Exploring Power:
Aboriginal Artefacts and Records in Australian Libraries and Archives

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Abstract
Knowledge is power. By extension, the language utilised to control, disseminate and record knowledge can actively challenge, or sustain, existing power dynamics. In libraries and archives across Australia the power over Aboriginal artefacts and records is complicated by competing interests, various approaches to collection development and management as well as a constantly changing political context. This paper explores the idea of power, in the context of Indigenous collections, through three diverse points of view that serve to highlight some of the ethical and logistical issues that circulate around three key areas: reclaiming power (exploring how Aboriginal communities can connect with historical texts documenting culture, language and events to understand the past and inform the future); returning power (exploring the role of cultural institutions in the digital return of cultural patrimony and enabling connections with collections); and giving up claims to power and the 'ownership' of knowledge (exploring how every citizen can contribute to the restoration of power to facilitate the 'return' of knowledge to traditional owners). This paper aims to, through these three brief narratives, highlight some of the historical issues that construct common views around Indigenous collections. In addition, this paper seeks to demonstrate the many opportunities that arise from exploring tensions that may be evident in library and archive collections. It will also explore how staff from diverse backgrounds can be professionally engaged to promote and explore, in strategic and thoughtful ways, Aboriginal materials in libraries and archives.

Keywords: archives, ATSLIRN protocols, Australia, collections, Indigenous, libraries, power

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We researched and wrote this paper on their traditional lands; an area known today as Sydney, Australia. We also acknowledge, and thank, all of the Indigenous Australians who have utilised the collections and services of libraries and archives across the country. These interactions have informed – and continue to inform – processes that aim to facilitate respectful and thoughtful access to Indigenous collections.

Introduction

Knowledge has often been described as power: such assertions are common within political science texts that explore the pervasiveness of power and aim to describe how 'control over knowledge forms a basis for power' in numerous ways (Smith 1997: 17, 22). By extension, the language utilised to control, disseminate and record knowledge can actively challenge, or sustain, existing power dynamics. In libraries and archives across Australia the power over Aboriginal artefacts and records is complicated by competing interests, various approaches to collection development and collection management as well as a constantly changing political context.

This paper briefly explores the idea of power, in the context of Australian Indigenous collections, through three diverse points of view that serve to highlight some of the ethical and logistical issues that circulate around three key areas: reclaiming power (exploring how Aboriginal communities can connect with historical texts documenting culture, language and events to understand the past and inform the future); returning power (exploring the role of cultural institutions in the digital return of cultural patrimony and enabling connections with collections); and giving up claims to power and the 'ownership' of knowledge (exploring how every citizen can contribute to the restoration of power to facilitate the 'return' of knowledge to traditional owners).

These three points of view – presented as three short case studies – are offered in combination with reflections on how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Information Resource Network Protocols (often referred to as the ATSILIRN Protocols or, more simply, as the Protocols) could have made a positive contribution to each of the situations presented here.

The ATSILIRN Protocols have been designed to guide various interactions between libraries and archives, as well as other types of collecting institutions, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the communities that these various organisations serve. The ATSILIRN Protocols also offer guidance on handling materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. We argue here that the ATSILIRN Protocols should also guide the interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections and non-Indigenous persons accessing such materials.

Power and Indigenous Collections

> We cannot fool ourselves into ignoring the ways in which knowledge services power and how knowledge in the service of power is collected, housed, catalogued and preserved (Hanlon 1999: 15).

Aboriginal people in Australia have had a difficult relationship with various types of collecting institutions including libraries and archives. This is, primarily, an outcome of the nature of the collections that institutions, such as these, hold within their repositories. Ann Laura Stoler describes these collections, particularly early colonial collections, as containing the 'written traces of colonial lives' and suggests that these 'commitments to paper, and the political and personal work that such inscriptions perform. [...] [Serve] as sites of the expectant and conjured – about dreams of comforting futures and forebodings of future failures' (2009: 1). In the Australian experience, it has been acknowledged that Indigenous people have been historically dislocated from various types of materials collected about their history and heritage. Henrietta Fourmile clearly articulated the tensions around awareness, access, ownership and control over such knowledge in her landmark article *Who Owns the Past?: Aborigines as Captives of the Archives* (1989).

It is important to recognise that libraries and archives are not neutral spaces, their collections are developed and affected by power relationships. Indeed the exercise of power dominates these organisations that are, popularly believed, to be founded upon the principles of egalitarianism: free and equal access to information for all (as articulated in Article 19 of the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, first adopted, by some, in 1948).

Such power is executed through processes that support acquisitions, as purchases and as the acceptance of artefacts offered as donations. Throughout such processes decisions are continually made – consciously and unconsciously – that impact upon what is promoted as the truth. Collection development policies have the power to silently privilege some truths while actively silencing other truths. In this way some collections are positioned as authoritative and serve, by default, to devalue other points of view. These values have the capacity to move beyond Indigenous-focused collections to other collections held within the institution, thus shaping an entire institution's view of Indigenous Australia. In turn these collections shape the views of those accessing these histories. Silence, in this way, can be systematically reinforced. Often unknowingly. For, as it has been noted:

> Every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user and archivist is intentionally or unintentionally enforced by power. Each of these activations leaves fingerprints, which are attributes to the archive's infinite meaning (Ketelaar 2005: 295).

Another way in which collecting institutions construct what is accepted as truth is through documenting the provenance of items ingested into a collection. Where this detail comes from is, for example, a key factor in constructing a story which is accurate and respectful. Is provenance taken from a transaction between a collector and a trader of objects? or, Is provenance taken from the person who provided the information and knowledge? How context is captured and recorded can have a significant impact upon an object or document and can serve to construct, or reconstruct, the truth of that item.

ATSILIRN Protocols: An Overview

First published in 1995, the ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services serve as a tool to guide interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, collections and services. The Protocols are intended to guide those working within libraries, archives and information services. This guidance is directed at facilitating appropriate ways for professionals, working across information-focused institutions, to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the communities which these information-based organisations serve, and, critically, how to handle materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content.

The Protocols serve as a guide to good practice which will need to be interpreted and applied in the context of the missions, collections and client communities of each organisation.

The ATSILIRN Protocols address several key areas including:

- The recognition of the moral rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the owners of their knowledge;
- Other important issues arising from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives in documentary materials, media and traditional cultural property;
- Issues in access to libraries, archives and information resources by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Encouragement for both the involvement and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the governance and operation of libraries, archives and information services; and
- Appropriate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures in libraries, archives and information services (ATSILIRN, [1995]2012).

We suggest that a knowledge of the ATSILIRN Protocols is just one component of developing cultural competency in this area; that the skills to deploy these Protocols and to integrate the key concepts of the Protocols into everyday practice is crucial. To draw on ancient arguments to illustrate this point we turn to the Greek philosopher Socrates:

> Socrates made his living as a stonemason, and he is reputed to have said that the only men who knew anything at Athens were the craftsmen. For Socrates, there was always more than an analogy between knowing something and a technical skill (McClelland 1996: 20).

To demonstrate the need to integrate the idea of 'knowing something' in this instance to have a knowledge of the ATSILIRN Protocols and the 'technical skills' that can deliver on these Protocols, we present here three personal examples of how the ATSILIRN Protocols have, and could have, interrupted dominant power structures in engaging with Aboriginal artefacts.

Reclaiming Power

> *Reclaiming power (exploring how Aboriginal communities can connect with historical texts documenting culture, language and events to understand the past and inform the future).*

> *A case study offered by an Aboriginal woman working within the information services profession in Sydney, Australia.*

The ATSILIRN Protocols were developed at a time when Indigenous concerns about access to information were being discussed by Aboriginal peoples, governments and the archive and library professions (Berzins 1991; Fourmile 1989; Reid 2000). As discussed within this paper, Aboriginal peoples have been historically dislocated from collections and artefacts that document personal, family and community histories.

There were marked changes in Aboriginal participation with libraries and archives as an outcome of these conversations. Aboriginal peoples had been identifying, and continue to identify, collections in order to trace family history and to conduct research on connections with their communities. Aboriginal protocols for libraries and archives are an important tool for two-way conversations to take place between communities and institutions to establish a dialogue about respectful management of collections. Another example of change in this period can be seen in relation to the employment of Aboriginal people in the information services professions.

ATSILIRN Protocol Number 8, 'Staffing', relates specifically to employment. This Protocol notes that the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within organisations can change organisations for the benefit of all. The Protocol identifies a number of opportunities for the organisation including:

- **8.1** Aim to reflect the composition of the client/community population in each organisation's staffing profile.
- **8.2** Take affirmative action to recruit and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This responsibility will require employers, educational institutions and professional bodies to be proactive in developing employment and promotional pathways.
- **8.3** Recognise the value and/or relevance of prior learning and/or qualifications in other fields when appointing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **8.4** Involve members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the selection of staff when it is appropriate.
- **8.5** Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members are suitably trained and supported.
- **8.6** Facilitate the entry of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members into management positions through support strategies such as mentoring and training.
- **8.7** Recognise and respond to the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.
- **8.8** Develop and implement cross cultural awareness programs which ensure that all staff are approachable and sensitive to cultural diversity (ATSILIRN, [1995]2012).

The employment of Aboriginal people in librarian, archivist or curator roles provides an opportunity for redress and reclamation, including the reclaiming of power. Aboriginal peoples are reconnecting with knowledge held in libraries and archives – texts documenting culture, language and events – for understanding the past and to assist in informing the future.

By enabling the employment of Aboriginal people in the information services professions – and, where appropriate, designing specialist roles for the care of Aboriginal artefacts – cultural institutions can begin to build connections and establish meaningful relationships with communities. When this dialogue is created, and trust is built, Aboriginal people can participate in service design and the management of collections in ways that are respectful of cultural diversity. Aboriginal staff members can spark and encourage change in practice, by giving voice to topics that may have been difficult for clients to raise historically. For example, collections may document subjects that were in the past only made accessible to a particular gender, or collections may document subjects that may have caused distress or triggered ongoing trauma to members of the community (such as materials documenting massacres, the removal of children as well as the systematic dispossession of culture and land).

Any reclamation of power requires cultural institutions to be responsive to Aboriginal cultural needs in relation to managing collections, and these specific needs and circumstances may change in different local Aboriginal communities. A flexible approach and an ability to acknowledge and respond to complexity is essential in order for change to take place. Cultural differences need to be accommodated to develop a pathway where Aboriginal people can feel understood and respected. This shifting of power opens up the possibility for the community to become empowered at a local level. It also provides an opportunity for cultural institutions to build a plan and contribute to reconciliation efforts nationally.

The State Library of New South Wales supports the employment of Aboriginal people through the provision of pathways into the information services professions. This support is being achieved through a number of measures. First, the Library Council of New South Wales – the governing body of the State Library of New South Wales – has officially endorsed the ATSILIRN Protocols as a guideline for respectful engagement with Aboriginal peoples and communities. Second, as a Government Agency the State Library of New South Wales supports the work of the Government to increase Aboriginal participation in the public sector (NSW PSC 2015). Third, the State Library of New South Wales, as a member of the National State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA) body, supports the project work and publications of the NSLA Indigenous Group that aims to promote best practice for the collection and preservation of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and supports employment of Aboriginal library staff (NSLA 2015).

In 2013, the State Library of New South Wales established an Indigenous Services Branch to provide a focus for action in relation to developing connections with the Aboriginal community, and for managing Indigenous collections at the Library. The work of the team is led by Indigenous information services professionals, librarians and archivists, who:

- Liaise with Indigenous communities across New South Wales in regard to the retention and management of Indigenous documentary resources;
- Promote the collections and services of the State Library of New South Wales; and
- Provide advice to staff and management of the State Library of New South Wales and public libraries of New South Wales on Indigenous matters including cultural protocols, policies, collections, collection building, projects, exhibitions, reconciliation initiatives, priorities and relationships with communities (SLNSW 2015a).

The Indigenous Services Branch team works across the State Library of New South Wales to build capacity for staff in working with Aboriginal people, content and collections. This work is being reimagined online, onsite and on tour with visits to communities.

Aboriginal participation and employment can facilitate a reclaiming of power and enable Aboriginal cultural priorities to become part of established practice in the information professions. Libraries and archives can include Aboriginal perspectives in service design and collection management through employment, and guide service design through mechanisms such as advisory boards or committees.

Workforce diversity can improve the services that libraries and archives deliver, and enable institutions and their staff to understand, respect and celebrate Aboriginal cultures as a vital part of their institution. The ATSILIRN Protocols offer a valuable resource in making these important changes happen within collection-focused organisations and to also realise the embracing of this change by the information services professionals that drive the interactions between these organisations and Aboriginal peoples.

Returning Power

> *Returning power (exploring the role of cultural institutions in the digital return of cultural patrimony and enabling connections with collections).*

> *A case study offered by an Italian woman now living and working within a cultural institution in Sydney, Australia.*

The State Library of New South Wales holds one of the richest collections related to the life and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (Sutton, 2008, iii). As outlined earlier in this paper, these collections contain crucial information for Indigenous people who want to reconnect with their history, land and culture. This information is scattered across the collections through a variety of formats – manuscripts, diaries, vocabularies, memorabilia and paintings – and they cover a variety of thematic content, such as Indigenous history, language and different traits of culture. Despite the richness of information that these documents provide, and their importance for the Indigenous people who access them, the perspective these documents provide is limited. Written, for the most part, by non-Indigenous people – travellers, missionaries, colonists, anthropologists and police amongst others – the records held by the State Library of New South Wales, and other collecting institutions in Australia and overseas, provide fragmentary, and thus inconclusive, histories of Indigenous peoples in New South Wales and across Australia.

The low presence of Aboriginal voices in the collections are the result of historical, and predominantly entrenched, power relationships in Australian history which is reflected in the perspectives expressed by the Library's collections. As can be seen, when examining the collections, power is embedded in the context of these materials and, in this way, physical repatriation and digital return can be viewed as an extension of power dynamics around collections. Such issues are relevant to many countries working to reconnect histories with First Nation peoples. In the Australian context the State Library of New South Wales is proactively working to answer questions such as: How can information professionals working in libraries and archives can make a contribution?; and How can the ATSILIRN Protocols assist in this process?

ATSILIRN Protocol Number 2, 'Content and Perspectives', draws attention to the responsibility information professionals – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – have when dealing with Indigenous content and collections. It reflects on the importance of the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in library and archive collections, in matters of building and accessing. The protocol also reminds cultural institutions of the importance of involving Indigenous people in the creation of new content in library and archive collections, and more broadly as records of Australian history:

> It is my view that you need to look carefully at the way Aboriginal people are portrayed in libraries, and you need to reach out to Aboriginal people and show us that we are welcome to participate in an area which we were excluded from for a long time (Mick Dodson, 1993, Protocol Number 2).

As an important tool of development in the professional field, Protocol Number 2 suggests different strategies cultural institutions can adopt:

- **2.1** Consult in an appropriate and ongoing manner with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regard to the development and management of the collections.
- **2.2** Seek to balance collections by acquiring material by and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **2.3** In the case of government archives, consult through the relevant government agency. Agencies should be advised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content of materials and appropriate access policies.
- **2.4** Promote the existence and availability of collections and provide clients with an explanation for any conditions governing access.
- **2.5** Facilitate the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge centres (ATSILIRN, [1995]2012).

At the State Library of New South Wales, the *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages* project has created a significant and exciting opportunity to re-balance these power relationships, through utilising the ATSILIRN Protocols. This project started in 2012 to survey, and make digitally available to the public, Aboriginal language resources held in the Library's collections. Previously buried in other parts of the collections and therefore difficult to find, this project has been an important opportunity to reconnect this material to the communities this information comes from. A website has been created to make collections available to those communities that cannot physically come to the Library to consult the language material. A partnership, with Indigenous artist and designer Lucy Simpson, during the project has demonstrated how, through collaboration and trust, it is indeed possible for cultural institutions to include Indigenous points of views in its collections. The relationship between Lucy Simpson and the State Library of New South Wales has overturned the power in the relationship: challenging assumptions and re-investing power in the object and its message. Thus, returning – digitally – traditional knowledge to traditional owners.

One of the outcomes of this relationship was the creation of a contemporary graphic to use as a layout for the *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages* project website (SLNSW 2015b). Simpson is a Yuwaalaraay woman belonging to the freshwater country of the Walgett Lightning Ridge and Angledool areas, in North West New South Wales and is the founder of the design company Gaawaa Miyay (Simpson

2015a). Simpson spent time with the language records, and created three stunning new designs: 'Gurayn (Flowers)': country/land, life, landscape, 'Message Sticks': communication, spoken word, passing on of story and message; and 'Spoken Lines' (Australian language groups): diversity, vitality, pride and strength. Her contemporary interpretations of the Library's Indigenous language manuscripts have since been deposited into the Library's collections, creating a two-way conversation and a unique interpretation of documentation that, up to the present, had been a strong representation of colonial power. Furthermore, her designs, inspired by historical documentation, shows to the general public accessing the website, a taste of contemporary Indigenous culture: a culture that is vibrant and dynamic. At a recent conference Simpson expressed her experience with the Library's collections:

> Developing a body of designs for the State Library *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages* project in 2014 was a beautiful example of potential connections with language material. Being a NSW [New South Wales] woman myself, this project was a great experience, and gave me the opportunity to rediscover more of my own language and express further my love for sharing story through design. After spending some time with records and collected materials at the State Library a beautiful image emerged from between the lines of the word lists. This image documented accounts, one of place of people, identity and connectedness. The designs and images I then created in response to this and reflected a vibrancy, diversity and strength – a real celebration of contemporary Indigenous culture and life (Simpson, 2015b).

Claims to Power

> *Giving up claims to power and the 'ownership' of knowledge (exploring how every citizen can contribute to the restoration of power to facilitate the 'return' of knowledge to traditional owners).*

> *A case study offered by an Australian woman, of European descent, working within the information services profession in Sydney, Australia.*

Power can be uncomfortable. Often such discomfort is associated with those upon whom power is exerted yet those who are in a position of power can also feel such discomfort. An example of this is the obvious displacement of power around the holding of traditional knowledge. This predicament is illustrated here through an example of an Australian woman of European descent possessing more information around artefacts documenting Indigenous history than an Aboriginal woman. The two women concerned are both Australian and both share an immediate past history yet their intergenerational connections to the land are vastly different with one from a family that can trace lineage back to 1788, the other from a family that identifies with a culture that presents with 75,000 years of continuous history on the southern continent. In particular this example highlights how power can be superimposed upon circumstances where no overt effort to claim power has been undertaken.

The State Library of New South Wales holds a significant collection of materials that contribute to the body of traditional knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One such item is a set of two wax medallions, measuring approximately 10.5 centimetres in diameter, each of the medallions features a side

profile of an Aboriginal person. In this respect the medallions, produced by artist Theresa Walker (1807-1876) around 1840, resemble coins despite stark differences in fabric and size. Each of the medallions features an image of an Aboriginal person – one man and one woman – both from South Australia (though it was, at one point in time, thought that both people were from Tasmania as the island state does feature in the history of these items). The man is Kertamaroo and the woman is Mocatta, more often referred to as Pretty Mary (and sometimes identified as Kertamaroo's wife though this connection has not been proven).

These medallions were selected for a supervised viewing, of a wide variety of items from the rich collections of the State Library of New South Wales, for a group of art history students from a local University. As is current practice colleagues from the Library's staffing body were invited to engage with items prior to the arrival of the visitors: this practice facilitates the sharing of knowledge between staff and encourages connections with the collections. On this occasion, an Indigenous woman asked me for information on the two wax medallions: she had not seen the items before and was curious. When asked to interpret the items I was unable to do so: I felt overwhelmed by the task and was immediately struck by a sense of how inappropriate it was that I held information on Indigenous history that was not held by an Indigenous colleague. I believed I had no right to hold such knowledge.

I had not claimed this knowledge as my own but years of policies and practices that have conspired to separate the traditional owners of the land from their own heritage, had, quite suddenly, materialised in a space I had always found to be egalitarian: a library setting (though as noted above, such settings are not neutral). I appreciated that libraries and archives have, in some instances, struggled to come to terms with power relations in this space. It was, however, extremely confronting to feel, even temporarily, to be complicit in supporting a dominant power structure. This is despite absolutely no intention on my part, or, importantly, on the part of my organisation, to generate this situation.

Another colleague, assisting with the setup of the viewing, proceeded to calmly and capably, recount the history of the items. This included an overview of the creator of the artefacts, an artist of some note, and of the ownership of the medallions and how they had been the property of Lady Jane Franklin who had been thought to procure the items when in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) during her husband's, Sir John Franklin's, tenure as Governor. It was noted that Lady Franklin did visit Adelaide in South Australia in 1840 and it was more likely the items were acquired there. It was explained that Sir William Dixson presented the medallions to the Library in 1945. There was also a review of the housing of the items: a velvet covered mount and frame (17.5 x 32 cm) with a glass sheet to protect the fragile objects. Interestingly, this interpretation did not include the names of the Aboriginal people appearing in profile upon the wax medallions. I was asked if I knew the names of the man and the woman pictured. Again, I felt very uneasy about holding this knowledge and, though I knew both names, I invested the power of knowledge in the Library's catalogue and, picking up a copy of a printed record for the medallions I read out both names.

For me, this was a complicated circumstance: I did not want to deny the provision of information but, simultaneously, I did not feel comfortable being the holder and thus distributor of information. In my view the distribution of power was particularly out of balance. The ATSILIRN Protocols articulate 'the moral rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the owners of their knowledge' and it was this statement that was of primary concern throughout this interaction. Yet, critically, the Protocols go on to stipulate in Protocol Number 10, 'Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues', the need to be proactive in the role of educator, promoting awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and issues among non-Indigenous people (ATSILIRN, [1995]2012).

A greater familiarity with the Protocols as a suite of guidelines that can support a range of requests for information would have allowed for a better outcome in this instance. I was, on reflection, in a position to share my knowledge on the medallions and do so in a way that privileged the Indigenous position by unpacking the information around the subjects of these artworks before working through the colonial context which saw the artworks created.

Moreover, incorporating the Protocols can, it is asserted here, assist in overcoming situations such as the one described – around the wax medallions featuring images of Kertamaroo and Mocatta – for this paper and thus facilitate a redistribution of power. It does need to be noted that, as revealed in discussions that took place after the event, no offence was felt by the Indigenous woman who asked the question: nobody acted disrespectfully or improperly. I do assert though that this interaction could have produced an outcome that was more positive for all involved.

Indeed, it is possible to work with materials and allocate power to objects rather than to those who serve as custodians for such objects. In this way non-Indigenous Australians can share with Indigenous Australians, in respectful and safe ways, information that provides insights into the cultural history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Concerted efforts to give up claims to power and the ownership of knowledge can, over time, restore knowledge – via divestment of power into the objects that capture and represent knowledge – to traditional owners.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed, through three brief narratives, to highlight some of the historical issues that construct common views around Indigenous collections. In addition, this paper has sought to demonstrate the many opportunities that arise from exploring tensions that may be evident in library and archive collections. It has also looked at how staff from diverse backgrounds can be professionally engaged to promote and explore, in strategic and thoughtful ways, Aboriginal materials in libraries and archives. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Information Resource Network Protocols can assist in creating a space for implementing change. The Protocols are an effective way for Indigenous people to establish positive relationships with libraries and archives by suggesting ways in which communities can become active participants in the design of policy and delivery of services. As demonstrated by the three case studies offered in this paper we have explored how the Protocols – knowledge of these and the skills to implement these – can effectively disrupt power relations in libraries and archives across Australia.
In this way reclaiming, returning and relinquishing claims to power.

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