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Decolonisation, Indigenisation and Digital Return: Two Case Studies from Australia

by Anna Edmundson

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Since the 1980s, museums have increasingly begun to re-evaluate their relationships and responsibilities with regards to First Nations and formerly colonised peoples. As museums begin to fully engage with the concept of 'decolonisation' (Lonetree 2011; Oncuil 2015; Giblin *et al.* 2019; Neale and Kowal 2020), developing appropriate protocols and practices for the custodianship of cultural collections and cultivating respectful relationships with originating communities have become central priorities for moving forward.

As part of this wider shift, the repatriation of ancestral remains and cultural patrimony and the digital return of cultural knowledge has become a critical area of research and engagement (Simpson 2009; Turnbull and Pickering 2010; Salmond 2012; Fforde *et al.* 2020; Neale and Kowal 2020; Morphy 2020; Pickering 2020).

Museum decolonisation has been defined as 'a process of acknowledging the historical, colonial contingencies under which collections were acquired; revealing Eurocentric ideology and biases in the Western museum concept, discourse and practice; acknowledging and including diverse voices and multiple perspectives; and transforming museums through sustained critical analysis and concrete actions' (Kreps 2011, p.72). Calls to decolonise museums and other collecting institutions may take many different forms, encompassing a wide range of actions reflective of different historical, legal, socio-political and economic circumstances. In Settler Nations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States (among others), decolonisation initiatives may be complicated by the fact that 'colonisation' has not necessarily ended. For First Nations peoples, ongoing inequity, and the residual trauma of historical violence and dispossession, means that relationships between First Nations and Settler States continue to be contested and complex.

Since 2000, the Australian government has recognised the return of ancestral remains, sacred patrimony and documentary heritage to First Nations communities as a central pillar of reconciliation and healing (AIATSIS 2020). While other Settler Nations such as the United States have relied on legislation (notably the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act 1990), the Australian model has been dependent on proactive negotiation between Australian collecting institutions and Australian First Nations, stopping short of direct legislation (Pickering 2011; 2020).¹ Despite the lack of formal legislation, Australia has become a recognised world leader in the field of repatriation and digital returns. This success can be attributed to three main factors: sustained advocacy and activism on the part of Indigenous Australians; a willingness of Australian collecting institutions to respond proactively to decolonisation and Indigenisation incentives; and, critically, financial support for museums and communities on the part of the federal government.

While 20th-century returns prioritised the repatriation of ancestral remains and secret/sacred materials, the 21st century has seen calls for the wider return of movable cultural patrimony and a restoration of intellectual authority and sovereignty over significant tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Since the 'digital turn', multi-sited initiatives and collaborations between museums, universities and communities have led to the development of a number of community archives (including specialist software and databases), maintained and controlled by communities and designed for exclusive community access and use.² Collectively, these projects have forged new ground in the development of community-led protocols for developing online access, information-sharing and classification systems for First Nations cultural heritage. This article centres on two digital return projects led by Yolngu community stakeholders from North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. Both projects illustrate how concepts of decolonisation and Indigenisation have been mobilised by Yolngu people within an affirmative action framework to overcome past malpractices, and to bring about a transformative environment of cultural reclamation and sovereignty. Both projects have served as pioneering models for digital return initiatives in Australia and internationally.

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The discussion begins by briefly addressing some of the critical differences between the repatriation of ancestral remains and moveable cultural property versus the return of documentary heritage in the form of digital 'archives' (including collection images and provenance data, photographs, film and sound recordings). It then outlines two different, but related, pathways taken by Yolngu stakeholders in establishing cultural archiving projects centred on decolonising and Indigenising museum collections through collaborative partnerships with museums and universities. Inherent in these discussions is the idea that decolonisation is complex, multi-sited and multi-focal. The article concludes by arguing that museums need to be proactive in reconnecting collections and communities. Working collaboratively with First Nations and formerly colonised peoples to restore cultural knowledge lost as a direct result of colonisation is a vital step for moving forward.

Repatriation versus digital return

Studying the connections between digital return and Indigenous wellbeing is an important area of emerging research. In the Australian context, research has been developing in this domain for almost two decades (Christen 2011; Ormond-Parker and Sloggett 2012; Barwick *et al.* 2019; Lydon and Oxenham 2019, AIATSIS 2020, Fforde *et al.* 2020, Morphy 2020). Returning collections in the form of digital surrogates has been demonstrated to enhance the restitution of cultural knowledge and its intergenerational transmission in originating communities through prompting linguistic and cultural revivals, generating new cultural performances and artistic creations, facilitating inter-communal collaborations, and returning agency over cultural collections and the knowledge that relates to them (Ibid.).

While not replacing the need for repatriation of physical objects, digital return projects have their own independent value and goals aimed at preserving, reviving and sustaining cultural knowledge (Christen 2011, p. 187). Focusing on cooperative partnerships and capacity-building, these types of return form a vital component of information sharing and transparency for post-colonial museums.

However, some confusion still exists between the different practices and values of digital return versus repatriation. The term 'virtual repatriation' originated in the mid-1990s to describe the process of returning information about museum collections through photographs of objects and provenance documentation (Dobbin 2013, p. 130). Since then, the terms 'digital repatriation' and 'visual repatriation' have gained popularity as a means of describing the return of documentary heritage to originating communities through digital surrogates.

Although the terms remain widely used, First Nations scholars (among others) have cautioned against eliding the concept of *repatriation* with that of *digital* or *archival return*. While acknowledging that both practices lead to positive outcomes for communities, they maintain that the term *repatriation* should be reserved for the unconditional return of ancestral remains and patrimonial objects to their place of origin, whereby the receiving community assumes full legal control of the repatriated material (Krpmotich 2011; Boast and Enot 2013; AIATSIS 2020).³ In contrast, *digital return* refers to the practice of creating digital surrogates of documentary heritage (photographs, films, audio, maps, government records, collection images and documentation as well as other forms of media that are considered to be of cultural or historical significance) and returning them to originating communities (Christen 2011; Krmpotich 2011; Hogsden and Poulter 2012; Bell *et al.* 2013).

Digital return projects are particularly suited to situations in which communities are seeking the return of cultural knowledge rather than the return of specific things. Within this framework, what is being 'returned' is not a singular, tangible entity (such as the remains of an ancestor or an item of sacred patrimony) but rather intangible cultural heritage in the form of knowledge embedded in digital records or archives. For example, a community might request that a partner organisation – such as a museum or university – gather and collate all existing research documentation (audiovisual material, research publications, historic writings, field notes, and lists of related objects held in museum collections) relating to a particular sacred site. The intent here is not the return of any specific item, but rather to

gather the widest range of historic documentation that that will allow traditional knowledge-holders to better manage their cultural responsibilities and custodianship of a given site. Other examples might include: the return of historic film and sound recordings where digital files are preferred to the original (often technically obsolete) tape or video cassette; where the return of spiritually powerful objects is considered dangerous, and therefore digital copies are substituted; where communities wish for their cultural objects to remain within the collecting institution, but require proper consultation about provenance, access, storage and display; or where repatriation is not currently possible due to lack of infrastructural capacity.

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Objects versus archives

Scholars working in the field of repatriation and return have observed that many Indigenous communities have expressed suspicion about the use of the term 'digital repatriation', seeing it as an attempt on the part of museums to avoid the physical repatriation of inalienable cultural patrimony by returning digital surrogates instead (Singh and Blake 2012; Boast and Enot 2013; Bell *et al.* 2013). For this reason, I would argue that museums and other cultural collecting institutions involved in digital return projects need to be conscious of the language that they use.

Whereas repatriation involves the return of singular, unique, irreplaceable and non-substitutable items, the return of 'archives' can more generally be conceptualised as replicating and sharing historical records for the benefit of communities.

Museum objects represent a unique category of collective patrimony in the form of tangible items, carefully preserved over time to serve as essential mnemonic markers of shared history, civic values and identity. They constitute what the anthropologist Annette Weiner (1992, p.36) has called 'inalienable possessions': objects whose value is derived from their owner's ability to deliberately

keep them out of circulation; these are things that are not exchangeable for anything else. Museums come into conflict with communities when the same objects preserved and valued in museums as wider humanist or scientific patrimony (universal, national or regional) are also considered as inalienable patrimony for specific cultural groups (Edmundson 2022).

In contrast, archives represent 'physical or digital collections of historical records' pertaining to 'documentary evidence of past events' (Society of American Archivists n.d.). Archives tend to be conceptualised as things that are infinitely replicable, as they are primarily related to record-keeping. They are repositories of knowledge that can be used over and over again for research purposes by multiple parties (Krupa and Grimm 2021).

If we shift the conversation from visual repatriation to digital or archival return, we can begin to gain a better understanding of how data archiving projects have their own separate agendas and purposes to that of repatriation. Digitisation refers to the process of creating a (digital) copy of an existing item, which can then be stored and shared electronically (Cullingford 2022).

In this sense, a digitised image of a museum object (as well as metadata such as provenance documentation) can be seen as existing in the realm of *archives* rather than *objects*. What is being digitally shared (or returned) are not tangible singular objects, but virtual images of the objects, enhanced by associated provenance documentation (field notes, maps, provenance data, photographic images, or even sound recordings, performances and commentaries involving the use of objects). Digital return projects are therefore not concerned with the repatriation of objects, but rather the more equitable sharing of archival data, in order to return knowledge and restore agency to originating communities. The purpose of digital return is to 'establish wider access to cultural collections for source communities and to establish new and more equitable relationships with museums, which result in meaningful engagement and exchange' (Barrkman 2017, p. 24).

In order to more concretely illustrate the different values and benefits of digital return projects, I now want to turn to two examples relating to the digital of cultural knowledge led by Australian First Nations community stakeholders.

The Mulka Project

The Yolngu are an aggregation of multiple communities living in North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. In 1998, Yolngu community stakeholders in the town of Yirrkala began planning the expansion of the Buku-Larrnggay Arts Centre to include digital capacity and to facilitate the creation of a digital archive, which could be harnessed by multiple communities in the region (Lane 2011; Wanambi and Marika 2016). The project had its genesis in an act of generosity when 47 Yolngu artists donated the proceeds from the sale of a collection of paintings known as the 'Saltwater Paintings of Sea Country', which had been purchased in 1998 as a permanent collection by the Australian National Maritime Museum (Lane 2011). The Mulka Project, as it became known, was launched at the art centre in 2007, and has gone on to be one of the most successful cultural archiving projects in Australia.

In Yolngu-matha, the language of the region, the term 'Mulka' has a dual meaning:

Yolngu people ... use the word mulka to describe a sacred but public ceremony. Mulka also means to protect and share things that are important to us – things that hold our identity, our culture, our connection to country and our past. When our people decided to bring together the films, photographs and audio recordings made in and about our community, the Mulka Project was born (Wanambi and Marika 2016, p. 2).

The Mulka Project functions as both a cultural archive and a digital production centre. As a cultural archive and digital library, it focuses on the digitisation and return of Yolngu cultural materials held off-country in museums, universities and other cultural collecting institutions. As a production centre, it provides

Yolngu youth with access to equipment and training to document their culture through digital media (Wanambi and Marika 2016, p. 4). Inherent in the conception of the Mulka Project is the idea of Yolngu people regaining access and control over the vast array of documentary heritage which has been produced with, and about, them since the 1920s.

From its inception the leaders of the Mulka Project set out to foster partnerships with universities, museums and individual researchers holding collections, archives and knowledge significant to the region. Working with university and museum researchers in multiple Australian Research Council-funded projects, they were able to capitalise on a 'hub and spokes model' (Morphy 2015), whereby key museums partners in Australia, Britain and the United States worked collegially to locate and digitise Yolgnu cultural and documentary heritage held in distributed collections.⁴



Fig. 1. Frances Morphy at the Mulka Centre in May 2020, looking at a photo of herself taken in 1975. © Howard Morphy

A process of collaborative endeavour and 'two-way' learning has been critical to the Mulka Project's successful interactions with the museum world:

We have been through all the major museums and galleries across Australia, helping their staff refine their collections and looking for material for ours. Many Australian museums have large photo archives of 'unknown' Aboriginal people. One of our jobs has been to help the museums 'name' the people. When we find photos, sound and film footage from our communities we ask the museum for a copy and then we add it to The Mulka Project. We really enjoy this two-way learning, where we work with the museum teams to improve their knowledge and we get to learn more about collections (Wanambu and Marika 2016, p. 5).

I first became aware of the Mulka Project in 2017, when I was working as a Research Fellow with Professor Howard Morphy at the Australian National University. Leading up to his upcoming retirement, Howard wanted to be sure that his nearly 50 year-long research legacy could be actively accessible to Yolngu people. A large proportion of his research and photographic archives had already been deposited with both the Mulka Project and with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Australia's peak body for Indigenous research. However, his office still contained an expansive collection of additional material, including some early audiovisual materials filmed on now-obsolete devices, which needed specialist computer hardware and software to be played and copied. By the time that the digitisation process was complete we had digitised and catalogued around 1,500 photographic slides and 200 hours of audio visual recordings for return to Yirrkala.

Howard had first arrived in Yirrkala in 1973 to undertake doctoral research on Yolngu art through the Australian National University. His wife, Frances, accompanied him and, in addition to writing the first grammar of a Yolngu language, researched women's cultural production. The Morphys' acute focus on art creation (illustrated in numerous photographic sequences) as well as art value (recorded through interviews with the artists) makes for a compelling record of almost four decades of art production in a remote community. As I began the process of digitising and cataloguing the material, I became aware of how important the archive was, covering almost 40 years of successive engagement with Yolngu people, with a central focus on Yolngu art.



Fig. 2. Narritjin Maymuru completing a painting titled *Yinapuṇapu* (now in the collection of the National Museum of Australia), 1974, Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land. © Howard Morphy

One of the significant values of this archive lies in the careful planning and documentation of the photographic and film sequences. For example, one series of slides shows the artist Narritjin Maymuru producing a bark painting, documenting each stage of the process, with particular motifs and explanations of the different stages written in pencil on the slide frame. Similar series show various artists painting, carving sculptures, making spears and harvesting bark for paintings. Other examples include hundreds of hours of film footage of people, community events and public ceremonies taken between 1973 and 2015. Although some of this footage appears in published films, the digitisation and return of the full sequences of raw footage allows Yolngu people to engage with the material on a different level; it can (for example) be repurposed for music videos, vlogs and community-focused short films.

Going through the images and adding additional documentation with Frances and Howard Morphy added important contextual information, such as specifying where an artwork ended up (in private or public collections), or the historical context in which an artwork was made. Adding search terms relevant for Yolngu researchers, such as artists' moiety and clan and changing the database from English to Yolngu orthography

added an important 'localising' element for the audio-visual archive database. As part of the digitising and return process, the Mulka centre was accorded unlimited copyright for use of the images and films by Yolngu people for their own purposes. However, as original creators, the Morphys still retain their own use rights for their research and publishing.

This illustrates how the issue of copyright has become an important aspect of data-sharing for museums and communities involved in digital return projects. While issues of hierarchies of access and cultural protocols inevitably occur, the value of shared copyright means handing over authority for local access and use to communities so that the appropriate knowledge-holders become responsible for appropriate community access and use, rather than external museum bodies (Morphy 2015). Data sovereignty allows communities to control rights of access and distribution of digital images and information on their own terms (Morphy 2022).

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From its inception, the Mulka Project was both conceived of and carried out along the lines of a distinctly Yolngu ontology:

Through our journey Yolngu law was passed on to outsiders with their cameras and microphones who wanted to understand the way we live and survived. Now we're still passing on our law through cameras and microphones, but instead we got the facilities on our country, to share our law with our people and the world (Wanambi, cited by Lane 2011, p. 85).

The project's success has been dependent on the fact that the Mulka Project was made for Yolngu, by Yolngu and along Yolngu principles. This has seen Yolngu people take control of their representation by outsiders to renew and reclaim this material for ongoing cultural revitalisation.



Fig. 3. Bandaka Mununggurr processing bark for making a bark painting, 1974, Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land. © Howard Morphy

The Gupapuyngu Legacy Project

In 2002, around the same time that the Mulka Project was being planned, a similar project was in discussion on Elcho Island, 133 kilometres east of Yirrkala. The Galiwin'ku Indigenous Knowledge Centre (GIKC), named after the island's only town, was a pilot project for an experimental digital archive funded by the Northern Territory Libraries and Information Services. The project was led by three brothers of the Gupapuyngu clan, Joseph Neparrnga Gumbala, Henry Djerringgal Gaykamangu and Matthew Gaykamangu, along with Liyagawumirr clan leader Richard Gandhuwuy Garrawurra (De Largy Healy 2018, p. 150). In 2002, internet access in the region was slow and unreliable, and mobile phones would not be readily available for another four years. For various reasons, the idea in its original form proved unsustainable. However, this marked an important turning point for Gumbala, the youngest of the three brothers, who was tasked with the mission of researching his families' legacy collections held in museums around the world and bringing the knowledge home (Ibid., p. 150).

Gumbala's work would place him at the vanguard of early scholarly research on Indigenous cultural archiving, digital innovation, and knowledge restoration through archival returns (Corn 2018; De Largy Healy 2018; Hamby 2018). He was to devote the rest of his life to digitally returning Yolngu legacy collections back to country, as well as teaching *Balanda* (non-Yolngu) museum staff and university researchers proper ways of understanding, displaying and preserving Yolngu cultural material held in their collections.

Gumbala came from a long line of ceremonial leaders of the Gupapuyngu clan, traditional custodians of the land in and around the island and township of Milingimbi (Corn 2018, p. 77). While in his late teens, Gumbala relocated to Galiwin'ku to join the country and gospel band Soft Sands as a singer and guitarist, where he lived until his death in 2015. However, he maintained close ties to his patrilineal clan and country, as well as representing Yolngu people and collections more generally on the world stage. Gumbala's participation in Soft Sands, the first Yolngu band to receive national popularity in Australia, brought him into regular contact with the *Balanda* world of popular music, but also anchored him through his song writing in Yolngu music and the

hereditary *manikay* (song cycles) which were the recorded oral histories of his patrilineal clan.

In 1997, after many years of training, Gumbala had completed the process of becoming a public ceremonial leader with extensive knowledge of his 'hereditary *manikay* repertoire... combining this with his extensive knowledge of executing sacred names, dances and designs to activate ancestral relationships with country" (Corn 2018, p. 84). That same year he wrote the song 'Djiliwirri', after a revelatory dream. Making a video clip to accompany the song, Gumbala put in a considerable effort to source a 1964 film made by filmmaker Cecil Holmes about a *djalumbu* (hollow log) public funeral ceremony directed by the former's father, Tom Djäwa (De Largy Healy 2020, p. 244; Corn 2018, p. 83). In the video, Gumbala spliced segments of the historic footage with contemporary footage from a similar ceremony, highlighting a continuum between past and present. According to his close collaborator Aaron Corn, 'Sourcing this film from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Land Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) was the specific labour that ignited the passion for collections research that would motivate Joe for the rest of his life' (Corn 2018, p. 83).

During his lifetime, Gumbala's father, Tom Djäwa, had worked with several Balanda researchers and filmmakers, including the anthropologist Lloyd Warner, assisting with the making of documentary films and creating artworks intended for museum collections (Hamby 2018). Gumbala's grandfather, Narritj Narritj, had also participated in some of the earliest recorded images of Yolngu people in the 1920s (De Largy Healy 2020, p. 244). As Arnhem Land had remained isolated from Europeans until the early 20th century, his family's legacy collections were among the earliest collected Yolngu material held in museums. As part of the European legacy of distributing and trading museum objects between museums, some of these collections ended up in institutions as far abroad as Britain and the United States.

Over time, Gumbala began to take an increasing interest in working collaboratively with museum staff and university researchers to locate, digitise and return images and provenance data relating to his ancestral collections. This project came to be known as the Gupapuyngu Legacy Project, led by Gumbala, his brothers and extended family, in partnership with non-Yolngu colleagues. The aim of the project was

to locate and make accessible the many materials that document[ed] his family history in ethnographic collections around the world, and to make new digital records of the homelands and culture of the Guapauyngu clan for the benefit of future generations (Corn 2018, p. 79).

I met Gumbala in 2015, when he was working with Louise Hamby. I was not involved in the conception of the project, but was assisting Hamby with the creation of a bilingual thesaurus for the project database, which would employ the most common Yolngu-matha and English terms for objects in the distributed collections of Lloyd Warner. It was during this time that I began gaining an appreciation of Gumbala's work, and of how very mixed the provenance of Yolngu collections were, ranging from highly informative data that named people, places and clans, to objects labelled only under the generic description 'Australia'.

Although I never worked closely with him, I was greatly influenced by the few conversations we had, and in which he articulated Yolngu concepts of circularity, gift-giving and reciprocity; these resonated with my own research into local agency in the making of Papua New Guinean colonial collections (Edmundson 2018, 2022). Our conversations reinforced my belief that reciprocity lay at the heart of the decolonisation process. According to Gumbala's philosophy, his father and grandfather has gifted these important objects to the outside world. As gifts, they were embedded in reciprocal-exchange relationships which both parties were held to. As his friend and collaborator, the musicologist Aaron Corn, has observed, 'the Gupapuyngu ethos of forging equitable alliances and sharing with other clans through ceremonial matjabala exchange informed his thinking in forging these new [museum] networks' (2018, p. 84).

As senior representative of the Gupapuyngu clan, Gumbala was not interested in the physical repatriation of cultural material from Milingimbi, but was adamant that the community needed to know about these objects, where they were held, and to be assured that they were being properly cared for (Hamby 2018). If museums were to continue storing, preserving and displaying these significant objects, this meant a commitment to proper documentation and display protocols aligned to Yolngu law (*rom*). As De Largy Healy (2022) observes, '[b]y re-documenting the objects from a Yolngu perspective, through a process of naming and classification, by reconnecting them to living kin, Joe Gumbala strived to restore their full value both in the museum and the community environments' (p. 247).

Within a Yolngu epistemology, actions of the ancestors are repeated in the lives of descendants. When a contemporary individual dances, sings, uses sacred language, performs rituals, or paints motifs that are ancestral, they reconnect with all past lives and ancestors who also used these in the past – right back to the first ancestral beings. Gumbala described his research as following in the footsteps of his ancestors, as well as leaving his own footsteps for future generations: 'for the Yolngu who want to take the next step' (Gumbala 2018, p. 73).

Connecting communities of origin with distributed collections has become a central tenet of contemporary museum practice, recognised as a fundamental human right under the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007). Reconnecting Indigenous communities with heritage collections that were removed as part of the colonisation process is a vital step in decolonisation and reconciliation, restoring greater equity and agency to originating communities and contributing to ongoing community health and wellbeing.

Both the Mulka Project and the Gapupunya Legacy Project provide important examples of First Nations communities leading collaborative exchanges with museums nationally and internationally, in order to take greater control over preserving, accessing and disseminating their cultural heritage along appropriate cultural lines. Through their respective focus on collaboration, community involvement, and the use of emerging digital technologies, these projects have helped to ensure that the rich cultural heritage of the Yolngu people is preserved and accessible for future generations.

The return of documentary heritage in the form of digital archives allows for new possibilities of interpreting and accessing history and memory for First Nations, on their own terms. Most importantly, the return of cultural knowledge embedded in archives allows for greater sovereignty for First Nations and formerly colonised peoples regarding their own histories and identities. While issues of access will inevitably occur, the value of digital repatriation is that such issues become localised, dealt with internally rather than externally. The value and outcome of decolonising archives is not in returning missing things as if they were pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that could suddenly make broken cultures whole. It is about restitution of authority.

As (co)custodians of important cultural heritage, museums and other collecting institutions share a responsibility to support the efforts of originating communities to reclaim their identities and cultural sovereignty in the face of ongoing colonisation and marginalisation. According to Bernice Murphy, former Chair of the ICOM Ethics Committee, it is not sufficient for museums to sit back and wait for change to occur. Rather, museums must be proactive in redressing the imbalances and injustices of our colonial pasts. 'The challenge,' as she notes, 'is for museums to utilise the unique advantages of their multiple resources, to conceive new measures of cooperative endeavour for the research and management of collections and continued care of cultural heritage today' (Murphy 2016, p. 47).

While the concept of decolonising museums is an 'open-ended' one that is interpreted in many different ways across diverse institutions (John Giblin 2019; Krmpotich 2011; Oncuil 2015), at the heart of the decolonisation process is the idea of reconciliation and renewal. A need to 'give back' and to acknowledge the ongoing relationships of originating communities to significant cultural heritage lies at the heart of the decolonisation process.

NOTES

¹ Within the Australian museum sector, several guidelines have been established to fill the gaps left by a lack of federal legislation. The earliest and most significant of these was 'Previous Possessions New Obligations' produced by the Council of Australian Museums Associations in 1993. This was revised by Museums Australia in 2005 and relaunched as 'Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities'. Most recently, in 2018 the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) in partnership with Indigenous lawyer and rights advocate Terri Janke, released 'First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries'.

² These include the Ara Irititja Project (<https://irititja.com/>), Mulka Project (<http://www.mulka.org>), Mukurtu platform (<https://mukurtu.org/>) and OCCAMS (<https://anu.edu.au/occams/>).

³ 'Digital repatriation' should then refer exclusively to the return of born-digital and digitised materials in which full legal control and copyright is accorded to the community of origin.

⁴ This kind of professional collaboration between and across a series of museums sharing related documents and knowledge for the benefit of First Nations communities is highly significant. Some recent Australia Research Council-funded projects involving the digital return of internationally distributed collections to Yolngu communities include The Relational Museum and its Objects (Howard Morphy CI); Clouded and mobile delivery platforms for early collections of Yolngu cultural heritage (Joseph Gumbala CI); The legacy of 50 years of collecting at Milingimbi Mission (Louise Hamby CI); Contexts of Collection, a dialogic approach to the making of the material record of Yolngu cultures (Howard Morphy CI); and Anthropological and Aboriginal perspectives on the Donald Thomson Collection (Nicolas Peterson CI).

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