Knowledge Discovery Empowering Australian Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

This paper explores how Australian Indigenous communities can be empowered through knowledge discovery from institutions with Indigenous cultural collections. Initially it examines the concepts of empowerment and disempowerment in relation to Australian Indigenous communities and their history, including recent key events and actions aimed at reversing this disadvantage. The primary focus of the paper involves research undertaken in Australian institutions with valuable collections of Australian indigenous material objects. These custodial collections, built since the mid-1850s, provide a key to repatriation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Currently these institutions are re-evaluating their role in the modern world, and in relation to Indigenous Australians. As Indigenous communities are developing the confidence to inquire about their culture, these institutions have a pivotal role to play in restoring the memory of their Aboriginal heritage, often through institutional knowledge mining. Many technological and other challenges are encountered in this process, including the dependence on effective cataloguing and metadata. Constraints are ever present but there are many possibilities for empowering Australian Indigenous communities, in particular by governments and institutions working together in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Australian Indigenous cultural heritage collections, knowledge discovery, community empowerment, metadata, digital access

1. Introduction

'Knowledge is power', is recognised by many as a truism, and today the saying is bandied around in everyday conversation. The origin of this idea can be traced to several sources, of which the most popular is Francis Bacon's 16th century Latin version: 'scientia potentia est', or, in translation, 'For also knowledge itself is power' (*Meditationes Sacrae* 1597). This maxim is important when considering the empowerment of communities, and the role of informatics in paving a way forward for under-developed communities. It is particularly so for communities which are not in the mainstream of the global information environment, and are thereby not enjoying the benefits of technology for enhanced communication. In seeking a meaning for the phrase: 'developing communities', there is a need to look at fundamental human needs, and the aspirations of community development, in a societal framework. The adequate provision of water, food, health care, education, and memory, are basic for community members. This is needed so that the community is able to develop into a self-reliant entity, supporting the lifestyle desired by its members, who are fully aware of the world at large. Developing solutions for such communities requires an understanding of the needs of particular communities, and not a 'one model fits all' approach.

This next section of the paper examines the concept of empowerment, and its converse, disempowerment, in relation to Australian Indigenous communities. It traces issues of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples in the colonial era from the late 18th Century, and then considers some key events and actions in more recent Australian history aimed at reversing this disadvantage and empowering Indigenous Australians. A particular focus is on the role of cultural institutions in this process of empowerment.

Section 3 of the paper reports on original research involving interviews in eight Australian cultural institutions with Indigenous heritage collections. It explores and compares the missions, roles, collections, means of facilitating knowledge discovery, technological and other challenges and constraints faced by these institutions in enabling knowledge discovery for Indigenous peoples, and possibilities for developing current services. The paper concludes with reflections on empowerment of Indigenous peoples and the role of cultural institutions in facilitating empowerment through knowledge discovery.

2. Empowerment and Australian Indigenous Communities

2.1 The Notion of Empowerment

Empowerment means to give authority or power to a group of people, to put them in control of their destiny. Empowering such people implies that the group has previously suffered *disempowerment*. As Hecker (1997) explains, 'empowerment is a process that enables disadvantaged people to increase control over events that determine their lives;' it 'cannot be given or taught but is something people do for themselves' (p. 784).

In Mick Dodson's words, 'the empowerment of Aboriginal people' means that they 'can take responsibility for their own situation and then act to change it' (Dodson 1995, p. 143). This contrasts with the feelings of helplessness of a people disempowered through generations of unjust government policies, which Tim (2003) expresses as follows:

> … we have been made to feel incapable of thinking well enough to help develop good, just policies. The belittlement of our thinking abilities begins in our childhoods and continues through school years and our work lives. … we are made to feel insignificant and powerless. None of this accurately represents the reality of any of us, although we often end up acting and feeling as if it does, because of the

mistreatment we have faced (p. 29). … And my people want to take their share of responsibility–to do more to achieve control over our lives and build better futures for our kids (p. 32).

This paper explores ways in which cultural heritage institutions can act as catalysts for Indigenous empowerment, for example by restoring memory of Aboriginal cultural heritage and reclaiming identity through reconnecting individuals with their communities.

2.2 Profile of a Disempowered People

Since the British colonisation of Australia from 1788, a very Eurocentric worldview has held sway. Australia was 'discovered' by Captain James Cook in 1770, with the first settlement under Captain Phillip, who arrived with his crew in Sydney Cove in 1788. A rich Indigenous history of well in excess of 50,000 years was largely ignored, and treated as pre-history. British explorers and surveyors traversed the country, mapping the land and assigning European names to places and geographic features. This was justified legally through a philosophy of *terra nullius,* or 'land with no people.' The process of colonisation not only displaced Indigenous people from their traditional lands, but also involved the denial of Indigenous voices (Gibson & Dunbar-Hall 2000).

In their article on 'Decolonising Indigenous Archaeology', Smith and Jackson (2006) present a perceptive exposition of how colonisation disempowered and dispossessed Indigenous Australians. One driver of the colonial expansion of the 18th and 19th Centuries was 'the notion of researching far-flung lands and their peoples,' conquering unknown worlds, asserting domination and returning to the home country material proof of their conquests. There was a pervasive fascination with the exotic, and Indigenous material objects found their way into natural history museums across Europe. Hence Indigenous cultures were appropriated by others and broadcast to the world, with little cultural sensitivity or respect for the secret or sacred nature of the object. Not only were Australian Indigenous peoples displaced from their land and subjected to external political and economic control but their dispossession was made complete through the destruction or deliberate undervaluing of their culture, art, beliefs, and oral traditions and the conscious elevation of European traditions. Smith and Jackson explain how language played a pivotal role in this process, embedding mental control of the coloniser, privileging one voice (the 'civilised' culture and written language of the dominator) and polarising the other (the 'primitive' culture and oral tradition of the subservient people). Oral histories of Aboriginal people have much greater antiquity than European history—for instance, they have stories about megafauna (giant kangaroos, snakes and the like) thought to have become extinct about 30,000-50,000 years ago. Language acts as a powerful weapon for assault and defence—injuring both by labelling and description, and through 'silences and omissions' (Smith & Jackson 2006). For instance, British colonists adopted the term 'Aboriginal' to imply homogeneity of Australian Indigenous peoples—stripping the distinctive identity from a diverse set of over 600 groups, each of which had its own political system, laws, and language.

The land has special spiritual significance to Australian Indigenous people, and forms the basis of their identity. Their dispossession from their traditional lands through 'development' had a disastrous impact on their psyche. As Farley (2003) puts it: 'The spirituality and culture of Indigenous peoples were diminished by removal from their traditional lands' (p. 55). Many were relocated to missions and reserves, with 'Indigenous nations … jumbled together, irrespective of their different laws and responsibilities for country.'

The British from early settlement passed laws for the 'management' of Indigenous peoples. The role of 'Protector of Aborigines' was established in each of the states.

Under the guise of these laws and government assimilation policies, Aboriginal and half-caste children could be removed from their families and culture and placed in missions or brought up by white families. This legal provision was not abolished until the latter half of the 20th Century in each of the states. Whitlock (2001) cites statistics claiming that in the years from 1910 and 1970, between 10% and 30% of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities. Such acts may have been well-intentioned at the time, but were misguided and had a dramatic impact on these 'stolen generations.'

Consequences of their dispossession and erosion of culture have been dire for Indigenous peoples. They have been, and continue to be, significantly disadvantaged in terms of key social and economic indicators—poverty, rampant unemployment and dependence on welfare; alcohol addiction and substance abuse; high levels of crime, violence, juvenile detention, suicide and self-harm; low levels of education and high school drop-out rates; major health problems and a life expectancy of 20 years less than non-Indigenous Australians.

Nonetheless, the situation is not without hope, as is explained in the following sections.

2.3 Tackling Indigenous Disadvantage

Over recent years with growing understanding of the nature and underlying causes of Indigenous disadvantage, there have been some positive steps towards tackling this disadvantage and empowering Indigenous peoples to control their destiny. Some of these moves and key events are outlined below.

2.3.1 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its Aftermath

Soaring rates of Indigenous deaths in detention, especially of juveniles, prompted a major legal inquiry in the form of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), which ran from 1987-1991. This inquiry produced masses of documentation—legal testimonies and reports on the situation nationally, by region and state, and reports of individual deaths. This was a pivotal turning-point for change to government policy concerning Indigenous people. It was 'a damning indictment of race relations in Australia' (Whitlock 2001). It dissected in minute detail the impacts of government policies such as the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. The RCIADIC reports provided numerous recommendations for addressing the issues raised, and many government initiatives were undertaken on multiple fronts to tackle those issues. One area of recommendation concerned the need for rediscovering identity and culture. In this respect, making more accessible records of Indigenous peoples held by government institutions and other organisations was one crucial dimension. Helping Indigenous people to rediscover their history was an important role for archives.

From the early 1990s, archives organisations enthusiastically took up the challenge and worked on devising ways to facilitate access to Indigenous records. Fortuitously, 1993 had been declared the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, and this added impetus for initiatives focused on empowering Indigenous peoples. There were several guides produced by the Australian Archives (later National Archives of Australia (NAA)) from this time. The Victorian Branch of the Australian Archives in 1993 published *My heart is breaking: A joint guide to records about Aboriginal people in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the Australian Archives, Victorian Regional Office.* This was a landmark publication, establishing a model for subsequent guides, and is still widely consulted. It is a research guide for Koories who wish to trace their family history through the records held by the State (PROV) and Commonwealth archives. It lists official records about Victoria's Koories from

1836, showing the types of resources available, where they are housed, how they are catalogued. Such ventures have highlighted the pivotal role that archives can play in facilitating the rediscovery of Indigenous identity, community and culture.

2.3.2 The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families [The 'Stolen Children' Report] and its Aftermath

Another highly significant government inquiry which has triggered empowering changes for Indigenous peoples is the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. The Commissioners traversed the country in 1995 and 1996, listening to over 500 personal stories about the impacts of the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families; and receiving another thousand or so written accounts (Whitlock 2001). The report of this Inquiry was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 2007 during the Australian Reconciliation convention. It was published by HREOC under the title *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, and is widely referred to as *The 'Stolen Children' report*. The power of the Stolen Children testimonies was comparable to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was under way at about the same time. Both 'produced a drip feed of testimony and confession which dominated print, radio and television journalism … and … demonstrated the extraordinary power of new media technologies, such as the Internet, in circulating testimonies to a large international readership' (Whitlock 2001). The telling of stories reliving traumatic memories and listening to others' stories was 'profoundly therapeutic.' The Stolen Children testimonies became 'the cornerstone of the pursuit of reconciliation between indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Whitlock 2001), and the day of tabling the Stolen Generations report is now commemorated as National Sorry Day. There was mounting public support for the Federal government to 'say sorry' to Indigenous peoples for their mistreatment over generations from misguided government assimilation policy. While the Howard Liberal government consistently resisted this call, refusing to take responsibility for the actions of previous administrations, the new Rudd Labor government when it came to office in late 2007 made this a high priority. Rudd's public apology on behalf of the Australian people was an important symbolic event, and a very emotional day for Indigenous Australians.

A number of the recommendations from the *Bringing Them Home* report related to records of Indigenous peoples held by government and other organisations. Again, archives institutions in Australia were quick to follow up on the recommendations. Consultations with Indigenous communities indicated that the highest priority for archives was to produce an index of names of Indigenous peoples referred to in archival records. The National Archives of Australia's *Bringing Them Home Name Index* was a large and labour-intensive project, involving collaboration between the national and state archives bodies, which took until 2004 to complete. Separate teams of indexers working in Darwin, Canberra and Melbourne indexed over 250,000 names of Indigenous people and names other people and organisations (such as missions and stations) associated with them. This index is an invaluable tool for identifying and locating family members separated for decades by government child removal policies, and for re-creating communities.

State archives and records agencies have also been involved in similar projects. For instance, the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) in 2005 published *Finding your story: A resource manual to the records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria*. This project involved collaboration between PROV, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce. The publication is presented in a user-friendly way, as a step-by-step personal journey for a Koorie finding their story—ie it is more

than just a guide to records. As 'finding your story' can be a very emotional process, this manual also addresses the difficulties and issues encountered along the way, for instance educating the searcher about the contemporary context associated with government policies concerning child removal, and preparing them for the often patronising, offensive and racist nature of comments contained in the records. Lynette Russell (2005) articulates well the emotional journey of Indigenous people seeking to reclaim their family histories through archives and libraries. Knowing who and what you are is something that most people take for granted, but the Stolen Generation lack those connections to family, community, land, culture and language. There are very different feelings in reaction to the records, such as excitement in finding and sharing their story, or anger that records have been kept, making them feel humiliated, or feel 'like a criminal'. Also there can be very different experiences in finding family—from complete acceptance and utter delight through to rejection due to a clash of cultures (eg 'you're black but you act white').

2.3.3 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators Reports

In 2002, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Productivity Commission's Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to report on key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. Their report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*: *Key Indicators* (2003-) has established a framework for the regular reporting on the progress and effectiveness of government initiatives to reduce key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. Follow-up reports on these indicators have appeared biennially since 2003. This is an important mechanism for ensuring that government initiatives for Indigenous people are well targeted and achieve 'positive outcomes for Indigenous people.'

2.4 Helping Realise the Vision of Confident, Empowered Indigenous Communities

Over recent years, there has been a growing awareness that overcoming Indigenous disadvantage necessitates re-creating cultural identity and pride; ensuring supportive family and community environments; and reversing a welfare culture mentality through creating opportunities for Indigenous wealth creation, employment and economic sustainability.

Self-determination is a vital element—it is critical that Indigenous peoples are in the 'driving-seat' of programs that affect them. Governments and researchers alike are learning through experience that successful outcomes are contingent on effective partnerships and genuine consultation. What external bodies think will be beneficial for Indigenous people is often not what they want.

In contrast to the pervasive sense of helplessness and desperation of a dispossessed people, Tim (2003) welcomes a mounting groundswell for change, and sees some positive signs of a strengthening of Indigenous families and communities, and developing capacity at the local level. She stresses the need for programs to build Indigenous leadership and for more consultative approaches, and is pleased to see that:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are beginning to identify their own strengths and capacities and are bringing those to negotiating tables with government and with each other. A partnership approach is forcing everyone to do business in a new way and is leading to innovative and effective models for local community development and capacity building (Tim 2003, p. 32).

There have been encouraging examples of successful partnerships in land agreements over the past couple of decades, where Indigenous peoples have reclaimed control of their land through successful native title claims and have

reached agreement with government authorities, national parks, mining companies, pastoral interests, tourist operators, and the like on the conditions under which they will collaborate. Such arrangements provide a source of income and employment for these communities. An excellent example of this is Nitmiluk (the area of the spectacular Katherine River gorges 300 kms south of Darwin in the Northern Territory), owned and managed by the Jawoyn people. In their article 'Nitmiluk: Place and empowerment in Australian Aboriginal popular music,' Gibson and Dunbar-Hall (2000) provide fascinating insight into how the successful land claim for Nitmiluk has empowered the Jawoyn people. This is captured in the Aboriginal rock band, Blekbala Mujik's celebratory song 'Nitmiluk', which reclaims Jawoyn land and culture in a symbolic way. 'In this context, popular music … forms a site of expression and empowerment' (p. 43). It is part of 'a process of an indigenous (re)construction of post-colonial space,' designed 'to reclaim and re-inscribe Aboriginal spatial identities after colonial experiences of appropriation and contempt' (p. 39).

Similar issues are raised in research involving Indigenous communities. While such research has a long history, Indigenous communities have often felt exploited by researchers 'who fly into their communities, conduct research on their people and fly out again with the results under their arms' (Hecker 1997, p. 784), never to be seen again. Fortunately, university ethics approval requirements are reducing some of these excesses, in terms of respecting privacy and intellectual property, and ensuring the dissemination of research results in ways that are useful for the 'researched' communities. Gaining approval from Indigenous communities to use an image, story or other piece of intellectual property, and courteously acknowledging their ownership is vital in presenting material (for example, through a note such as 'Image used courtesy of the [name] community'). Such acknowledgement is empowering as it recognises and validates Indigenous authority over their knowledge systems (Smith & Jackson 2006).

Building strong, respectful relationships is critical for researchers involved in research with Indigenous communities. Within such relationships, there is trust and mutual obligation, genuine reciprocal dialogue, a willingness to listen, to share insights and to learn. Here Indigenous people are treated as equal partners, rather than as research objects (McKemmish & Piggott 2002). Fruitful research partnerships can take years to build and develop, and require ongoing cultivation and nurturing. One such collaboration at Monash University has been over the Trust and Technology research project that started in 2003 and has sought to develop ways of 'enabling Koorie communities to archive oral memory.' This research project involves collaboration between the Caulfield School of IT and the Centre for Australian Studies at Monash, and the Public Record Office of Victoria, the Koorie Heritage Trust, the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce, and the Australian Society of Archivists Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group. Although this collaboration built on existing networks, it has involved a strong learning process for all parties, and researchers have had to modify their original ideas along the way where their planned outputs were not what the Indigenous communities actually wanted.

3. Facilitating Knowledge Discovery in Australian Indigenous Cultural Heritage Collections

3.1 The Participating Institutions

The qualitative research forming the basis of this paper involved interviews in Australian institutions with Indigenous cultural heritage collections and/or research initiatives. Six of these institutions were located in Victoria (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV), the Melbourne Museum (MM), the Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre (KHTCC), the State Library of Victoria (SLV), the Public Records Office Victoria

(PROV), and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV)), and two in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)—the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research (CCR), Australian National University (ANU). Collectively, these institutions are empowering Australian Indigenous communities by making their collections accessible and facilitating knowledge discovery of Indigenous cultural heritage.

Victoria is a state on the eastern coast of Australia. Australia has both State and Federal Governments. The Federal or Commonwealth Government has its national parliament in Canberra—the capital city of Australia located inland within the ACT. Five of the six participating Victorian institutions are the responsibility of the Victorian Government; the KHT is an independent body. AIATSIS, a relatively young institution, is funded by the Commonwealth Government and plays a major role in supporting the Australian Indigenous cause. The CCR is university based, relying on Commonwealth Government research grants for its projects.

It should be noted that the interviews undertaken did not include the separate oral history units of AIATSIS and the Koorie Heritage Trust (KHT). In Victoria, there is an understanding that the KHT has responsibility for oral history, and other cultural institutions such as the SLV refer enquiries to the KHT rather than attempting to maintain their own collections of Indigenous audio- or video-recordings.

Table 1 provides a summary of the comparative profiles of each of these institutions in relation to key characteristics and issues pertinent to the current study. The rest of the paper elaborates on each of these issues.

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Table 1: Profile of Participating Institutions

ISSUES	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, ANU	Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre	Melbourne Museum	National Gallery of Victoria	Public Record Office Victoria	State Library of Victoria
Institution	State Government of Victoria	Commonwealth Government of Australia	University, Australian Capital Territory	Private	State Government of Victoria	State Government of Victoria	State Government of Victoria	State Government of Victoria
Institutional Mission / Philosophy	*In situ* preservation of Victorian Aboriginal cultural heritage.	To support knowledge discovery and scholarship of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.	To foster research through institutional collaboration of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.	Ongoing Koorie support and preservation of their cultural heritage in Victoria.	To collect, preserve, facilitate knowledge discovery and research, and negotiate repatriation of Australian Aboriginal culture.	To collect, preserve and facilitate knowledge discovery and research of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.	To collect, preserve and make accessible official records from Victorian government departments and agencies.	To collect, preserve and provide access to images, manuscripts and printed material of Victorian Aboriginal culture.
Collection Type	Landscape	Documents	Ideas [Research]	Artefacts, pictures, photographs.	Artefacts (archeological & anthropological), human remains, manuscripts.	Art works, paintings, artefacts.	Records	Documents, pictures, photographs, manuscripts.
Geographic Coverage	Victoria	Australia	Global	Victoria	Australia	Australia	Victoria	Australia

Table 1: Profile of Participating Institutions *(Cont'd)*

ISSUES	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, ANU	Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre	Melbourne Museum	National Gallery of Victoria	Public Record Office Victoria	State Library of Victoria
Means of Facilitating Knowledge Discovery for Indigenous People	Regional database on CD.	Web access to library catalogue with detailed metadata application.	Facilitating research partnerships with/between institutions.	Exhibitions and availability of library for public use. Indigenous employees.	Exhibitions, displays, educational seminars, web accessible information sheets, assisting individuals' inquiries.	Photographing collection for web access.	Printed collection guides, detailed indexing of collection, specialised staff for assistance to the public. Indigenous employees.	Exhibitions, Indigenous employees, working with the Koorie Heritage Trust to facilitate use of the Library. Colour images available on the web catalogue and *Picture Australia*.
Technological Challenges	Upgrades of software and moving to controlled web-based access.	Online web thesaurus available free for global application. Web access of digitised resources.	Connecting Australian Indigenous collections worldwide for easy access.	Home-grown software and terminology. Concern for future network interoperability.	Using the full potential of the EMu software which is promising uniformity with central database administration.	Implementing the Vernon software with web access to the collections. Potential for complex database discovery.	Implementing upgrades to the software and providing online booking of records for future use if not available online.	Keeping abreast of upgrades to the database software and the digitisation of records for web access.

Table 1: Profile of Participating Institutions *(Cont'd)*

ISSUES	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, ANU	Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre	Melbourne Museum	National Gallery of Victoria	Public Record Office Victoria	State Library of Victoria
Cataloguing	Local mapping with ArcView. Prescribed database fields.	Detailed contents description.	Not applicable.	In-house rules. Backlog.	Traditional Museum practice since 1850s.	Basic. Backlog.	Broad not detailed.	AACR2 and LC subject headings.
Metadata	Archaeological terminology, not Aboriginal.	In-house thesaurus.	Not applicable	In-house lists of descriptive terminology.	In-house lists of descriptive terminology.	Added by the Cataloguing Section.	Lodging institutions. On-site indexing projects.	Library of Congress (LC) subject headings.
Constraints	Web access not developed. Limited resources.	Limited resources.	Limited resources. Reliance on grants.	Customised software. In-house development.	Lack of resources. Historical perspective.	Limited resources to develop Vernon database.	Information difficult to identify and locate.	Limited resources.
Collaboration/ Partnership	Not developed, for example Titles Office	National and State Libraries.	Networking with interested institutions.	Koorie Heritage Trust with the SLV.	Research institutions.	Not covered in the interview.	Koorie Heritage Taskforce. National Archives.	Koorie Heritage Taskforce. Melbourne Museum.
Working with Indigenous Communities	Regional officers and consultants.	Indirectly by liaising with research staff.	Research with communities.	Not developed for KHT Cultural Centre, (unlike KHT Oral History Section).	Workshops. Returning human remains.	Not covered in the interview.	Locally to improve access.	Koorie Heritage Trust
Possibilities for Empowering Indigenous Australians	Use Aboriginal terminology. Collaboration/ partnership.	Digitisation of resources for web use.	Access global resources on the web.	Cultivate liaison with Melbourne Museum, SLV and Koories.	Research and catalogue the collection. Work with KHT.	Web access with images of Indigenous resources.	Greater web access and detailed indexing.	Use of AIATSIS thesaurus terms for federated searching.

3.2 Institutional Mission and Philosophy

Individual cultural institutions play a valuable role in society. Each has its own distinctive function, like separate parts of a jigsaw that together form a picture. Collectively these organisations are enabling access to recorded knowledge of Australian Indigenous cultural heritage. AAV, KHTCC, and PROV have mandates which confine their activities to the Victorian region. AAV is working to protect *in situ* in the landscape Indigenous cultural heritage objects, such as a tree from which a canoe has been cut, rock painting, and sacred sites where remnants of past activities are visible. AAV manages archaeological digs which are uncovering Aboriginal artefacts. The contractor and/or researcher may be working with the local Indigenous community. Some of the finds are cared for by community members; some are directed to the Melbourne Museum; and others remain at the site.

In contrast, KHTCC is collecting Koorie artefacts and pictures (including paintings), and photographs. Whatever is purchased or added to their in-house collection by donation must in some way contribute to understanding the Koorie way of life, past and present. The heritage collection is being enlarged where possible, and enriched by contemporary objects so as to record the development of Aboriginal culture over time. PROV is engaged in collecting and preserving official documentation emanating from Victorian Government departments and agencies, for the use of official bodies and the public. PROV's mission is broad in scope and the nature of government business and the handling of records do not allow a neat categorisation by subject of Indigenous matters. Aboriginal documentation is dispersed throughout the collection and must be sought in the records of relevant government departments.

From the 1850s, the other three Victorian Institutions (the MM, the NGV, and the SLV) formed the cultural triangle at one Melbourne city block. This was before the Museum and the Gallery moved to other locations, allowing the Library to expand to accommodate its growing collection. Unlike AAV, KCHCC, and PROV, the collecting activities of these institutions are not restricted to Victoria.

The MM's history reflects the strengths of staff interests in collecting Aboriginal artefacts while working in the field well beyond the Victorian boundary. In just over half a century after settlement, the impact of European culture had been considerable on the Victorian Indigenous way of life. By the time the Museum opened, there was little of the original Victorian Indigenous cultural landscape remaining to add to the Museum's collection. While there are collections of Aboriginal anthropological information and artefacts from various parts of Australia, the strength of the collection is outside Victoria. Also the MM has a collection of artefacts of archaeological importance. The MM is active in returning human remains which were collected by Victorian institutions to Indigenous communities. For many years collecting human remains was a common practice world-wide for the purpose of scientific endeavour. The MM's mission is to build a representative Victorian Indigenous collection of appropriate museum objects but not to the exclusion of other Australian geographic areas. This philosophy is replicated by the SLV in its policy of providing a resource of Indigenous library materials.

The SLV strives to collect documents, pictures, photographs, and manuscripts which reflect Victoria's Aboriginal history anthropologically, culturally and socially. The Library has built a strong Indigenous collection, which is an essential resource for Aboriginal Victorians and researchers. It maintains a less developed collection for other parts of Australia, which are the province of the other State Libraries. The Gallery is a collector of paintings and objects relevant to the Indigenous artistic culture Australia-wide.

Unlike the Victorian institutions, the Canberra based AIATSIS Library and the CCR at the ANU, can each be described as having a nationalistic philosophy. The AIATSIS Library, while primarily collecting resources for its own staff, is a specialised library for Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander studies. By default it is the national resource centre for library materials in this culturally significant field. The AIATSIS Library leads the way and is sought out by other libraries, including the SLV which considers its resources as complementary to their own collection. The AIATSIS Library mission is for Australia-wide resource coverage including the Torres Strait Islands.

The research centre at the ANU is not restricted geographically. Where there is research potential emanating from work in the area of Indigenous Australians, the CCR seeks financial support through the Australian Research Council. The CCR aims to research proposals from well grounded preliminary investigations and discussions with those active in the field. Museums throughout the world have collections of Australian Indigenous artefacts, such as the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford, England. It is appropriate to find ways of enabling access to these collections in Australia. Australia is their source of origin and home base. By providing access for those who need the resources for knowledge discovery is highly commendable and a means to empower Indigenous communities.

Today, Arnhem Land in the far north of Australia is one area that provides opportunities for the Museum and the Gallery to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in their traditional ways. On the whole, the European culture has not had the same invasive impact on the traditions of these societies, even in the 21st century. However, there is the dark side where the Aboriginal youth struggles with cultural tensions and the destructive nature of alcohol in a disintegrating traditional life style. The positive side is the coming of the computer together with the Internet and cultural centres to some Aboriginal communities, thereby cultivating a sense of pride in their Australian Indigenous heritage.

3.3 Facilitating Knowledge Discovery for Indigenous People

Rapid technological advances have provided the impetus and a way forward to achieve remarkable feats in knowledge discovery for Indigenous people. Without the computer and the Internet it would not be possible to access collections of objects wherever they are needed. While institutions are at the beginning of this exciting venture which supports the empowerment of Indigenous communities, it is interesting to look at the direction of progress, however small. The following is a summary of the technological challenges facing the eight institutions and the ways in which knowledge discovery is being facilitated for Aboriginal Australians.

The AAV Heritage Registry database is made available by region for use by the cultural heritage program for the particular area of regional Victoria. Local communities can access relevant information at the regional office rather than contacting Melbourne where the database is maintained. AAV does not provide access to the public so that the development of web-based access is a timely approach for incorporating changes and replacing the quarterly produced CDs. Upgrades to AAV's use of ArcView software, the capability of 3D presentation, and the ongoing application of ArcView's GIS module for geographic representation of the Indigenous landscape are ever present challenges.

Similar technological challenges to those of AAV are evident for all other institutions. ICTs are a vital component for facilitating knowledge discovery for Indigenous people. KHTCC is developing home-grown software, which is unusual today with the plethora of software packages available off-the-shelf. At the KHTCC sophistication of the software increases in tandem with the growth of the collection. It is a concern for future network interoperability for knowledge discovery where there is ad hoc

development for a particular institution. The exhibitions at the KHT gallery, the engagement of Aboriginal employees and the availability of a library for public use provide support to those searching for knowledge about the Koorie cultural heritage.

The MM is addressing an enormous technological challenge centralising the database administration from sectional control and implementing the EMu software. EMu offers unprecedented complexity of search discovery and control over its collection. Some of the ways the Museum is assisting knowledge discovery for Indigenous people is through exhibitions and displays, educational seminars, web accessible information sheets, and assisting individual inquiries.

Similarly, the NGV is facilitating knowledge discovery about its collection by implementing the Vernon software. It has completed photographing its Australian Indigenous Collection to input into the database, which will allow web access to its collection. The Vernon software, like the EMu software, offers great potential for complex questioning of the database for knowledge discovery.

PROV, as all the institutions with custodial collections, has the ongoing challenge of system upgrades. Access to the collection is facilitated by provision for advance online bookings of records at its website and subsequent use at PROV at a specified time. PROV has specialised staff to assist the public in knowledge discovery, with some Indigenous employees facilitating communication with Aboriginal Australians.

The SLV uses the popular Voyager library system and needs to keep abreast of upgrades to the database software. It is challenged by its digitisation programme aiming for access to collection resources online on the web. In its online web catalogue, colour images of pictures are available for access. The SLV is a participant in the highly successful National Library of Australia (NLA) *Picture Australia* database. It is opening up picture resources throughout Australia, thereby enabling remote access for Indigenous people via the internet.

The AIATSIS Library web-based catalogue with detailed metadata application is available on the internet. *Libraries Australia*, the NLA's online union catalogue of holdings of contributing Australian libraries, complements the AIATSIS catalogue by possibly providing other library locations closer to home. Two areas which are proving technologically challenging for AIATSIS are its online web thesaurus available free for global application, and web access to digitised resources.

In order to facilitate knowledge discovery for Indigenous people, it is essential for the CCR to address the ongoing challenges of technology in its research strategy. It has a vision of global access to institutional custodial collections worldwide. This encompasses connecting Australian Indigenous collections for easy access from one web location, such as a portal, and using the Internet as the vehicle to facilitate access to the digitised resources.

3.3.1 Cataloguing and Metadata

The quality of cataloguing and the application of metadata elements within the catalogue collection records, such as subject and author, are crucial in the application of sophisticated software for complex discovery of resources. NGV has the Vernon software, which has great potential for resource discovery but first the foundations need to be dug to accommodate this development. There is a cataloguing backlog and the institution has historical challenges with cataloguing practice and terminology which need to be aligned for optimal discovery of resources by the advanced software.

The same can be said for the MM and the SLV with their collections dating from the mid-1800s. The MM has in-house lists of terminology which need to be researched in conjunction with the historical records contemporary for the times. The SLV

cataloguing and terminology has evolved over 150 years, with existing records not updated at the time of major changes. It is hoped the SLV will adopt the AIATSIS thesaurus now that the Library of Congress has recognised this subject heading list and advocated its use. The Library of Congress subject headings were underdeveloped for use for Australian Indigenous resources, which had posed a problem for many years.

In contrast, the KHTCC does not have such a historical backlog of records to address in the online catalogue as it is an institution established towards the end of the 20th century. However, its in-house cataloguing practice, including metadata application from its own lists is a concern when it is developing in isolation from similar institutions in the field.

PROV has its own set of problems in facilitating knowledge discovery because of the nature of official records and the way these are handled. The lodging institutions provide broad, not detailed cataloguing and descriptive terms for their documents. More detail is provided by organisations lodging electronic records. PROV is addressing this issue by undertaking indexing projects, and when Indigenous information is uncovered by chance it is indexed. Published guides to the collection to assist Indigenous people to find family connections are particularly useful.

AAV is unique among the institutions as it is dealing with resources in the landscape. It relies on consultants and archaeologists to provide detailed description of these resources on prescriptive forms. Interestingly, the Aboriginal communities assisting in these ventures use archaeological terminology and European place names rather than their own language terms. This is unfortunate as the Aboriginal language names for objects and places peculiar to an area and a particular Indigenous community could well be lost. Aboriginal heritage is couched in European language to bring it in line with scientific practice. This needs to change so that both of these aspects are recorded officially.

3.4 Constraints to Knowledge Discovery

The major constraint to facilitating knowledge discovery for Aboriginal Australians at the eight institutions studied can be summed up in three words 'limited human resources.' The impact of working with insufficient resources to move forward with satisfaction is felt most by the large institutions, such as the MM and the NGV. These institutions are grappling with the implementation of new systems for their collections and the challenges of improved technology to achieve the optimal outcome for their needs. Grappling with the enormous relocation of MM collections to a new building ensured that boxed artefacts remained so. A hold was placed on promoting the inquiry service as insufficient staff members were available for handling an increase in inquiries.

Unregistered and uncatalogued backlogs are evident at the MM and the NGV. The implementation of the Vernon software at the NGV cannot fulfil its potential until the system's foundations are in place. Advanced cataloguing of resources is needed to make use of the power of resource discovery that the new technology offers. At the KHTCC, the uncatalogued photographs are boxed for future attention when resources are available. The SLV and AIATSIS require financial assistance to expand their digitisation programmes to enable Internet access to important resources Australia-wide and globally. The CCR needs financial resources so that its dream of an interconnected world-wide access to Australian Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander objects is realised.

Both AAV and PROV with additional resources would be able to develop more satisfactorily areas of knowledge management for empowering Indigenous communities. Land titles need to be annotated with AAV information so that when a

title is transferred, a new owner is aware of any culturally significant areas on the land at the time of purchase. PROV has undergone a move to new premises and while the collection is linear in arrangement by government departments and agencies, access to detailed information is possible by indexing. There is a strong need for knowledge discovery by Indigenous communities.

3.5 **Addressing Issues and Constraints in Knowledge Discovery**

An important way of addressing issues and constraints of knowledge discovery so as to empower Indigenous communities is for institutions to work together in collaboration and partnership, and to work with the Aboriginal communities. AAV is not an active participant in developing lines of communication with other institutions (as are the CCR, MM, PROV and the SLV), although it has worked with Indigenous communities on special projects. At KHTCC, networking is not developed, although the KHT Oral History Section is reliant on this type of involvement for the success of its work with Koorie communities. PROV and the SLV are active members of the Koorie Heritage Taskforce, which has been responsible for publishing a guide for assisting in discovering cultural heritage memories and family relationships. PROV networks with the Canberra-based National Archives and other State record offices. The SLV works with the MM and the KHT. The KHT is the centre for Victorian Indigenous oral history. The SLV does not collect in this area by mutual agreement. As the KHT is responsible for maintaining this resource area, all inquiries at the SLV are sent to the KHT Oral History Section for use of this resource.

The AIATSIS Library works indirectly with Indigenous communities by liaising with its research staff that have direct contact with Aboriginal communities and Indigenous employees. It has cultivated relationships with the Australian National and State Libraries. The MM works in collaboration with research institutions, including universities. It works with Indigenous communities through workshops and answering individual inquiries. Museum collection objects are being reproduced for repatriation to communities in digitised form at the request of the communities. The CCR networks with institutions throughout Australia and abroad, undertaking research with Indigenous communities while building respect and working together. Aspects of working with Indigenous communities, and working in collaboration and partnership with other institutions were not covered in the NGV interview.

3.6 **Possible Future Directions for the Indigenous Cultural Heritage Collections**

There has been a remarkable change in attitude towards Indigenous Australians in the community, emanating from the top with the respect shown by Kevin Rudd, the Australian Prime Minister who was able to say 'sorry' to Aboriginal Australians for the plight of Aboriginal children being taken forcefully from their families and placed in institutions as government policy for many years. Rudd said 'sorry' on behalf of the Australian people in 2008. Today's Australian of the year is Professor Mick Dodson from AIATSIS who has worked tirelessly for Indigenous Australians and is vocal in promoting their well-being. With this change in attitude in society gaining momentum, possibilities for empowering Indigenous Australians through institutional knowledge discovery and education are greatly enhanced.

AAV can be more pro-active in this area by adopting Aboriginal terminology for use in its Heritage Registry database as well as the present use of archaeological terminology. By collaborative ventures and partnerships such as with the Titles Office, this will assist Indigenous Australians to connect with their past. A positive step for the KHTCC is cultivating liaisons with the MM, SLV and the Koorie communities. It needs to catalogue its collection of boxed historic photographs. The MM has an enormous task of registering, cataloguing and researching a collection spanning over 150 years so that the new discovery software can be applied optimally. The MM and the KHT need clarification on collection policy for Victorian objects, in

particular those which present themselves at auction. By opening up the custodial collections, pathways are provided for restoring memory and repatriation of objects, helping to empower communities through knowledge discovery of their heritage.

While the NGV is grappling with system and cataloguing issues, its aim for web access to records for Indigenous resources with attached images is a policy moving in the right direction. PROV is working to provide greater transparency to its collections by digging deep. Through information mining and indexing of Indigenous resources, its web based resources can be enriched by future enhancements. The SLV and the MM are moving toward web access to their resources so as to make their collections available to distant users. Again this is a step in the right direction, although these are long-term projects. The SLV needs to reassess its indexing terminology for Indigenous resources now that AIATSIS thesaurus terms are being supported by the Library of Congress. Uniformity of terminology use by institutions is a step towards federated searching and interoperability on the web. The vision for empowering Australian communities through knowledge discovery is envisaged by the CCR. Digitisation can penetrate institutional walls so that there is access to global Aboriginal Australian objects on the web for viewing in Australia and elsewhere.

4. Looking Forward

Australia's national anthem is *Advance Australia Fair.* There has been a half- hearted acceptance of this anthem by many, if not most Australians. In May 2009, Judith Durham, from Melbourne, Victoria (lead singer from the vocal group 'The Seekers') released a CD. Working with Indigenous people she has rewritten new words for the anthem. The end result appears to be an anthem that all Australians can relate and it has been enthusiastically received by Aboriginal Australians. The first four lines of the first verse are as follows:

> Australia, celebrate as one, with peace and harmony.
> Our precious water, soil and sun, grant life for you and me.
> Our land abounds in nature's gifts to love, respect and share,
> And honouring the Dreaming, advance Australia fair.

These words relate to the Aboriginal way of life and 'the Dreaming'. The second verse reflects the recent change of attitude to Aboriginal Australians in Australian society. Durham's empathy with Indigenous Australians has made the writing of these words possible:

> Australia, let us stand as one, upon this sacred land.
> A new day dawns, we're moving on to trust and understand.
> Combine our ancient history and cultures everywhere,
> To bond together for all time, advance Australia fair.

It is by working together and understanding each other's cultures that empowerment of Australian Indigenous communities is possible. The tensions of an ancient society (inhabiting Australia for 60,000 years) and a modern European society arriving at the end of the 18th century need to be reconciled. Knowledge discovery in institutions which are custodians of times past, such as museums, is essential for empowering Australian Indigenous communities in our society. A way forward for Indigenous communities is to know the past and restore the memory of ancient times.

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