Song-poetry of Central Australia: sustaining traditions

MYFANY TURPIN

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1. Background

At the time of colonisation in the late 18th century, Australia's Indigenous linguistic landscape, with some 275 known languages and 500 dialects, contained many genres of song. Only in the most remote areas least affected by colonisation have the Indigenous languages and music survived. Yet these are severely endangered as communities move from speaking traditional languages to varieties of English and Kriol. Not only are languages being replaced, but also many songs, cultural practices and knowledge are at risk of being forgotten altogether. The Indigenous genres of songs that once supported the economic, ecological and artistic fabric of society now struggle to find a place in contemporary life.

Maintaining cultural practices in a rapidly changing world and against increasing pressure to assimilate is a complex undertaking. In the past, people learnt songs through frequent exposure to performances where the intricate conventions of song-poetry were absorbed in much the same way one learns a language. Today, however, performances are too infrequent for younger people to absorb these conventions. Consequently, some elders think younger people do not want to learn what they regard to be a fundamental aspect of their identity, while for some younger people the difficulties they have in learning can cause them great shame.

This paper explores the survival and adaptation of a traditional Aboriginal women's song style called *awelye* [aˈwʊʎə] in Arandic languages and *yawulyu* [ˈyawʊʎu] in neighbouring Warlpiri, Warumungu and some Western Desert languages. This is a multi-modal public ceremonial genre known over a vast area of Central Australia (see Figure 1). This paper focuses on the women's public song style performed in Arandic, Warlpiri and Warumungu communities, where Linda Barwick, Myfany Turpin and Mary Laughren undertook joint fieldwork in 2009–2010.[1]

In this article I discuss current initiatives that assist in sustaining and reviving *awelye*. I identify the role of ceremonies such as *awelye* in


Aboriginal cosmology, their relationship to country, land ownership and reasons for their performance. I then describe this multi-modal genre that encompasses visual designs, dance, music and poetic texts. I explain how song ownership and geographic affiliation can be identified from features of these multi-modal elements. I conclude by suggesting that the complexities of combining music and text present a significant challenge for learners.

1.1. Language and terminology

While the term *awelye* is common to all the Arandic languages, in Arrernte *awelye* refers instead to a healing genre performed by either women or men (Dobson 2007). In Arrernte the term *arrartenh-artenhe* (lit. 'coming out') describes the public women's ceremonial genre that is the subject of this paper. Because spelling systems differ across Arandic languages, for example Anmatyerr *awely* but Kaytetye *awelye* (pronounced the same), I use the term *awelye* as a cover term to avoid the more cumbersome expression 'women's public ceremonial song genre', unless the term is followed by a specific language abbreviation, in which case it refers only to the genre in that language(s).

Figure 1: Region where awelye is performed (thin line) and region where fieldwork was undertaken (thick line)
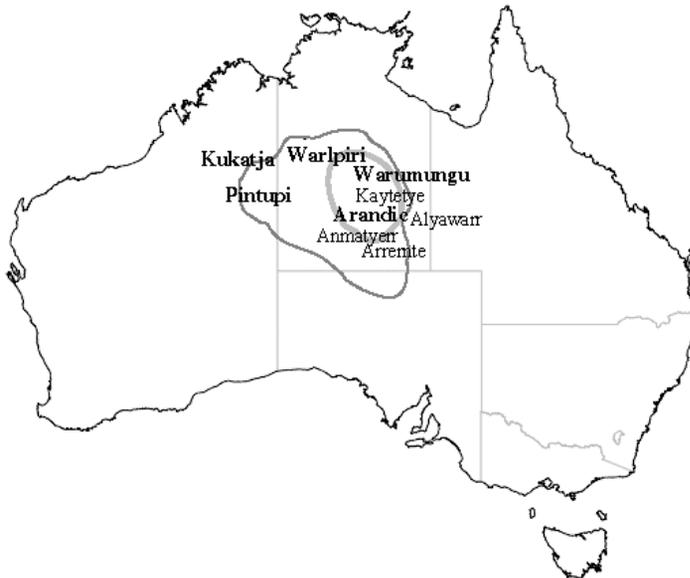
2. The *awelye* revival

Concern over their cultural survival has led many Aboriginal people in Central Australia to engage in projects to teach, perform and document their traditional ceremonies, often teaming up with academics, arts organisations, schools and local councils to take on such tasks. In this section I describe these initiatives to show how Aboriginal people in the region have taken up reviving and stabilising *awelye* over the last decade.

A recent academic project that seeks to understand how to sustain music cultures is *Sustainable futures for music traditions: towards an ecology of musical diversity* (Australian Research Council (ARC) 2009–2013).[2] This international project aims to identify the social factors influencing music genres in varying states of health in order to understand the forces on music cultures in general. This article draws on recent work on *awelye* as part of this project.

There have been three recent academic projects to document *awelye* specifically: *Warlpiri songlines* (ARC 2007–2009) and *Arandic songs project: documenting Aboriginal verbal art in Central Australia* (Endangered languages documentation programme 2007–2008) and Turpin's doctoral research (2005). These projects aimed to document traditional ceremonies and songs; their language, music, dances, visual designs, meanings, cultural significances and provenances, as well as provide recordings for community use. The role of *yawulyu* in Warlpiri society has been considered in anthropological research by Dussart (2000) and Bell (2002).

Singing the Dreaming (ARC 2010–2013) builds upon this research by investigating how words are set to music, and through comparison, identifies regional features. This project is currently working in collaboration with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (henceforth Batchelor Institute) to make a resource for learning *awelye*, with federal funding from the Maintenance of Indigenous Records program (2010). These projects, both past and current, provide performance and learning opportunities as well as produce recordings for community use, both archival and new.

Awelye has also been part of some school programs, where staff and family encourage children to participate. Two such schools are Ti-Tree and Willowra. Ti-Tree has an Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) program that includes *awelye*. Willowra School has included *yawulyu* in its curriculum for decades, possibly since 1974; however, since the Northern Territory

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[2] Chief Investigator Prof Huib Schippers, Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University.

government's closure of bilingual education in 2008 this is no longer the case. Since the 1980s Women's law and culture meetings have been held almost annually in Central Australia with support from Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council and the Central Land Council. These non-public events have provided a valuable performance opportunity and inspired a number of younger women to learn *awelye*.

One-off celebrations, such as openings or book launches often feature *awelye*. Warumungu women travelled to Melbourne to perform *yawulyu* at the commissioning of the HMAS *Warramunga* in 1998, and to Sydney in 2000 to perform as part of the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony. The launch of the CD of *Yawulyu Mungamunga* in 2000 also involved *yawulyu* performances by Warumungu women (Papulu Apparr-kari 2000). The opening of the Central Land Council's new building in Alice Springs in 2009 featured many ceremonial performances from Central Australia, including *awelye*. The opening of Batchelor Institute's new campus in May 2010 also featured *awelye* performances from a number of groups. A harmony day celebration at Willowra in 2009 organised by the Central Desert Shire, and a traditional dance festival at Alekarenge in 2010 both featured local *awelye*. The previous occasion a traditional performance festival had been held at Alekarenge was in 1976. A comparison of the event in 1976 and in 2010 reveal a dramatic loss of ceremonial life in terms of diversity of songs, complexity of visual designs, and most significantly, a decline in the numbers of singers.[3]

There are now two annual inter-cultural arts events that include *awelye*. Since 2007, Artback NT have run DanceSite, which is a day of traditional Central Australian Aboriginal music and dance and includes one or two acts from elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia[4]. In 2008 at Ti-Tree school, the non-profit Music Outback Foundation ran a festival for the Central Australian schools that incorporated its music program. Since then the annual event 'Mobfest'[5] has included traditional ceremonies from surrounding communities. At both events, *awelye* is the traditional genre most often performed.

Last year Warlpiri women from Central Australia travelled to Lajamanu to perform *yawulyu* at the Milpirri festival. Milpirri was concieved by Warlpiri

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[3] Mary Laughren and many of our Indigenous collaborators attended the festival at Alekarenge in 1976. While there are written records and photos of this event, (e.g. NTDEET publication), no audio and video recordings have been located to know whether there have been changes in the music and dance.

[4] http://artbacknt.com.au/dancesite.html

[5] http://www.musicoutback.com.au/mobfest2010.html

schoolteacher Steve Jampijinpa Patrick, who secured the involvement of NT dance company Tracks[6] in 2005 to create a new ceremonial genre that fuses contemporary western dance and traditional Warlpiri ceremonies. Whilst neither Mobfest nor Milpirri were conceived as a forum for *awelye*, *awelye* is now part of these festivals.

The Alice Springs Yeperenye festival in 2001 was possibly the largest event ever of Central Australian ceremonies (and it also included many other arts). Whilst calls from Aboriginal people to make this a regular event were not successful at attracting the necessary funding and support, the momentum the festival spurred no doubt influenced the inception of DanceSite and Milpirri, and has been cited by individuals as an event that triggered their own desire to learn *awelye*.

3. Music making in Central Australia

Before colonisation all music making in Central Australia was part of larger events, the prototypical event being ceremony. In addition, music in Central Australia was primarily vocal. The only instruments that accompanied singing were boomerangs – a men's hunting tool that was clapped and rattled for percussive effect – and clapsticks, a women's instrument, although clapping against one's thigh is also common. *Awelye,* as well as other ceremonies, were a regular evening activity of the larger family groups throughout the region.

Most Central Australian language groups have around six different ceremonial genres. They are referred to as ceremonies because they involve more than just music and because they relate to religious beliefs and have existed since the dawn of time, a cosmology sometimes referred to as 'the Dreaming'. Pitjantjatjara elder Bob Randall (2003: 21) describes the origin of ceremonies and the Creation time as follows:

> From the time of the beginning when the land was featureless, the ancestor beings came out, and under the light of the stars, they started to move. As they moved across the landscape they developed their Dreaming tracks or song lines. Every site has the story, the song, the dance and the painting. This is what you follow, the trail of these ancestor beings. And in every place where they did something or if something happened while they were

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[6] http://tracksdance.com.au

there, then that is the spot for ceremony, and that site becomes very significant to that song line.

3.1. Ownership of songs and relationship to land

Awelye is one of several ceremonies owned and performed by land-holding groups. These people are regarded as the spiritual descendants of the song-bearing Creation ancestors (Strehlow 1971; Moyle 1983). Each land-holding group or 'estate' has its own totems. These are the specific flora, fauna or natural features that are the tangible evidence of the ancestral spirits who created the world and ceremonies as they traversed the country. Each land-holding group also has its own song series in each ceremonial genre: one of the women's *awelye* genre, one of the men's genre (*ltharte*) and one of the mixed genre (*angkwerre*). Any given song series can be referred to by its estate name, for example *Ntarrengenye awelye* 'the women's song series from Ntarrengeny estate' or by the main totem of its estate, for example 'the rain *awelye*', 'the kurrajong *awelye*', 'the budgerigar *awelye*', etc. From either of these ways of naming a song series, a knowledgeable person will know who the owners are, what area of land and totems the song series relates to, as well as the *ikwe* – the tune of the particular song series and essence of the totemic being (Barwick & Marett 1995).

People own the estate, totems and land-based ceremonies of their father's father's estate. These ceremonies cannot be sung without approval of the owners. People also have rights and obligations to manage their mother's father's estate, along with its associated totems and ceremonies. Figure 2 shows how estates encompass a geographic area, totems and land-based ceremonies such as *awelye*. The two different, yet complementary relationships people have with an estate are also shown.

Figure 2: An estate refers to a tract of land, totems, owners, managers and a song series from each of the land-based ceremonial genres
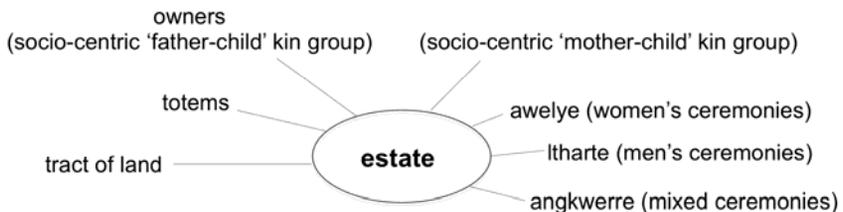
Awelye is a type of ceremony that is clearly linked to land ownership. Since the *Aboriginal land rights (Northern Territory) act* of 1976 and the *Native Title Act* of 1993 *awelye* has been performed at many legal hearings in relation to land ownership, as well as other disputes relating to activities affecting country to which people are related. For example, a group of Warumungu women protested against the Muckaty nuclear waste dump by performing their *awelye* (Gilbert et al. 2010). This was an assertion of their right and responsibility to make decisions affecting their country. Women who know *awelye* are concerned that young people who do not know *awelye* will be powerless against those with interests on their land (Barwick, Turpin & Laughren 2011).

Awelye is an assertion of Aboriginal legal rights to country and as a performative act of communicating with ancestors *awelye* is the means to look after country and bring about ecological change. Although *awelye* and other land-based ceremonial genres are often described as 'music' or 'performance art', both these terms fail to fully embrace the legal connotations and transformative power, to which I now turn, inherent in ceremony.

3.2. Reasons for performing awelye

Women born before settlement life, before the mid 1950s, recall *awelye* being performed regularly, perhaps as often as two or three times a week, as part of the evening entertainment camping with the women 'in the bush' whilst men were out mustering or doing other station work. Prior to the 1970s, Aboriginal people worked on cattle stations which meant they could continue living and travelling on country, however since the 1970s changes in various government policies decreased these work opportunities and resulted in welfare dependency which required residency on the one settlement.

Today people live in houses in much larger communities and TV, phones, electronic games and internet are now the regular evening entertainment. Today *awelye* is instead performed at large public gatherings for women, children, men and non-Indigenous people to enjoy where it is often a statement of group identity. At the most local level, the community, *awelye* reinforces estate identity. At inter-community events *awelye* is often a statement of *community* identity specifying the local residence of the performers. At the state or national level it can be a statement of language identity and in international contexts a statement of Australian Indigenous identity.

As suggested earlier, *awelye* is often performed at one-off public events in the community, such as the launch of a book, opening of a building or anniversary. At such occasions it is an expression of support or approval for

the celebrated occasion or organisation. Where tensions between groups exist, women may come together and perform their respective *awelye* as a means to put differences aside in order to co-exist harmoniously.

Awelye performances also have the ability to transform situations. They can invoke ancestral powers to cause change, such as bring about the proliferation of the totemic species to which the *awelye* relates. *Awelye* can also be performed in private for women only, which is its most potent context for healing and other types of transformation. In contemporary contexts the power of *awelye* can be drawn upon for new effects. For example, the Warumungu women sang *yawulyu* at the commissioning of the HMAS *Warramunga* to ensure the safety of the vessel and its sailors. Such a performance resembles the performative act of a blessing. *Awelye* can also be sung to imbue a rubbing medicine with special powers. This medicine can be rubbed on people to get better or enhance their chances of winning a game or fight. In this context *awelye* renders the other person or organisation powerless and assists those that have been 'sung' to get the upper hand. For example, a Warumungu *awelye* song was sung to send away a peeping tom (see track 5, Papulu Apparr-kari 2000).

Another context where people sometimes perform *awelye* is on overnight camp-outs in the bush. These trips can be to learn about specific sites and Dreamings, or to collect or hunt particular foods, or as part of land clearances for economic enterprises, or simply as a change from community life. Opportunities to go on such bush trips are usually seized at by all, young and old.

In contrast to the formal contexts where *awelye* is prepared for in advance, *awelye* can also be sung spontaneously without painting-up or dancing. Without the visual designs and dances the lyrics, music and the meanings of songs become the focus, which makes this a suitable forum for learning words and music. Such informal singing occurs around the campfire at night or sometimes even in the car, primarily as a social activity. In this context women joke amongst themselves and interpret the songs. The song may refer to a place, particular actions by ancestral beings, or particular cultural practices, or contemporary events.

Awelye can also be sung whilst doing other activities, such as painting a canvas, or while picking bush foods, or visiting significant sites on one's estate. In these contexts the link to the Creation time and the powers of the totemic ancestors are brought to bear on the activity undertaken. For example, singing *awelye* may enhance the value of a canvas being painted or can maintain the health of a species being harvested. Singing whilst visiting significant sites ensures that the visitors do not get sick or have accidents and may lead to a successful hunt on that country.

In a society where *awelye* is evidence of women's legal title to land and used for transformational purposes, knowing the correct songs for your country is fundamental. Senior Arrernte woman Veronica Dobson (2007: 19) explains:

> People don't use *awelye* belonging to other people's country – they only use *awelye* belonging to their own country. Whatever their own *awelye* Dreaming is – whether it is emu, perentie or kangaroo or whatever – that's the *awelye* that they use. They use the things that originated in their own country.

This raises the question of how people know what *awelye* songs are theirs. Is this knowledge learnt by rote, or is there something in the songs themselves that link them to the estate from which they originate? In the next sections I consider how features of the songs themselves may contribute to this understanding.

4. A multi-modal performance genre

Awelye includes visual designs, dancing and singing, as discussed in Section 3. In this section I describe each of these modalities.

4.1. Visual designs

A formal *awelye* performance commences with a senior woman painting the ceremonial designs on another woman whilst she and other women sing. The senior woman is usually an owner or manager of the ceremony performed. If there are lots of participants in a performance, one or more women may be painted up at the same time, each by a different woman. The designs applied are those belonging to the father's estate of the person being painted. For some estates there is more than one design, which may reflect different regions or totems within the estate (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Warlpiri Yawulyu performers from two different estates:

Maisy Napaljarri Kitson and Dora Napaljarri Kitson wearing two different Patirlirri estate ngatijirri 'budgerigar' designs (3rd and 5th from left) and Marilyn Nampijinpa, Leah Nampijinpa, Peggy Nampijinpa and Kathy Nangala wearing two different Pawu estate ngapa 'rain' designs.

(Photo: M. Turpin June 2009).

A performance may incorporate two or more song series if the participants are from different estates. In such cases a different design and song is performed. When two people from different estates are being painted up at the same time then there is simultaneous singing of two different songs.

Awelye also refers to the women's body painting, though the more general term *arlkenye* (A)[7] 'design, mark' can also be used. There are two verbs used to mean 'paint someone up' (neither of which are the verb *ertnkwenke* (K) 'paint an object'): *arrenke* (K) 'put, place' and the verb meaning 'throw', which is *eletnhenke* (K), *wenke* (Ar). In song texts *arrenke* means 'create', a polysemy possibly based on the actions of the ancestral beings who created the world by 'putting' plants, animals, etc., where they travelled. The verb 'throw' occurs in compounds such as *etne-wenke* 'to name, call into existence' (lit. 'name-throw'). Both verbs have semantic extensions 'bring

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[7] Language abbreviations used in this paper are: Warlpiri (Wlp), Warumungu (Wm) and when referring to Warumungu and Warlpiri (W), Arandic (A) and for the individual Arandic languages: Kaytetye (K), Alyawarr (Aly), Anmatyerr (An) and Arrernte (Arr).

into existence' and are performative verbs: throwing or putting on designs is ceremonial enactment.

Most *awelye* designs involve at least two ochres: either red, white, yellow or black (which is actually charcoal from the corkwood tree and not an ochre). Painting is applied with a women's ceremonial brush, *tyepale* (A), although some people use their finger (see Figure 4). *Awelye* is painted on the chest, breasts and arms. In the past the thighs were also painted, however since women began performing in skirts the thighs have not been painted.

Figure 4: Alyawarr awelye performers rubbing tyepale bushes into ground ochre to paint on body designs. Photo Margaret Carew.

In any one song series there is usually a set of songs that specifically accompany painting-up. The song chosen to accompany painting-up must then be repeated until that part of the body is complete; only then is a different painting-up song used. *Awelye* designs are easily transferred onto a two dimensional surface such as a canvas (with or without the thigh design) in varying degrees from concrete to more abstract representation. At the Sydney and Tennant Creek launches of the Warumungu *Yawulyu Mungamunga* CD, *awelye* designs were painted on t-shirts using fabric paint and worn by the performers, with singing accompanying the painting up of the t-shirts (Barwick 2005: 1).

After being painted up, a woman goes to the edge of the ceremonial ground and may put on a headband *iterlarre* (K), feather headdress *arrkaylpe* (K), and if Warlpiri, she may adorn her upper arm with armbands and feathers called *wakurlji* (W) and put on necklaces made from beantree seeds, the latter of which may be a more recent innovation. Unlike painting-up, adornment

does not require singing, which suggests adornment may be a more recent innovation than painting-up.

It is not uncommon for women to put their tops back on after being painted up and before dancing, especially if it is cold. This suggests that it is the process of painting-up that is important rather than the visual result. Similarly, simultaneous singing of different songs which sometimes occurs suggests that it is the process of singing that is important rather than the audio result. In cases where the songs are now only known by one or two older women and where there are lots of participants to be painted up, a recording of the songs is sometimes played to accompany the painting-up, as it is difficult to sustain singing for hours. The importance of the song to painting-up is critical.

4.2. Dancing and choreography

In contrast to painting-up, which can last for many hours, dancing is often brief, sometimes lasting only five minutes. Two different styles of dancing can be identified. One is where the same dance is performed by a large group of dancers simultaneously, where women of all abilities and ages are involved. The dancers slowly move in a line, usually one behind the other. The dance usually involves a rhythmic movement of the hands, often to one side of the body and then the other. For example, each dancer may hold a ceremonial dancing stick at each end, first pointing it with their left hand forward then with their right. The left and right dance movements create a symmetry and binary structure resembling the two line structure of a song. Comparisons of the same song series performed in the 1970s and then 20–30 years later show that the dancing in recent times is shorter. This may be because the age-group of dancers in the 1970s was younger. Another contributing factor could be a decrease in fitness and health of people since that time.

The other style of dancing involves only a few senior women. It often involves a ceremonial pole placed in the ground and movement by the dancers in relation to the pole or to one another (Laughren, Turpin & Morton 2011). The pole often represents an ancestral being, or the main place or protagonist in a story. In this sort of dancing the spatial arrangements and movements of the dancers in relation to one another or to the pole represents the travels of groups who meet up with, or depart from, the main protagonist. Such dancing generally spans 5–10 song items, as it is the dance over time that conveys information about the extent of an ancestral journey.

Ceremonial props such as headbands, ceremonial poles and dancing boards are used throughout the region in both styles of dancing. Dancers also

come out from behind a *walthe* (Aly), similar to the wings of a stage. This is a shelter constructed specifically for the performance so that performers can suddenly appear (see Moyle 1986). The *walthe* and other props can represent different things. For example, a headband can represent women's ceremonies, a cloud, rain, or someone in the distance. The dance movements are mostly iconic of the song's meaning. For example the movement discussed previously represents the use of a digging stick. Another dance involves the dancer's hands shaped like a claw and this dance accompanies the song with the word *kirrkirlanji* 'brown falcon' (W), a bird that takes its prey in its talons. Another dance involves a gesture of throwing something over one shoulder and then with the other hand, throwing something over the other shoulder. This dance or dance gesture is performed to a song that contains the word *iwey-iwerl-alpe-* 'to throw something away whilst going along' (Aly) and refers to women throwing away a plant. Many of these dance gestures have the same meaning for many groups across Central Australia.

Abbreviated dance movements can also be done by singers sitting down where there is no movement across the dance ground, just their hands doing the action.

Public performances such as intercultural exchanges lend themselves to the shorter gesture style of dancing, as in these contexts there may be only 10 minutes allocated to each performance group. In such instances the painting-up and singing usually occurs 'backstage'. That is, some hours before the public dance performance there may be many different groups all painting up and singing their own songs at the same time off to the side of the performance ground. It is notable that two innovative contexts for *awelye*, such as DanceSite and Milpirri, have a focus on dance. Whilst dances are often taught through semi-formal instruction, there seems to be no equivalent teaching of singing, which people say is more difficult to learn than the dances.

4.3. Singing

A single *awelye* performance may contain as many as 50 different songs, each one sung two or three times, all sharing a common melodic contour, and thus ceremonies are sometimes referred to as 'song cycles' (Ellis 1992). These highly symbolic yet brief texts have clear lineation and there are particular ways to set words to musical rhythm. There are also particular ways to set the resulting rhythmic text to the melodic contour. New songs that adhere to these structures can be revealed to people in dreams, their origin attributed to the totemic ancestors of their particular group. However, massive social upheaval resulting from colonisation and the spread of popular culture mean that few people have received new songs in the last two or three decades.

4.3.1. *Ikwe* 'melody'[8]

Ellis et al. (1978) showed that the melodic contour of a song is how a particular song series is identified (see also Ellis 1985). That is, all songs within a series have the same basic melodic shape referred to as *ikwe*, a polysemous word that means 'taste, smell, essence, skin name (the socio-centric kin terms)'. Just by humming this 'tune' a knowledgeable person can recognise the estate, totems and owners of the song series. There are usually two parts to the *ikwe*: a short high-pitched section sung solo and a longer descending section sung in unison by a group. As an example, a musical transcription of the Ntarrengeny *awelye ikwe* is given in Figure 5. All songs in the Ntarrengeny *awelye* song series are sung to this pitch contour. A song begins with the lead singer singing one of the two lines of a song, which she repeats, all to the SOLO section. Then the rest of the singers join in with the other line of the song text, which they repeat, to the GROUP section. The GROUP section of the melodic contour is then repeated until the whole song text (AABB) has been sung three or four times.

Figure 5: The ikwe (pitch contour) of the Ntarrengeny awelye. Note that the GROUP pitch contour is repeated until the cycling of the song text is complete

The ways in which the song text is set to the *ikwe* is not fixed. In the moment of performance different parts of the text can be matched to different parts of the *ikwe*, just in the way different cogs on two different wheels can be aligned. The ways in which these two structures can align have been discussed elsewhere (Turpin 2007), and what is relevant here is that recordings of the same song series over time show there is less variety in how these structures align today than in the past. This reduction in complexity suggests that the songs are possibly now being learnt by rote rather than through knowledge of how the *ikwe* and text can align.

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[8] Spelt *ikwe* in Arrernte and Kaytetye, *ikwa* in Anmatyerr and Alyawarr, but pronounced identically.

4.3.2. Rhythm

The basic rhythmic structure of songs across the region is the same. Songs are made up of groups of short and long notes, which Ellis calls 'rhythmic cells' (1985: 93). Most rhythmic cells end in a long note. For example, there are three rhythmic cells in the Kaytetye rain *awelye*, an estate in the northwest of the region. These are shown in (1), where (a) and (d) are a two-note cell, (b) is a three-note cell and (c) a four-note cell. There are no cells of only one note. Crosses underneath the sung syllables represent hand clap beats and can be regarded as the tactus. Four tactus beats per line are the minimum across the region.

(1)   a.   short-long   b.   short-short-long   c.   short-short-short-short

          ♪♩.   ♫♩   ♫♫

          x x   x   x   x   x

                    d.   long-long

                          ♩   ♩

                          x   x

Rhythmic cells specify the number of note attacks, where each attack occurs, and their duration. Each syllable is set to one note. There are some 'surface' differences in rhythmic cells depending on the quality of the consonants in the syllable. For example a three syllable sequence, set to (b), can have a surface form (d) if the onset to the second syllable is a glide and thus it can be elided to form (d). The double duration of the first note in (d) signals that there are two underlying syllables.

Rhythmic cells combine in different ways to form rhythmic lines. Example (2) shows a rhythmic line that has the cell (1b) followed by (1a). Single lines represent rhythmic cell boundaries and double lines a line boundary. The colon shows that this line is repeated before moving on to the other line of the song text. Bold text represents the sung text and the line below it shows the morphemic breakdown. The songs and lines are identified underneath by a code used in my Arandic Songs Database deposited at the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR)[9].

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[9] http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/turpin2009arandic

(2) ‖: ♫ ♩ | ♪♩. :‖

       x x   x x

       welyewa   *rrerne*

       awelye#   arrerne-

       ceremony   put-

       'Put on the ceremonial designs'   (w-kwely01b)[10]

Most lines in this song series are the length of two rhythmic cells, such as the line in (2). Longer lines are a feature of *awelye* in the southeast of the region. As a point of comparison, lines in the Alyawarr Ntarrengeny *awelye*, an estate in the east of the region, are usually four rhythmic cells in length as illustrated in (3). Lines of four or six cells have higher groupings called segments (2+2 and 3+3 respectively).[11]

(3) ‖: ♪♩ ♩. | ♪♩ ♩. | ♪♩ ♩. | ♪♩. :‖

     x x x   x x x   x x x   x x

     kanaka   *kerrenha*   *lamperrnga*   *leway*

     anwekakerrenh-arle#   amperrnge-arle#   iwe-ke

     1PL.POS-REL   sad-REL   throw-PST

       '(It) is making (us) homesick for our (country)' (w-ntarr03b)

The Ntarrengeny song series has only two rhythmic cells. These are shown in (4), where (a) is a two-note cell and (b) a three-note cell. Note that the two-note cell is the same in both the Ntarrengeny and the rain song series, but the three-note cell is different. Significantly, in the Ntarrengeny song series the cell is three beats long, whereas in the Kaytetye song series it is two beats long.

(4)   a.   ♪♩.   b.   ♪♩ ♩.

            x x   x x x

           short-long   short-long-long

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[10] The reference following song texts and lines refer to the author's cataloguing system, which is archived at ELAR.

[11] The following abbreviations are used: CAUS = causative, DEN = denizen of, DO.ALONG = do action while moving, ERG = ergative, PL = plural, POS = possessive, PST = past, REF = reflexive, REL = relativiser.

All lines of Ntarrengeny *awelye* songs are based on different patterns of these two rhythmic cells. In summary, rhythmic cells are the set of building blocks used to make rhythmic lines; and the particular cells and resulting lines are unique to each *awelye* song series. In any given *awelye* song series, there is usually somewhere between 5 and 20 different rhythmic lines. This is far fewer than the number of different text lines. This means that most rhythmic lines are 'used' for more than one text line. The set of rhythmic cells are unique to any given song series. This means that the estate can be identified from the rhythmic cells.

4.3.3. *Akerte* 'song text'

In Arandic languages the word *akerte* 'tip, edge' is used to refer to a song text or 'verse' of a song series. A song series usually has somewhere between 20–40 *akerte*. The various Arandic words for 'name' can also be used to refer to a song text. Turning now to how the *akerte* is set to music, we find general principles that exist across the region as well as region specific principles. The general principles we find so far are:

(i) Each syllable is set to one rhythmic note

(ii) Each word is set to one rhythmic 'cell'

The first principle means that a syllable can only be set to one rhythmic attack (no rhythmic melismas), though a note can slide in pitch, especially if it is a long note. The second principle means that the number of words it contains determines the length of a line of song. Syllables are never set to shorter notes to accommodate a longer text.

In addition to these general principles, in the eastern region we find that a line of text has only one rhythmic setting, whereas in the western region, a number of song texts have two rhythmic settings, one in a duple metre and one in a triple metre. These two settings are often described as a fast and slow setting, which reflects the beat, both clapping and dancing. The fast and slow settings of a text are often sung as a pair. Example (5) shows the slow setting and the fast setting of a Kaytetye/Warlpiri *awelye* song from the Jarra-Jarra estate. Both lines, which make up the entire song text (the *akerte*), are given in (5).[12]
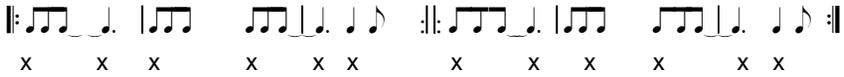
---

[12] A translation and glossing of this song text is not given, as the speech equivalents have not yet been confirmed.

(5)

(a) 'slow' (duple meter) (w-jarra06)
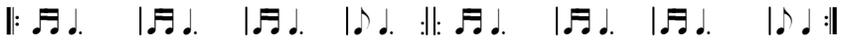
(b) 'fast' (triple meter) (w-jarra07)

x	x	x		x	x x		x	x	x	x	x x

kurnpali- kurinpa lijarray- jarray kurnpali   kurinpa talkarra- karra

These 'fast' and 'slow' rhythms can be compared to the rhythmic modes found in the Kimberley (Treloyn 2009: 43).

   As discussed in section 4.3.2, differences in the length of lines is also a regional feature. In the northwest of the region lines tend to have between 4–7 syllables and only two rhythmic cells, as in (2). In contrast, Alyawarr and Arrernte lines may have as many as 13 syllables and consist of five rhythmic cells, as in (6) below.

(6)

x x x	x x x	x x	x x x	x x
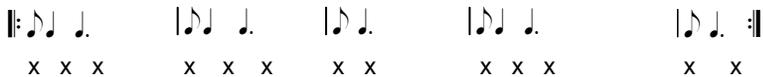
(k)artanga   rrangarra   rinya   lenaway   lhenhay
Artwengarre   akngerre   -arénye-le# itnéwe-lhé-nhe-ke
NAME   big   -DEN-ERG   call_by_name-REF-DO.ALONG-PST

'I named myself Artangarrangarr (from an important place)' (w-ntarr50)

The difference in length is related to differences in the syntactic structures of lines. In the northern part of the region, songs tend to have only one or two words per line, whereas in the southern region songs have up to four or five words per line and thus form a full sentence. Here 'word' refers to a prosodic unit and not a syntactic unit. The line in (6) has five prosodic words: *Artwengarre*, a place name, *akngerre* 'big', the suffix -*arenyele*, and the compound verb *itnéwe-lhénheke* 'named oneself'.

   In contrast, lines in the northern Warumungu and Kaytetye songs often consist of a single word or noun phrase with filler syllable(s) used to fit any additional number of notes required by the rhythmic cell. This is exemplified by the line in (7), a song discussed by Barwick (2005: 13) and Marett & Barwick (2003: 147). It has only one word, *wakiriji* 'mulga' (*Acacia aneura*), followed by a 3-syllable 'filler', *wakiriji* again and a 2-syllable filler.

(7)

segment		segment	
cell	cell	cell	cell
x	x	x	x
wakiriji	*larrana*	*wakiriji*	*larra*
mulga	(filler)	mulga	(filler)
'Mulga'			

(line a of track 21, Papulu Apparr-kari 2000, see also Barwick 2005: 13)

The minimal semantic content of lines in the northern *awelye* songs are in contrast to the Alyawarr, Anmatyerr and Arrernte songs in the south, where the lines have more words and may form complete sentences. Thus the grammar and lexical complexity of the song text – the *akerte* – contains clues as to which part of the region it is associated.

In contrast, the linguistic variety of the words in songs is not always indicative of where they are from. Words from neighbouring languages and English occur in *awelye* across the region. While this may seem at odds with the fact that songs are legal title to land, it is consistent with the view of songs as being in the language of the ancestors and not of everyday speech. Turpin & Green (2010) suggest that the use of other linguistic varieties in song is a way of marking songs as being of an alternate register.

The subject matter of *awelye* songs is not always indicative of the estate to which they are associated. Whilst names of places, plants, animals and other natural features that are the totems of that estate do occur in some songs, many songs contain words that are not place specific. Words to do with women's activities, such as collecting foods, words for different types of women and women's ceremonial activities, east, sun, as well as feelings of love and longing for country occur throughout all *awelye*. Some general words can have localised meanings through metaphorical extension. For example, a totem specific meaning 'rain cloud' is metaphorically referred to by the word for 'women's ceremonial white headband', a meaning common to all *awelye*.

Recordings of the same song series spanning 30 years show that there has been little change in the melody, rhythm and text of songs. However, diversity in how these components interlock has reduced. More significantly, the number of singers in a performance is much fewer and each song is shorter today. Such changes can be seen with the Alyawarr Ntarrengeny song series,

recorded by Richard Moyle in 1975 (Moyle 1986), and the Kaytetye Akwelye
song series recorded by Grace Koch in 1976 in comparison with recordings
made by Turpin over the past 10 years.[13] As with the dancing, these changes
in singing could be attributed to the younger age group of performers and a
decrease in fitness and health of people today. In addition there are fewer
people that can sing today than in the past. A common complaint from able
singers is that of people 'humming' the songs, instead of articulating the
words. As discussed in section 4.1, the playing of pre-recorded singing in
performances highlights the lack of able singers today and the importance of
using the correct songs in ceremony.

5. Conclusion

The visual designs, melody, rhythm and line length are indicative of the song
series to which an *awelye* song belongs. The estate can even be identified for a
new song if the listener knows the musical features of its estate song series.

The current resurgence in *awelye* is seeing a growing number of budding
awelye dancers. There appears to be a growing movement of people who feel
pride in being able to perform their *awelye* and recognise the importance of
being able to demonstrate their legal rights to land, and who also derive great
social and emotional wellbeing in the process of doing so.

While the numbers of dancers has grown the number of singers has not.
This seems to be related to the complexity of the song: how it is set to rhythm,
and how the resulting rhythmic text is set to the pitch contour. In this revival
there are still few people who can align the lyrics with the *ikwe* in variable
ways and unravel the lyrics into prose. Whether the resurgence of interest in
awelye will lead to people receiving new songs may depend on their ability to
absorb the conventions of *awelye*, and more specifically, the *awelye* of their
estate. Given that *awelye* is no longer a weekly event, formal teaching of
awelye singing will play a crucial role to ensure recordings do not replace live
singing, and for new songs to be incorporated into the canon of their estate's
awelye.

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[13] The 1975 recordings can be heard alongside those made in 1999 on the CD by
Turpin *Awelye Akwelye* (2004). Turpin (forthcoming) compares recordings of
Ntarrengeny songs made in 2009 and 1976.

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