KAYA WANDJOO NGALA NOONGARPEDIA – WELCOME TO OUR NOONGARPEDIA

Report on a research project.[1]

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Chapter 8: Bulla djandanginy – Challenges and tensions

Introduction

Some of the difficulties confronting a project like this are the consequence of a history of colonisation and institutional oppression of Aboriginal people in south-west Western Australia (Haebich, 1992; 2000; Haebich and Morrison, 2014). It is a history characterised by land theft (Reconciliation, n.d.); a history in which only a minority of the original, Indigenous population survived the first decades of colonisation (Green, 1984; Swain, 1993; Aboriginal Legal Service, 1995), and a history in which that population was then subject to a period of discriminatory legislation and the denigration of Noongar language and culture which lasted well into the late twentieth century (Haebich, 2000). More recently, Noongar language and knowledge has increasingly been celebrated in mainstream cultural life – festivals, theatre, music, literature, exhibitions and the like, along with numerous examples of general urban and street signage and, of course, Welcomes to Country. It has become a major denomination in the currency of identity and belonging in this part of the world.

What follows is a discussion of the challenges that have confronted the project since its inception. We begin with an exploration of the politics of sharing knowledge and language.

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[1] Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project IN140100017 (2014-17): *Noongar kaatdijin bidi – Noongar knowledge networks; or, Why is there no Noongar Wikipedia?*

The Politics of Sharing

Such a history of denigration, pivoting relatively recently towards celebration and – some would argue – appropriation, has contributed both to the endangered status of Noongar language and to a degree of mistrust among sectors of the Noongar community towards wider society and, in some influential instances, a reluctance to share that knowledge with wider society:

> *Australian Aboriginal Knowledge has been misinterpreted, reified, released illegally, misunderstood, and profited from for two centuries.* (Irene Cunningham, n.d.)

Such an attitude is not exclusive to sectors of the Noongar community. The Native American Mardu people, among others:

> *... may be wary of sharing the key to [their language]. The language barrier is one of the few defences they can still put up against the outside world. What will happen if the world is let in?* (Davies, 2014)

Similarly, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) has argued that 'their' language, Palawa kani:

> *... should not become available to the general public 'until Aborigines themselves are familiar and competent with it' ... [in order to] ... preserve the traditions and cultures that have often been scattered and brutally suppressed, preventing outsiders from trivializing or copying them. Establishing control ... is a way to draw boundaries around a community that's trying to reconstitute itself.* (Robertson, 2014)

The TAC has argued that their approach is supported by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 31 concludes that Indigenous peoples have:

> *... the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.* (United Nations, 2007)

In various Indigenous communities there may also be barriers to the transmission of certain kinds of knowledge – barriers determined by such things as age, gender, genealogy, cultural status and rivalries or even levels of assertiveness. The effectiveness of at least some of these barriers may be threatened by a free and unrestricted global platform such as Wikipedia, even though such a platform may also bring liberation, freedom and growth and provide the basis for a new form of community.

On the other hand, there is also a strong history of sharing that continues to the present moment. Some Noongar have been working hard to see that knowledge is shared widely in public art, the naming of places, in schools for Noongar and non-Noongar and in the availability of language classes.[2]

The Politics of Language

Noongar language stretches across a vast area of the south-west Western Australia, from around Dongara on the west coast to approximately Israelite Bay in the south-east. There are numerous of dialects; the exact number depends upon the source consulted. The number 12 is often cited (e.g. O'Grady et al., 1966: 37-8; Tindale, 1974: 142). Interestingly, Tindale's informants recognise few of these terms as names of dialects or groups, and most told him 'Noongar' was the language of the south-west, with regional variations suggesting fewer dialects than O'Grady, e al.'s work might suggest. Further, it has been cogently argued by Clint Bracknell (2016) that Tindale's terminology may not in fact refer to language groups at all. In Wilf Douglas's opinion there are four dialects (Dench, 1994). Daisy Bates (1985: 46), along with some contemporary south-west Aboriginal people, uses the term 'Bibbulmun' rather than Noongar for south-western Aboriginal people and language. She identifies 17 dialects, although she says 'fundamentally they were one'.[3] Dench (1994: 174) distinguishes only three: northern, south-western and eastern. Hassell and Davidson (1936) drew similar conclusions, as do von Brandenstein (1988) and Theiberger (2004). The Noongar Boodjar Language Centre is of the opinion that there may have been between 3 and 15 dialects at the time of colonisation, but organises contemporary dialects into three main groups.[4]

Dialect difference may have been reduced by increased mobility in recent decades (Dench, 1994). Claims of strong diversity may be the result of mistakes and over-enthusiasm in early wordlists (Thieberger, 2004; Bracknell, 2016). In the 1840s, George Grey asserted that across the south-west 'the language is radically the same.'

The 1996 Australian census tells us that Noongar was spoken at home by 163 people. In 2006 it was 213. In 2011 it was 369.[5] This is a very small proportion of the more than 30,000 people who identify as Noongar, but nevertheless it indicates a growing

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[2] For example: Noongar language classes are offered by the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation: http://noongarboodjar.com.au; and through local councils http://www.fremantlestory.com.au/your-story/arts-culture/galleries-and-studios/walyalup-aboriginal-cultural-centre/events/nyoongar-wangkaniny-noongar-language-classes.html; and see *Nyungar Placenames in the South West of Western Australia*: http://www.boodjar.sis.uwa.edu.au.

[3] An edited version of some of Daisy Bates's manuscripts (Bates, 1985) is held in the Battye Library and the National Library of Australia. The sections of her files relevant to Noongar language are II to IX and XII, 'Language, grammar and vocabularies'. Discussion of totems and of kinship includes terms in local languages from all over Western Australia; songs and animal names in Noongar.

[4] Noongar Boodjar Language Centre: http://noongarboodjar.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Noongar-Learners-Guide-2edn-web.pdf. (p. 4)

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics: *Census*: http://www.abs.gov.au/census.

community of speakers that speaks of a shift from induced shame to pride in ancestral language. Noongar language is currently considered 'critically endangered'. It was named as 'extinct' in the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) catalogue until 2009, and was then categorised as 'living'.[6] Elsewhere, it is labelled as 'threatened' (AIATSIS and FATSIL, 2005).

Noongar language was not a written down until the beginning of colonisation, and in those documents there is a vast variety of spellings. This is not surprising; English orthography does not accurately represent the sounds of Noongar, some of which can't be captured by English phonemes or writing systems. Nevertheless, a rigorous set of guidelines has been established to match orthography to sound, and also to standardise the orthography itself (NBLC, 2015). The fact that some people rely on the written page and the English alphabet to learn Noongar has likely added to the range of dialects! The Noongar Boodjar Language Centre, among other authorities, stresses that learners need to hear language actually spoken, and acknowledges that:

> the re-emerging Noongar has been developed under the influence of English and that there is still considerable work to be done to bring the Noongar language closer to its original voice.

In this project, we use the spelling 'Noongar', following the advice of institutions – and their advisors – such as the WA Department of Education and the Noongar Boodjar Language Centre, both of which rely on information collected from Noongar elders in the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, other ways the word Noongar is commonly written include *Nyoongar, Nyungar, Njonga, Nyunga, Yunga* and *Nyungah* and there is similar variety in spellings of the entire vocabulary.

Wikipedia, like many modern encyclopaedias, applies standard rules regarding citations and sources. This method of validating material may also, when appropriate, apply to a Noongar Wikipedia. However, as Kelly (2009) has explained, written records have created inaccurate renderings of Noongar culture but were given greater credence than Noongar oral accounts; writing conveyed 'official' status (even when it was inaccurate).

Because of extensive experience of legislation and policy that punished cultural distinction, many Noongar people chose not to offer cultural information to outsiders (Bracknell, 2016: 16). This has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of a breakdown in intergenerational transmission of knowledge. However, in 2006, supported by evidence of continuing oral transmission of cultural knowledge, Noongar people succeeded in their native title claim. Further, research into intergenerational transmission of Noongar knowledge found that Noongar families

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[6] SIL (2015) Documentation for ISO 639 Identifier: Nys: http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=nys.

have particular traditions that are shared according to specific protocols and relationships (Bracknell 2016: 15). Thus it would seem that oral and informal knowledge sources must be regarded as valid, at least until cross-referencing allows for differently weighted verification. The resistance by some Noongar to attempts by bodies such as the Noongar Language Boodjar Centre to agree on a single orthography, together with rivalry between elders and the closeness of the vote to support the Noongar Native Title Settlement, all point to continuing diversity of opinion and judgement within the Noongar community. As a consequence, recruiting people with the necessary language and knowledge skills, and the confidence to work and prepared to take the risk of it being inappropriately used, remains a significant challenge.

Politics of not knowing and being confronted with those who have knowledge. Possession of Noongar knowledge and language is a powerful marker of identity. Victimhood and oppression – indicating, among other things, the forced loss of such knowledge – is also a strong marker of identity. A 'Noongar Wikipedia' can include both these sets of knowledge. However, the difference between them is also a marker of rivalry and division within Indigenous culture. It may be an unrewarding experience for an individual who has experienced such loss to share that knowledge and to compare their own situation with those who have a stronger sense of connection to the knowledge base of their traditional heritage. The context of an impending Native Title settlement deal and the perceived sense of kudos attached to it may exacerbate this rivalry. Such internal conflict is of course a challenge to the Noongar Wikipedia, in particular, to its potential function as a means of developing community.

Noongar control of knowledge

We have mentioned various challenges: access to technology; appropriate skills; issues to do with spelling; the oral nature of Noongar knowledge transmission; and a degree of mistrust or suspicion of rival Noongar or other people already involved. These all add up to a pressing question: who controls knowledge? Some Noongar are highly suspicious of any non-Noongar involvement, and of the use of global digital platforms beyond their control. Through its development Noongarpedia has become a site where all, regardless of cultural background, have the chance to shape and be shaped by the knowledge of others. In this way it has opted for an 'open access' approach to knowledge-sharing rather than a Noongar controlled approach or what has been called 'Aboriginal Terms of Reference'.[7]

The concept of 'Aboriginal Terms of Reference' is one developed at Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies to guide Indigenous research and teaching

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[7] A similar protocol is used by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in relation to the use of the revised language Palawa kani: http://tacinc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/POLICY-PROTOCOL-for-use-of-palawa-kani-Aboriginal-Language.pdf (and see Robertson, 2014).

(Oxenham, 2000). This idea distinguishes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains, and outlines a number of principles. The first is:

> *A conscious commitment to acknowledging that the authority for the construction of Indigenous meanings and knowledge rests with Indigenous people.* (Oxenham, 2000: 113)

This may appear to necessitate an exclusively Aboriginal – in our case, Noongar – control of editing and contribution, if not indeed readership. The concept of Aboriginal Terms of Reference is concerned with power relations: the politics of knowledge and wrestling for control. Proponents of Aboriginal Terms of Reference explain that its application depends upon the extent to which the activity or issue in question resides within the Aboriginal domain or at the intersection of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains. The intention is to assert and ensure Aboriginal authority and control.

We have already identified the close connection between Aboriginal identity and the perceived possession of even fragments of Aboriginal language and knowledge. However, Michael Chandler (2013) stresses a difference between knowledge (facts) and *ways of* knowing – 'the fraying *contents*' versus the '*processes* of cultural life' – as being fundamental to Indigenous identity. His thesis is that the latter, 'Indigenous ways of knowing and meaning making' – not content – contribute most to a sustainable cultural identity.

Would such a belief lead some not to participate in Wikipedia activity for fear that (like high achievement at school) that is 'acting white?' Of course, Wikipedia is a recent phenomenon with a presence in a vast number of diverse cultures and races, and hardly a 'whites only' activity, but it may appear at first sight as a thoroughly 'Californian' enterprise. Chandler notes that international Indigenous scholars commonly claim that Indigenous ways of knowing (in contrast to Eurocentric views) are:

> *…said to stand in binary opposition to 'scientific', 'western,' 'Eurocentric,' or otherwise 'modern' systems of knowing …; to be holisitic rather than analytical…; to be context-sensitive and especially moved by immediate circumstance and lived experiences…; to describe physical geography as a foundation stone of indigenous knowledge building…; to make room for the sacred as opposed to only the physical and human worlds…; to view prayers, rituals and ceremonies as links to this spiritual world…; to regard knowledge as ecologically situated and unique to specific settings; to count the list of possible 'epistemological agents' whole communities rather than only individuals; and to insist that true knowledge is always the result of processes that can only be validated by whole cultural groups…* (Chandler, 2013: 93)

Of course it stands that, Wikipedia assumes (and also promotes) many of the ontological frames that are axiomatic in Western approaches to knowledge. For example, to undertake the task of writing a global encyclopaedia starts from the ontological position that knowledge proceeds through writing and the abstraction of knowledge from bodies, place and relationships. Abram (1997) argues that there are limitations on simply relying on language, particularly written language, as a means of coming to know. Separating that from experience and the body follows a longstanding tradition (Cartesian dualism) of dividing 'mind' (human consciousness) from 'matter' (nature), which many scholars since Eric Havelock, Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan (see Ong and Hartley, 2012) trace back to the invention of alphabetic writing.

Abram cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty to remind us that perception and understanding involve a reciprocal exchange between our bodies and the world around us. Coming to know, coming to understand, coming to see, then, involves the body in 'dialogue' with the entities around us. He explains how people's relationships in the world are formed by 'a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness, and often, even, independent of my verbal awareness' (Abram, 1997: 52).

Too frequently in our reliance on modern knowledge systems we assume that our words are the principal means through which we enter into dialogue. We assume that language (and thence reason) comes before perception – a contention thoroughly critiqued in the work of social theorist Niklas Luhmann (2000) – and that knowledge is formed by our minds and exercised upon our bodies. However, we learn language not so much mentally as bodily. Abram writes:

> *We appropriate new words and phrases first through their expressive tonality and texture, through the way they feel in the mouth or roll off the tongue, and it is this direct, felt significance – the taste of a word or phrase, the way it influences or modulates the body – that provides the fertile, polyvalent source for all the more refined and rarefied meanings which that term may come to have for us.* (Abrams, 1997: 75)

With sociologist Richard Sennett (2012: 199) we could say that Noongar knowledge has long involved a 'conversation' between boodjar, moort and katatjin, just as shaped by bodies and country as by words and ideas. Noongar knowledge systems draw us into a *performance with country*, feeling, moving and being moved, singing along and joining the rhythm and dance that comes from boodjar. Perhaps we could say that, just as important, Noongar knowledge draws Noongar out of themselves in a way that is difficult when we become so reliant on words, particularly written words.

The arts, performance, music and the creative experience – aesthetic systems founded in perception, not reason (Luhmann, 2000) – are, in some ways, more powerful than

direct speech or didactic instruction. Many Noongar are familiar with longstanding traditions that make use of the body, arts and music as sense-making practices, establishing relations among people, country and what can or can't be known. Indeed, for many senior Noongar, country, community, dance and 'singing' are inseparable. The practice of singing is literally a way of life, a way of bringing country to life and in turn the way one comes to life in country (Muecke, 1997; and see Muecke et al., 1984). Catherine Ellis (1985) put it clearly: for those Anangu old people with whom she worked, their view of the world, their insights, indeed their knowledge, are held in their music. Her mentor Ted Strehlow made similar observations about Arrernte. Outlining Strehlow's poetics of song in Central Australia, Barry Hill wrote:

> *The whole life of the region was, in a sense, conducted according to song, the secrets of which were central to the laws of the culture ... the whole region was animated by song that gave almost everything – fauna, flora, much of the topography – meanings. The terrain was a narrative, and song, like rain, united the sky with the earth, and day with the stars of the night ... The songs were important among the deeds of the land. To sing the song was to transmit proprietorial responsibilities to others. A song served to locate men and women in totemic terms, and this in turn mapped individuals with regard to birthplace and place of conception. A man or woman, and the clan to which they belonged, owned the song as they owned the land ... they belonged to the song and its country, as much as the singer's voice belonged to his or her body.* (Hill, 2002)

As for Arrernte, so for Noongar. Not only do Noongar see people as being brought into being by boodjar, but their 'daily and yearly interactions with country are 'communicative events' (Rose et al., 2002). When travelling through boodjar, Noongar old people often call or 'sing out' to country to announce themselves. Music literally becomes the way of addressing country (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, 2004). This also happens because singing *about* a place involves 'singing a place'. As Dunbar-Hall and Gibson put it, 'by performing a song about a place, the events of the past, through which that place came into being, are re-created in the present' (2004: 220). Through the performance of a song about a place the place comes again into existence, being reborn through the act of singing. In this way dialogue with country occurs through song not the written word.

Maja van der Velden (2011) is critical of how 'traditional knowledges' fare in Wikipedia. She is sceptical of the way it 'fragments' Indigenous knowledge as a result of its classification system and compares it unfavourably to a database, TAMI (Text, Audio, Movies, Images), which 'emerged from within the dilemma of the compatibility of digital technologies and Indigenous knowledges on the one hand and, on the other, the need to finds ways to keep knowledge of the elderly people of the community before they passed away' (2011: 250). Van der Velden argues that the 'Western ontology and taxonomy underlying Wikipedia' insists upon the subjugation

of Indigenous knowledges, and that its design is informed by a 'representational perspective' that sees 'knowledge as out there', *versus* TAMI, which operates on the 'understanding that knowledge is the result of a direct material engagement with the world'. Wikipedia, she says, is a 'contact zone' and a place of world-making entanglements'. She asks:

> *Trying to fit Indigenous knowledges in Wikipedia's design would destroy precisely that what we try to keep. The question thus becomes: Can we imagine a Wikipedia in which incommensurable knowledges can meet and stay alive?* (van der Velden, 2011: 253)

Perhaps fortunately for Indigenous Wikipedia users, van der Velden answers her own question:

> *...redesign Wikipedia as an authoring tool... an open, unfinished database design provides Wikipedia users the tools to perform their knowledge and at the same time design the databases. Wikipedia has decentred the authoring of knowledge. Maybe we can take this decentring a step further?... we can start thinking of different Wikipedia access points connected with different modes to remix, to design and to make connections both within Wikipedia as well as across other knowledge communities.* (van der Velden, 2011: 255)

Chandler (2013) writes that 'holistic, relational and narrative-like' views are fundamental to Indigenous ways of knowing. Similarly, a number of recent papers (Robertson et al., 2016; Collard and Palmer, 2015) compare scientific and Noongar knowledge systems and claim that narrative or 'story' is fundamental to Noongar knowledge. What follows is a story from a Noongar elder that stresses the importance of relationships in *access* to knowledge. It suggests why some knowledge should not be in Wikipedia.

> *So we walked down, walked down the rock there. All the weeds were all banked up. It was just like a big dam see, from top end of the river. But because it was all scrubby people never come this way, see. They fish down the bottom there.*
>
> *It's concealed, see. Some people, some times, from the cliff they can't tell. And like underneath, down the bottom, there's a big ngaamma hole right around like that boy, and it's about, must be over six feet deep and the water's just blue. And it's fresh as a daisy.*
>
> *Audrey reckoned, 'Oh, this is salt water.'*
>
> *I said, 'You never see tadpoles swimming in salt water, eh? Alright, take the photo now.'*
>
> *Graeme sat down on a rock.*

'You know years ago this was where they used to camp, when they travelling, when they run away from police. This is where they used to always stay.

'And you see that red rock over on the other side, over there? That red rock?' Graeme nodded his head.

'Years ago,' I said, 'little mambara man, like a little tiny bloke, he was here. Well they used to live in the hills. One day they all had a big fight, so the story goes, and the family went away and left behind one little bloke. He was by himself, see? He come here looking for his family.

'When he come along, he had an idea there was water here, and he sat down on this rock, and he was looking across to the cave over there. He could see people walking around over there, and they were his own people, too.

'He was sitting here,' I said. 'Right here. This is the rock he was sitting on.'

And Graeme said, 'How you know he was sitting on this rock?'

'Well' I said, 'He left his footmarks down for you to see.'

I broke the bushes like that, and I swept the sand away from the rock, and you could see it, two little footprints. Each little foot about that long – about five inches long – and the big toe sticking out, and the five little toes, and the foot, the heel mark and all.

I said, 'That's where he was sitting watching all the others, and that.'

'Just fancy that,' said Graeme, and he took a photo of it.

'He sat down and folded his arms and he watched them,' I said. 'See if they're gunna come and look at him, see?'

And this Noongar woman – she'd been following him behind – sneaked up behind him, and she stood on her left leg, with her right leg up. And her left foot went right in the muddy ground as she hit him on the head with her stick, her waana. He was in the wrong place, see. This wasn't his place.'

And Graeme and Audrey, they said, 'Well, how you know? Where's the woman's track?'

I said, 'You're standing on it.'

I cleaned more sand away, and showed them the woman's footprint, in the rock. Proper imprint, you know. Proper imprint. You could see how she stood on one leg, how the foot went down as she swung to hit him.

Then I covered it all up with sand, and I said, 'Don't you two show anybody this place. You're not supposed to, you know.'

We always cover it up with sand, because if you leave it everybody will see it, and everybody will want to go and see it, see. They'll make a sort of museum thing of it. Brown and Scott, 2005: 253)

This story illustrates issues to do with access to knowledge, and the importance of human relationships and context to that access. Although told in English, it uses a particular dialect and spelling ('Mambera', not 'mamari'). It gives information and knowledge in a 'global' medium, but withholds the specific location and thus

functions to illustrate a protocol. It suggests what information might not be appropriate in book (also relevant to a Wikipedia) and to a wider audience.

Marcia Langton, in a famous study that discusses representations of Aboriginality in film and TV, identifies three categories of knowledge construction:
1) An Aboriginal person interacting with other Aboriginal people in social situations located largely within Aboriginal culture,
2) White people who have never had any substantial first-hand contact with Aboriginal people,
3) Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engaging in actual dialogue and adjusting their models as they proceed. (Langton, 1993: 34-5)

It may be that there is confusion as to which of these applies to Wikipedia, by assuming it is type (2) when it may be both type (1) and type (3), makes some people reluctant to contribute and engage.

Failing to draw on new forms of knowledge transmission

The choice to encourage young people's adoption of new technology, as a way of expressing and creating culture and language, has not always sat well with senior Indigenous people's ideas. The cultural differences between Noongar generations may therefore result in tensions for the Noongarpedia project. For example, the choice to spend time with young people, to invite them to translate and speak with their colloquial use of language, could subject the Noongarpedia to criticism that its knowledge work is not accurate or 'proper'. Indeed, in other parts of the country, projects involving young people in new forms of cultural expression have been seen as breaking down culture and language (Palmer, 2010; 2013). Indeed, in the early stages of work such as this, there often appears to be some resistance to new forms of cultural expression, particularly by some senior people who are hurt by the idea that young people are keener to adopt new cultures, music, dance styles and technology and less inclined to want to practice old forms of law and culture.[8]

This reflects a long postcolonial pattern of outsider cultural systems standing in direct conflict with Indigenous systems. This may mean that young people and older generations are being pulled away from each other by the use of new technologies. For example, in Central Australia Kral (2014) has noted that, at times, 'youth are often exhibiting a technological expertise impenetrable to the older generation. Hence, the gerontocratic norms of the past are undergoing a profound disturbance where the patterned habitual practice of elders exercising authority and exerting social control is under challenge.' As Kral points out, while there are many positive aspects to the use of new forms of cultural expression, they can also 'lead to intergenerational tensions

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[8] See the documentary 'Nothing Rhymes with Ngapartji' for an exploration of this tension in Pitjantjatjara communities https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvo4p7QfMFI.

as young people explore new patterns of behaviour, and older people come to terms with new cultural challenges' (2014: 171).

However, some senior people appear to have a much more liberal view of youth culture and new cultural influences. One senior Pitjatjatjara woman said:

> *Some old people think that the young ones are drifting away from culture and traditional things. Some do not want cameras and film and hip hop in our community. But some of us are learning that young people want these things and, thanks to the Ngapartji Ngapartji mob, we are learning that things like video cameras can bring our young ones back to language and culture.* (cited in Palmer 2010)

This chapter began with the significance of the historical context, and the consequent perceived need to assert a degree of control over culture and heritage. This may well help to explain the reluctance of some to contribute: 'establishing control … is a way to draw boundaries around a community that's trying to reconstitute itself' (Robertson, 2014). At the same time, as Kral's work demonstrates (2014; Kral and Schwab, 2012), failure to engage with new knowledge platforms, particularly platforms that Indigenous young people enjoy and are using, can lead to a paralysis in the relationship between the generations. Likewise, only accepting 'traditional knowledge platforms' that have become unreliable, difficult to manage or unpopular has resulted in the breakdown of relationships across the generations (see Muecke, 2004; McCoy, 2008).

As Kral points out, globally designed systems are being taken up by Indigenous young people and to fail to engage in them is to risk failing these young people:

> *The current youth generation is exploring and internalising new and diverse 'intercultural arenas of social practice' to forge an emerging identity not based on models reproduced within cultural memory, but on a synthesised multiplicity of influences. Youth today are seeking new ways of expressing a contemporary Indigenous identity: they are change agents, drawing on pre-existing knowledge and skills from the local community, but also seeking to know more about the outside world. They are infused with contemporary images and ways of being, and this affects every aspect of how they orient their daily life: how they dress, what they listen to and how they project their sense of self. And many ... are successfully mediating between old knowledge and new technologies to create new forms of cultural production …*
>
>> *This generation cannot replicate the traditional template set by their elders; instead they are seeking new ways of expressing a contemporary Indigenous identity. The research shows that they are forming the understandings, skills and competencies they require to enter young adulthood as bilingual, bicultural beings, drawing on the language and culture*

transmitted by their elders, but also transforming it. They are choosing to participate in these projects because the cultural production roles are in the domains of knowledge that matter to them—culture, arts, country, and new technologies, all within a framework of social relatedness. Significantly, they are doing this outside school or post-school training and so often remain invisible to many policy makers and government officials. The research indicates that when learning opportunities are provided in the projects described above, successful outcomes are being attained and young people are projecting positive futures Kral, 2010: 10).

Conclusion

The obstacles facing the Noongarpedia project have been many and varied. In part this reflects the original framing of the work and the research question: 'why is there no Noongar Wikipedia?' Is that a criticism of Wikipedia, or of Noongar? It is noteworthy that 16 years after its own launch, there is not a single Australian-Aboriginal language version of Wikipedia, despite the use of that platform by other Indigenous, First Peoples and minority languages around the world. Is Australia slow on the uptake? Is Wikipedia more trouble than it's worth? Are Indigenous languages and knowledge systems incompatible with Wikipedia? Have Aboriginal speech communities got better things to do? The challenges facing the work reflect longstanding political tensions among Indigenous groups and between Indigenous and settler cultures. There are also ethical questions and practical impediments associated with any work supporting Noongar knowledge renewal and transmission. Many of the hurdles discussed in this chapter apply equally to work outside the digital space.

But not doing anything doesn't resolve tensions, answer questions or relieve the challenges. The Noongarpedia Project has chosen test out these challenges by facing them head on, designing a 'pedia platform and carrying out work with Noongar community, tertiary students, primary schools and a range of other organisations. In a way reminiscent of both older Noongar conventions and the newer practices adopted by the global Wikipedia movement (Osman, 2013; 2015), the Noongarpedia team have chosen to engage with these questions by 'having a go'. When confronted with hitches, ethical dilemmas and setbacks, the project chose to keep going, to try another way of approaching things and to bring critical interlocutors into the conversation.

As Gideon Digby (Wikimedia Australia) pointed out, this is in keeping with the way Wikipedia does business.

> *Many people think that Wikipedia is only about the content. Actually the strength in the movement is that we recognise that knowledge is a dynamic thing, always in the making, constantly full of things to be negotiated, in a way alive and in process. There is no 'end point for Wikipedians', rather it is in the doing of the work that knowledge becomes democractised. This means that*

*identifying the problems, the differences and the disagreements is something
we don't shy away from. Actually, it is the differences and the disagreement
that make it work. When we get confronted with a problem we seek a solution
by making the problem public, using discussion and moderation and trying
something new. This means that one of the elements in the culture of
Wikipedia is to plough ahead and work things out by doing.*

As Ingrid Cumming (Noongarpedia researcher) points out, there are elements here
that are consistent with old Noongar conventions for resolving disputes about
knowledge:

*This is very Noongar too. The way I understand how the old people taught me
'culturally' was that when people disagreed, when people had a problem with
each other, they came together, talked it out and, eventually, came up with a
solution. This was often very practical and sometimes physical. It was often
done through creative ways like dancing, singing and doing ceremony. In
Noongar ways of learning you make mistakes. You have to make these
mistakes to learn how to do it better next time. You are taught to have a go
and try things. That is how you learn. You are going to get jarred when you
get things wrong. Someone will disagree. There are consequences for your
actions. As a Noongar young person you have to got to learn from your
mistakes. Like Wikimedians, as a Noongar young person you have to learn
who to go to, who to get mentoring from, who will support you after you get
growled at. The cool thing about this project is that it joins the two worlds,
new technology with ancient story and ceremony-based knowledge systems.*

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