Reflections on the preparation and delivery of Carl Strehlow’s heritage dictionary (1909) to the Western Aranda people

Anna Kenny
Australian National University

Abstract
This chapter reflects on the predicaments encountered while bringing ethnographic and linguistic archival materials, and in particular an Aranda, German, Loritja [Luritja], and Dieri dictionary manuscript compiled by Carl Strehlow and with more than 7600 entries, into the public domain. This manuscript, as well as other unique documents held at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs and elsewhere in Australia, is surrounded by competing views about ownership and control. In this case study I discuss my research and work with Western Aranda people concerning the transcription and translation into English of the dictionary manuscript. I also discuss the immense difficulties I faced in seeing the dictionary through to final publication. I encountered vested interests in this ethno-linguistic treasure that I had not been aware of and ownership claims that I had not taken into account. They arose from diverse quarters – from academia, from individuals in the Lutheran church, from Indigenous organisations, and from the Northern Territory Government. One such intervention almost derailed the dictionary work by actions that forced the suspension of the project for over 12 months. In this chapter I track the complex history of this manuscript, canvas the views of various stakeholders, and detail interpretations and reactions of Aranda people to the issues involved.

Keywords: Aranda, Loritja (Luritja), Dieri, Strehlow, dictionary
Introduction

This chapter is a case study of the repatriation of archival knowledge. It discusses some difficulties encountered while bringing ethnographic and linguistic archival materials into the public domain, in particular an Aranda, German, Loritja (Luritja), and Dieri dictionary manuscript compiled by Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow in 1909, and looks at the associated politics of knowledge and ownership involved in that process. This manuscript – the original of which is held at the Strehlow Research Centre (SRC) in Alice Springs – is surrounded by competing views in relation to its dissemination and the control of its contents. For the Aboriginal community, it is their cultural heritage and of great socio-symbolic importance, to which they assert ownership rights. For others, such as scholars, it is a body of knowledge that is perceived to be general patrimony, and others again (e.g. the Lutheran community) believe that they too have ownership rights that are based on historical associations.

The predicament in relation to the publishing of Carl Strehlow’s dictionary manuscript and the issues that were raised were sparked by complaints about orthography. However, the complaints about orthography disguised the underlying issues, namely the desire of different interest groups to assert control over the representation of language and Western Aranda literacy, and by extension over people, and the ownership of history and knowledge. In the process of unravelling and considering the multiple audiences for this cultural representation with their oftentimes conflicting vested interests, it became clear that Strehlow’s ethnolinguistic work effectively embodied different identities and histories. The various views about orthography, the community politics, and the agendas of the various interest groups can be understood in the context of Clifford’s proposition in relation to cultural representations in a post-colonial context, to the effect that an ethnographer’s audience is multiple, and ethnography is a negotiation between at least two but usually more “conscious, politically significant subjects” (Clifford 1988: 41).

1 An ARC postdoctoral fellowship at the ANU has made it possible to write this chapter. It is part of ARC Linkage grant LP110200803, 2011–2014 Rescuing Carl Strehlow’s Indigenous cultural heritage legacy: the neglected German tradition of Arandic ethnography. A version of this chapter was given at the ESfO conference in Munich in June 2017. I thank Nic Peterson, Rainer Buschmann, Helen Wilmot, Brian Connelly, Felicity Green, Shaun Angeles Penangke, Adam Macfie, Wendy Stuart, Diana Romano, Sally Babidge, and John Morton for their support and suggestions to improve this chapter. I am also very thankful for the comments of my anonymous reviewers.

2 I use in this chapter ‘Aboriginal’ rather than ‘Indigenous’ when referring to people in Central Australia because they have a preference for the word ‘Aboriginal’.
Over the past four decades, the interest in early unpublished Australian ethnographic and linguistic materials held in archives has increased significantly. This surge in interest is due substantially to land and native title claims made respectively under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth) and the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) (NTA). Since the High Court judgement in *Mabo v Queensland [No. 2] (1992) 175 CLR 1*, which entitled the Meriam people “as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the island of Mer” (Brennan J 1992: [97]), Australia recognises that native title (i.e. traditional rights and interest in land) of Aboriginal peoples has not been extinguished by the declaration of British sovereignty. This allows them to make claims to their traditional lands under the NTA. Among other things, these processes have led anthropologists preparing claims to turn to the earliest ethnographic sources across the Australian continent in order to establish what the original situation was likely to have been in a region and to demonstrate that elements of these pre-colonial systems show some sort of continuity to the present systems (Peterson & Kenny 2017: 3).

Consequently, the interest and awareness among Aboriginal people (and many others) about the value, power, and significance of early ethnographic and linguistic materials held in archives in Australia and overseas has increased notably. While these documentary records support land and native title claims and cultural maintenance and revitalisation projects, they have, in some instances, nevertheless become a contributing factor in various conflicts and aggravated disputes in relation to the ownership and economy of knowledge in Aboriginal communities, particularly in contexts with actual or perceived economic implications.

---

**Figure 1.** Map of Carl Strehlow’s study area in Central Australia showing some place names in his spelling system (source: Kenny 2018: xi)
(e.g. mining developments or tourist ventures). In such cases, archival records have often become more authoritative than orally transmitted ecological or ontological knowledge. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the fundamental reality that, for increasing numbers of Aboriginal people, archival materials have also become highly politicised, disputed, and even misused.

Genealogical data such as those contained in the Strehlows’ family trees (c. 1900–1960s), Tindale’s genealogical data (c. 1920s–1960s), Daisy Bates’ records (c. 1901–1909), and Phyllis Kaberry’s fieldnotes (1930s), held respectively at the Strehlow Research Centre, the South Australian Museum, the National Library of Australia, and at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, are often at the centre of these politics of knowledge in contemporary remote Australia. For the Western Aranda the material Carl and TGH Strehlow collected is particularly important and highly sensitive, especially information about place and Aboriginal systems relating to land and its ownership that are glossed in English ‘the Dreaming’ or ‘the Law’. Olive Pink (1884–1975), who also worked with the Aranda and collected material about land ownership, wrote in the 1930s that songs relating to segments of Northern Aranda mythology “definitely establish a man’s title, to use legal phraseology,” and that “to inherit the song is to inherit the estate” (Pink 1936: 286). She showed that knowledge about segments of myth is owned by clearly defined individuals or groups of people. Morgan & Wilmot (2010) have written about the misuse of genealogical data from the Strehlow Collection. Such observations illustrate how archived knowledge is fraught with difficulties due to its contemporary relevance to land ownership, identity, community politics, and the interpretation and perception of history by different interest groups.

While it has been possible, despite great difficulties, to repatriate material culture (e.g. sacred objects) and human remains for decades now, archived information about Aboriginal cultures still remains highly problematic. Many institutions in Australia, including archives, museums, libraries, Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRBs), and other government bodies, grapple with the issues of ‘Who has the rights to these knowledges?’ and ‘Who may access them?’ Several reports identifying the issues and problems surrounding the protection and possible return of these often culturally sensitive materials have been written (e.g. Koch 2008; McGrath, Dinkler & Andriolo 2015; McGrath 2018), but none of them provide any general guidance or policies on how to return material into the public domain or to groups of Aboriginal people (Dunn et al. 2018).

The desire to return intellectual property and further repatriate material culture to Australian Aboriginal people has become important for many institutions, because they have had to realise that these materials are of great significance to Indigenous Australians. The Strehlow Research Centre⁴ is such an institution that recognises that its collection is of paramount importance to the Aranda people.

---

3 In this chapter the spelling ‘Aranda’ is used when speaking about the Arandic group who identifies as ‘Western Aranda’ or when used in a particular ethnographic source. Other spellings include ‘Arrernte’, which is now used by most other Arandic groups in the regions, such as the Northern Arrernte, and ‘Arrarnta’, which is mainly used by people at Hermannsburg.

4 The SRC is part of the Museum of Central Australia, which sits under MAGNT (Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory).
The Strehlow Research Centre

The SRC (see Figure 2) was opened in Alice Springs in 1991 by the Northern Territory Government and is regulated by its own legislation, the *Strehlow Research Centre Act 2005* (NT). Its history has been conflict-ridden due to many different ownership claims over one of the most valuable ethnographic collections of Central Australian material in the world. The recordings of sacred songs, ceremonies, and mythology held in the Strehlow Collection include materials of both Carl and TGH Strehlow (respectively father and son) and are understood by the traditional owners as cultural assets and capital.

The SRC holds 44 field diaries, 17 other diaries, more than 150 genealogies, countless site maps with thousands of site names, approximately 100 unpublished manuscripts (dictionaries, ethnography, novels, papers, and lectures), thousands of letters dating back to the late 1800s (in German, Aranda, and English), as well as more than 20 kilometres of film, more than 170 hours of sound recordings, more than 10,000 photographs and slides, and circa 1200 sacred objects held on behalf of the traditional owners in a special vault in the basement of the Strehlow Research Centre. It also houses the professional library of TGH Strehlow and many rare books about Aboriginal Australia.

Figure 2. The Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs, Central Australia (source: Anna Kenny)

---

The Strehlow Collection was the focus of possibly the most bitter fight in Australia about the ownership and return of sacred objects to their rightful owners. While the collection of these original materials by Carl and TGH Strehlow and the creation of the SRC itself has been extremely problematic at both ethical and political levels (see for details McNally 1981; Hugo 1997: 127–136; Kaiser 2004), the SRC is nonetheless an institution that courts and attracts the attention of Central Australian Aboriginal people (and particularly Aranda people), whose cultural heritage is stored in its archival facilities and vaults. Of its seven board members, four are Aboriginal and at the time of writing the centre employed two Aboriginal persons as staff members and others on a casual basis when funding permits.

Shaun Angeles Penangke, a Northern Arrernte man employed by the SRC, has remarked that “the archives are already acting as our elders today”6 and that the senior knowledgeable men he works with comment with admiration on the materials that the Strehlows collected, because they show their ancestors as powerful holders of the Law, the Dreaming. It is not only the records of the sacred songs and ceremonies or the objects that Aboriginal people access and value, but also family trees that sometimes show the names of forbears they did not know, or photographs of their ancestors whom they had never met.

**Carl Strehlow’s dictionary manuscript**

The Strehlow Collection includes Carl Strehlow’s manuscripts, which for most of the 20th century were believed to have been housed in Germany and destroyed in World War II. His published work *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* was based on three of these manuscripts entitled *Sagen* (myths/legends), *Cultus* (cults), and *Leben* (life). *Sagen* contains the Aranda and Luritja myth collections, *Cultus* details songs that were sung during ceremonies, and *Leben* describes aspects of social life. They were published in seven instalments between 1907 and 1920 and are the richest ethnographic texts written on Western Aranda and Luritja cultures of Central Australia at the beginning of the 20th century. The original manuscripts survived in Australia. Strehlow had in fact only sent copies of them in segments for comment and publication to his editor, Baron von Leonhardi, in Germany (Kenny 2013: 37). It was these copies that were destroyed at the Ethnological Museum of Frankfurt during Allied bombings in World War II.

The dictionary is the fourth manuscript (c. 1909) (see Figure 3) and remained unpublished until 10 August 2018. It contains more than 7600 entries in Aranda, 6800 in Loritja, and 1200 in Dieri with German glosses. It probably represents the most comprehensive collation of Indigenous words of Australian languages compiled around the turn of the 20th century, closely matched only by Reuther’s work on the Aboriginal languages and cultures of the Lake Eyre Basin (Lucas & Fergie 2017).

The journey of this dictionary manuscript as well as the other three manuscripts is fascinating. They disappeared in the first part of the 20th century and appeared again many decades later at the turn of the 21st century. The dictionary’s journey began mid-1910, just after Carl Strehlow had completed his ethnolinguistic work, and when he had departed with his family from Central Australia for Germany. At the request of his German editor, he took

---

6 Shaun Angeles Penangke, pers. comm. to Anna Kenny, 23 January 2018.
many items with him in his luggage that were of anthropological interest, including the dictionary manuscript for publication. However, his editor died in Frankfurt from a stroke late in October 1910, only days before he was to meet Carl Strehlow and, as a consequence, the dictionary was never published. The dictionary as well as the other manuscripts returned with him back to the Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia in 1912. Carl Strehlow and some Aranda men subsequently used the dictionary manuscript there to create a typed wordlist for an Aranda bible translation between 1913 and 1919. Three years later all manuscripts were taken on Carl’s excruciating final journey to Horseshoe Bend in 1922, having been packed by his 14-year-old son, TGH Strehlow, in the fortnight before the family’s departure from the Hermannsburg Mission (Strehlow 1969: 9).

Following Carl Strehlow’s death at Horseshoe Bend on 20 October 1922, his wife, Frieda Strehlow, despite her ambivalence towards her husband’s ethnographic work on Aboriginal religion and culture, gave the manuscripts to their youngest son, TGH Strehlow, when he started his language studies in the early 1930s at the University of Adelaide. The dictionary manuscript seems to have been a lifelong companion of TGH Strehlow, who later became one of Australia’s most controversial anthropologists. Indeed, he took it with him when he returned in 1932 to Central Australia, and when he died in 1978 it was found on his desk at the University of Adelaide. All manuscripts disappeared for some time thereafter, but surfaced again in the 1990s. They were among the items confiscated from the house of TGH Strehlow’s second wife, Kathleen Strehlow, by Northern Territory Government order. In exchange for a considerable sum of money, Kathleen Strehlow had previously agreed to make over all of her late husband’s research materials and associated records to the Northern Territory Government. Following a protracted dispute over their ownership, they were ultimately

---

7 TGH Strehlow’s Diary I (1932: 2); see also Kenny (2013: 153).
8 Schedule B of a draft of the Strehlow Research Centre Act, held at the SRC.
deposited at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs, where they remain, subject to the regulatory provisions of the Strehlow Research Centre Act 2005.

**Re-entering the public domain**

My initial contact with archival materials at the SRC began nearly two decades ago within the context of native title claims over country belonging to Western Aranda and Luritja peoples that have now been successfully determined by the Federal Court of Australia. As a native German-speaker, I found the earliest of these materials (as compiled by Carl Strehlow and others) to be readily comprehensible and extremely useful. After this claim research, my intention was to make some of the ethnolinguistic and other cultural heritage stored at the SRC available to the relevant Aboriginal communities, since it remained functionally inaccessible to them due to its codification in 19th century German scripts and shorthand. When I drew attention to Carl Strehlow’s treasure trove of early ethnolinguistic material, and asked Western Aranda people if they were interested in having it made available through publication, their responses were enthusiastic, particularly in view of their concerns about language loss. The Strehlow Research Centre also endorsed this proposal. Based on the positive responses to the idea of publishing Carl Strehlow’s dictionary manuscript, and believing that a dictionary was a harmless – that is, politically neutral – product that no one would oppose, I worked on its transcription and then its translation with Aboriginal people at various times between 2013 and 2016.

The initial difficulties I encountered in preparing the dictionary were mainly technical and required time and patience. Thus, in the first instance, the manuscript had to be painstakingly transcribed from the German script and shorthand annotations Carl Strehlow used (see Figure 4). After transcription and digitisation of the manuscript, the process of bringing it into the public domain involved many months of work with Western Aranda and Luritja speakers. Detailed collaboration with a small group of fluent Western Aranda speakers was essential for the purpose of checking Carl Strehlow’s original translation into German and my own subsequent translation of the German into English.

It was often difficult to find an English gloss, because some words were not known to my informants. Other terms seemed familiar or related to known words, but the specific form of the word was unclear, or the spelling did not provide an accurate pronunciation guide and made the words unrecognisable. It takes quite some work to interpret this resource, as senior Aranda woman Rhonda Inkamala remarked, but at the same time the very process of working through this type of material can enrich one’s own understanding (Inkamala 2018: 17).

Other difficulties surrounding archived knowledge of Aboriginal cultures include gender restrictions, age restrictions, personal affiliations to information, uneven distribution of knowledge in a group, different versions of family histories, variations in traditional narratives and competing ownership claims to knowledge. Some of these aspects had to be considered in relation to Carl Strehlow’s dictionary manuscript and required extensive consultation, because information relating to language is still highly valued as cultural capital and therefore important in the economy of knowledge.

---

9 This problem with Strehlow’s original renderings would not, of course, have been solved by the use of any subsequent alternative orthographies.
However, the main difficulties in publishing this dictionary manuscript only really surfaced in April 2016 when my work with fluent speakers of Aranda and Luritja had nearly been completed. There were several groupings whose vested interests in this ethnolinguistic material I had not previously been aware of, and whose views or ownership claims I had not taken into account. These interested parties included academics, non-Indigenous individuals within the Lutheran community, the Finke River Mission (FRM), different Western Aranda groups, and several government branches (including the SRC itself, which holds and legally owns the manuscript), the Central Land Council (CLC), IAD (Institute for Aboriginal Development) Press, and representatives of the Minister for Central Australia in the Northern Territory Government.

Problems with the dictionary project initially became evident when complaints about orthography were made by a non-Indigenous Lutheran source. This source (an amateur linguist) seemed to feel that the latest of a long, and ever-evolving, line of Lutheran-inspired orthographies should be employed rather than Carl Strehlow’s original orthography, as was my intention. This would have done injustice to the pioneering ethnolinguistic work and defeated much of the purpose of the dictionary – namely to show what Strehlow recorded and how he recorded it.

The orthography issue in this post-colonial context is not simply about codifying language in a consistent, phonemic manner or about ‘proper’ spelling. It is, in fact, determined by localised historical, symbolic, and political factors. Western Aranda people have very strong views about the orthography of their language due to its symbolic meaning and the sense that language is owned regardless of whether one can speak it or not, as long as it is the language of one’s ancestral lands. The elements that play a role are the formation of group and individual identity and autonomy, language ownership, and loyalties felt towards ancestors. It is important to many Western Aranda that they feel in control of the writing of their own language – free from the concerns of others, whom they fear may have more power, such as the state, academia, the Finke River Mission, non-Indigenous Lutherans, etc.
Because the Lutherans played a major role in developing Western Aranda literacy for overtly religious purposes, they too have very strong views about the proper orthography of Western Aranda. The Lutheran spelling system of the Finke River Mission has been taught over the past 130 years in at least seven different variations due to frequent revisions. Therefore, there are major competing views about orthography that at times are pursued with vigour and aggression.\(^\text{10}\)

The complaints about orthography disguised the underlying issues, namely the desire of different interest groups to assert control over the representation of language and Western Aranda literacy, and by extension over people, and the ownership of history and knowledge. The scale and intensity of the complaints I received about the production of the dictionary surpassed anything I could have anticipated. These complaints arrived in a series of letters via the ethics committee of my university, the Northern Territory Government, the Central Land Council, and the Institute for Aboriginal Development.

These circumstances compelled the Central Land Council and, to a lesser extent, the Strehlow Research Centre, to become proactively involved in the process of bringing Carl Strehlow’s dictionary into the public domain, since both organisations supported this aim. On the other hand, my university called its ethics committee together for meetings to discuss Arandic orthography, my field methodology, and my approach to consultations. I had to respond to their queries in several reports outlining dates, places, the persons I had consulted and so forth. The ethics problem was resolved within months, but the damage caused by the complaints of a non-Indigenous gatekeeper was by no means mended. With the generous assistance of mainly the Central Land Council, further information sessions and community consultations over a 12-month period between April 2016 and April 2017 were organised (see Figure 5). No less than 12 meetings were held in Central Australia to make sure that the Western Aranda at Hermannsburg and its surrounding outstations as well as in Alice Springs were informed about the dictionary’s content in its published form. These consultations were conducted by an experienced CLC anthropologist and myself with small family groups and larger community groups. The consultations themselves variously involved formal discussions, informal interviews, the recording of diverging (and sometimes quite unexpected) opinions about orthography and archived materials, and several large-scale community meetings attended by additional staff members of the CLC and SRC.

Organising these meetings required considerable resources and logistical support, both of which the Central Land Council provided. The logistics included organising meeting spaces in remote areas, notifying people, picking up individuals from remote outstations, catering for lunches, and printing posters and other information brochures. Overall the costs were substantial, and the process as a whole was very time-consuming.

Even after the extended rounds of consultations, the different groups within the Aboriginal community were still divided on how the dictionary should look and what should or should not be added. Finally, a compromise was found that avoided conflict. It was decided

\(^{10}\) See Kenny (2017) for an extensive discussion of the many diverging views about the different orthographies employed in and around Hermannsburg. The different views about correct spelling have generated considerable dispute among the Western Aranda.
to publish it as a ‘Heritage Dictionary’ (see Figure 6) – that is, as an exact transcription of the original handwritten manuscript\(^ {11} \) – because the Western Aranda understand its original form to reflect their history and identity as a particular Arandic group (Kenny 2017: 278), and to maintain its historical authenticity (Kenny 2018: 5). This compromise also avoided having to tackle the fraught politics of orthography, which were mainly the result of the colonial involvement of the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg and caused some conflict in the community (Kenny 2018: 10).

\(^{11}\) The only addition to each entry was an English gloss.

\[ \text{Figure 5.} \text{ Auriel Swan, Christobel Swan, Helen Wilmut, Mildred Inkamala (left to right), and Anna Kenny presenting the dictionary work at Hermannsburg, mid 2016 (image courtesy of MAGNT, Adam Macfie)} \]

\[ \text{Figure 6. Sample entries from Carl Strehlow’s 1909 comparative heritage dictionary: An Aranda, German, Loritja and Dieri to English dictionary with introductory essays (source: Kenny 2018: 242)} \]

\[ \text{CARL STREHLow’S 1909 COMPARATIVE HERITAGE DICTIONARY} \]

\[ \text{kiritja Leben (in Zusammensetzungen).} \]
\[ \text{kiritjulakama Leben-abbrechen),} \]
\[ \text{erachligen, erlösen) \text{ (end life), stay,} \]
\[ \text{shaut.} \]
\[ \text{aluru käräntänani} \]
\[ \text{kuuma anfachen (Feuer),} \]
\[ \text{fan (fire).} \]
\[ \text{kimbira postp. zuerst, vonm.) \text{(postposition) first, in front.} \text{warika} \]
\[ \text{arakimbira laka das rote Känguruhr tiefe} \text{vorn an.} \text{the red kangaroo leads [7],} \]
\[ \text{malluwarikaku jennu} \]
\[ \text{crá kimbala or zuerst.} \text{he first.} \]
\[ \text{paluru warika} \]
\[ \text{kirminjambalarala alles Gebüsch} \text{niedertretend weiter laufen.} \text{treading} \]
\[ \text{undergrowth down while pressing or} \text{running on.} \text{multilinkumalunku} \text{jennu} \]
\[ \text{kiriitja (këntja) Blüten spitzen, Blüten.} \text{bloom tips, blossoms.} \text{akiriitja} \]
\[ \text{kinjinta in Zusammensetzungen: Haupt.} \text{in word compounds: head.} \]
On 9 October 2018 Carl Strehlow’s 1909 comparative heritage dictionary: An Aranda, German, Loritja and Dieri to English dictionary with introductory essays\textsuperscript{12} was launched by CLC Director David Ross at the SRC in Alice Springs (see Figure 7). This launch was mainly attended by Western Aranda people.

\textsuperscript{12} Access at: http://doi.org/10.22459/CSCHD.08.2018

\textbf{Figure 7}. CLC Director David Ross (left) and Conrad Ratara (right) at the dictionary launch on 9 October 2018 at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs (source: Central Land Council, Alice Springs)
The predicament

The situation described above relates directly to Clifford’s post-colonial critique to the effect that an ethnographer’s audience is multiple, and ethnography involves at least two but usually more “conscious, politically significant subjects” (Clifford 1988: 41). The groups and individuals involved in this predicament were not all active and some only became active – reluctantly – when others did.

In the process of unravelling and considering the multiple audiences for this cultural representation, with their oftentimes conflicting vested interests, it became clear that Strehlow’s ethnolinguistic work effectively embodied different identities and histories. One of those identities was explicitly articulated when some Aboriginal people made clear to me the central fact that, for them, their language was not an abstract academic or linguistic resource, but was tied closely to their culture and identity. They said, for example, that “My language goes with my culture, my place, my dreaming. If you do not have language, you have no culture, you are nothing,” “My language is who I am. It gives me power. My language makes other people respect me,” and “Language is where we come from, what makes us, in our culture. It makes us who we are” (Kenny 2017: 277).

Aranda people refer both to the content of and the orthography used for the Aranda language in Carl Strehlow’s unpublished manuscripts as ankatja ingkwia13 ‘old language’ or ankatja ekarltal ‘strong language’, meaning the language of the ‘old people’ – their ancestors. They explicitly distinguish it from ‘church language’ and ‘today’s language’ (Kenny 2017: 265). In some instances, these archived materials are even viewed as ancestral voices of the past. At other times, however, the realisation surfaced that it is not possible to reproduce knowledge as it was formerly. According to some senior informants who worked with me on the dictionary manuscript, one “cannot get that old language back – too far gone. The old people took that language with them when they passed away” (Kenny 2017: 276).

Codified and archived knowledge is always recontextualised (Strathern 1995: 3), interpreted, and reinterpreted and, as Jorgensen & McLean have shown in their edited volume Indigenous Archives, knowledges can be and are creatively constituted and reconstituted (Jorgensen & McLean 2017: viii). When these processes occur with manuscripts such as Carl Strehlow’s dictionary or other archival materials, e.g. a genealogy, photograph, or sacred song, in politicised environments they become highly symbolic and stand for history and identity, which can generate conflict.

Although at the Hermannsburg Mission the missionaries mitigated some of the frontier violence against the Aranda, the missionaries remain an integral part of Australian colonial history (Monteath & Fitzpatrick 2017: 199).14 The historical circumstances of the Lutheran involvement with Western Aranda people included a subtle yet violent appropriation of the Aranda language since the late 1870s (Kenny 2017). They appropriated parts of the Aranda language for bible translation, imposed on the Western Aranda people rigid non-Indigenous

13 In Carl Strehlow’s dictionary: ankatja (Wort; Sprache; auch, ‘Märchen, Fabel, Mythos’ [also, fairytale, fable, myth]).

social structures and suppressed important cultural practices relating to Aboriginal belief systems that they understood to be ‘heathen’. This caused the reduction of vocabulary relating to the spirit world as well as ecology (Kenny 2018: 7) and some ontological shifts over the past century (Austin-Broos 2009, 2010). The Lutheran church and community still have a strong presence in some Central Australian Aboriginal communities, although these communities are now often located on Aboriginal land such as Ntaria (the former Hermannsburg Mission) or the former Jay Creek government settlement on the Iwupataka Aboriginal Land Trust.

Members of the Lutheran community connected to the Finke River Mission have a strong view about the ownership of Lutheran history in Central Australia that includes ownership claims over Aranda heritage and language as recorded by German missionaries. For many Lutherans, their history is embodied in items such as this dictionary manuscript created by one of their missionaries more than 100 years ago. In this case, ironically, the item relates to Aboriginal mythology. At that time, the Lutheran authorities were in fact highly critical of Strehlow’s ethnolinguistic work and derided it, alleging that he was neglecting his missionary duties. Drawing upon little more than the institutional paternalism of their Church’s past in Central Australia, the same present-day Lutherans appear to ‘know’ what is good for Aboriginal people,15 which in their view allows them to take control of cultural representations.16

The Aboriginal versions of events sometimes do not mesh well with the view the local non-Indigenous Lutheran community has of their ‘mutual history’. This ‘history’ is further manifest for the latter in their Finke River Mission archival holdings in Alice Springs and the Lutheran Archives in Adelaide. To some degree, attempts to return cultural heritage and decolonise history do not sit well with non-Indigenous views of identity and history as constituted from the same materials. Aboriginal people, too, see their history embodied in items such as this dictionary manuscript that a Lutheran missionary created more than 100 years ago. For many Western Aranda, for example, the language contained in Carl Strehlow’s dictionary stands for their culture, in which their kin and specific ontological beliefs relating to land are embedded.

While some Lutherans have recently objected to projects of cultural representation, others have been protective of their legacy in such situations. Their objections to progressive post-colonial developments such as the Northern Territory Land Rights movement (Eames 1983) go back to the 1970s, or the 1990s, when a leading Lutheran in Anmatyerr country backed a breakaway ‘Anmatjere Land Council’ (Morton 1994). To illustrate further the conservative colonial legacy that continues to dog many (if not all) Lutheran interventions in Central Australia, it is worth considering Austin-Broos’ work (2009: 25–101). She describes the conflicting narratives about the Lutheran founding of Hermannsburg and the bringing of Christianity to Central Australia.

15 A point made by a representative of one of the government offices who had to approach me after complaints had been made about my dictionary work (May 2016).
16 In addition to the orthography issue, this sense of entitlement was manifest in the way in which some non-Indigenous members of the Lutheran community reacted to and resisted two other separate projects being undertaken at the time of my research: the Jay Creek settlement cemetery restoration and the Strehlow Research Centre field repatriation project, both of which cast different (i.e. negative) perspectives on colonial events and the Lutheran past in Central Australia.
Concluding remarks

There are at least three sets of difficulties involved in bringing these archived cultural materials into the public domain. Firstly, the materials have to be decoded because they may be codified in scripts that only a few specialists now know, or they may use language that includes, for example, anthropological terms, concepts, and models that are not easily understood. Secondly, the cultural sensitivities and restrictions surrounding archived Indigenous knowledges must be discussed with relevant target groups (e.g. senior people, particular ethnic groups) and thirdly, the politics of knowledge and ownership – that is, the different interest groups that may think they have rights to a body of knowledge – have to be taken into account.

In hindsight, my view that a dictionary was a harmless choice for an intellectual repatriation project appears very naïve. And indeed, in the context of the Strehlow Collection, this dictionary manuscript belongs to the least restricted category of items. I had not considered the many views that different interest groups had about the ownership of Carl Strehlow’s dictionary manuscript, nor its significance as a symbol of identity for both the Aboriginal community and the Lutheran non-Indigenous community. Although this manuscript is ‘only’ a dictionary – not a sacred object per se or a manuscript with restricted religious content – its symbolic meaning goes well beyond what one might think an ethnolinguistic manuscript might stand for. Not only is it a unique heritage item, it is also attached to weighty views about history constructed by diverse interest groups who believe that they own history and have the correct version of it.

These tensions that arise due to the diverse views of ownership of knowledge can result in scenarios that are costly, time-consuming, and painful, and cause some institutions to be overly fearful about sensitivities as well as protective of their archival materials. In Australia this sometimes makes it very difficult even to access knowledge that was originally public knowledge for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and which could have been expected to remain in the public domain, such as linguistic and certain ecological information.

Although there are enormous problems regarding sensitive information in early ethnography and native title records, they should not have a paralysing effect on attempts to make important information available. Among the archived materials are pieces that assist Aboriginal community groups to recover their cultural heritage and regain pride in it. Indeed, some records are of incommensurable richness and are unique treasures and, thus, of great value to Aboriginal people (Kenny 2018) who may want to celebrate them (McGrath 2018). This makes it worthwhile to overcome the ‘risk, benefit, and aggravation equation’.

These archival records are an integral part of the creation and writing of Aboriginal history and have become relevant in the process of decolonising history and constituting identities. Many Indigenous Australians have undertaken the reinterpretation, recontextualisation, and reconstitution of archived knowledges, turning to the archives to access materials collected by colonial administrations and directly incorporating such materials within Aboriginal identities and expressions of Aboriginal histories.17 Indeed, in the hands of Indigenous people,

such re-renderings of archived materials can become powerful tools to reclaim their history and autonomy.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{References}


\textsuperscript{18} Michael Arid’s work on archival materials called \textit{Transforming Tindale}, for example, threw a different light on archival photographs that had been taken to illustrate Tindale and Birdsell’s physical anthropology data cards, which were based on information they had collected in Queensland in the 1930s and 1950s. The images were turned around to reconnect people with their ancestors and kin (see Lydon 2017: 374–377).


McGrath, Pamela Faye, Ludger Dinkler & Alexandra Andriolo. 2015. Managing information in Native Title (MINT). Canberra: AIATSIS.


Morgan, Rebecca & Helen Wilmot. 2010. Written proof: The appropriation of genealogical records in contemporary Arrernte society. AIATSIS Native Title Research Unit Issue Paper vol. 4, no. 5. Canberra: AIATSIS.


