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## Chapter 7

### Keepsakes and Surrogates: Hijacking Music Technology at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)

Linda Barwick

This paper focuses on some uses of digital recording technology in the township of Wadeye in Australia's Northern Territory, where I recently completed work on a project focusing on *djanba*, a genre of public ceremonial song created and performed by Murriny Patha people.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will draw a distinction between “traditional” song forms like *djanba*—ceremonial genres using indigenous musical forms and instruments whose origins predate contact with Europeans and that continue to be performed because of their fundamental religious and social role—and “non-traditional” musical forms—recently composed secular songs that use introduced musical instruments (guitar, electric piano) and accompanying musical features such as diatonic scales, two-part harmony and strophic form.

The chapter will discuss how emerging non-traditional musical forms composed by members of one of the local Indigenous groups in Wadeye, and the dissemination of these compositions via various digital platforms, continue and develop a strategic assertion of cultural and territorial autonomy and identity through song that was and is also fundamental to traditional musical forms in the area. In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, Indigenous identity is not monolithic: “the voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness”, and the “assertion of territorial (and cultural) autonomy” recognized as common elements of Indigeneity worldwide<sup>2</sup> are cultivated not only in relation to the

nation state, but also in relation to regional and local intergroup relations. The deployment of digital media discussed here concerns local distribution, the construction of local collectivities and intergroup politics; a form of ‘strategic traditionalism’, or perhaps better a ‘strategic blend of traditionalism and innovation’ intended as an intervention in local rather than global discourses of identity.<sup>3</sup> As discussed by Hilder in the introduction to the volume, nuanced attention to creative practice in case studies such as this is needed for the development of broader insights into contemporary global articulations of indigeneity, difference and identity.

Originally established as Port Keats Roman Catholic mission in 1935, the present-day township of Wadeye lies about 250km southwest of Darwin. It is home to approximately 2500 people,<sup>4</sup> mainly Aboriginal people descended from about twenty clans from the surrounding areas, whose members were originally attracted to the settlement by the availability of food, work and schooling. The township lies within the traditional estate of the Kardu Dimirnin clan, who continue to assert their special interest in the town and its surrounding areas. Their traditional language, Murriny Patha (also known as Murrinh-patha)<sup>5</sup> is now spoken as a *lingua franca* by young people of all clans.<sup>6</sup> With about 3000 speakers, Murriny Patha is one of the healthiest indigenous languages in Australia,<sup>7</sup> no doubt due to the relative isolation of the community: the single access road is cut by wet season rains for about six months of each year.

Despite the common spoken language, clan identity continues to be highly relevant at Wadeye, being taught and enacted in many dimensions of life in Wadeye, including the school, church and community governance. The fundamentals of clan-based social organisation in this area have been described since the 1930s by W.E.H. Stanner and J. Falkenberg.<sup>8</sup> Clan organisation predates the founding of the mission, was recognised in mission times (1935–1974) and continues today.<sup>9</sup> People, totems, clans, languages, songs and stories all spring from a common origin in the life-force of the relevant country.<sup>10</sup> Each patrilineal exogamous clan has its own set of *ngakumarl* “totems” and *nguguminggi* “Dreaming sites”, with associated stories and ceremonial obligations. This connection with the ancestral clan country— and associated language, totems, sites and stories—is maintained irrespective of actual residence within the country of another clan (Kardu Dimirnin).

For example, members of the Kungarlbarl clan<sup>11</sup> identify with their ancestral language Marri Ngarr, their *ngakumarl* (totems)—including *ku karnarndurturt* “crocodile” and *nandji bamngutut* “bottle tree” (the boab tree, *Adamsonia Gregorii*)—and their *nguguminggi* (focal sites) within the clan country—including the places Kungarlbarl, Arrntji, Numurli, Banagayi, Yeperrmi, Yeneri and others. Members of the clan bear one of the four main patrilineal surnames, and each person in a clan bears a personal name of a clan site or totem.<sup>12</sup>

Since the 1970s, when the community became independent of the Roman Catholic mission, there have been many changes, including a population boom and the progressive modernisation of the community's infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> As I discuss in more detail later, indigenous ceremonial musical traditions have always had a key role in creating and channelling relationships between people of the area and outsiders. Although at various times the Church attempted to suppress ceremonial practices, during the 1970s and 1980s the development of syncretic forms was encouraged, including the creation of songs in indigenous musical style for liturgical performance<sup>14</sup> as well as efforts to create hymns and other religious-themed songs in Murriny Patha language.

Contact with modern guitar songs had begun in the 1950s, when many men from Wadeye (then Port Keats) worked on cattle stations to the east and south of Wadeye. Furlan reports that at first live music sing-alongs accompanied by guitar were the main form of general contact with popular music, but as elsewhere in Australia, as soon as music technologies for accessing, recording and broadcasting music became available, they were enthusiastically adopted. In the early 1970s, commercial cassette recordings of American popular music artists like Neil Diamond were beginning to become available, and Australian artists like the country singer Slim Dusty presented live concerts in the community. Local guitar bands like the "Last Sunset Band" and the "Iddiyi Bush Band" soon formed, initially performing covers in English of commercial songs, and later creating their own songs in Murriny Patha.<sup>15</sup> AM radio broadcasting began in the late 1970s, and then television in 1987 with the commissioning of the Aussat satellite service, although there were many problems with communication networks for accessing and relaying content. As in many other communities in Australia's Top End, funding to support production and broadcasting of locally recorded material alongside national content was made available through the government-funded Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS).<sup>16</sup>

Over the years, BRACS has been just one of a number of sources of recordings documenting the rich traditional cultural life of Wadeye and its various clans; other collections have been made by local educational and cultural bodies, church and government staff, cultural researchers and visitors. In collaboration with three local institutions—the Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre (WALC), the Kanamkek Yile Ngala Museum and the Wadeye Library and Knowledge Centre (WLKC)—our University of Sydney research team (Allan Marett, Michael Walsh, Joe Blythe, Nick Reid and Lysbeth Ford) recently completed a project to digitise and document all the song recordings held by WALC, and to make them available through a music database in the WLKC.<sup>17</sup> In addition to these recordings of traditional song (many created during previous research projects of our team members) the collection also includes numerous recordings of oral history and language

materials, and non-traditional song genres such as songs from various rock bands documented by University of Sydney postgraduate student Alberto Furlan in 2002-2003, as well as recordings donated by locals of various church songs and hymns in Murriny Patha, some translated from English-language originals, others created during the 1970s and 1980s in the course of song-writing workshops sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.<sup>18</sup>

Since the establishment of the WKLC database in 2003, almost all new additions have been “funeral songs”, an emerging syncretic genre that draws on precedents from both traditional music and non-traditional styles including hymns and western-influenced popular music. Indeed, according to staff at the Library and Knowledge Centre, the main use for the music database since 2003 has been to provide music for playing at funerals in the Catholic church, a function that was previously provided by live performance of one of the traditional song genres *djanba*, *wangga* and *lirrga* (these will be discussed in some detail later in the chapter). When a person dies, it is important that their spirit returns to their home site within clan country, so performance of clan-based songs is particularly important at this time. Recordings from the music database, selected to match the clan of the deceased, are burned to CD and played over the PA system of the church during the funeral. On occasion, new songs are also composed and recorded for later use at funerals, and added in turn to the music database.

Through detailed attention to one case study of songs created for a funeral in 2009, this chapter will address the modalities of production of these funeral song recordings, and how the adoption of new technologies for recording, editing and tagging sound files supports various aspects of traditional social organisation while creating new channels for social interaction and displacing old ones. I am particularly interested in the extent to which localised diversity of clan affiliation is played out in the composition, performance, content and circulation of the songs.

To frame my understanding of the significance of these emerging musical practices, and bearing in mind that readers may have little previous acquaintance with social and musical institutions in this remote area of Australia, later in this chapter I will spend some time explaining the social history of music in the Wadeye area, and in particular the ways in which ceremonial performance has functioned to support different layers of individual and group identification within a complex social fabric. But let us first turn to the case study.

### **Some Funeral Songs Recorded in 2009**

The case study concerns four funeral songs I recorded in 2009, at the request of the family of a young woman from the Kungarlbarl clan who had died some

weeks earlier but whose funeral was to be held the following day. That day, I had been working on recordings of old *djanba* songs in the Kanamkek Yile Ngala Museum with the deceased woman's brother-in-law and elder sister, when they asked me to come down to their house later that day to record a Kungarlbarl song to be played at the funeral.

The first song was in fact recorded even before I reached my friends' house. Seeing me head out the door with my microphone and recorder, another family from the same Kungarlbarl clan as the deceased woman stopped me on the verandah of the Museum and begged me to record first the song they had composed in memory of the deceased. They pulled out a sheet of paper with the words written down on it, arranged an extension lead to plug in the electric keyboard they had brought with them, and sat down on the verandah with me to record the song. Two women, Kungarlbarl clan members, sang while the husband of one of them played the keyboard.

Example 7.1. Musical transcription of two verses of the Kungarlbarl song composed by MK, as performed by MK and CM, accompanied on electric piano by LD, at Wadeye, June 29, 2009. Recording and transcription by Linda Barwick.

Ka - nyi - wa - - - - - nan - dji - nga - rra      bam - ngu - tut

2      - Pi rri dha      ma - nan - dji - wa - rda - - - - -

5      Dang - ka - rdu - - -      ni - yerr pa - ngu - re

6      - da - rri - pirr      Nu - mu - rli

<i>Kanyi-wa</i>	This place
<i>nandji ngarra bamngutut</i>	Is where the bottle tree
<i>pirridha</i>	Once stood
<i>manandji warda</i>	Now it's gone

<i>Dangkardu</i>	Look
<i>niyerr pangu-re</i>	Look out over there
<i>darrinpirr</i>	On the floodplain
<i>da Numurli</i>	At Numurli <sup>19</sup>

Although the song was composed in Murriny Patha, the language of Wadeye itself, the Kungarlbarl clan's home country lies some distance to the north and east of Wadeye, on the floodplains of the Moyle River, and their traditional language is Marri Ngarr. The quoted part of the song features the *bamngutut* "bottle tree", already mentioned as one of the important totems of the Kungarlbarl clan, and the important clan site named Numurli. (The song refers to a particular tree that used to stand at another clan site, but which is now no longer there.) As can be seen from the musical transcription of these two verses (example 7.1), the melody has a simple four-phrase structure, with use of harmony in thirds in the last half of each verse.<sup>20</sup>

Having completed this recording, I proceeded to my friends' house, where a group of family members, including four sisters of the deceased woman, their husbands and some nieces and nephews, were waiting to record their own Kungarlbarl song, which had been composed by the sisters. Once again a hand-written text and electronic piano were used to support the performance. Here is an extract from the second song recorded (translation by CLK):

<i>Kanyi-wa</i>	This one
<i>da ngarra ngay-yu</i>	Is my place
<i>nandji ngarra bamngutut</i>	Where the bottle tree
<i>pirridha</i>	Was standing up.
<i>Manandji warda</i>	It's not there any more
<i>da ngarra ngay yu</i>	At my place
<i>da tjingarru</i>	Oh my lovely place
<i>da Arrntji</i>	Arrntji [it's so beautiful]
<i>Da tjingarru</i>	Oh my lovely place
<i>da darrinpirr</i>	On the floodplain
<i>da Numurli</i>	That place is Numurli
<i>da ngay-yu</i>	That's my place <sup>21</sup>

The similarities in wording and subject matter to the first song are obvious, mentioning many of the same Kungarlbarl clan places and totems, though the tune is quite different (example 7.2).

<<Example 7.2 about here>>

A third song recorded from the same group had been composed by one of the sisters (CL) for her nephew. It mentioned similar Kungarlbarl places and totems but specified in each verse that her nephew was singing for his mother's country. While one's primary affiliation is to the clan of one's father, rights and responsibilities are also inherited through one's mother, who in this case

Example 7.2. Musical transcription of two verses of the Kungarlbarl song composed by the deceased woman's sisters KL, PL, and CL, as performed at Wadeye, June 29, 2009. Also singing were family members RL, LP, LK, accompanied by JP playing electric piano. Recording and transcription by Linda Barwick.

I

IV

Ka - ny - wa - - - da nga - rra nga - yu - - - - -

7

V

I

- - nan - dji nga - rra bam - ngu - tut - - - - pi - rri - dha - - - -

16

IV

- - - ma - nan - dji wa - rda - - - da nga - rra nga - yu - - - -

23

V

I

- - da tji - nga - rru - - - - da Arrn - tji

was a Kungarlbarl clan woman. In this way the songs prepared for the funeral acknowledged the relationship of relatives from both sides of the family.

We made several takes of some parts of the songs, and the next morning, before the funeral, I got together with my friends again, who directed some editing of the recording on my computer. Once satisfied, we burned the recordings to a CD, which was then given to the person in charge of the PA system at the church.

Family members, identified by t-shirts that had been screen-printed by the sisters with the image of the Kungarlbarl clan totem *ku kanandurturt* “crocodile”, and the clan name Ma Thawurr (“people of the tree”, in Marri Ngarr language), were, as is usual in funerals at Wadeye, active participants in the service. Male relatives carried the coffin, covered with a large cloth bearing similar clan-specific designs, into the church at the beginning of the service, and at the end of the service carried it out again to the truck that would proceed at walking pace to the cemetery, followed by a procession of mourners. As has become the custom at funeral services in Wadeye, after the reading family members took turns to approach the coffin, each bearing a plastic flower to leave on top of it (which would eventually be placed to ornament the grave). During these activities, and while the congregation lined up to take Holy Communion, the funeral songs recorded in advance were played. In addition to the three



songs I had recorded, two other songs, composed and recorded by another relative on similar themes, were also played, one of which had been edited so that the recorded roar of the clan totem, crocodile (the recording of which had been found in the music database), was mixed in as part of the song's introduction. Towards the end of the service, two hymns in Murriny Patha on conventional (non-clan-based) religious themes, were the only music performed live.

The day after the funeral, I was approached by the deceased woman's brothers to record a fourth funeral song in her memory, even though the funeral by now was over. These men had not been able to participate in the original recording session because of the presence there of their sisters (a strong brother-sister avoidance is practised at Wadeye). Brother-sister avoidance had also been evident in performance of the two song texts composed and performed by their sisters two days previously. On that previous occasion, whenever the song mentioned the name of a site that was also the given name of one of the brothers of the deceased woman, all the sisters omitted singing that word, and instead called on other relatives (nieces and nephews) to pronounce the name. Brother-sister avoidance was also practiced in handing of the song recordings: when I subsequently prepared CDs of all the recordings for distribution to family members as keepsakes, I was asked to burn the song composed by the brothers onto separate CDs from those used for songs composed by the sisters, showing that the brother-sister avoidance continues into the digital realm. In the several years since this funeral, I have been contacted regularly to send additional copies of the CDs.<sup>22</sup>

In these funeral songs we can see a strong assertion of continuity with traditional clan-based social organisation. Although composed to be heard as part of a church service, the songs make almost no mention of Christian themes; rather, they foreground the places and totems that signal traditional clan identity. Traditional modes of social organisation and behaviour (such as brother-sister avoidance, and acknowledgement of relationship to the clan country of one's mother) are also integrated into the performance and management of the recordings.

Nevertheless, there are also some quite striking divergences from traditional practice, and not just in musical style. The most important innovation is the creation and performance of songs by the same clan group as the deceased person. In ceremonial practice at Wadeye in at least the preceding forty years, this would never have happened. To explain why this innovation is so significant, we need to understand the history and function of the traditional tripartite ceremonial system.

### **The Tripartite Ceremonial System**

As the Wadeye community grew in the 1950s and 1960s, a strategy was agreed amongst the elders of the various clans to increase social cohesion among

disparate groups coming into the Mission. Following precedents and social structures that predated the Mission,<sup>23</sup> three mutually supporting “mobs” (groups) were formed from clans grouped by geography, language and culture.<sup>24</sup> Each mob within this tripartite ceremonial system created its own set of songs and dances, drawing on its ancestral stories concerning the important places and totems within the clan territory of the song composers. These ceremonial repertoires were then adopted in a variety of public ceremonies, including rag-burning ceremonies for the disposal of the belongings of the deceased, funerals, and circumcision ceremonies, as well as more modern rites of passage such as openings of buildings, presentation of awards and graduation ceremonies.<sup>25</sup>

Clans from the coastal areas to the north of Wadeye, who spoke a variety of different languages from the Marri language family (Marri Tjevin, Magatige, Marri Ammu and Mendhe), were grouped into the Wangga mob, named after the traditional song styles that came from the northerly direction (around the mouth of the Daly river). The inland clans, speakers of Marri Ngarr, Ngen’giwumirri, Marrithiyel and Ngan’gikurungurr, were grouped into the Lirrga mob, named after the traditional song styles of south-western Arnhem Land (which lies in an easterly direction from Wadeye, near the present-day township of Katherine). The Murriny Patha-speaking clans in Wadeye and neighbouring areas to the south were grouped into the Djanba mob, named after ceremonial styles from the Kimberley area far to the southwest of Wadeye.<sup>26</sup>

Three new repertoires of song, all “in language”,<sup>27</sup> were composed in the period around 1960 when the tripartite ceremonial system was adopted. For the Djanba mob, a newly-created repertory, also called *djanba*, was conceived by a Kardu Dimirnin man Robert Kolumboort, and later added to by, amongst others, his brothers Harry Luke Kolumboort and Lawrence Kolumboort, fellow Dimirnin clansman Joe Birrarri, and various members of the neighbouring Yek Nangu clan including Johnny Ninnal. With few exceptions, *djanba* songs are in Murriny Patha language.<sup>28</sup> The *walakandha wangga*, named after the song-giving spirit beings that inhabit the country of the Marri Tjevin-speaking Nadirri and Perrederr clans (principal composers Nadirri clansmen Stan Mullumbuk, Thomas Kungiung, Les Kundjil and Philip Mullumbuk, with some songs from the neighbouring Perrederr clan composer Wagon Dumoo) became the principal repertory for all Wangga mob clans.<sup>29</sup> For the Lirrga mob, the principal repertory performed at Wadeye became the *lirrga ma-muyil* in Marri Ngarr language (principal composers the brothers Pius Luckan and Clement Tchinburrurr from the Marri Ngarr-speaking Wurdipuli or Rak Dirrangara clan).<sup>30</sup>

The mobs practiced a system of ceremonial reciprocity: each mob could be called upon to perform for one of the two other mobs, but as a rule would not

Table 7.1. Grouping of clans within the three mobs

Wangga mob	Lirrga mob	Djanba mob
<b>Nadirri</b>	<b>Wurdipuli</b>	<b>Dimirnin</b>
<i>Perrederr</i>	<i>Mardinga</i>	<i>Nangu</i>
<i>Tjindi</i>	Kungarlbarl	Maniny
Kuy	Kulinmirr	Kultjil
Yederr	Wakal Bengguny	Wakal Tjinang
Nganthawudi	Wuny	Kirnmu
Anggileni	Merrepen	

perform for the rites of passage of their own members. For example, the family of a Lirrga mob person could call upon either the Djanba mob or the Wangga mob to perform for the funeral or circumcision ceremony of their loved one. Thus, the songs and dances performed were not those of the ancestral country of the deceased person, but rather, came from the clan country of the leader of the ceremonial group performing. One reason for this is that the family of the focal person has other duties during the ceremony, and family members may also be too emotionally involved to perform during a funeral or rag-burning ceremony. This practice also functions to broaden the social networks of the clans, through strengthening bonds of mutual obligation.

Songs in each of these three main repertoires shared certain features. As Marett has demonstrated, when sung in a rag-burning ceremony these songs have the ability to draw the spirit of the deceased away from the everyday world and back to its home country, where it must join the company of the other ancestral dead. The songs were received in dream from ancestral song-giving spirits, and the texts often consisted of the utterances of these spirits.<sup>31</sup> Just as we saw in the funeral songs recorded in 2009, so too do the traditional songs frequently name the key sites and totems of the clan of the composer and are full of expressions of longing for the home country.<sup>32</sup>

For example, one Marri Ngarr lirrga song (PL6)<sup>33</sup> composed by Pius Luckan contains the following text, which refers to the promontory Yenmura in Wurdipuli clan country:

<i>wuyi ngina wuyi ngina</i>	Our dear country, our dear country!
<i>Yenmura Yenmura</i>	Yenmura, Yenmura!
<i>Wurdipuli Wurdipuli Wurdipuli</i>	Wudipuli, Wudipuli, Wudipuli!
<i>awu pulimi kumunnalderri kani</i>	White eagle keeps swooping
<i>Altjama Altjamaga</i>	above the creek at Altjama

This song, in Marri Ngarr language, mentions the significant sites Yenmura and Altjama, the clan name (also a site) Wurdipuli, and refers to the activity there of the important clan totem *pulimi* (white-breasted sea eagle). In a parallel fashion, songs in the other two repertoires include frequent references to the specific sites and totems of the clans of their own composers.

Reflecting the common function of all three repertoires of inducing the spirit of the deceased person to return to its home country, the songs frequently include expressions of homesickness or longing for home: in this song, the Marri Ngarr term *wuyi ngina* “my own dear country!” is used, but in *djanba* it is the Murriny Patha cognate term *da tjingarru*<sup>34</sup> and in *wangga*, *nidin ngina* (Marri Tjevin language).

It is important to note here that while the composer is usually the lead singer for the relevant mob, other members of the mob are active participants in the performance as dancers and secondary members of the musical ensemble (backup singers, and in the case of *wangga* and *lirrga*, didjeridu players). For mob members from clans other than those of the composer, the places, totems and spirit beings celebrated in the songs are not their own. For example, members of the Kungarlbarl clan, who belong to the Lirrga mob, would dance to *lirrga* songs celebrating the Wurdipuli clan place Altjama and clan totem *pulimi* rather than their own clan places and totems such as Kungarlbarl and *bamngutut*. Here we can observe a similar displacement to that we observed earlier, when *djanba* songs and dances celebrating Dimirnin clan sites, totems and ancestors were performed to conduct the ghosts of the *lirrga*-owning deceased to their own clan country. In both cases, the clan sites and totems of the song composer stand in for those of the dancers and the group that commissioned the performance. The functional equivalence of the different clan groups is asserted, even while the particularity of each is celebrated.

### **Functional Innovation in the Funeral Songs**

The situation with these new funeral songs is very different. The time displacement allowed by recording technology (a form of “schizophrenia”)<sup>35</sup> allows the family of the deceased to present their own songs and their own clan totems and places at the funeral. This would have been impossible with live performance, not only because of the traditional reliance on the songs of another mob, but also because of the other duties that the family of the deceased have to perform in leading the mourning at the church service. New digital music technologies have allowed a fundamental shift in the musical practices around funerals at Wadeye, including the adoption of portable recorders to record new songs in advance of the funeral, the editing and production of CDs to use in the church or for distribution to family members, and the use of the computer database to

search for previously recorded songs or sounds relating to the relevant clan to include in the mix.

Another notable innovation in the funeral songs is the prominence of women in composing and leading the singing of songs. In traditional *lirrga* and *wangga* performances, by contrast, women never form part of the musical ensemble, though they may compose songs, which are then passed to their husbands or other kin to sing in ceremony, and have a prominent role in the dancing. In *djanba* songs, the singing ensemble is normally led by men (though in the absence of male singers senior women may take on this role), and the participation of a chorus of women is an integral part of the ensemble.<sup>36</sup> In newer Western-influenced song styles, there are clear gender differences according to music genre. Rock bands, especially heavy metal bands, like the Nangu Band,<sup>37</sup> are almost exclusively made up of men, though there is at least one all-women group, the Emu Sisters, who compose and perform songs that are more pop-influenced.<sup>38</sup> Women are also prominent in the performance of hymns and church songs, both in Wadeye and elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia.<sup>39</sup>

The funeral songs, with their association with church music, and the use of soft pop style tunes and instrumentation, are clearly aligned with other modern genres dominated by women performers. Interestingly, in all the performances I recorded and observed, keyboards were played by men, with women (and some men) singing. In two cases at least, the keyboardists were the husbands of the women composers (and thus belonged to another clan). It is possible that this pattern reflects a reluctance of non-clan members to sing about Kungarlbarl totems and sites, but equally it may reflect local gender-specific musical practices such as men-only use of didjeridu in ceremony.<sup>40</sup> Certainly the division of labour between the spouses mirrors a pattern common to the *djanba* and *wangga* traditions, where the wife of the song leader might nevertheless be actively involved in supporting performances through occasionally composing songs, organising the dancers, and (in the case of *djanba*) singing alongside her husband.

Producing the songs of one's own clan for these funeral ceremonies reduces reliance on other groups in the community, and arguably contributes to a weakening of the social networks of mutual obligation that the old tripartite ceremonial system had been designed to support. We have also seen how some new complications can arise through the practice of singing one's own clan songs, specifically in singing about sites that happen to be the name of an opposite-sex sibling. I have also observed the development of new practices around the recorded artefacts, the CDs that are burned as keepsakes for family members and the addition of the recordings to the computer database. With live performances, such questions would rarely have arisen. Although live performances were frequently recorded and archived in the community's cultural collections, their efficacy and power lay in the moment of the ceremonial performance.

Repeated requests I have received to send copies of the recordings indicate that the traditional function of the funeral and later ceremonies like the now-waning practice of rag-burning—to allow the spirit of the deceased person to return to their ancestral country, and to free the family from grief—may be changing. Further unequivocal evidence of the transfer of focus from the ceremonial event itself to the recorded artefacts can be found in the request by the brothers of the deceased to record their own song in memory of their sister several days after the funeral itself. It is also likely that the recordings are being re-used in funerals as other members of the clan pass away.

It seems, too, that recordings are being used as a resource for the composition of new songs. When working in the library to help maintain the music database, on several occasions I observed a noticeable increase in use of the database in the days before a funeral. Relatives come to listen to songs there, but mainly to get new copies of songs to take away. The database workstation provides a way for people to find and access appropriate songs independently for private study, providing musical and textual models and ideas to be reused in new songs. Once again we may contrast this practice with the traditional public, embodied modes of learning songs through witnessing and dancing to live performance.

Amongst many other songs, the music database holds a number of recordings of songs by local Wadeye band formed in the 1980s named “Hot Wheels”, which included a number of Kungarlbarl clan members. One of the songs in the computer database is their song “Kardu Thay”, composed by Desmond Longmair and George Cumaiyi in about 1986, set to a tune based on the ABBA song “I have a dream”.<sup>41</sup>

Even though the tune, musical setting and genre are quite different from the Kungarlbarl funeral songs I recorded some 23 years later in 2009, parallels with the texts quoted above are clear, celebrating the same sites and totems, and even using the same turns of phrase (e.g., *niyerr pangu-re* “look over there”, found in example 7.1). It seems quite likely that renewed circulation of this song and other pop-influenced band songs of the 1980s and 1990s through digitisation of the recordings and making them available via the music database (carried out by Alberto Furlan in 2002–3 as part of his doctoral research) could have had an effect on the increasing activity in creating and performing funeral songs in the mid-to-late 2000s. More specifically, if the Kungarlbarl funeral songs I recorded in 2009 had indeed been directly influenced by Hot Wheels band songs accessed via the database, we could see this too as a continuation of traditional practices, since the repetition, borrowing or re-casting of textual formulae from the cultural creations of previous generations has been an integral and highly valued part of the composition process. We might remember in this respect that new traditional songs are received via witnessing in dream the performances of ancestral ghosts.

Although in the case study reported here members of the deceased's own family created the songs, it seems that there may be an emerging demand for specialist music production services to create clan songs for funerals in Wadeye. In 2010 I was told that nowadays the main activity of the Emu Sisters (the all-woman pop band previously mentioned) lies in composing and recording songs for funerals. Even though most of the women in this group belong to the Wurdipuli clan (part of the Lirrga mob, see figure 7.1 above), they have composed songs on commission for various other clans to use in funerals, incorporating the names of the relevant totems and sites for the commissioning family. It may be no coincidence that several members of the Emu Sisters work in the Library and Knowledge centre, with access to the music database as well as to other staff with expertise in musical instruments, digital recorders, digital sound editing facilities and the means to reproduce and distribute the CDs.

In contrast to the traditional songs, which required no technological infrastructure other than the ability to source or manufacture wooden instruments (clapsticks and didjeridu), the funeral songs as currently practised at Wadeye have multiple dependencies. Electricity, programmable electric pianos, recording, editing and playback equipment, the expertise to use a computer database to select CDs, the media (CD, DVD) and devices for playback (mp3 player, or since 2009, mobile phone): the list goes on. Many homes in Wadeye lack the environment to keep equipment or even a CD collection safe from dust, heat, humidity and children. Consequently, most people rely on the community's cultural institutions (the library, museum, church, youth centre and school) to house and maintain instruments, recording equipment, computer facilities and so on. This institutional environment therefore provides the essential infrastructure enabling the production and development of funeral songs, and those clans that have better access to the institutions are in a better position to produce this repertoire. In a sense, the music technology infrastructure of these institutions, has been hijacked, or diverted from its ostensible purpose (education, training, collection maintenance), by the composers and performers of funeral songs.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined some of the ways in which the practices of composition, performance, use and dissemination of funeral songs have led to a loosening of social ties with other mobs (through replacement of the inter-mob reciprocity of the tripartite ceremonial system), and even to loosening dependency on other clans within one's own mob (who formerly were needed to sing on behalf of your own clan). Music technologies have allowed a democratisation of the means of making music, even a dispersal of the original social

power and authority of the mob system, and possibly, a de-professionalisation of music-making within the community.<sup>42</sup> At the same time the funeral songs contribute to a strengthening of family and internal clan networks, and to a strengthening of relationships with institutions and outsiders who control the means of production of the songs.

It is difficult to separate out the complex chains of causality that have interacted to produce the present situation. On the one hand, we can see these technologies as having fostered pre-existing tendencies to clan autonomy through the time-shift that enables clans now to produce their own music for funerals; on the other, we might blame these technologies for having destabilised or disrupted the precarious balance between clans established through live performance and the mutual dependencies of the tripartite ceremonial system. Have these music technologies been hijacked by the people of Wadeye to suit their own ends, or have they seduced the people of Wadeye into an unsustainable dependence on consumer goods and outsiders? Music technology is presently one of the many social means by which the tensions between autonomy and interdependence continue to play out in Wadeye.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My first thanks go to the Longmair and Kolumboort families, who invited me to participate in their funeral preparations. Mark Crocombe, Bernardine Kungul and other staff at the Wadeye Library and Knowledge Centre and the Kanamkek Yile Ngala museum have been unfailingly helpful and provided me with much practical and personal support at Wadeye over the years. I also wish to thank Allan Marett, Michael Walsh, Joe Blythe, Lysbeth Ford, Nick Reid and Alberto Furlan for their company and intellectual stimulation in the course of our project, and for assistance in translation of song texts, and the staff of Pacific and Regional Archive for Indigenous Sources in Endangered Cultures at the University of Sydney, especially Amanda Harris and Aidan Wilson, for technical and editorial support. The research was funded by the Australian Research Council grant DP0450131 "Preserving Australia's Endangered Heritages: Murrinhpatha Song at Wadeye".

For information on *djanba* see the Wadeye Song Database: Linda Barwick et al., "Wadeye Song Database," (University of Sydney, 2010). For information on the project see Linda Barwick et al., "Murriny Patha Song Project Website," University of Sydney, <http://azoulay.arts.usyd.edu.au/mpsong/>.

<sup>2</sup> Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart, "Indigeneity and Indigenous Media on the Global Stage," in *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics*, ed. Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), 12, 14.



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<sup>3</sup> Faye Ginsburg, "Rethinking the Digital Age," *ibid.*, 289-93; Tony Bennett and Valda Blundell, "First Peoples," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (1995): 5; Wilson and Stewart, "Indigeneity and Indigenous Media on the Global Stage," 31.

<sup>4</sup> John Taylor, "Demography of the Thamarrurr Region," ed. John Taylor, *Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: Insights from the Thamarrurr Region, Northern Territory* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2004), <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/mono.php>.

<sup>5</sup> There are two different orthographies of the language in use. This paper adopts the orthography developed by Joe Blythe for our project. For full details see <http://azoulay.arts.usyd.edu.au/mpsong/orthography.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Lysbeth Ford, Aloysius Kungul, and Judith Jongmin, "A Sociolinguistic Survey of Wadeye: Linguistic Behaviour of the Marri Ngarr, Magati Ke, Marri Amu and Marri Tjebin" (paper presented at the Top End Linguistic Society meeting, Darwin, 2000). Michael Walsh, "The Murinypata Language of North-West Australia" (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1976); Chester Street, *An Introduction to the Language and Culture of the Murrinh-Patha* (Darwin, N.T.: Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005* (Canberra: Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> William E.H. Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, Oceania Monograph 11 (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1963 (1989)); Johannes Falkenberg, *Kin and Totem: Group Relations of Australian Aborigines in the Port Keats District* (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1962); Theresa Ward, *The Peoples and Their Land around Wadeye: Murrinh Kanhi-Ka Kardu I Da Ngarra Putek Pigunu* (Port Keats, NT: Wadeye Press, 1983); R. John Pye, *The Port Keats Story* (Darwin: J.R. Coleman, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> New governance structures introduced in 2003 (Thamarrurr Regional Council) had clan-based representation, but were replaced in the NT Intervention in 2009. See Tobias Nganbe and Dominic McCormack, "Education in Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region: Challenges and Responsibilities across the Generations," Bowden McCormack Lawyers and Advisers, <http://www.bowden-mccormack.com.au/resources/research>; Alberto Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change: The Reproduction of Aboriginal Culture through Traditional and Popular Music" (PhD, University of Sydney, 2005); Bill Ivory, "Indigenous Community Governance Project: Kunmanggur, Legend and Leadership: A Study of Indigenous Governance and Succession in the Northwest Region of the Northern Territory," Australian National University Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, [http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/ICGP\\_Wadeye.php](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/ICGP_Wadeye.php).

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<sup>10</sup> Allan Marett et al., "The National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia: Year One in Review," in *Backing Our Creativity: The National Education and the Arts Symposium, 12-14 September 2005* (Surry Hills, NSW: Australia Council for the Arts, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> The clan is also known as "Kardu wakal thay" or "Ma thawurr". *Kardu wakal thay* means "descendants of the tree" in Murriny Patha, the language spoken by all clan members now; *ma thawurr* is the cognate term (literally, "people of the tree") in Marri Ngarr, the ancestral language of the clan, which is now known by only a few elderly members of the clan. See Ward, *The Peoples and Their Land around Wadeye: Murrinh Kanhi-Ka Kardu I Da Ngarra Putek Pigunu*.

<sup>12</sup> Baptismal names are used for government records, and are the names used here, because the clan names are more private in nature.

<sup>13</sup> Reasons behind these changes and some practical consequences for community governance and education are discussed in Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change."; John Taylor, *Demography as Destiny: Schooling, Work and Aboriginal Population Change at Wadeye*, Caep Working Paper No. 64/2010 (Canberra: Australian National University Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2010); Ivory, "Indigenous Community Governance Project: Kunmanggur, Legend and Leadership: A Study of Indigenous Governance and Succession in the Northwest Region of the Northern Territory".

<sup>14</sup> Linda Barwick, "Tempo Bands, Metre and Rhythmic Mode in Marri Ngarr 'Church Lirrga' Songs," *Australasian Music Research* 7(2003).

<sup>15</sup> For a history of contact with popular music and the formation and evolution of guitar bands in Wadeye, see Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change," 216–20. In the early-to-mid 1970s, the lay missionary Lesley Reilly (nee Rourke) made recordings of many of these groups, which in later years she was often asked to copy and circulate to family members (personal communication to Linda Barwick, 2003). Her collection is now deposited with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (collection REILLY\_L01) and the digitised song files are also held in the database of the Wadeye Library and Knowledge Centre.

<sup>16</sup> Helen Molnar, "The Broadcasting for Remote Areas Community Scheme: Small Vs Big Media," *Media Information Australia*, no. 58 (1990).

<sup>17</sup> Linda Barwick et al., "Communities of Interest: Issues in Establishing a Digital Resource on Murrinh-Patha Song at Wadeye (Port Keats), Nt," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 20, no. 4 (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Furlan recounts that formal song-writing workshops for the creation of religious songs in Murriny Patha were organized by missionary linguists Chester Street and Lynette Street in Darwin, and that later secular songs on "cultural" themes were composed on the same principles. Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change," 219–20.

<sup>19</sup> The text is based on a hand-written original used in the performance, written in Murriny Patha by MK, which I was invited to photograph to keep alongside the recording, and has been transliterated into the orthography used by the Murriny Patha song project. The translation is my own. Reproduced with permission.

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<sup>20</sup> The musical style of the song, including the use of the electric piano, resembles some of the Murriny Patha hymns composed in the 1970s and 1980s, which are still performed in the church at Wadeye. See *Nhinhi Pekpeknhingka* and other recordings by Chester and Lynne Street with the Wadeye Choir. Chester Street and Lynette Street, *Nhinhi Pekpeknhingka*, (Seven Hills, NSW: Global Recordings Network, 1983), cassette recording, also available online.

<sup>21</sup> Reproduced with permission.

<sup>22</sup> This happens even though the songs are available within the community through the music database in the town library. Asking me to provide them acknowledges my role and relationship with the family.

<sup>23</sup> The traditional trade routes of the *mayern kulu* and the *mayern mandjigat* – see Falkenberg, *Kin and Totem: Group Relations of Australian Aborigines in the Port Keats District*.

<sup>24</sup> Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change."; Allan Marett, Linda Barwick, and Lysbeth Ford, *For the Sake of a Song: Wangga Songmen and Their Repertories* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013); Allan Marett, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts: The Wangga of North Australia* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); Barwick, "Tempo Bands, Metre and Rhythmic Mode in Marri Ngarr 'Church Lirrga' Songs."

<sup>25</sup> For extensive discussion of the ceremonial occasions and social functions of *wangga* and other repertories in the Daly region, see Marett, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts*; Marett, Barwick, and Ford, *For the Sake of a Song*, chapter 1. For discussion of the extra-regional links of these repertories see Linda Barwick, "Musical Form and Style in Murriny Patha Djanba Songs at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)," in *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music*, ed. Michael Tenzer and John Roeder (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> The song-giving spirits of Karlu Dimirnin country are also called *djanba*, and are frequently mentioned in *djanba* song texts. It seems likely that this name for the song-giving ancestral spirits is relatively recently coined, however, since it was not documented by Falkenberg, whose fieldwork was carried out in the early 1950s before the creation of the tripartite ceremonial system.

<sup>27</sup> That is, in the everyday spoken languages of the composers, rather than the unintelligible spirit languages that were formerly in common use for *wangga* and other song repertories in this area. See Marett, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts*. See also Linda Barwick et al., "Arriving, Digging, Performing, Returning: An Exercise in Rich Interpretation of a *Djanba* Song Text in the Sound Archive of the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, Northern Territory of Australia," in *Oceanic Music Encounters: The Print Resource and the Human Resource. Essays in Honour of Mervyn Mclean*, ed. Richard M. Moyle (Auckland: University of Auckland, 2007); Michael Walsh, "A Polytopical Approach to the 'Floating Pelican' Song: An Exercise in Rich Interpretation of a Murriny Patha (Northern Australia) Song," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 30, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>28</sup> Two other public dance-song genres belonging to Yek Nangu and Karlu Dimirnin people (*malgarrin*, composed by Karlu Dimirnin clansman

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Mulindjin; and *wurltjirri*, composed by Nangu clansman Tchimararr) were also performed on ceremonial occasions by the Djanba mob.

<sup>29</sup> Wagon Dumoo was a member of the neighbouring Marri Tjevin-speaking Perrederr clan. Another rarely performed repertory for the Wangga mob was the *Ma-yawa wangga* (named after the song-giving spirit beings of the Marri Ammu-speaking Rak Tjindi clan (principal composers Charlie Brinken and Maurice Tjakurl Ngulkur).

<sup>30</sup> Two other *lirrga* repertories were held by composers resident some distance away at Nauiyu Nambiyu community at Daly River. One, also in Marri Ngarr language, was composed by Jimmy Nambatu (Rak Mardinga clan), while the other repertory, composed by Ngen'giwumirri clansman Long Harry Kilimirri, comprised songs mainly in untranslatable spirit language, some modelled on Western Arnhem Land kun-borrk songs from the *Midjdjarn*, *Diyama* and *Karrbarda* songsets encountered by the composer while working in Western Arnhem Land. See Lysbeth Ford, "Marri Ngarr Lirrga Songs: A Linguistic Analysis," *Musicology Australia* 28 (2005-2006)(2006); Linda Barwick, "Marri Ngarr Lirrga Songs: A Musicological Analysis of Song Pairs in Performance," *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Allan Maret, "Ghostly Voices: Some Observations on Song-Creation, Ceremony and Being in Northwest Australia," *Oceania* 71, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>32</sup> Barwick et al., "Arriving, Digging, Performing, Returning."; Walsh, "A Polytropical Approach."

<sup>33</sup> Text transcription and glossing by Lysbeth Ford. See Ford, "Marri Ngarr Lirrga Songs: A Linguistic Analysis."

<sup>34</sup> In the second Kungarlbarl funeral song cited above, the Murriny Patha term *da tjingarru* is used, translated by Colleen Longmair as "my country is a beautiful place".

<sup>35</sup> Steven Feld, "From Schizophrenia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World Beat'," in *Music Grooves*, ed. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994). Originally coined by Murray Schafer, the word 'schizophrenia' indicates the 'split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction' (R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1977, 90). The time displacement to which I refer here is but one inevitable consequence of the 'acoustic dislocations and respatializations' of 'sounds split from sources' explored by Feld (pp. 258-259).

<sup>36</sup> Barwick, "Musical Form and Style in Murriny Patha Djanba Songs at Wadeye (Northwest Australia)."

<sup>37</sup> Nangu Band, *Red Sunset*, (Alice Springs: Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, 1998), Audio compact disc, CAAMANangu.

<sup>38</sup> Although they have no commercially available recordings, The Emu Sisters, like many other local Wadeye bands, have recorded many songs for local distribution through the database at the Library and Knowledge Centre.

<sup>39</sup> Fiona Magowan, "Shadows of Song: Exploring Research and Performance Strategies in Yolngu Women's Crying-Songs," *Oceania* 72(2001); Diane Austin-Broos, "Whose Ethics? Which Cultural Contract? Imagining Arrernte Traditions Today," *ibid.* 71; Muriel Swijghuisen

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Reigersberg, "Applied Ethnomusicology, Music Therapy and Ethnographically Informed Choral Education: The Merging of Disciplines During a Case Study in Hopevale, Northern Queensland," in *Applied Ethnomusicology: Historical and Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Klisala Harrison, Elizabeth Mackinlay, and Svanibor Pettan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Linda Barwick, "Gender 'Taboos' and Didjeridus," in *The Didjeridu: From Arnhem Land to Internet*, ed. Karl Neuenfeldt (Sydney: John Libbey in association with Perfect Beat Publications, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> For the full text of the song, see Furlan, "Songs of Continuity and Change," 388, "Hot Wheels Band 02".

<sup>42</sup> As noted by Furlan, since the 1980s, young people's social groups at Wadeye have come to be organized around affiliation to bands ("Songs of Continuity and Change", 221). The interrelationships between these groupings and the ceremonial Mob system outlined in this chapter is far too complex to address here, but interested readers are directed to the research of John Mansfield, "The Social Organisation of Wadeye's Heavy Metal Mobs," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2013).