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Restoring Dignity

The Ethical and Technical Challenges of Creating Digital Resources for the Repatriation of Indigenous Australian Ancestral Remains

The repatriation of Ancestral Remains is of great significance for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and many other Indigenous peoples worldwide. An extraordinary Indigenous achievement, repatriation has been the single most important agent of change in the relationship between Indigenous peoples, museums and the academy over the past 40 years. Its importance is enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Repatriation has revealed subaltern histories, enabled new narratives and continues to provide rich opportunity for understanding cross-cultural relations, reconciliation approaches and the work of Indigenous organisations and nations to achieve social goals. It has challenged orthodoxies, prompted radical shifts in policy, driven legislative change, and engaged politicians and diplomats at the highest level.

There is now widespread public appreciation that, starting within the first decade of Australian colonisation, the remains of the land's first peoples were removed from funerary sites, morgues and sites of violent conflict and sent to scientific institutions worldwide. Tracing where they are now and establishing their communities of origin are complex processes that pose major research challenges. But from where and how ancestral remains were acquired forms the basis of repatriation requests to holding institutions and has, in various instances, proved a key factor in securing their return. Establishing, as best as surviving historical sources allow, the provenance of remains has also essential in communities' determining the appropriate ceremonies and form of their reburial.

Since 2013, the Return, Reconcile, Renew Network (RRRN) has illuminated over 40 years of the repatriation of Indigenous human remains. It has brought together Indigenous community organisations, government, cultural institutions, and universities in Australia and overseas. One of the networks main initiatives has been the creation of a digital knowledge base,[1] with funding to date from the Australian Research Council, Australia's federal Ministry of the Arts, and six Australian universities.[2]

1 The beta version of publicly accessible resources within the knowledge base can be explored via https://returnreconcilerenew.info/ (accessed 12/7/2021).

2 The University of Melbourne, University of Tasmania, Flinders University, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Ministry for the Arts (Department of Communication and the Arts), the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and

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To date, RRRN resources comprise guides to repatriation processes prepared in collaboration with the three Indigenous Australian representative organisations participating in the network. All three organisations have gained a wealth of experience in repatriation over the past 20 years, and are keen to share what they have learnt with communities only beginning the journey of securing the return of their Ancestors, ideally for burial in ancestral country. RRRN also aims to provide communities, provenance researchers and scholars with interests in the history of scientific acquisition and uses of Indigenous human remains with the outcomes of what amounts to nearly 30 years of research by members of RRRN in museum and other scientific archives, the personal papers of collectors and scientists and copies of publications in the vast literature relating to the collecting of Indigenous human remains from the 1790s to the early 1980s.

This chapter discusses RRRN's efforts to find workable solutions to two key problems it has faced in creating digital resources. One challenge will be familiar to anyone working in the still highly experimental fields of digital history and heritage research: how might various kinds of information be provided to potential users in durable digital forms that do not unduly diminish understanding of the complexities of the past thought, intentions and actions. A second problem is that arising from the culturally sensitive nature of a significant amount of the information within historical sources located by RRRN researchers, illustrative of the acquisition and scientific uses of the bodily remains of Australian and other Indigenous peoples. Finding workable solutions to dealing with information that, in the context of repatriation, is extremely useful to have in digital forms, but which relates to elements of traditional knowledge, cultural beliefs and practices, or otherwise sensitive matters that necessarily warrant restriction on circulation and access. Finding workable solutions to creation and curation of sensitive or culturally restricted knowledge have proved no easy task. Indeed, reasonably good solutions to the challenges in terms of informatics in creating, curating and ensuring the possible reuse of RRRN digital resources have proved easier to identify and implement than developing appropriate access protocols and governance arrangements for ensuring appropriate access to and ethical use of what Indigenous members of RRRN judge to be highly sensitive information.

Given this, it seems best to devote the better part of this chapter to discussing the challenges of dealing with information that the communities served by our three partnering Indigenous Australian organisations consider culturally sensitive information. And in doing so, it seems useful to reflecting on a recent article by Timothy Neale and Emma Kowal, addressing the question of how Indigenous and

Culture Centre (KALACC), the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA), National Museum of Australia, University of Otago, Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council.

non-Indigenous scholars might best seek to harmonise their aspirations in respect of decolonising Western traditions of knowledge making (Neale/Kowal 2020).

Decolonisation and Its Challenges

As Neale and Kowal (2020) point out, the differences in theory and praxis between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars of colonialism by no means amount to dichotomous perspectives on colonialism and its legacies. But there are differences. Even so, the approaches of postcolonial historians of science and museum professionals since the 1980s to decolonisation of Western ways of knowing they suggest can be characterised as 'epistemic', in that they have been primarily concerned to explore the implication of Western sciences in settler colonialism through contextual studies of the ways in which the ambitions, activities and interactions between scientists in colonially situated universities and museums and their metropolitan peers, produced knowledge that served, in obvious and also in subtle ways, to legitimate Indigenous dispossession and relegation to slave-like existence on the margins of settler society. In the case of museums in the Australian colonial capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane – all of which began systematic ethnological and anthropological collecting on the basis of recurrent public funding in the middle of the 19th century – here have been concerted efforts since the turn of the 21st century by staff and scholars associated with these institutions, to critically assess the circumstances in which Indigenous ancestral human remains and ethnographic objects came into their possession – although in the case of Sydney's Australian Museum, the decolonisation of exhibition practices date back to the mid-1970s.[3]

Indigenous Australian material culture is now routinely displayed to the museum-going public in ways that readily acknowledge the colonial context in which many artefacts were produced and acquired,[4] but which aim to contextualise them through Indigenous interpretations of their meanings and values that emphasise the continuing richness and vibrancy of present-day cultural to these objects and their makers.[5] This transformation in curatorial aspirations has been seen the

3 Interview with Phil Gordon, Head of Indigenous Australian Collections, Australian Museum, 20/12/2019. Recording available on application to info@returnreconcilerenew.info.

4 For a critical discussion of exhibition practices in the case of another sensitive topic – slavery – and technical possibilities of crediting Indigenous authorial voice and ownership, see Paul Longley Arthur and Isabel Smith: *Digital Representations of Slavery in Australia*, pp. 47–62 in this volume.

5 See, for example, the website of the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Culture Centre of Museum Victoria, https://museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/; the Australian Museum's Indigenous collections, https://australian.museum/learn/cultures/atsi-collection/; and the Indigenous collections of the National Museum of Australia, https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/collection/collection/indigenous (accessed 12/7/2021).

employment of Indigenous people as curators, who often have genealogical connections to communities from which substantial numbers of artefacts were acquired, or communities with ancestral ties to the land on which the museum stands. Since the 1980s, there have also been unconditional repatriations of ancestral human remains, which were mostly acquired between the early 1860s and the late 1920s, through the plundering traditional burial places either by field collectors of natural history specimens employed by museums, or amateur naturalists with ethnological interests.[6] There have also been returns of artefacts, mostly of sacred or profound cultural significance, on the basis of consultation with community Elders and knowledge custodians. And all these initiatives have helped museums to build new connections with source communities and collaborations centering on the curation and display of items that by mutual agreement have been left in the care of museums.

Neale and Kowal (2020) suggest that we can usefully distinguish these epistemic decolonising initiatives from what they call more 'reparative' approaches to overcoming the hegemonic legacies of Western ways of meaning and knowledge-making, and its makers. What they have in mind when speaking of reparative initiatives are the growing number of scholars, many of whom are Indigenous, who have argued that scholarship needs to go beyond fostering awareness of the entanglements of Western sciences in colonialism (Smith 1999; Moreton-Robinson 2016). These scholars concede that postcolonial historiography has done important work, not least in showing in contextual depth how Western natural and human sciences variously contributed to the erroneous and pernicious categorisation of Indigenous meaning and knowledge-making traditions as myth. However, what is required, scholars favouring reparative approaches to decolonisation argue, is political action, in solidarity with Indigenous communities, to support their efforts to regain ownership and enjoyment of their ancestral lands, and make positive steps towards dismantling surviving structural legacies of colonialism that continue to perpetuate everyday social and economic inequalities. Indigenous scholars have questioned whether it is inescapable that epistemic approaches to decolonsation can work against Indigenous aspirations, due to their grounding in Western ontological assumptions and employ epistemic practices which treats all meaning and knowledge-making as historically contingent, socially situated activities (see, for example, Tallbear 2013).

The question of how we might most productively harmonise epistemic and reparative approaches has preoccupied RRRN members from the outset. Neale and Kowal observe that there has been a noticeable reluctance on the part of non-Indigenous scholars and museum curators to "touch on the hybridity of Indigenous worlds, often presenting Indigenous knowledge as a discrete category in the familiar terms of positive ethnological discourse" (Neale/Kowal 2020, 406). This is

6 For an investigation of collecting processes by private collectors, see Friederike Schmidt: *Retracing the Mobile Object,* pp. 63–72 in this volume.

certainly true of some epistemic decolonisation initiatives, including, for example, a recent project by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to seek the return of sacred or profound cultural importance from overseas museums, which were in many instances collected during the long 19th century, to present-day communities. It is unclear whether any consideration was given in this project to the changes in self and communal identity occurring under settler colonialism, and its implications for the return of cultural property – an issue critically reflected upon, for example, by museum curator and anthropologist Philip Batty (2006). Likewise, as I have argued elsewhere, the loss of Indigenous control of the management of repatriation of Ancestral Remains, in the years immediately following the disestablishment of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Commission in 2005, saw mainstream government agencies fail to take into account the contemporary social and political dynamics of communities wanting to secure the return and reburial of their ancestors (Turnbull 2020; see also Lambert-Pennington 2007).

In the current Australian context, reluctance on the part of non-Indigenous scholars and museum professionals to address the hybridity of present-day Indigeneity is understandable. Since the 1970s, the political aspirations of Indigenous Australians have been underpinned by self-representation in terms of essentialist, pan-Indigenous solidarity. In the case of scholars and museum professionals engaged in repatriation and restitution ventures, one suspects that reticence to engage in discussion of the diversity of Indigeneity is due to concern lest doing so inadvertently provide ammunition to scholars, museum curators and social commentators who oppose the return of Ancestral Remains and items of great cultural significance on grounds which in effective reassert the explanatory and ethical superiority of Western ontological and epistemic traditions (an influential illustration of this is Jenkins 2016). Reluctance to draw attention to the relationality of Indigeneity is also understandable given the climate of political conservatism prevailing in Australia, which frequently prompt reactionary commentaries in popular media to the effect that the hybridity of contemporary Indigeneity has been so pronounced as to erase any meaningful connections with lands lost to colonial ambitions.

However, reluctance to address the relationality of Indigeneity also has its risks. Not the least is the danger of complacency about the representation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in colonialist terms of whether or not they are 'traditional' that are still very much in evidence in the making of government policies directly affecting Indigenous peoples and, notoriously, Australian federal and state laws in respect of land ownership (Merlan 2006). As Neale and Kowal point out, in connection with changes in the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australian museums over the past 40 or so years, ignoring the complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary experiences since British invasion might privilege as truly Indigenous in non-Indigenous eyes only those Indigenous communities or families that, by dint of historical fortunes, are able to demonstrate continuities in cultural practices in connection with ancestral lands, as opposed to

those whose experiences under colonialism have rendered them unable to easily demonstrate connections with the precolonial past (Neale/Kowal 2020).

Because of long experience of the social complexities of repatriation, RRRN members have been alert to the diversity of contemporary Indigeneity. Interactions within the network have reflected collective aimed to foster understanding of the historical experiences of its three main Indigenous community partners, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC)[7], the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA)[8], and Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council[9]. It could be fairly said that between them they exemplify the diversity of contemporary Indigeneity. They acknowledge that experiences of settler colonialism has wrought changes in customary law and culture, but each have stressed that, where possible, adaptation to change has been consistent with the interpretation of traditional beliefs and practices.

In respect of the points of connection and incommensurability between epistemic and reparative approaches to decolonisation that Neale and Kowal (2020) highlight, RRRN members would agree that there is nothing to be gained by abandoning the epistemic approaches to decolonisation in postcolonial scholarship and museology because of their past implication in colonialism. Rather, the consensus within the network has been to develop pragmatic solutions, often blending reparative and epistemic approaches to decolonisation. This is reflected, for example, in recognising that, for our community partners, the remains of individuals acquired colonial era scientists are entities possessing all of the traits of living persons. The belief is that until they are laid to rest in the right place in the traditional country of their ancestors, with appropriate ceremonies and rituals, they will be in a state of torment. Moreover, the country of their burial is seen as a living entity; and the plundering of burial places that was the prime means by which the remains of these men, women and children were acquired by museums and other scientific institutions, is believed to have caused environmental degradation and suffering of the country that gave them life and to which they must return. As the late Tom Treverrow, Elder of the Ngarrindjeri people, observed when reburying the bones of his ancestors returned from the Anatomy Department of the University of Edinburgh,

> all those Old People and the people we got here, [they are] all our family. We know where they were taken from, illegally taken from their burial grounds: their resting places and we know that they are our ancestors, we are connected to them … We know that their spirit has been at unrest. We believe that the

7 Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), https://kalacc.org/ (accessed 12/7/2021).

8 Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA), https://www.ngarrindjeri-culture.org/contact (accessed 12/7/2021).

9 Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council, https://aiatsis.gov.au/publication/117041 (accessed 12/7/2021).

> things that happen around us – our lands and waters – is all connected. It's part of it, and what's happening here is part of the healing process, when we bring our Old People home. (Hemming/Wilson 2010, 183)

Non-Indigenous members of the network may personally see the remains in question in purely material terms as organic structures devoid of life; but they have come to appreciate how and why repatriation is so important for Indigenous network members. This in turn has highlighted for non-Indigenous RRRN members the degree to which Western sciences have been grounded in a physical, determinist view of nature, which in its modern forms have ruled out natural processes having any inherent meaning or ultimate purpose. Within this envisaging of reality, the self appears as no longer defined by intimate relations to other living and inanimate entities within local contexts of place and time. As network member, Edward Halealoha Ayau, a Native Hawaiian scholar and longtime repatriation campaigner, has observed, the repatriation of Hawaiian Ancestors heightens consciousness of Hawaiian values of *ʻohona* (family), *mālama* (care), *kuleana* (responsibility) and *kūpale* (protection), which while local in origin, speak to universal human concerns (Halealoha Ayau 2020).

What has, at times, proved more challenging for network members has been reconciling perspectives on why scientists of the 19th and early 20th centuries sought to acquire the bodily remains of Indigenous Australian and other Indigenous peoples. Given the enormity of the outrage committed by the removal of Old People from the care of their ancestral country, Indigenous members of RRRN have been understandably quick to claim that anatomists and anthropologists who participated in or encouraged the plundering of the dead did so with the conscious intention of scientifically justifying Indigenous dispossession and subjugation. They have also charged scientists with having bought and sold the remains of their Ancestors for personal profit.

Often these claims involved the projection of contemporary ethical concerns onto the past, so as to deduce value judgements from facts, which in their disciplinary training, non-Indigenous network members have been taught to see as an implosive epistemological blend in scientific reasoning. However, discussing the motivations of scientists implicated in the plundering of the Indigenous dead offered by network members have been productive. Indeed, it has provided the basis for a new research project – entitled *Profit and Loss*.[10] Research by RRRN members has so documented the acquisition of Ancestral Remains by gift and donation, tracing how they were obtained through professional relationships, mutual scientific

10 *Profit and Loss: The Commercial Trade in Indigenous Human Remains*, Research project by Fforde/Nayak/Tapsell, https://app.dimensions.ai/details/grant/grant.8676566 (accessed 29/10/2020).

interests, and in the hope of strengthening ties of patronage and intellectual reputations (Fforde 2004; Turnbull 2017).

What has not been explored in contextual depth is the presence of commerce and commodity exchange in comparative anatomical and anthropological collecting of human remains during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Moreover, in doing so, the project will aim to consider what might be learnt of contemporary relevance by investigating the conduct of factual reasoning and making of value judgements in the investigation of Indigenous Australian Ancestral Remains.

Building a Repatriation Knowledge Base

Turning from discussion of RRRN's aspirations in respect of decolonising Western traditions of knowledge making, the chapter now turns to explain how the network has sought to create a knowledge base to assist Indigenous Australian communities in repatriation processes. As previously mentioned, the repatriation of these Ancestral Remains from overseas scientific institutions requires in-depth historical research to determine their origins and (ideally) identity as far as surviving documentation allows. It is critically important for those to whom they are returned have as much information as possible of relevance in deciding where and how they will be reburied, or cared for in a resting place on ancestral country. When collection records indicate only that Ancestral Remains are from Australia or one of its states or territories, and are likely to stay in the care of a museum, there is still as need for research that might uncover further information – as was recently the case in respect of a Yidinji Elder whose remains were acquired by Bavaria's Ethnological Museum (now the Five Continents Museum) in 1889. A search of museum records revealed nothing more than that these Ancestral Remains were from the north of the state of Queensland; but investigation of Australian newspapers, records of the Queensland Museum and an old map in the collections of Queensland's Department Mines and Energy, allowed Yidinji Elders to confirm the identity and original burial place of their Ancestor (Appel/Fourmil/Turnbull 2018).

RRRN has sought to include within the knowledge base a wealth of facsimiles and transcripts of diverse source materials held by Australian and overseas museums, libraries, government archives and other institutions relating to the theft and scientific uses of Ancestral Remains. Much of this material was already obtained by several RRRN members over the course of what is now near the last 40 years. Some sources were 'born digital'. Others have been digitally reproduced from handwritten records of archival investigations by RRRN. Others are recordings of events orally passed down between generations within Indigenous communities relating to the plundering of Ancestral Remains and related artefacts of a sacred or culturally important nature. The archive has been created employing techniques and standards in informatics developed by digital archivists and

libraries in collaboration with information scientists since the late 1990s. This has been done to put the information in the archive into a contextual framework that is best suited to assisting Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, as well as provenance researchers and museum professionals with whom they may be working on repatriation related matters – to know the historical circumstances in which Ancestral Remains were acquired, and what happened to them after they came into the possession of museums or other scientific institutions. Importantly, while the RRRN knowledge base may not provide information disclosing from where, when and how Ancestral Remains were acquired, it has, in a number of instances to date, drawn attention to avenues for further research that have enabled the community from which Ancestral Remains came to be identified.

The decision was taken early in the history of RRRN to create its digital knowledge base using the Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM), a data curation tool created and progressively refined over the past 20 years by Gavan McCarthy and staff of the eResearch Scholarship Centre of the University of Melbourne (Fig. 1).[11]

The OHRM uses Microsoft Access and bespoke Visual Basic code to create data using two international archival standards developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA).[12] The OHRM modifies the print function of Microsoft Access to output data in HTML web pages, and as XML records in standard international schemas, such as the Encoded Archival Context Description (EAC-CPF) maintained by the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).[13] The OHRM thus has two important features. Firstly, it can take advantage of the power of a relational database like MS Access to create relations between entities such as people, persons, places and events, and then reproduce these relations in the OHRM's HTML output.

11 Further information about the OHRM can be found at https://www.academia.edu/877140/Engineering_utility_a_visionary_role_for_encoded_archival_authority_information_in_managing_virtual_and_physical_resources (accessed 29/10/2020) (by McCarthy 1999; and also (McCarthy/Smith/Villiers 2020, 637–653). Regrettably, the eResearch Scholarship Centre has recently been dis-established by the University of Melbourne. No credible explanation has been given by those responsible for its closure in the light of its significant contributions to informatics in archival science and digital humanities scholarship since its establishment in 2007. The decision has caused RRRN and other Australian researchers whose digital resources have been developed and maintained by the Centre serious problems in terms of future development. RRRN is currently in the process of moving its knowledge base to the Australian National University. The migration should not, however, disrupt access to its contents.

12 ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, Second Edition, https://www.ica.org/en/isaar-cpf-international-standard-archival-authority-record-corporate-bodies-persons-and-families-2nd (accessed 29/10/2020); ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, Second Edition 9, https://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition (accessed 29/10/2020).

13 Encoded Archival Context for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families – EAC-CPF, https://eac.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de (accessed 29/10/2020).

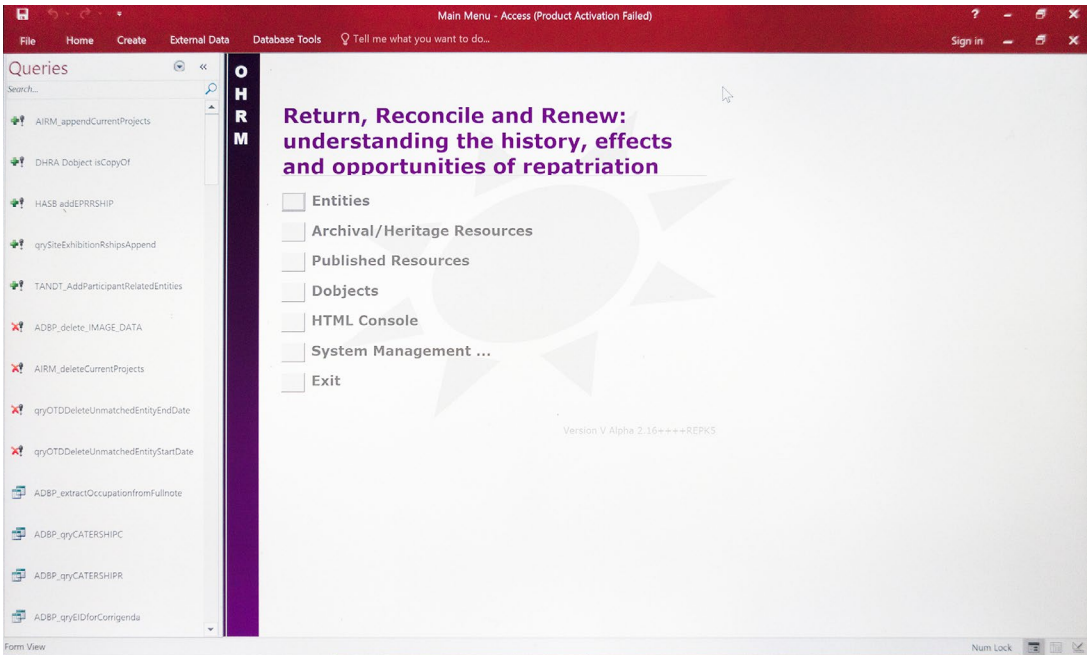

Fig. 1: OHRM: generates static HTML to build rich web resources that meaningfully express relationships between people, places, events and various other kinds of entities.

Secondly, data within the OHRM is exportable in open structured formats allowing its long-term curation and reuse in future platforms. To date there has been experimentation with the RO-Crate approach to packaging up OHRM content and associated metadata.[14]

The OHRM separates the creation and curation of data from its output in HTML (or XML should this be required) (Fig. 2).

This has the advantage that the HTML output sits as static files within a public_html directory. This differs from most knowledge bases created by scholars in the digital humanities in that information is not called from a Structured Query Language (SQL) type database using scripts in written on Python or a comparable programming language (Fig. 3).

OHRM created files are thus not only speedily served, but also can be confidently cited by other web resources. Links to and between the HTML files in question will not break. Even if they are physically moved elsewhere users can access them by a simple redirect file. Also, the files can rich metadata records in their headers that ensure the information they provide has a high visibility in searches by commercial and scholarly search engines.

14 On the Research Object Crate (RO-Crate) framework, see http://www.researchobject.org/ro-crate/ (accessed 30/10/2020).

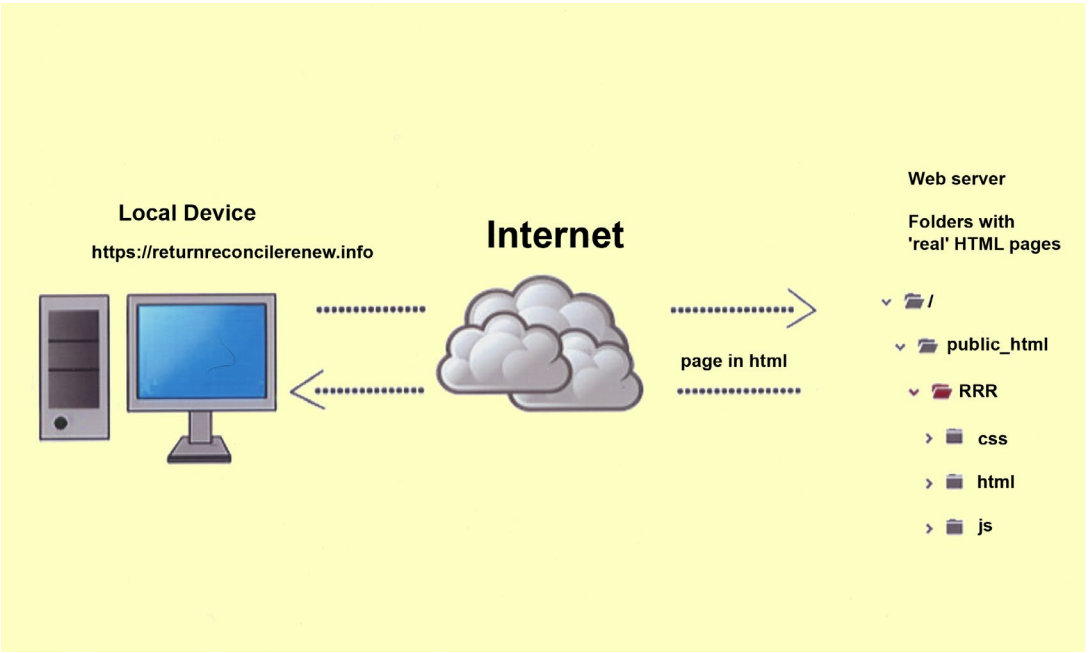

Fig. 2: OHRM framework for serving static HTML files in RRRN Knowledge.

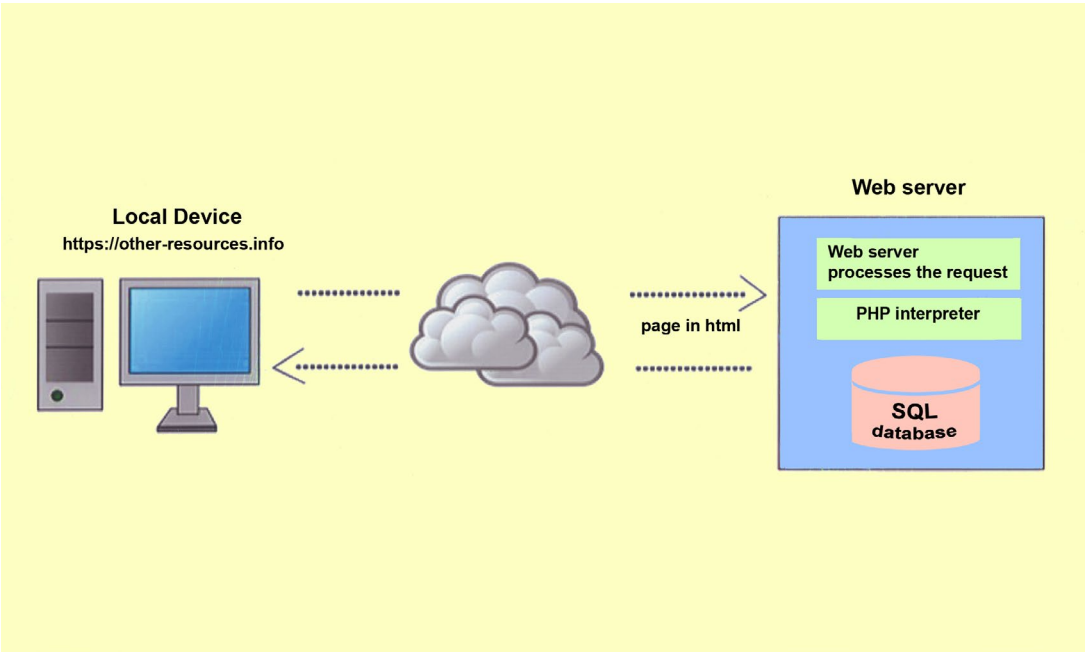

Fig. 3: Typical Server-Side Dynamic Web Resource.

In these respects, the informatics of OHRM are similar to elements of the JAM Stack approach to web development that has emerged over the past three to four years.[15] JAM Stack web resources similarly entail the creation of prerendered pages which can be served directly to users without using dynamic servers. Where they differ from earlier static websites – which proved harder to maintain than dynamic content publishing solutions, such as Wordpress, for example, – is in the combined use of JavaScript, application programming interfaces (APIs) and static content files. In its most effective form, JAM Stack web resources are made up of files with simple markup that is transformed into HTML using a static site generator such as Hugo, Jekyll or Gatsby (see Shaleynikov 2019),[16] which are hosted on GitHub or GitLab and accessed by users via Netify,[17] or other companies offering hosting services that enable the serving of content to users across geographically distributed networks. It is also possible to serve content files created by a static site generator on a local computer by uploading them to a simple static website. But what is lost in using this approach is the ease and speed with which new marked up files can be uploaded and the entire site re-rendered in a matter of seconds to incorporate new content and whatever links to information in other files it might contain, as well as rebuilding site indexes and files associated with the site's search engine.

There are no immediate plans to move from using the OHRM to a fully JAM Stack approach in the further development of the RRRN knowledge base, but doing so has its attractions. Firstly, the OHRM relies on Microsoft Access and Visual Basic code. This software will be around for some time yet, but as with all proprietary software, there is the risk that its future development may adversely affect the OHRM's functionality. Secondly, employing a JAM Stack framework would allow the OHRM to overcome one of its long-term shortcomings, which is the inability for RRRN members to directly add or edit content, as would be possible in a database back-ended web resource built on an open source content management system such as Drupal, Joomla or Wordpress. This would also simplify the process of RRRN's current Indigenous partner organisations offering their interpretations to historical sources. On the other hand, even if a JAM stack framework were employed, it is likely that the preference would be to continue have RRRN members in one offline location add or edit information for the knowledge base. This has the advantage of ensuring that new or revised content complies with the standards for information management that are among the greatest strengths of the OHRM. Also, as will shortly be discussed, a significant proportion of the information within the

15 See https://jamstack.org/ (accessed 29/10/2020); also Schockwellenreiter 2017, "*Worknote: Was ist ein JAMstack?*".

16 See Shaleynikov 2019, "*DZone, Static Site Generators Overview: Gatsby vs. Hugo vs. Jekyll*".

17 See https://www.netlify.com/ (accessed 29/10/2020); also t3n, *Was ist eigentlich Github?*, https://t3n.de/news/eigentlich-github-472886/ (accessed 30/10/2020); Wikipedia (s.d.), "GitLab".

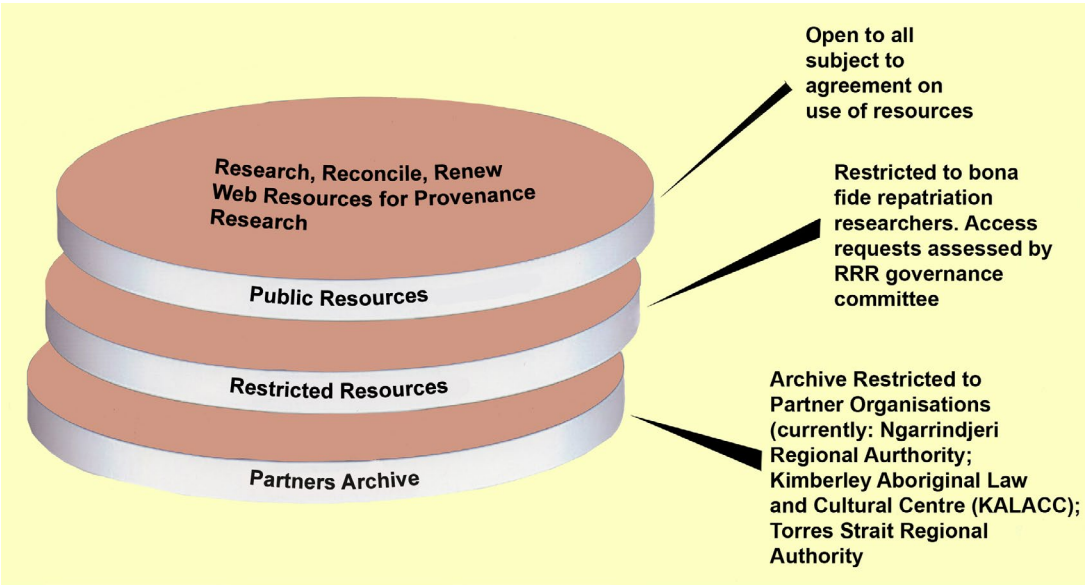

Fig. 4: RRRN OHRM entities.

knowledge base has been judged to be culturally sensitive, and is best kept locally and not accessible via the Internet.

Currently the RRRN knowledge base contains around 2500 separate files that provide information about historical people, places, organisations, and other entities, the great majority of which relate to the acquisition and scientific uses of the Ancestral Remains of Australian Aboriginal people and Torres Strait (Fig. 4).

Together they comprise a complex web of knowledge in which around 13,000 relations have been drawn between information on entities in individual files. Due to the employment of informatics standards within the OHRM, users can make their own investigative paths through this wealth of interrelated information with relative ease, and able to understand how and why entities are related. Also, the use of informatics standards has assisted efforts by RRRN members to describe the relations between entities in ways that render explicit the historical implication of the Western scientific interests in Ancestral Remains in settler colonialism.

An important aspect of building the RRRN knowledge base has been acknowledging that many of the sources it now contains, or will in the future, contain information about things that are regarded as culturally sensitive, and which should be known only to those who are recognised by the relevant persons as able to do so. In many instances, the information in question relates to traditional beliefs and practices, often in respect of death and burial, but also to do with other important aspects of the lives of men and women. In many instances, sacred or secret practices may no longer be observed, but the free circulation of information about them is distressing and considered offensive. In other instances, the information in

Fig. 5: Entities in the RRRN knowledge base.

question may relates to traumatic historical events or to places of spiritual significance in Ancestral lands. One fear expressed by Indigenous RRRN members has been that public circulation of information pin-pointing the location of traditional burial places might result in their desecration and new theft of remains.

In response to these sensitivities, the RRRN knowledge base actually comprises three related resources (Fig. 5).

The first is a public website with information serving the dual purpose of enhancing public understanding the history of scientific interest in the bodily remains of Indigenous peoples, while providing initial sources of value to Indigenous communities, representative organisations and collaborating researchers wanting to find out whether the remains of their Ancestors came to be in the possession of overseas scientific institutions. The second is a restricted area, and likely to be available at that contains sensitive information of value to communities wanting to determine whether there are remains of their Ancestors held in overseas museums or other scientific institutions. The aim here is to provide the basis of detailed research into the provenance of remains. Access will be granted on application to a governing board to appropriate community members, researchers working on behalf of communities and others who are otherwise judged to have bona fide interests in the information contained in this closed resource. Finally, there is a private resource within the knowledge base that contains detailed, sensitive information supporting the efforts of RRRN's three current Indigenous community partners in ongoing repatriation activities. Much of this information consists of the findings of research relating to the remains of particular individuals, which has sought to

discover the circumstances in which they were acquired, what subsequently happened to them and also any other associated information.

Like most other digital initiatives in history and heritage research, the next phases in the development of the RRRN knowledge base depend on success in fierce competition for project funding from government agencies and private philanthropic foundations – an unsatisfactory situation that is likely to become more so due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, project funding has recently been won to investigate the history of sales and exchanges of the remains of Australian and other Indigenous peoples, and this will see the participation in RRRN of data scientists and the development of techniques for analyzing the wealth of information concerning the acquisition and uses of these Ancestral Remains in the conceptual evolution of comparative anatomy, anthropology and cognate disciplines in metropolitan European and colonial contexts since the late 18th century. This research may well be useful to communities wanting to determine whether Ancestors rest in scientific collections outside of Australia. Also, our aspirations in respect of the development of the knowledge base are to explore network graph visualisation of the current and future entities within the OHRM.

Repatriation related research is a complex and challenging activity. It comprises various different yet over interconnected threads of meaning and knowledge-making and practical action in support of Indigenous obligations to repatriate the Ancestral dead. Indeed, Indigenous RRRN members commonly liken repatriation research to weaving in explaining how its various different elements interrelate. Members of the network have become accustomed to thinking about engaging in decolonisation in ways that weave together various differently situated perspectives on the implication of Western sciences in colonial ambitions gained by their commitment to repatriation. Repatriation highlights our shared humanity, and while it brings to light often disturbing insights into how the Western sciences served, in obvious and also in numerous subtle ways, to diminish the humanity of Australian and other Indigenous peoples, the hope of the RRRN is that initiatives such as the development of its repatriation knowledge base, will practically assist the return of Ancestral Remains to the case of their descendant communities, but in doing so will encourage dialogue and negotiation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in understanding this difficult history and acting to restore and replenish what colonialism took from our common humanity.

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