny Naburula was concerned that in the future her family might be disadvantaged by not carrying on knowledge of their *yawulyu*.

Bunny: 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.’ [T100715a, 13:53–14:23]

Nappanangka and Naburula expressed anxiety about the extent to which the younger generations would be able to uphold the traditional performance practice. For example, where traditional performance practice demanded that women sing loudly and in unison, Nappanangka and Naburula were concerned that nowadays younger women were singing too softly, perhaps for fear of making a mistake such as singing the wrong words. This change in performance practice was evident already in 1996 when the first performances for the CD were recorded at Mary Ann Dam north of Tennant Creek.

Kathleen: 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. [T100715a, 04:04–05:03]

Bunny Naburula was generally more optimistic about the prospects of younger people learning from the example of the older generation, although she suggested that younger generations need the assistance of writing in learning songs. She suggested involving language workers from the Papulu Apparr Kari Language and Culture Centre in this effort:

Bunny: But we [older generation] can still do it [sing *yawulyu*], the language centre mob can write it down. [T100715a, 13:53–14:23]

We learned that recently, due to ill health, Nappanangka had formally handed over ownership of her *yawulyu* to younger people. Bunny Naburula commented:

Bunny: [Nappanangka] handed over [the *Yawulyu mungamunga* songs] to these young people. Those two women, Nampin and Napaljarri, are doing it now. [They] are in charge now, and DK and I are supporting them [T100715a, 01:30–02:02]

There is a formal ceremony for transmitting ownership and responsibility for songs. As Barwick has documented elsewhere, Nappanangka herself received authority for the *yawulyu* in part via a tape recording of the relevant ceremony (Barwick 2005). There was considerable discussion of the booklet of songtexts and explanations that Barwick had assembled for Nappanangka in 1999 for approval before production of the CD, which it turned out had now entered into the bundle of documents and other artefacts that was handed over to the new owners of the *yawulyu*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dussart (2000) gives a detailed account of the handover of ceremonial authority from one woman to another in the Warlpiri community of Yuendumu in the 1980's.



Kathleen: She [Nampin] got that book [of song texts from the *Yawulyu Mungamunga* CD], this one [LB] fixed it. [To LB:] Remember you [put together] that book for *yawulyu*? Well, I gave it to [Nampin] [as part of the handing over process for the *yawulyu*] [T100715a, 02:06–02:18]

Bunny Naburula commented, ‘She has to show it and share it, that book’ [T100715a, 02:22–02:24].

Showing and sharing are equally important aspects of the maintenance and transmission of *yawulyu* knowledge. The display of knowledge through performances led by the owners of the relevant *yawulyu* series is carefully checked and monitored at each stage by women from the opposite patrimoiety in the role of ‘policemen’ or managers (*kurtungurlu* in Warumungu).<sup>18</sup> Equally important is the sharing of knowledge with succeeding generations of owners, through the correct transmission of the songs and associated artefacts and knowledge. Then it is the turn of the next generation to show their knowledge through continued performance.

### **Rosemary Plummer Narrurlu**

In our conversations in Tennant Creek, various formal and informal circumstances for teaching and learning *yawulyu* were reported to us, ranging from weekend trips out bush to take young women and girls to their country to learn songs, through to participation in the Women’s Law and Culture meetings<sup>19</sup> and more formal use in the schools. Rosemary Plummer Narrurlu, a well-known author and cultural worker, recounted the following story about the innovative use of *yawulyu mungamunga* songs in a Tennant Creek high school play production.

Rosemary: When I was working at the high school we used one part of it for that *Romeo and Juliet*, because they were lovers. We spoke to Mrs Fitz, that old Nappanangka, [to ask] which one we’re not allowed to use, so she told us which number to use. Mrs Fitz said, ‘Nope, don’t use this one, don’t use that one, use this one!’ I think it was number four. She [told us not] to use number nine. [T100716a-01excerpt, 00:00.00-00:00:44.5.]<sup>20</sup>

While using the published *Yawulyu mungamunga* CD and its documentation as a teaching resource in the school, Narrurlu observed traditional protocols around management of knowledge about songs by asking the senior traditional owner for permission and advice about which songs to use. It is interesting that Narrurlu referred to the song selected by its track number on the CD (information that was shared by all of us who had been involved with the CD production, including Barwick), rather than by its text, as is more usually the case amongst tradition-bearers. It may be that Narrurlu is using an oblique communication strategy, as is often observed in discussions around songs and other culturally important information, as a way of ensuring that only those who already have the context to receive the information are able to decode the discussion (Ellis 1985; Ellis & Barwick 1989). Since she knew that Barwick had been closely involved in the CD project,

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<sup>18</sup> The owner/manager relationship (*kirda/kurdungurlu*) in Warlpiri, as previously discussed in relation to Wirliyarrayi) is referred to as *mangayi* or *kampaju* in Warumungu, while managers are *purlungalkki* or *kurtungurlu*.

<sup>19</sup> The annual Women’s Law and Culture Meetings are sponsored by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council and the Central and Northern Land Councils.

<sup>20</sup> Rosemary Narrurlu Plummer talking to Linda Barwick, Tennant Creek, 16 July 2010. Video recording by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed by Linda Barwick.

this communication strategy invoked Barwick's previous history in Tennant Creek, and acknowledged her role in the production of the CD. We might also speculate that Narrurlu's unwillingness to refer to the songs by name could indicate a reluctance to be seen to assume too much authority in relation to the *yawulyu* (which after all belongs to others), or even a fear of incorrectly naming the songs due to a lack of familiarity with the song texts.

The song selected in this case was 'Kalanjirri No. 1,'<sup>21</sup> about boyfriend and girlfriend 'tata' lizards waving to each other. An image of the 'tata' lizard (so named because it waves one paw as if to say goodbye) had been chosen by senior Warumungu women for the cover of the CD, indicating that this aspect of the *yawulyu* was felt to be suitable as the public face of the song set. This also happens to be one of the few songs containing words in everyday Warumungu (*kalanjirri* being the usual Warumungu word for this lizard species), whereas the majority of other songs on the CD are entirely made up of special song language words (said to be in the language of the song-giving *mungamunga* spirit beings) (Papulu Apparrkari Language and Culture Centre and Barwick 2000; Barwick 2005). The *kalanjirri* song may therefore have been regarded as easier for learners to pick up than the more difficult, esoteric (and more powerful) songs in *mungamunga* language. All these features suggest that the older women had taken considerable care to select a song for youngsters to learn that would resonate with the theme of the play as well as being suitable for learning and public performance.

### **Alekareng**

Our next stop was Alekareng (previously spelled 'Ali-Curung'), a large community 170km south of Tennant on Kaytetye country, established in 1956 as a government settlement and previously known as Warrabri. Both Barwick and Turpin had visited there in previous years to work with women on Warlpiri *yawulyu* (Barwick) and Kaytetye *awelye* (Turpin).

### ***Fanny Walker Napurrurla and family***

In the mid-1990s Barwick had made several recordings of large groups of Warlpiri women singing *yawulyu* from the songlines of *Ngapa* (Rain/water) and *Ngurlu* (seed), but due to lack of opportunity to re-visit the community in later years had never been able to document the songs properly. Laughren had previously recorded and documented many Warlpiri women's songs from other women living in the more westerly communities (Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Wirliyajarrayi). On this trip, we hoped to return copies of the 1990s recordings to the relevant families, and also to take advantage of the occasion to improve the documentation of the recordings.

On arriving at Alekareng, we were saddened to learn that only one woman, Fanny Walker Napurrurla, remained with knowledge of the songs: all the other singers recorded having died or become incapacitated due to illness and age. Napurrurla was keen to work with us on documentation of the 1990s recordings, and her daughters and several other

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, this song is track 9 on the CD, and track 4 is 'Tarrarrantarrara,' one of the song texts entirely in *mungamunga* language. Evidently Narrurlu accidentally reversed the track numbers in our discussion. The selection of the *Kalanjirri* song was later confirmed both with Mrs Fitz Nappanangka and Rosemary Plummer Narrurlu herself.



**Figure 5. Fanny Walker Napurrurla and family work with Laughren and Barwick to document *Yawulyu ngurlu* song texts, Alekarengge, 19 July 2010 (T100719-1.jpg) (photograph by Myfany Turpin).**

women who wished to learn about the songs were eager witnesses of the documentation sessions, which were mainly conducted in Warlpiri by Laughren (Figure 5).

The *Ngurlu* line Barwick recorded crosses two different Warlpiri clan estates, those of Jiparanpa (Napurrurla's side) and Pawurrinji. Napurrurla told us:

Fanny: I was a young woman (adult) when I came to Alekarengge. People had been at Philip Creek first, and there was no water, so we were moved to Kaytetye people's country at Alekarengge. The old people brought the songs and ceremonies for Miyikampi, Jiparanpa (*ngurlu*), Pawurrinji (*ngurlu*), and Kulpurlunu (*ngapa*).

The Nangalas and Nampijinpas danced for Rain (*ngapa*).

The Napanankas and Napangardis danced for Miyikampi.

The Nakamarras and Napurrurla danced for Jiparanpa (my side) and for Pawurrinji.

Also the Jarrajarra groups (NapaJarri-Nungarrayi) had their business and the women would dance for their own father's father's country and Dreaming.

It was the old people who have since passed away who taught me and the others the songs and dances and paintings. They used to paint up. (Edited translation from Warlpiri by Mary Laughren.) [T100718a-03.wav]

In the *Ngurlu* performances recorded by Barwick in the 1990s, songs from the two different *Ngurlu* lines for Pawurrinji and Jiparanpa had been mixed together. Napurrurla could only speak for her own section of the *Ngurlu* line, that relating to Jiparanpa (her own patrilineal country), and referred us to a Nakamarra in Tennant Creek who could speak for Pawurrinji.

Figure 6 presents one of the *Ngurlu* songs for Jiparanpa as documented by Napurrurla. As is typical of songs across a wide area of Australia,<sup>22</sup> even though in this instance the text is in grammatical Warlpiri, its meaning and references are opaque. For example, the word *kalajirdi* 'spinifex' occurs frequently throughout the *Ngurlu* songs. Spinifex plains cover much of Warlpiri country, and spinifex resin is one of the most important

<sup>22</sup> References discussing this quality of opacity include Barwick (2000, 2006), Garde (2006), Merlan (1987), and Walsh (2007).

<b>kalajirdi</b>	<b>japa+rna</b>	<b>wuyuwuyu</b>	<b>yirra+rnu (x2)</b>
<i>spinifex sp.</i>	<i>QUESTION+IsS</i>	<i>rub</i>	<i>put+PAST</i>
‘Did I rub against “Kalajirdi”?’			

<b>kalajirdi</b>	<b>japa+rna</b>	<b>turdurr-turdurr</b>	<b>yirra+rnu (x2)</b>
<i>spinifex sp.</i>	<i>QUESTION+IsS</i>	<i>completely</i>	<i>put+PAST</i>
‘Did I gather up all of “Kalajirdi”?’			

**Figure 6. Glossed song text of *Yawulyu Ngurlu* song 6 ‘Kalajirdi japarna wuyuwuyu-yirrarnu’ (text glossing and translation by David Nash and Mary Laughren). Source: Performed by Ada Dickenson Napurrurla, Mary Napurrurla, Fanny Napurrurla, Annabelle Nakamarra, Irene Driver Nungarrayi, Marjorie Limbiari Nangala/Napurrurla, Lilian Napangardi, Peggy Napangardi, Jessie Rice Nungarrayi, Edna Brown Nungarrayi, and recorded by Linda Barwick at Alekareng, 17 September 1996, Barwick tape AT96\_18a, song items 33–34.**

plant products, traditionally used as cement in making various artefacts (Latz 1995). In discussion of the song, Napurrurla suggested that in this case ‘Kalajirdi’ might also be the name of a small bird, and/or of the man who is chasing two women along the *Ngurlu* song line. In the context of a *yilpinji* song sung by women to attract boyfriends (*waninjawarnuku*), the action of working the spinifex resin by rolling it between one’s hands (described by the verb *wuyuwuyu-yirrarnu*)<sup>23</sup> suggests comparable motions of a sexual nature.

In recent years, because of the loss of other senior Warlpiri songwomen, Fanny Walker Napurrurla has performed her *yawulyu* songs all but solo at public events such as the 2010 Alekareng Traditional Dance Festival organised by the Arlpwe Art and Culture centre and held on July 3–4, 2010, shortly before our visit (see Turpin 2010). Her daughters and the other women who listened eagerly to the song documentation session some weeks later were very keen to learn the songs so that they could participate more effectively in such performances. A solo recording of Napurrurla singing this song can be heard as the introduction to the country rock song ‘Jipirunpa,’ track 7 of Ali Curung Band Nomadic’s 2010 album *Freedom Road* (2010).<sup>24</sup> According to Jane Simpson, ‘Jiparanpa [is] too far to get to, and has become the homeland of dreams, of imagination, of the golden past and the unattainable future’ (Simpson 2010). In Alekareng, due to the loss of so many tradition-holders, the complex multi-lingual environment, and distance from the traditional clan estates, it seems that *yawulyu/awelye* may have become iconic of a lost classical past for men and women alike.

### ***Maureen O’Keefe and Mona Hayward***

Turpin also took the opportunity of our visit to Alekareng to talk about Kaytetye *awelye* with Mona Haywood Nungarrayi and Maureen O’Keefe. Mona, in her seventies, is one of the few Kaytetye speakers at Alekareng, where most Kaytetye people now speak a variety of English or Warlpiri as their first language. She is also the most senior performer of the *awelye* of Jarra-Jarra. Mona teaches the Jarra-jarra songs, dances, paintings and their

<sup>23</sup> According to the Warlpiri-English dictionary, the English translation of WUYUWUYU-YIRRA-RNI (V) is ‘press down on, massage, pummel, rub, rub down’ (Laughren and Warlpiri Lexicography Group, 2005); in relation to spinifex resin, the translation would be ‘rolling between one’s hands,’ ‘bending and straightening it.’

<sup>24</sup> *Freedom Road* was shortlisted for the 2010 NT Indigenous Music Awards shortly before the untimely death of the band leader and composer B. Murphy.

meanings to younger family members, including Maureen O’Keefe, Mona’s sister’s daughter. Maureen speaks Warlpiri and English and is literate in both languages. She also writes poetry and has published with IAD Press.<sup>25</sup> Maureen’s late mother was a senior law woman who left various records of her knowledge, which are highly valued by Maureen.<sup>26</sup> In 1982, Maureen’s mother described the importance of *awelye* in the following terms:

We make the country good for fruit ... so it will grow up well, so that we can make it green, so that we hold the law forever. My father told me or instructed me to hold it always this way, so I go on holding *yawulyu* for that country ... (Molly O’Keefe, interpreted by Laughren) (Aboriginal Land Commission 1982b, p. 191).

Twenty-eight years later, in 2010, Maureen explained why *awelye* is important to her, and the urgency of working on it:

Maureen: 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 [Mona Hayward], 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. [T100718c, 5:30–5:50]<sup>27</sup>

Mona’s experience of learning her *awelye* is somewhat unusual in that she was an adult when she first heard and learned Jarra-jarra *awelye* from her sister (Maureen’s mother). One of the reasons she may have picked it up so well as an adult was that she was exposed to other *awelye* from a very young age. Despite the different tune and words, the musical structure and principles for setting words to music in *awelye* are similar across the region. As a child, Mona was brought up by Kaytetye women from Barrow Creek. Sometimes she was the only teenage girl taken out bush by the large group of senior women. With just the older women for company, and being exposed to regular *awelye* performances for which she was also painted up, Mona learnt by listening and observing. The onus of learning *awelye* was on the learner; it was not up to the senior women to teach.<sup>28</sup>

For many complex reasons, *awelye* performances have become more infrequent over the last forty years, which has no doubt contributed to the waning number of *awelye* singers.

Maureen: If we have dance all the time [it would help to learn]. That’s what we did when we were little. I remember my Mum, she used to have dances every night. The whole family would come and watch us dancing. It was a fun thing for me. Today I still enjoy it. I could see it in [the] eyes [of the *awelye* dancers at the Alekarenge dance festival]. They were so happy. They had never been to one of these before.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Maureen is one of the poets featured in McDonnell (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Molly O’Keefe played a major role in the Warlpiri Kaytej Land Claim of 1980 (see Aboriginal Land Commission (1980) and Plasto (1982).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Maureen O’Keefe and Mona Hayward by Myfany Turpin, Jarrajarra road near Alekarenge, 18 July 2010. Video recording by Linda Barwick. Transcribed by Myfany Turpin.

<sup>28</sup> The onus on the learner is also observed by Hale (1984).

<sup>29</sup> Prior to this event, the last festival at Alekarenge featuring ceremony was probably the 1978 Purlapa Wiri, which Laughren attended in her capacity as linguist for the NT Education Department.

Learning may have also been impeded by the facts that the ratio of elders to young people has changed dramatically since Mona's childhood, and that nowadays less time is spent in mixed-generation groups.

In response to this situation, Mona has adopted a more formal teaching style. Her family members' desire to learn *awelye* influenced her decision to teach *awelye* more formally. Maureen and Mona recall the Alekarenge traditional performance day in 2010, where many younger people demonstrated their desire to learn:

Maureen: We didn't know that a lot of them would come and dance that day. We didn't expect it.

She [Mona Hayward] got quite a shock.

Mona: That's why I gotta learn' em bout all the kids. [*That's why I am teaching my children and grandchildren*]

Maureen: They were into it, we didn't ask them little ones to come—they came on their own.

Mona: Hey, all the kids coming too much! [*Look at all the kids coming!*]

Maureen: They really enjoyed it. [17:05–17:50] ...

Mona: *Ayengepe etarrenhe mpelarte* now, 'I can't leavem *awelye nyarte*, I gotta still *arrtyerrantye* him, I gotta learnem *kely-kely tyampe, artnwenge inenge*.'

[*Then I thought, 'I can't forget this awelye, I've got to keep it going and teach it to my children and grandchildren.'*]

Maureen sees festivals as one measure to help sustain *awelye*. A recent Dancesite festival in Tennant Creek, an evening of traditional singing and dancing from across Central Australia, was highly valued by Mona and Maureen as a forum to perform *awelye*. It is one of the few (if not only) regular forums where *awelye* can be performed. Festivals can instil a sense of pride in culture, provide an opportunity to learn through participation, and may inspire further education. Festivals are one way that the importance of *awelye* is communicated to young people, a hurdle identified by Kaytetye teacher Alison Ross 'It's gotta be clear to the young people, you know, that these things are important.'<sup>30</sup>

Spending more time with elders is another strategy to help learn *awelye*. However, for a variety of reasons, younger people often spend time in urban centres such as Tennant Creek, where there are more employment, education and health services than in remote Aboriginal communities. The difficulties in bringing elders and young people together for *awelye* have not been lost on Mona and Maureen. In August 2011, they secured the support of the Central Land Council and Turpin<sup>31</sup> to bring people together for this purpose. This involved travel across some 600 kilometres through country accessible only by four-wheel drive. Without careful planning and the support of well equipped vehicles, such an undertaking would not have been safe.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Alison Ross by Myfany Turpin, [T090621a\_03, 02:78], Arnerre outstation 21 June 2010. Recorded and transcribed by Myfany Turpin.

<sup>31</sup> Funded by the Australian Research Council, DP1092887, 'Singing the Dreaming.'

<sup>32</sup> The importance of camping out on country with elders to learn *awelye* and the difficult logistics involved, was also highlighted by Kaytetye school teacher Alison Ross (pers.com 2008).



Documentation projects are another way to support intergenerational learning. They can provide an additional performance platform without the time constraints of a formal performance, and they can be conducted during a private event, such as an estate-based camping trip.<sup>33</sup> Documenting *awelye* in the form of books and recordings is one way of making this knowledge available to future generations, and people who cannot be with their elders (for example, Maureen's sister is on dialysis, which effectively restricts her access to elders). For younger people, the opportunity to make books and recordings also utilises their skills in reading, writing, interpreting and electronic media, whilst at the same time acknowledging senior people as the knowledge holders.

Maureen: 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. [T100718c, 6:04]

Mona, too, finds audio recordings useful, but for different reasons. *Awelye* involves 'painting up' (body-painting), which must be accompanied by singing. With the number of people to be painted up sometimes reaching twenty or more, this can take up to three hours. As the sole Jarra-jarra *awelye* singer, and at more than seventy years of age, Mona finds it difficult to sustain solo singing for this length of time. Mona uses cassettes and compact disks of herself singing (recorded by her younger family members) to accompany the painting up, and when teaching *awelye* dance movements.

Maureen finds that stories about the songs, in either oral or written form, help people to understand the song texts and the significance of the songs. Mona regards knowing the country from which the song originates as essential for learning the songs. This reflects the fact that *awelye* verses often refer to specific locations within the estate. The location, its name and the song text are linked through shared meanings. Knowledge of these locations may assist in recalling the correct sequence of verses, which can number over seventy.<sup>34</sup>

## Ti Tree

Anmatyerr mother and daughter Aileen Perrwerl and April Campbell are actively involved in language and cultural maintenance. April is a teacher in her mid-thirties, who co-ordinates the Language and Culture program at the local school. *Awelye* is one aspect of the network of Indigenous knowledge that the program aims to teach. In our discussions, April identified a variety of issues and initiatives to sustain *yawulyu/awelye*, and these are used as subheadings in the following discussion.

### 4.1 Learning *awelye*

From as young as she can remember, April's mother Aileen recalls regularly hearing *awelye* when camping out bush with her mother, aunts and grandmothers.

Aileen: Pwety-warl alhetyart map. Nheng warl-eng anetyart, iter-el alyelherl-alpetyart, arlkeny werrerl-alpetyart. werrkel pwety-el. Amarl map alhetyart. Artwang map warrk-irretyart.

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<sup>33</sup> A number of documentation projects in central Australia are discussed in Turpin (2011).

<sup>34</sup> For example Myfany Turpin has documented 75 songs of the *awelye* repertory from Antarrangeny, of which 57 are published in Turpin & Ross (2013).

Kel anwern alhetyart, ayeng pwert-antey alhetyart, mother-el angetyart ayeng. [T10021a, 04:05–04:55]

*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.*<sup>35</sup>

Aileen learned by listening, watching and gradually joining in the singing. Her mistaken belief that the older women were laughing at her when they were actually joking amongst themselves highlights the frequently prevalent fear of making a mistake.

Aileen: Kel awetyart 'alyelhang' kwenh ntwā too-kwenh, ntwang alyelhay! Ayeng mother-el iletaryart ntwā catchem-il-erl-alpem yanh. Kel alyelhetyart, kwek war. Kel ntert-am-arl anetyart ayeng alakenh kwek-am-akwek alyelherl-alpem. Kel inang arrken atherrem-arl, kel ayeng ntert-arl-irr-erleng, alakenh. [T100721a, 07:08–08:01]

*'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 [embarrassed].*

Aileen's daughter April Campbell first heard *awelye* when she was eight years old, at a Land Claim hearing. Whilst she was not a participant and it was not her own *awelye*, it gave her an understanding of what *awelye* is, and led her to enquire about her own *awelye*.

[At the Land claim] I learnt to see the designs and see the meaning of the designs and stories. And when I saw other people's designs and songs, then I starting asking around for my country, how it is [the *awelye*]. [T100720a]<sup>36</sup>

### ***Learning the words***

April: We already know now the designs, we are good at drawing designs, but we are still learning to sing, sing that song. [T100720a, 24:05]

The lyrics, which have a set rhythmic pattern, are cited as the most difficult part of *awelye* to learn. One of the common complaints heard from *awelye* custodians is that when people do not know the words, they just hum the tune instead of singing. Traditionally, singing was learned much later than dancing and visual designs. This late acquisition may in part be due to difficulties in hearing the words in group singing. The meanings of the songs were probably learned even later. Aileen recalls that it wasn't until she was in her late twenties that she could sing the words of her *awelye*, even though she had been involved in regular performances since she was a young girl. April thinks literacy can play an important role in learning *awelye* lyrics:

April: 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. [T100720a, 09:10]

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Aileen Perrwerl by Myfany Turpin, Ti-Tree, 21 July 2010. Recorded and transcribed by Myfany Turpin. Translated by April Campbell.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with April Campbell by Myfany Turpin, Ti-Tree, 20 July 2010. Audio recording by Linda Barwick. Transcribed by Myfany Turpin.

April is referring to the way the text cycles, making it difficult to find the beginning and end of text lines. She is also probably referring to the way words are difficult to identify through consonant shift and the use of long note values within a word (Turpin 2007a, 2007b). April envisages literacy-based teaching to support the learning done with the *awelye* custodians.

April: We need a paper with the songs, so that when the elders are singing, kids can sit around with the paper and follow the words. ... When you learn syllables first, you can say it first, the syllables, then you can start slowly singing then. Quickly putting them in together then, that's the way we learn to sing that song. And then use the tape or music on the tape, and sing it and follow the words. [T100720a, 08:10, 25:40]

### ***Role of awelye custodians***

In sustaining *awelye*, both Aileen and April regard the role of senior *awelye* custodians, such as Clarrie Kemarr, as pivotal. Clarrie is one of the most senior *awelye* performers and teachers for Anmatyerr people.<sup>37</sup> Senior *awelye* custodians are the performers, teachers and decision-makers about *awelye*. Respect for these women is fundamental, because it is up to them to decide whether to pass on *awelye* or not. Where they have decided to pass on *awelye*, encouragement and positive reinforcement from these women is highly valued by learners:

April: If there is only 'country' there sitting down and there is no song, that means we are not remembering our designs or songs. But we are lucky because Clarrie has everything for us, she is already passing it on to us, trying to teach us to sing. ...

They [senior custodians] were telling me 'When you grow up, you gotta start doing like this [painting and dancing], and listen to songs carefully so you can learn how to sing.' Clarrie always tell us, 'You gotta learn now, I'm getting older. I want to see you singing your country.' [T100720a, 20:01]

One of the difficulties for custodians in deciding to pass on *awelye* is overcoming the grief of the loss of a family member who used to perform *awelye*. It is common to leave out a verse that has a strong association with someone who has passed away, especially if the performer was particularly close to that person. April's comment on this issue suggests that the new generation's willingness to learn may assist custodians to overcome this grief.

April: [Sometimes] elders don't want to use it [*awelye*] because some of our family have passed away. And then they thought 'Oh, there's a lot of family rising up, especially children, and us [April and her cousins].' Because we didn't know about it [her father's *awelye*]. And then they started teaching, passing it on to others, so others can pass it on. [T100720a, 20:01]

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<sup>37</sup> Clarrie plays a vital role in traditional culture and features on the DVD Lisa Watts, April Campbell, and Myfany Turpin, *Mer Rrkwer-Akert* (2009) (2 video discs (49 min), Charles Darwin University Central Australian Research Network).



**Figure 7. April Campbell on a country trip to document *awelye* (photograph by Jenny Green).**

### ***Inspiration and prestige***

Inspiration to learn *awelye* can come from a variety of sources. For older people it was often the desire to be part of the social activities. For people who did not grow up with regular performances, it can be a Land Claim hearing, or the realisation that *awelye* is a critical part of country and identity. April teaches the network of kin, country and ceremony, drawing on a DVD of *awelye* from the country Rrwek<sup>38</sup> to motivate students to learn their own *awelye*.

April: We always use that [*Awely Rrwek* DVD] in the school when we doing story telling or history, or like dancing or body painting. We always show it to kids. ‘That belongs to that country [and people].’ And others watch it too, to get ideas. Then they can think about their country. What they are going to do [to learn about their country]. [T100720a, 11:05]

### ***Recordings and documentation***

April sees recordings as playing a role in sustaining *awelye*, especially media that contain the texts and information as to what the songs are about. For some estates in the region

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<sup>38</sup> *Awely Rrkwer-akert* is one of two DVDs in *Mer Rrkwer-akert* (2009) produced by Lisa Watts, April Campbell and Myfany Turpin.

the *awelye* is no longer known. Many people April's age lament the absence of recording equipment and documentation projects twenty years ago, because the songs and cultural knowledge of their grandparents are now gone forever.

As mentioned, April makes use of a DVD of the *awelye* from Rrwek, which also features the Dreamings, sites and stories of that estate. To date, this is the only pedagogic publication of an Anmatyerr *awelye* repertory, and it has inspired the making of others.<sup>39</sup>

April: People were asking me when they saw the DVD [the Rrwek DVD]; they came up ... to me and said 'we want a DVD too, about our country.' And they ask me 'How did you do this? [T100720a, 17:50]

The production of such resources also provides learning opportunities. The Rrwek DVD involved intensive learning of the *awelye* Rrwek for the Anmatyerr collaborator through recording and translating.

### **Community events**

Festivals and other community events provide a forum for *awelye* performance that is strongly supported by *awelye* custodians. Ti-Tree school has been host to the annual Music Outback Festival. Ti-Tree women have also performed at DanceSite<sup>40</sup> and at one-off public events such as book launches, as well as on bush trips aimed at learning and documenting *awelye*. These events provide a forum to display *awelye* to the community, which can inspire people to learn.

One of the reasons for the relatively high level of engagement with *awelye* in the Ti-Tree region may be the successful Language and Culture program at the school.

April: [We] started teaching in the school to the young kids with the songs now, and kids are learning a lot now about their Dreamtime stories, about their body painting, their country. They have been learning a lot now since we started Language and Culture. [T100720a, 10:45]

The motivation of key individuals plays a major role in the establishment and success of community events. Clarrie's boundless energy and April's creativity and organisational skills have no doubt contributed to the high level of engagement with *awelye* in this community.

### **Alice Springs**

Agnes Abbott is a senior Arrernte Law woman and custodian of the women's ceremonies from Therririrte.<sup>41</sup> She plays a key role in the Indigenous well-being centre in Alice

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<sup>39</sup> In July 2011, April, Aileen, Clarrie and some 15 other Anmatyerr custodians teamed up with the Central Land Council, Batchelor Institute and researchers Myfany Turpin and Jenny Green (University of Melbourne) for a fieldtrip to document the places, Dreamings and *awelye* of April's own country, *Ngenty* (DVD forthcoming).

<sup>40</sup> (<http://artbacknt.com.au/dancesite.html>).

<sup>41</sup> The Arrernte term *awelye* usually refers to a healing ceremonial genre; and while some people refer to public women's ceremonies by this name, others use the term *arrartenh-artenhe*. To avoid misunderstanding, I use the term 'women's ceremonies' to refer to Arrernte public women's ceremonies akin to *yawulyu/awelye*.

Springs, Akeyulerre (Abbott 2004). Arrernte is the language and people of Alice Springs, a major regional centre of 36,000 people. The pressure to assimilate, together with the attraction of mainstream culture, has had a detrimental impact on Arrernte culture and the appeal of women's ceremonies over the last half-century. Agnes discusses the turning point for her, when she started to embrace women's ceremonies, referred to below as 'culture.'

Agnes: Iterretyarte ayenge 'Oh iwenheke arle ame ayenge corroboree-ke akaltyirreye kwenhe? Ayenge kwenhe church arenye, church werne alhep-alheme kwenhe ayenge. Iwenheke-arle ayenge akaltyirretyenhe?' Anemele alyelhetyarte, walethe anenge awetyarte, town nhenge angkerrerlenghe people. 'Arelhe errpwerle mape arle got culture itne-kenhe akwete atnyenerle kwenhe.' The awetyarte nhenge angkerrerlenghe people, atnyenetyeke akwete wenhe itne culture itne-kenhe, don't aparlpilerle. Wele ayenge iterreke, mame atherre kwenye, yaye uthene, ampwe-aneme re atherre irreme kwenhe. Ayenge iterreke wele ayenge aneme akaltyirretyeke kwenhe.

*I used to sit far away from them [my female relatives] when they were singing because I didn't want to learn the songs. I used to think, 'Why on earth would I want to learn Aboriginal ceremonies? I'm a Catholic, I go to church.' But then I heard people on the radio and in town saying 'Aboriginal people have their own unique culture, keep it strong!' I heard people talking about how Aboriginal people should hold onto their own culture forever. And I thought, well, my two mothers and older sister are very old now, so it's time for me to learn. [T100316a, 0:42–1.35].<sup>42</sup>*

Another influential event for Agnes was her first Women's Law and Culture Meeting, in the 1980s. The hundreds of women from across central Australia performing their ceremonies was a real eye-opener for her, and although unprepared, Agnes led a performance of her own ceremony. Reflecting on this event in 1993, Agnes lamented the lack of transport available for younger people to attend.

Agnes: Ampe awenke mape akwele akngetyeke ayenge wantem-irreke, awenke school nhenharenye mape. But mweteke kwenyele anwerne aneke. Ampe atningke apekarle ampe marle mape akaltyirrekarle itne iterlaremere, alakenhe akwenhe arelhekenhe iwenhakweye, ilpentye arlke awelye arlke arratekarle, itne iterlaretyenhenge. Ampe arunthe apeke urntekarle iterlareye ampe awenke mape imernetyeke.

*I wanted to bring the young girls along, the schoolgirls from here [Ltyentye Apurte]. But we didn't have transport. If only we had taken lots of young kids there they'd know what it's all about. If they saw it they'd know about women's ceremonies. If we had a lot of young girls dancing they'd know about it and might remember it. [JG\_020306, 18:24]<sup>43</sup>*

Since its establishment in 2003, Akeyulerre has provided, amongst other things, logistical support for Arrernte to perform and pass on their ceremonies. Akeyulerre regard engaging in ceremonial practices as a significant contributor to good health:

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<sup>42</sup> Agnes is probably referring to a time in the late 1970s. Interview with Agnes Abbott by Myfany Turpin, Akeyularre 16 March 2010. Recorded and transcribed by Myfany Turpin. Translated by MK Turner.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Agnes Abbot and L Cavenagh by MK Turner. Recorded by Jenny Green, 1993. Transcribed by Jenny Green and Myfany Turpin. Translated by MK Turner.



Agnes: The spiritual rhythm of dance and song and stories also connects to our way of life and balance within the true natures of law. So everything is holistically bound to the spirit as well as the physical world. The importance of dance and stories need to be taught to young people so that they can go back to the land. Dances and stories teach us about abundance and the quality of life, to respect each other and our families. (Abbott 2004, 5)

The need for institutional support to help sustain women's ceremony is evident in light of the extreme social changes that have affected Arrernte cultural life. Like many people her age, Agnes recalls ceremonies as regular evening events as a child.

Agnes: Every ingwele anyentirrerle ampe akweke mape arlke renhe paintem-ilerle.  
*Everybody-le anyentirretywenkene yanhe ikwerele alyelhetyeke, ilpentyeke urnterltanerle.  
Every night they'd get together and paint up the children as well. Everybody used to get together there to sing and dance ceremonies.* [JG\_020306, 12:27]

Because ceremony is no longer a daily or weekly event, institutional support and individual custodians such as Agnes play a crucial role in sustaining ceremony. Her role is also one of liaising with relevant organisations and individuals to ensure the necessary logistical support for ceremonies.<sup>44</sup>

One issue facing custodians is overcoming the grief of loved ones with whom they sang, an issue highlighted above by April. Agnes describes how she dealt with this issue.

Agnes: My Mum lost her brother and she didn't want to sing that song again. We used to say 'Can you teach us the songs so that we can keep them going?' And she always said 'No, I can't. I lost my big brother, I can't renew it again.' But I kept asking her 'You have got a lot of grand children now,' I used to tell her 'You should teach us.' And then one day she was really happy to teach us. When I lost my Mum I didn't want to sing that thing too, you know, I was going to just leave it. A lot of people used to ask me 'Come on, why can't you sing, don't be thingy.' I didn't want to sing. I used to feel sad without my Mum. People kept asking me. Then when people were practising for the Yeperenye festival I brought it out. I felt a bit sad, but them old ladies used to talk to me, 'Don't feel sad, just do it.' [ T100316a, 16:15]

Large events featuring women's ceremonies may assist custodians in overcoming the grief, as do persistent younger relatives.

Agnes regards family-based bush trips to the country from which the songs originate as essential for learning because of the link between ceremony and country:

Agnes: Bush-werne anwerne iwethe again alhemele, re atherre anwernenhe ileke, 'All right you song nhenhe mape, you atnyenerle akwete kwenhe. Don't impetyeke.' Corroboree nhenhe, like grandfather atyenhe, country atyenhe-arle apetyeke-arle. Right up to Santa Teresa. Travel-irreke, arelhe mape-arle travel-irreke Mission-werne. Ikwere-werne travel-irreke, altyerrengre re. Kele nhenge akaltye anthurre aneme ayenge irreke. Nhenge everywhere ikwerarle aneme anwerne alyelhetyarte ampe kweke mape-arlke aneme teachem-iletarte.

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<sup>44</sup> Performances include the Yeperenye festival (2000), DanceSite (2010), Law and Culture meetings and various openings, such as the Central Land Council office in 2009.

*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 travelled 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.*  
[T100316a, 0:2:35]

As a custodian of ceremonies, she visualises the country as she sings:

Agnes: Wele utnenge atyenhe, wele nhakwe apeke-arle, nhakwele-arle alheme, 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, utnwenge ngkwenhe you awerle-arle mwerre-arle when you sing.  
*When I sing (awelye), it's as if my spirit travelled 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.* [T100316a, 22:05]

## Conclusions

Despite the diversity of languages, repertoires and personal perspectives, some generalisations can be made on the basis of the various interviews.

In almost every case, sustainability was interpreted as intergenerational transmission of the *yawulyu/awelye* ceremonies. 'Holding onto' ceremony was stressed as a key aspiration by all our interviewees. Just as Maureen O'Keefe's mother Molly had followed her father's instructions to 'hold it always this way', so Dianne Stokes Nampin urges her children: 'that's the main thing you always have to hold'. The reasons for holding ceremony relate not only to its fundamental importance for tying kin, country and Dreamings together, but also the political and social recognition of performance in gaining and continuing to assert rights to land in contemporary Australian society. As Bunny Naburula put it when discussing the booklet of *yawulyu mungamunga* song texts, 'You've got to show it and share it.'

For various reasons this intergenerational teaching and learning has become more and more difficult, especially where the words and music of the songs are concerned. With the huge changes in Central Australian societies that have taken place in the past half-century, a number of factors have interrupted or threatened inter-generational transfer of knowledge. The following remarks relate to women's *yawulyu/awelye* traditions, but in many instances similar observations might be made about men's public traditions such as *pujjarli* or *yilpinji*.

Opportunities for day-to-day contact between the older women who hold *yawulyu-awelye* and younger generations are scarcer. This is not only because of demographic change (as Maureen observed, nowadays there are proportionately fewer people in the older age brackets compared to youngsters), but very often families, and younger people in particular, are separated by the need for education, health care and employment opportunities to be found in the larger towns and cities. Fewer people of any age continue to live in or near their own patrilineally-inherited clan estate. Because *yawulyu/awelye* needs to be handed down to the right people, women need to pass it on to their nieces and great-nieces—their brother's or uncle's daughters or grand-daughters (that is, to other women whose father has inherited rights in the relevant country)—not necessarily to their own

direct descendants.<sup>45</sup> Such cross-family relationships may be difficult to activate in a host society focused on the nuclear family. Nieces and great-nieces at the prime age for learning to sing *yawulyu/awelye*, in their thirties, are likely to have family and employment obligations that mitigate against extended visits to learn *yawulyu/awelye*.

These are just some of the reasons that have led to it becoming much harder to build the learning and holding of *yawulyu/awelye* into everyday life. Women have responded by relying more on special occasions—festivals like DanceSite, visits to country, Women’s Law and Culture meetings, research project documentation sessions—where institutions such as the Land Councils, schools, health or language centres, or Universities provide the resources to bring the right people together, often from very dispersed regions.

Many of the older *yawulyu/awelye* singers we interviewed learned their ceremonies by the old methods of experiential teaching and learning, that is by repeated exposure to performances over time, usually without didactic teaching about song texts or performance techniques, just ‘listening to all the old people,’ as Kathleen Nappanangka observed. Camping out on country with *awelye* performances ‘every night’ was a regular part of station life. Performing in the correct way was achieved through graduated levels of participation by the learner, who was first expected to demonstrate understanding and respect for the ceremony by dancing before beginning to learn about the content of the songs, and eventually, as Aileen explained, was encouraged to join in group singing. Leading performances, composing new songs, explaining meanings and painting up was performed only by the most senior women. The life-long learning trajectory between first exposure to *yawulyu/awelye* as a young girl and taking on the full authority of a senior tradition-holder is all but impossible to achieve in the modern world, where television dominates evening entertainment and *yawulyu/awelye* performances are few and far between.

Senior women charged with holding *yawulyu/awelye* seek to uphold traditional protocols for song transmission, even when at times this may mitigate against the intergenerational transfer they desire. For example, women like Clarrie who know the *yawulyu/awelye* for a country other than their own may be reluctant to perform or teach it for fear of acting out of their authority, even when there is no right person left to fulfil that role. Women’s reluctance to perform songs that remind them of a deceased close relative (mentioned by Amy and A. Abbott) may be another factor leading the diminution over time of the number of songs being performed in some *yawulyu/awelye* repertoires.<sup>46</sup> Insistence on only performing or teaching the proper way, during bush trips, or laughing at young women’s mistakes (a traditional method for enforcing appropriate respect and drawing attention to incorrect performance) may also be counterproductive. Even in communities such as Wirliyajarrayi, where *yawulyu* is still performed at part of traditional ceremonial life, knowledge of song texts is confined to the most senior women.

Senior women like Kathy and Kathleen complain of lack of interest from girls and young women, but many factors may be at play. As mentioned by Kathy, very young girls frequently state that they are ashamed to dance bare-breasted in public performances, as

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<sup>45</sup> As mentioned, women also have interests in their mother’s and mother’s-mother’s clan country and songs, but their primary ceremonial relationship is to the *yawulyu/awelye* of their father’s clan country.

<sup>46</sup> Historical documentation of *yawulyu/awelye* performances, such as those discussed by Berndt, Dussart and Glowczewski, shows that in the past performances consisted of many more song texts than are typically performed today (see Glowczewski 1991, Dussart 2000; Berndt 1950).

*yawulyu/awelye* traditionally requires. Then too we should not underestimate how different are the musical style and performance conventions of *yawulyu/awelye* from the commercial popular music that younger generations encounter every day on TV, radio and personal media devices like phones and mp3 players. As already mentioned, most young people live at a distance from their traditional country, and none are any longer dependent on or knowledgeable about a traditional foraging lifestyle, yet the cryptic texts of the songs are full of placenames and references to now obsolete subsistence lifeways. This opacity of text, coupled with the loss of full competence in the traditional languages in which the songs are composed, means that the song texts are particularly difficult to distinguish and learn.

Across the region, we found grave concerns that the words and music of songs are not being learned, and without singers for the songs, dancers and painters cannot be animated. The younger women we interviewed, especially Amy and Maureen, were keen to supplement traditional learning modes with new techniques, such as documentation of song texts in CDs, books and multimedia products such as the *Awely Rrkwer-akert* DVD Amy helped to produce. These multimedia products are used not only for formal teaching situations such as the language and culture programmes in the schools, but also deployed for private study by younger women, who can thus practice the songs in private and avoid being shamed by making mistakes in public.

As seen from Mona's example, recordings of songs may also be used by older generations when human resources are lacking for the singing necessary to accompany painting up and dancing. Beyond this incidental use, it became evident when discussing the *Yawulyu mungamunga* CD with women in Tennant Creek, that recordings and written documentation of song texts have joined coolamons, feathered sticks and other ritual objects to become part of the formal transmission package when songs are handed on to new generations.

Examples from Tennant Creek and Ti-Tree show that recording of such documentary resources provides opportunities for performances and intergenerational engagement, while documentation sessions can provide an enjoyable environment for involvement of both young and old. The re-use of such materials in schools often occurs with the direction and involvement of elders to assist in the transmission of *awelye* within the schools further increases opportunities for intergenerational collaboration and learning.

It is clear that *yawulyu/awelye* is highly valued by both younger and older women, and is acknowledged by all as playing an important role in personal and group identity. Yet there is a need for more performance opportunities, pedagogical resources and teaching with a specific focus on the song texts and their associated meanings if the next generation is to be able to carry on this tradition. Consistent with the multimodal and flexible nature of traditional performances, it seems the practice of *yawulyu/awelye* may already be changing to recognise and incorporate new modes of learning for younger women. It is to be hoped that succeeding generations will be motivated to learn and perform *yawulyu/awelye* by accessing the feelings expressed by our interviewees and others of deep enjoyment and satisfaction in performing *yawulyu/awelye*. As Agnes Abbott commented, 'When you sing *awelye*, your spirit feels happy.'

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