Approaching an Epistemic Community of Applied Ethnomusicology in Australia: Intercultural Research on Australian Aboriginal Song

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This paper uses Klisala Harrison’s concept of an epistemic community as a methodology,1 in order to understand applied ethnomusicological research on Australian Aboriginal song. It will investigate the ways in which the goals and methods of applied research are informed by institutional recommendations that emanate from an Indigenous rights agenda and Australia’s colonialist past and present, and will consider how applied ethnomusicology has been supported by recent regulatory and funding environments. Framing repatriation and intercultural collaboration as sites of critical discourse, an epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology in Australia is theorized as a site of convergent, pluralistic practices that respond to: social and political determinants of music endangerment; and, aims and principles prescribed by institutional documents that set out priorities for and govern the ethical conduct and design of academic research.

Introduction

In 2006 Stephen Wild asked, does ethnomusicology have “a distinctive voice in the antipodes?,”2 observing that while American ethnomusicology “has been dominated by an anthropological approach that has militated against the analysis of musical sound … Australian ethnomusicology has been dominated by a musicological approach which has fostered the analysis of musical sound.”3 A description of ethnomusicology in Australia, some ten years later (in 2016), particularly ethnomusicological research on Australian Aboriginal song traditions (the subject of Wild’s research throughout his career), might read differently:

1 Harrison 2012.
2 Wild 2006.
3 Ibid., 351.
almost all ethnomusicological projects in Australia, while examining various musical traditions, also seek to produce knowledge about and promote change in approaches to music sustainability, archives and repatriation, education, cross-cultural understanding and/or other issues that affect the day-to-day lives of local and global communities. Adopting the account of applied ethnomusicology offered by the International Council for Traditional Music’s Study Group for Applied Ethnomusicology—as “the approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and toward working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts”—it seems that applied approaches to ethnomusicology are almost ubiquitous in research on Aboriginal song traditions in Australia.

To some extent, the uptake of applied approaches to ethnomusicology in Australia reflects a global shift of praxis in ethnomusicology and demonstrates the notion that all ethnomusicology entails social impact insofar as it involves engaging with musicians. Indeed, looking beyond research on Aboriginal song traditions, applied approaches to ethnomusicology in Australia are common. Ethnomusicology is applied to music education and children’s musical cultures, to archives and archiving, to recording and media industries, to cultural heritage and resource management, and beyond. This paper adopts Klisala Harrison’s concept of an epistemic community as a methodology to understand the applied nature of contemporary and historical intercultural research on Australian Aboriginal song. The Australian epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology is approached as a site of convergent, pluralistic practices that respond to: social and political determinants of music endangerment; and, aims and principles prescribed by institutional documents that set out priorities for and govern the ethical conduct and design of academic research. Writing as a non-Indigenous Australian ethnomusicologist, I suggest that historical and contemporary policy and institutions in Australia have fostered and even necessitate applied approaches to ethnomusicology and Aboriginal song in the neo-colonial settler state. In this paper I suggest that these necessitating factors position ethnomusicologists who work interculturally and collaboratively with Aboriginal members of cultural heritage communities as an epistemic community. Insofar as Australia and research in Australia operate from shadows of historic and systemic violence, I consider ways in which this epistemic

5 Araújo 2008.
6 Cottrell 2011, 229.
7 Harrison ibid.
8 The term “ Aboriginal Australian” is used in this article to refer to the First Peoples of the continent that is today known as Australia. The term “Indigenous” is used when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(s). “Non-Indigenous” refers to Australian people(s) who are neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander.
9 Bird Rose 1986.
community of applied ethnomusicology in Australia is distinctively marked by critical discourse on collaboration, impact and intercultural relationships. Following on from Harrison, through an examination of diverse manifestations of the application of these relational histories and institutions in ethnomusicological research, the article seeks to articulate a pluralistic, emerging, epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology engaging with Aboriginal song in Australia.

**Preservation, Tangible Benefit, Self-determination and Applied Ethnomusicology in Australia**

Beginning with Trevor Jones in the 1950s and continuing with the prolific output of Catherine Ellis, Alice Moyle and Jill Stubington (1960s–80s), ethnomusicology in Australia has long been preoccupied with recording Aboriginal song and, to some extent, its notation and analysis. The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), established in 1964 and governed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989, is today the primary repository of these recordings and associated documentation. Whereas the birth of ethnomusicological research in Australia in the 1950s subscribed to both anthropological (Richard Waterman) and musicological (Alice Moyle) schools, both of which continue today, the ethnomusicological recording of musical events in Aboriginal Australia has been set against a backdrop of “preservation” to create a record of intangible, oral musical practices that are at risk of endangerment.

The problem of music endangerment in Australia was triggered by invasion and colonial expansion by the British Empire, founded on the wrongfully applied international law of Terra Nullius (“a land belonging to no people”). Following the arrival of the British—who claimed the east and central portions of the continent in 1770 and the western portion, from 1827—Acts were introduced to control the lives of Indigenous peoples, impacting use of and access to land and food sources as well as employment, citizenship and basic human rights. Colonial expansion had a devastating impact on language and song practices, and the social worlds that they support. Chester Street, a linguist at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) in the 1980s, explained:

Confronted by force, ignorance and arrogant contempt, by the sheer weight of white numbers, by new authorities replacing the old …, the music and its embodied authority,

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11 Originally the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (AIAS).
13 Toner 2007, 86.
power and cohesion were wounded, often to death. ... Aboriginal people were dispersed from the places where songs ought to be sung, often by direct prohibition of performances or by the death of too many of the song owners. The songs could no longer be passed on. As an initiated Flinders Ranges man said in the 1960s:

We see everybody going to the pack boys and even girls—they just do what they like. The old people that went through the rules, they know better. White fellas interfered in our rules, stopping us from doing our corroborees. No songs—no rules.\(^1\)

A *Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance* prepared in 2002 by delegates of the inaugural Symposium on Indigenous Music and Dance convened by Yolŋu leader, musician and educator M. Yunupiŋu (dec.), Indigenous academic Marcia Langton and Australian ethnomusicologist Allan Marett, at the Garma Festival of Traditional Culture at Gunyanjara in Arnhem Land notes:

Once found all across Australia, these traditions now only survive in a few regions, and it is estimated that ninety-eight percent of musical traditions have already been lost. Many senior composers and performers have passed away leaving limited or no record of their knowledge. Modern lifestyles and the ongoing devastating impact of colonization are affecting the dissemination of cultural knowledge between generations.\(^2\)

To address this impact, a preservation approach to Aboriginal song traditions continues today and is advocated for in the *Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance*. This document is a manifesto of aims and directives taken up by the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia, an initiative that was conceived at the 2002 symposium, and founded in 2005. The *Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance* affirms that “[t]he preservation of performance traditions is … one of the highest priorities for Indigenous people” and calls on researchers and institutions to orient their research agendas to the task of recording and preserving records of song: “the recording and repatriation of songs [should] … be supported by universities and other institutions”; “well documented recordings of Indigenous song [should] be published in order to educate the broader Australian public and international audiences about Aboriginal performance traditions” (ibid.).

The *Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance* is an institution in intercultural ethnomusicological research in Australia, insofar as its directives are widely subscribed to, discussed in the literature,\(^3\) and cited in funding applications. It has informed subsequent institutional documents, including the *Statement on Indigenous Performance* issued by the Australia and New Zealand Regional Committee of the International Council for Traditional Music (ANZ-ICTM), which states that “[t]he preservation of Indigenous Australian performance traditions

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\(^{15}\) Street cited in Breen 1989, 12; “Flinders Ranges man” cited by Ellis 1968.


through recording and documenting is … vital for their survival.” The ANZ-ICTM Statement on Indigenous Performance also recommended that the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia should be “supported and expanded in any way possible” on the basis that “[u]rgent action is required to ensure the preservation of those living practices that remain, for the benefit of all Australians, and for cultural diversity worldwide,”18 The strength of these statements has contributed to numerous successful bids for funding put forth by ethnomusicologists and community members for the purpose of researching Australian Aboriginal song and for pursuing associated issues of preservation and repatriation.

Irrespective of whether ethnomusicologists respond to a “preservation” agenda or not, in designing and conducting research they must abide by standards for research prescribed by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007.19 This document regulates the conduct of research with humans in Australia, providing guidelines to researchers and to university ethical review boards. The National Statement suggests that researchers and research organizations that conduct research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also refer to the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Aboriginal and Indigenous Studies (GERAIS)20 produced by AIATSIS. GERAIS prescribes fourteen principles to apply in the conception, execution and consolidation of research. Several relate to themes and issues of direct interest to ethnomusicologists, such as diversity (Principle 1), intangible cultural heritage (Principle 3), traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions (Principle 4), and Indigenous, knowledge, practices and innovations (Principle 5).

More pertinent to the question of applied ethnomusicology in Australia is that all fourteen principles prescribed by GERAIS are underpinned by recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to cultural practices and knowledges, and—citing Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples21—to the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine how they will be researched and to participate in that research.22 Furthermore, all principles emphasize that tangible benefit, determined in consultation with participants, must result for Aboriginal contributors to the research.

18 ANZ-ICTM 2011.
19 The three bodies that developed the National Statement (the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee) require that this statement “must be used to inform the design, ethical review and conduct of human research that is funded by, or takes place under the[ir] auspices” (NHMRC, ARC & AVCC 2007 [2015], 4).
20 AIATSIS 2012 [2002].
22 See AIATSIS ibid., 2.
As ethnomusicologist Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg has noted, the GERAIS principles can be read to foreground the requirement of positive impact—on the peoples and communities with which we work—as a prerequisite of project design, conduct and outcomes. Ways in which all ethnomusicological research can be viewed as applied have long been a subject of academic discussion, challenging notions that applied work does not involve knowledge production, and that pure research does not involve social impact. In Australia, however, all ethnomusicological research on Aboriginal song must be explicitly applied in nature, at least as far as GERAIS is applied and concerned. Jennifer Newsome from the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (which played a key role in supporting Indigenous participation in the academy via the work of Catherine Ellis in the 1980s) has explained, “[a]pplied research … [is] an effective response to the call for self-determination and self-representation by Indigenous peoples in research.”

A further factor that supports applied research in Australia is the set of Strategic Research Priorities prescribed by the Australian government based on five identified societal challenges: living in a changing environment, promoting population health and wellbeing, managing our food and water assets, securing Australia’s place in a changing world, and, lifting productivity and economic growth. While it is not compulsory to do so, insofar as the large majority of research in Australia is funded under Australian government schemes, a grant applicant usually targets at least one of these challenges when seeking to secure competitive research funding. As Harrison has noted, “resultant ethnomusicological work is frequently ‘applied’ in that sense” in Australia and in similar systems elsewhere. The success of Australian ethnomusicologists in securing major research funding, guided by tangible benefit for and self-determination of Indigenous cultural heritage communities, suggest that this “applied” funding environment and context-specific, socio-cultural and political research policies have promoted the growth of applied approaches to ethnomusicology in Australia. The extent to which rights-based research guidelines and funding interplay to foster applied ethnomusicologies elsewhere in the world, either in contrast to or in synch with the Australian situation, would be a worthwhile topic of future research.

In the following two sections of this paper, ways in which principles of tangible benefit and self-determination have informed an Australian epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology, fostering critical discourses around repatriation and collaboration, will be considered.

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23 Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2012.
26 Australian Government 2015.
27 Harrison ibid., 512.
Repatriation and Intercultural Collaboration

The “preservation” approach to ethnomusicology, characterized by recording and documentation, may be viewed as a form of “salvage ethnomusicology” reminiscent for many of colonial acquisition. As Australian historian Martin Thomas has suggested, “[w]ith some justification, the gathering of recordings can be associated with a broader history of cultural appropriation by colonial powers. Westerners have been making likenesses of the people they colonize since Columbus took mirrors to the Americas.” Such an approach is inextricably and problematically tied to the colonial roots of the Australian nation state. Treloyn and Ngarinyin/Nyigina cultural consultant Rona Googninda Charles, for example, explore the complex entanglement of current intercultural endeavors to preserve the Junba dance-song tradition in the Kimberley region of northwest Australia by recording, documenting, and archiving, with historical intercultural research that involved the stealing of human remains. Insofar as salvage ethnomusicology is premised on a deficit view of Indigenous cultural practices, it is also linked to State and Territory Aboriginal Protection Acts that supported policies that separated children from their parents, people of mixed heritage from those determined “full blood,” and people from their hereditary country, all predicated on a view that the Indigenous race would “die out”.

While using the term “preservation,” the Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance shifts attention towards the importance of using research to support the management of records of Indigenous musical traditions by the Indigenous stakeholders of those traditions and for purposes that Indigenous stakeholders determine. Exemplifying a global shift in discourse around intangible heritage sustainability, notions of vitality and cultural innovation are now seen as vital to preservation. The Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance identifies repatriation and dissemination of archival recordings as key to this, recommending:

That the recording and repatriation of songs to local Knowledge Centres be supported by universities and other institutions to assist Indigenous communities to integrate their cultural knowledge into a broad range of community activities such as education, bilingual and health programs; and that the maintenance of performance and ceremony be encouraged by their incorporation into community governance. …

That the establishment of local Knowledge Centres with digital storage and retrieval systems be supported as a basis for the repatriation of sound and visual records to communities. Such records play an important role in the maintenance and protection of tradition. Research should be conducted into the most culturally appropriate ways of storing and retrieving knowledge from computers. It is acknowledged that different

28 Thomas 2007, 118.
29 Treloyn & Charles 2014.
30 See Grant 2015.
communities may ultimately adopt different storage and delivery systems, and that there should be regular meetings to explore the success or failure of different strategies.\textsuperscript{31}

The approach to recording and repatriation recommended in the \textit{Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance} indicates a clear and distinct move towards self-determined management of past and present ethnomusicological recordings by cultural heritage communities and for self-determined benefit. Self-determination—a trope of the Australian Indigenous rights movement that emerged in the late 1960s as a response to the dominant colonial assimilationist policies\textsuperscript{32}—permeates both the \textit{Statement} and \textit{GERAIS}, which cites Article 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples\textsuperscript{33} in noting that researchers must “[u]nderstand the meaning of self-determination in relation to Indigenous peoples and their rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, including their traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and intellectual property.”\textsuperscript{34} Accordingly, repatriation, guided by community management, has become almost ubiquitous in research on Aboriginal song in Australia.\textsuperscript{35}

As well, by requiring that Indigenous peoples have input into determining what is studied and how, self-determination is embedded in the principle that stresses the importance of rights to participation. Principle 10 of \textit{GERAIS} states that “Indigenous people have the right to full participation appropriate to their skills and experiences in research projects and processes.”\textsuperscript{36} Informing the application of self-determination to ethnomusicology, the \textit{Statement} enshrines leadership by Indigenous stakeholders as the cornerstone of all preservation- and repatriation-orientated projects:

The production of both the recordings and documentation should be based on broad consultation with learned senior men and women who would control access to sacred knowledge in song texts. … This … will be conducted under Indigenous control with an advisory board of senior men and women from a broad range of communities guiding its priorities and strategies.\textsuperscript{37}

A priority of enabling Indigenous participation and direction of research is a distinctive characteristic of contemporary applied ethnomusicological research in Australia, moving participants beyond “informant” status to claim intellectual ownership of not just research content, but also process and method. This shift

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Garma Forum on Indigenous Performance Research 2002.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} See Kowal 2008.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} United Nations 2007.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} AIATSIS ibid., 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} See Treloyn & Emberly 2013.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} AIATSIS ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Garma Forum on Indigenous Performance Research 2002.
\end{itemize}
has been a long-standing priority of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music and is increasingly embedded in project design.

Collaborative research and the movement of recordings, transmitted from hard drives to community repositories or private collections, via cables, Bluetooth, storage cards or shared online data repositories, can yield tangible benefits for communities. Interim results of a project that has been driven by the collaborative efforts of Treloyn, Indigenous leaders associated with the Mowanum Art and Culture Centre, Dolord Mindi Media (previously known as Barnjamedia) coordinator and manager Katie Breckon, and Rona Googninda Charles, exemplifies some of these benefits. In the course of the Junba Project (which was initiated as part of a three-year project supported by the Australian Research Council), elder teacher and singer Matthew Dembal Martin has described how the process of discovering, listening to and retrieving copies of recordings from personal and institutional archives for repatriation to the Mowanjum Community, has supported his learning and memory of songs and his task of teaching songs to younger generations:

TRELOYN: So, [is there] anything you want to say about why it's important to bring those old recordings back from Canberra, and how you have been using those old recordings for yourself, to teach kids?
MARTIN: Yeah, well the main thing is learning [teaching] kids—our next generation coming up—before they [the songs and dances] die away, you know …
TRELOYN: How do you teach the kids to dance with the old recordings?
MARTIN: Well, that's the recording, you go by the words: the meaning, you know. The meaning of the songs and what it's about: Country or … the spirit, [or] birds. Just follow that. … Follow the spirit. [The] spirit [will] always be there. … It's sort of bringing in to it, you know. Old old songs, old old people what been passed away, like you bringing the spirit back to you. So you … can carry on … [as] the teacher for them, for the next generation.
TRELOYN: It's like the spirits are helping you do the teaching.
MARTIN: Yeah, its like the old spirit comes back. You can't see it but you can feel it. … Singing… Dancing it brings memories back to [me], from the old time. … When young people dance, it brings back the memories of old people. They [the old people that have passed] are teaching them. Its just like … they're happy to dance and you see the young kids running around. They are willing to dance. The spirit comes back to them, … to their spirit you know. … It sort of draws them in.

The process of collaborative repatriation in the Junba Project has also rested upon involvement of young people in managing digital collections of records of Junba, and in generating video documentary pieces about the tradition and the revival of Junba dances using these records. Preliminary application of

38 Newsome ibid.
ethnomusicologist Catherine Grant’s Music Vitality Endangerment Framework\textsuperscript{42} to the Junba performed at the annual Mowanjum Festival since 2010 has indicated an increase in musical and linguistic diversity that corresponds to the first five years of the Junba Project.\textsuperscript{43} Also evident, but more difficult to measure, are benefits to physical, social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and the community.\textsuperscript{44} Reports from ethnomusicologists conducting research elsewhere in Australia suggest that similar uses of repatriation processes and repatriated recordings also yield benefits for teaching and learning,\textsuperscript{45} music vitality and creative innovation,\textsuperscript{46} and social connectedness and well-being.\textsuperscript{47} Arguably, collaborative repatriation—more so than recording—has become the primary research intervention that is used to address the problem of music endangerment in Australia, as ethnomusicologists recognize that processes and products of repatriation support self-determined processes of revitalization and reclamation.

**Critical Discourses of Repatriation and Collaboration**

As Harrison has noted, “theorization of approaches to applied ethnomusicology … becomes possible as we examine analytical frames of applied ethnomusicology in themselves and in terms of issues of social, cultural, and political power.”\textsuperscript{48} As the field begins to view repatriation as a new field of “critical discourse,”\textsuperscript{49} not just as a bi-product of research or as simply something that researchers do to “give back,” such an examination of the analytical frames of applied ethnomusicology is possible. We see this, in Australia at least, in repatriation and collaboration emerging as key research methods and topics, underpinned by rights-based principles.

Repatriation is a process that has the potential to render a range of benefits for cultural heritage communities, examples of which have been provided. Repatriation and the study of repatriation also makes a significant contribution to new approaches to the assessment of music endangerment that take into account social creative innovation, change as a factor in continuity, opportunity to practice music, and social attitudes about the health of traditions. However, as musicologist and ethnomusicologist Stephen Cottrell warned in his consideration of the impact of ethnomusicology:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Grant 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Treloyn & Charles ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} See Campbell 2012 regarding the repatriation of song recordings to the Tiwi Islands.
\item \textsuperscript{46} See Campbell ibid., 2014, and Marett & Barwick 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{47} See Toner 2003, in reference to Arnhem Land.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Harrison ibid., 525–526.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Nannyonga-Tamusuza & Weintraub 2012.
\end{itemize}
[N]ot everything in the garden is rosy. If, in facing one direction, we confidently assert the positive outcomes of at least some of our activities, then this serves only to mask our Janus-like concerns with the underlying implications of some of those assertions.\(^50\)

Having established how applied ethnomusicology in Australia has developed according to principles of tangible benefit and self-determination, are we tacitly claiming that our practice carries less risk of perpetuating colonial power imbalances and repetitions than earlier acquisitive approaches? Do we claim that we have found our way to a distinctly Australian “decolonizing” ethnomusicological practice via attention to rights-based institutional guidelines and applied ethnomusicology that might even be applicable to other settler states, such as Canada, or, closer to home, New Zealand or Papua New Guinea? Do we risk falling into the “liberal tendency to minimalise or disavow difference”\(^51\) when we claim consensus and alignment between our research questions, methods and outcomes, and the priorities of Indigenous collaborators? Before we can answer these questions we must treat repatriation and collaboration as analytical frames, and, following Harrison, attend to issues of social, cultural, and political power in which they are entangled.

In Australia, there is a particularly uncomfortable proximity between, on the one hand, the history of intercultural research on Aboriginal song, and, on the other hand, the policies and interventions that have indisputably had a devastating impact on Indigenous peoples and the very linguistic and musical traditions that are the subject of study. At risk of over-simplification, insofar as the applied ethnomusicology described in this article responds to situations of music endangerment, it owes its very existence to the devastation caused by intercultural intervention in Aboriginal oral traditions.

Moreover, while collaborative research aims to support self-determination and equitable representation of Indigenous perspectives, and to support the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine how their cultural knowledges and practices are researched and represented, such a task is challenging. Achieving Indigenous self-determination and equitable representation of Indigenous perspectives in ethnomusicological research is complicated by factors ranging from difference between performers’ and Western ethnomusicologists’ ways of analyzing music, to inequities in access to education and resources, and is compounded by a lack of literature on the challenges and processes of intercultural research collaboration in Australia. As Somerville observes, “[t]here are many examples of ethnomusicological research in the contact zone of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaboration but there is little discussion of how collaborative research processes

\(^{50}\) Cottrell 2011, 231.

\(^{51}\) Manathunga 2009, 168.
work in practice.”52 We are yet to untangle our practice from the social, cultural, and political inequities and implications of colonialism.

Looking specifically at research centered on repatriation, the fact that the same records that may render benefits for communities of origin may also have a detrimental effect on musical vitality requires conscientious attention. Steven Knopoff describes the potential of recordings to “distort performance practice—by reinforcing notions of ‘fixed’ authoritative versions of songs over the traditionally oral, extemporal, and fluid approaches to performance.”53 Stephen Wild has similarly observed:

> It can be seen that the fixing of interpretations by researching and archiving can ..., by acceptance of an archival record as authoritative, interpose a factor in community adjustments which the researcher and the archivist did not intend and bear a responsibility for introducing.54

In so doing, legacy records have the potential to freeze the fluidity of musical form, limiting the extent to which they can be used to adapt to changing environments (social, linguistic or technological). When legacy records are used in tools for teaching and learning, they possibly supplant face-to-face intergenerational transmission. In such cases, the potential for freezing—or for an undermining of the agency of some contemporary cultural heritage stakeholders—increases. Thus, as I have previously noted, repatriation is not an unambiguous good.55

New media types, new technologies and new content management systems that are developed to help disseminate recordings, compound such risks. Supported by institutions and local organizations, including AIATSIS, ethnomusicologists, linguists, and others in Australia have participated in cross-sector, trans-disciplinary projects in efforts to make collections of data accessible to local stakeholders via ad-hoc (e.g., iTunes libraries) and specially-designed digital content management systems (such as Ara Irititja). With expansion of telecommunications and Internet systems across the Australian continent and open-source solutions (such as Mukurtu CMS), increasing numbers of communities are adopting these technologies. However, while designed to support access, content management systems give rise to a range of issues around access and the intellectual property of Indigenous cultural heritage. In “Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation,” digital cultural heritage researcher Kimberly Christen Withey discusses the process of making the Mukurtu Wumpurrarni-kari Archive available to community members at the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory:

52 Somerville 2014, 17.
53 Knopoff 2004, see also Campbell 2014.
55 Treloyn & Emberly 2013.
While digital technologies allow for materials to be repatriated quickly, circulated widely, and annotated endlessly, these same technologies pose challenges to indigenous communities who wish to maintain traditional cultural protocols for the viewing, circulation, and reproduction of these newly animated and annotated cultural materials.56

Michael Christie, a specialist in Indigenous knowledge systems, education and new technologies, considers the ramifications of misfits between Indigenous knowledge systems and the platforms into which they are organized, warning:

Databases are not innocent objects. They carry within them particular culturally and historically contingent assumptions about the nature of the world, and the nature of knowledge; what it is, and how it can be preserved and renewed.57

With regard to technologies of repatriation, there is an emerging body of research that takes a critical look at database design, metadata and curation to support cultural innovation. There is also a groundswell of critical discourse about collaboration. Katelyn Barney’s 2014 volume Collaborative Ethnomusicology: New Approaches to Music Research between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians positions intercultural collaboration as its primary topic of research. This edited volume presents examples of intercultural collaborations that treat the “contact zone”58 as a productive postcolonial “discomfort zone,”59 where attention to difference (rather than homogenization) allows for hybridity and new knowledge.60 Payi Linda Ford, Linda Barwick and Allan Marett61 enact this postcolonial approach by finding ways to restructure research processes, including relationships between communities and researchers across generations, with Indigenous knowledge frameworks. It is also embraced in a growing body of scholarship by Australian ethnomusicologists that explicitly seeks to form collaborative relationships that recognize rather than erase the violence of past and present intercultural histories in Australia.62

The increase in presentations by Indigenous performers and researchers in the annual Symposium on Indigenous Music and Dance convened by the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia and the growing number of publications on Indigenous song traditions written with or by Indigenous researchers also open paths for critical dialogue. Finally, increasing Indigenous leadership of research about song signals a new era of self-representation and

56 Christen 2012, 192.
61 2014.
critical voice in the ethnomusicological landscape: senior Indigenous scholars such as Payi Linda Ford and Steven Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu Patrick, and a new generations of scholars (Clint Bracknell, in particular) are championing research into Indigenous song epistemologies, Indigenous research methodologies, records of cultural heritage in museums, and the digital circulation of records. The development of new Indigenous teaching and research spaces, such as the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development at The University of Melbourne, further support the emergence of critical discourses in research about Indigenous song, arts practices more broadly and arts-based research.

Conclusion

This article has considered an epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology that addresses agendas of music endangerment, repatriation and collaboration. It has explored the ways in which applied research goals and methods are informed by Australia’s colonialist past and present, and by institutional recommendations for tangible benefit and self-determination that emanate from the recognition of Indigenous rights. The article has also critically analyzed repatriation and collaboration as frames of applied ethnomusicology in terms of particular social, cultural and political conditions of the neo-colonial settler state. Policies impacting Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal song traditions and research on these song traditions have been entangled for as long as they have coexisted in Australia (from 1770 onwards). Intercultural research today operates on, and attempts to push away from, a colonialist stage, as actions (repatriation) and tools (recordings and digital content management systems) that support the vitality of traditions must be balanced against the risk of inadvertently harming them. Similarly, attempts to embed a decolonized intercultural collaboration in research and the achievements of those working in the “discomfort zone,” must be balanced against the risk of colonial entanglements, systemic social inequity, and a tendency to assume shared goals and consensus in collaborative work. The result is a need for continuing critical analysis and critical discourse.

As we begin to theorize applied ethnomusicology in Australia and beyond, and particularly repatriation and collaboration, as critical discourses that produce knowledge, it is necessary, as Harrison notes, that we “examine analytical frames of applied ethnomusicology in themselves and in terms of issues of social, cultural, and political power.” Such a task is particularly required of the emergent epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology in Australia for reasons of social justice and human rights. Critical examination of intercultural research is also needed to equip ethnomusicologists and cultural heritage communities, in Australia and elsewhere, with frameworks, language and tools that will enable them to be “guided

63 Harrison ibid., 525–526.
by principles of social responsibility”—the core priority of the epistemic community of applied ethnomusicology in Australia and beyond.

References


