

**BETWEEN SURFACES: A PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH TO CULTURAL
IDENTITY, CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND RECONCILIATION IN
AUSTRALIA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

STUDENT DECLARATION	xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xii
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH	xiv
<i>PROLOGUE: BENEATH THE SURFACE</i>	xix
<i>Case Study One: Lake Mungo</i>	xx
<i>Case Study Two: Legend Rock</i>	xxii
<i>Cultural framing</i>	xxvi
CHAPTER ONE: THE ABORIGINAL-WHITE ENCOUNTER	
1.1 Wittgenstein’s Language Games: How propositions become social facts	1
1.2 The “Colonial Eye”	3
1.2.1 Aboriginality in Victoria: A culture of the past?	7
1.2.2 The “real” Aborigines	8
1.3 A white Australia	12
1.4 Caring for country: an Aboriginal ontology	19
1.5 Country and kinship	22
1.6 Bain’s Study: The Aboriginal-white encounter	25
1.6.1 Aboriginal interaction	27
1.6.2 European transaction	28
1.6.3 “Miscommunication”	30
1.7 The dilemma of difference	32

1.8	Positions of enunciation	38
1.9	Unconscious motivation	40

CHAPTER TWO: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT

2.1	Archaeological “sleuthing”	47
2.2	Freud’s divided subject	49
2.3	From mistranslation to the occlusion of the Aboriginal other	50
2.4	Initial Research Questions	50
2.5	The sense of symptoms	51
2.6	The return of the repressed	53
2.7	The “uncanny”	56
2.8	The Freedom Ride revisited – Black-White relations 1965-2005	58
2.9	The “Aboriginal Question”	64
2.9.1	Aboriginal disadvantage as a symptom	67

CHAPTER THREE: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT USING A CASE STUDY APPROACH

3.1	Psychological research in the antipodes	71
3.2	The psychology of difference	73
3.3	Propositions to be tested by the current study	76
3.4	The case study approach	78
3.5	Criticisms of the case study approach	79

3.6	The current study: An investigation of cultural difference	81
3.6.1	How a case study approach will be used to test the propositions of the current study	83
3.6.2	Bain’s indices of difference	84
3.6.3	Reliability and validity	85
3.6.4	Rationale - The need for culturally sensitive service provision	87
3.7	Guiding hypothesis	89
3.8	Aims and objectives of current study	90
3.9	Contribution to knowledge statement	90

CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY AND THE “OTHER”

4.1	Relational theories of identity	93
4.1.1	The formation of the subject, reflections in the social mirror	94
4.1.2	The ego-ideal	98
4.1.3	Melanie Klein – the fear of annihilation	101
4.1.4	Klein’s paranoid/schizoid position	102
4.1.5	Infantile phantasy: Splitting, projection and projective identification	103
4.1.6	The depressive position	105
4.1.7	A “normative” psychotic core	106
4.2	The banality of evil	108
4.3	Projection and splitting in the name of the nation state	110
4.4	Identification with the aggressor	113
4.5	Horizontal violence	114

4.6	A mythical ego-ideal: The Australian “being without lack”	117
4.7	Tolerating difference: Multiculturalism in Australia	119
4.8	The unassimilable Other	123
4.9	An Australian way of life	125

CHAPTER FIVE: THIS WHISPERING IN OUR HEARTS

5.1	Love, guilt and reparation	128
5.2	This “Sorry business”	129
5.3	Persecutory and depressive guilt	130
5.4	Paul Keating’s Redfern Park speech	132
5.5	The Stolen Generations – a denial	134
5.6	A history of denial	136
5.7	Hanson’s One Nation: The manic defence of the white mainstream	138
5.8	The myth of privilege	144
5.9	The lucky country	145

CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

6.1	The critical position within psychology	149
6.2	Ethical ground rules	150
6.3	The “warranting voice”	151
6.4	A note on purposive sampling	152
6.4.1	Criterion sampling	153
6.4.2	Snowballing	154

6.4.3	Redundancy	155
6.5	The interviews	156
6.5.1	Ethics	157
6.5.2	Confidentiality	157
6.5.3	The interview setting	157
6.5.4	The interview process	158
6.6	The participants	161
6.6.1	Demographics of the indigenous participants	161
6.6.2	Limitations of the indigenous sample	162
6.6.3	Demographics of the non-indigenous sample	163
6.6.4	Limitations of the non- indigenous sample	163
6.7	Data analysis	164
6.7.1	Analysis of interview transcripts	165
6.7.2	The problem of interpretation and researcher bias	165
6.7.3	Emergent themes	166
6.7.4	Conceptual reduction of themes	169

CHAPTER SEVEN: AN ABORIGINAL ONTOLOGY – A COMPARISON WITH BAIN’S STUDY

7.1	An overview of the chapter	170
7.2	“The whole of Australia is a sacred site”	171
7.2.1	Parallel worlds	174
7.2.2	“Wheels within wheels”: The bureaucracy of Native Title	177

7.2.3	Relationship to land: Past and present	180
7.2.4	A clash between cultures	183
7.2.5	Demographics – urban versus rural?	186
7.2.6	The Koori grapevine	188
7.2.7	Mainstream mapping	190
7.3	Family, Kinship and community	192
7.3.1	“Who’s your mob?”	193
7.4	Kinship as an organizing structure	198
7.5	The social family	203
7.6	Caring and sharing within indigenous communities	209
7.7	Obligation to kin: There’d be no “No”	214
7.8	Aboriginal politics	218
7.8.1	The “Aboriginal industry”	219
7.8.2	Speaking the whitefella way	223
7.8.3	A level playing field?	226
7.8.4	Capacity building and mutual obligation	229
7.8.5	The role of social support in capacity building	231
7.8.6	A three tier model of authority: Family, community, Elders	236
7.8.7	The “cause” and the “struggle”	238
7.8.8	“I’m not racist – but ...”	240
7.9	Affiliations and identity: Schisms in reclaimed culture	246
 CHAPTER EIGHT: CULTURAL IDENTITIES		
8.1	Aboriginal identity	251

8.1.1	Tradition – the “lost object	251
8.1.2	Hybrid Aborigines	255
8.1.3	Stolen identities: Aboriginality as a bureaucratic category	260
8.1.4	Stuart’s story	264
8.1.5	“Am I a man or a boy?”	265
8.1.6	Knowing the culture, learning the culture	267
8.2	Reconstructing culture	271
8.3	The transmission of knowledge	275
8.3.1	Gendered knowledge: Men’s business and women’s business	278
8.3.2	Cultural artifacts or cultural fictions	280
8.3.3	Burn out: Struggling with the cause	286
8.4	Horizontal violence	288
8.5	Unresolved grief	292
8.6	The “Tall Poppy Syndrome” within Aboriginal Australia	295
8.6.1	“Flash Blacks”	297
8.6.2	“Tall Poppies”	298
8.6.3	“Nine-to-five blacks”	299
8.6.4	“Coconuts”	299
8.6.5	The “New Assimilationists”	303
8.6.6	The underdog has to remain an underdog	304
8.7	Internalized racism: Denial of denial	306
8.8	Manufacturing Aboriginality	309

CHAPTER NINE: SYMBOLIC SOLUTIONS

9.1	The unconscious structured like a language	315
9.2	Symbolic solutions	315
9.2.1	The metaphors we live by	319
9.2.2	Renaming country	321
9.2.3	The Aboriginal flag	321
9.2.4	Indigenous role models	325
9.2.5	The Freeman factor	325
9.2.6	Winmar's jumper – a modern icon	326
9.3	The rise and fall of ATSIC	327
9.3.1	Did ATSIC really fail?	328
9.4	Symbolic representation or “practical reconciliation?” The public debate about the loss of ATSIC as a national Indigenous voice	333
9.4.1	Apartheid versus positive discrimination?	335
9.5	The eternal return of the Aboriginal Question	339
9.5.1	The more things change the more things stay the same	340
9.5.2	What's wrong with practical reconciliation?	341
9.5.3	Basic rights	343
9.5.4	Recent research in Indigenous health	344
9.6	Moving on from identity politics?	346
9.7	Practical reconciliation or symbolic inclusion?	349
9.8	The symbolic struggle – Aboriginal activism from 1967 to 2005	352
9.9	The symbolic act	353

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

10.1	The propositions that were tested in the current study	355
10.2	A comparison between Bain’s sample and the current study	356
10.3	Partial support for the guiding hypothesis	357
10.3.1	Relationship to land: An Aboriginal ontology	359
10.3.2	Kinship as an organizing structure	359
10.3.3	Traditional law and authority	361
10.3.4	Relationship to time	363
10.4	The second proposition: Perceptions of Aboriginal identity	363
10.5	Broader implications of the findings of the current study	365
10.6	On reconciliation	367
10.7	Healing the damaged Aboriginal object	369
10.8	Working through	370
10.9	The significance of a formal apology	371
10.10	A common Humanity	375
10.11	Summary of Recommendations	377
	1. Saying sorry	377
	2. Recognition of indigenous Australians as First Nations peoples	377
	3. Recognition of Country	377
	4. Education	378
	5. Recognition of Regional Authorities: Local solutions for local issues	378
	6. Recognition that “real” Aborigines are throughout Australia	379

7. Capacity building	379
10.12 Limitations	379
10.13 Further research	380
REFERENCES	381
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A Plain Language statement for indigenous cohort	405
APPENDIX B Plain Language statement for non-indigenous cohort	406
APPENDIX C Consent Form for participants involved in research	407
APPENDIX D	
D.1 Introduction to the indigenous contributors	408
D.1.1 Indigenous interview 1: “Stuart and Trish”	408
D.1.2 Indigenous interview 2: “Becky”	409
D.1.3 Indigenous interview 3: “Uncle”	410
D.1.4 Indigenous interview 4: “Nan”	411
D.1.5 Indigenous Interview 5: “Graham and Chrissy”	412
D.2 Introduction to the non-indigenous contributors	412
D.2.1 Non-indigenous interview 1: “Penny” – the community artist	412
D.2.2 Non-indigenous interview 2: “Mark” – the performing artist	413
D.2.3 Non-indigenous interview 3: “John” - the public servant	414
D.2.4 Non-indigenous interview 4: “Barry” – the engineer	415
D.2.5 Non-indigenous interview 5: “Fred” – the technician	416
APPENDIX E Further notes on the mirror stage of subject formation	417

STUDENT DECLARATION

“I, Jane Saunders, declare that the PhD thesis entitled: *Between surfaces: A psychodynamic approach to cultural identity, cultural difference and reconciliation in Australia*, is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

Jane Saunders, August, 2007

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OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

The impetus for this enquiry came from two experiences with an Aboriginal Other, which prompted the initial research questions: “Why does the existence of an Aboriginal Other threaten a white sense of belonging?” and; “What are the mechanisms and purposes of aggression towards, or exclusion of, that which represents otherness in the Australian context?” In the introductory chapters, the author’s experiences at Lake Mungo and Legend Rock are presented as case studies to illustrate Wittgenstein’s (1953/1968) concept of the ways that subject positions are constructed through language games and hegemonic discourses. Psychodynamic theories of identity formation have been applied to the analysis of these cases to argue that the unconscious construction of Australia as a good, white and Christian nation has acted to overwrite Aboriginal perspectives and to position Aboriginal people at the margins of society.

In Chapter One the case of *Lake Mungo* was presented to illustrate the ways that language games function as cultural frames, through which all experience is filtered. As well, Buhler’s (1934/1990) conception of the deictic and symbolic fields, and the role of the proper noun in allowing or disallowing individuals to occupy a position in the symbolic order as subjective agents was discussed. Here, a relationship between cultural framing and the construction of hegemonic discourses which act to position all that is Other outside positions of enunciation was posited. This was followed by a brief exploration of the concept that the lives of Aboriginal people are organized according to an ontological position that differs in fundamental ways from the world view of the white

mainstream. Specifically, it was argued that the social realities of Aboriginal people are embedded within their relation to land and the kinship obligations associated with belonging to a particular community in a particular place. A series of hypothetical *indices of difference*, based on Margaret Bain's (1992) research into a semi-remote Aboriginal community at Finke, in Central Australia, was presented.

The centrality of whiteness as an organizing principle in Australia was illustrated by Barton's (1901) "A White Australia" speech, made at the time of Federation. In the ensuing investigation of the way that the dominant culture has constructed an ideal image of the typical Australian, it was suggested that white Australians identify with a mythical Good Australia through white discourses of enlightened nation building and Empire, in which Aboriginal culture has been "mapped and managed" into a museum context and Aboriginal people have been rendered as "metonymically frozen into an extinct past" (Hemming, 2003, pp. 1-3).

In Chapter Two, a case study approach, based on Freud's model of analysis as an archaeology of the present, was used to explore the mechanisms behind the occlusion of Aboriginality as a presence in the case of *Legend Rock*. The Freudian (1919) concept of the uncanny was critical to the investigation of the particular anxieties around belonging that are evoked for white Australians when confronted with the unfamiliar Aboriginal presence in familiar spaces. In this section of the thesis, Gelder and Jacob's (1999) characterization of the overturning of the legal fiction of *terra nullius* after Mabo as the return of the repressed was discussed.

In Chapter Three, the rationale for using a case study approach to address the guiding hypothesis and the propositions to be investigated in the current study are outlined. Chapter Four introduces Lacan's (1949/2002) conceptualization of the mirror stage, during which identifications are formed and the ego, or "I" is first recognized, as well as Klein's (1937/1964) theory of primitive defence mechanisms. The ideas of these clinicians were used to explore the function of the Other in both normal development and in pathological states. This literature was then applied to an investigation of the process of othering as it has manifested in the Australian context in more general terms.

Rutherford's (2000) thesis: that an Australian ego-ideal has been based on the identification with a mythical being-without-lack, provided a starting point for analysis of the ways that white Australia has constructed a veil around cultural difference in order to defend against acknowledging the fact that Aboriginal peoples have been profoundly damaged by the practices and processes of colonization, and that these practices and processes continue to damage current generations of Aboriginal people.

In Chapter Five, it was argued that, after Mabo, white Australians have had no choice but to adopt one of two defensive positions with respect to Aboriginal Australia. Following Money-Kyrle's (1951) reading of Klein, these positions were nominated as being characterized by either persecutory or depressive guilt. The rejection of the Aboriginal story of *Legend Rock* was posited as representing the persecutory position, which was discussed in terms of the phenomenon of the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation. It

was argued that the denial of Aboriginal rights, and attacks on Aboriginal people as the recipients of special treatment, could be explained as representing the manic defence of a large minority of the white mainstream in response to perceived threats to identifications with the Good Australia evoked by the recognition of Native Title. As Klein has explained, the manic defence is driven by anxiety and functions through the primitive psychological process of splitting, whereby internalized good (ego syntonic) objects are retained and internalized bad (ego dystonic) objects are projected onto the scapegoated Other. In the case of One Nation, Aboriginal people were represented as “greedy” people who wanted to take away “our backyards”.

By contrast, it was argued that many white Australians had adopted the more difficult depressive position, which was best exemplified by Paul Keating’s (1993) Redfern Park Speech. The processes of splitting and projection that characterize the persecutory position enable us to repress the knowledge that we have inflicted harm, and thereby escape feelings of guilt. Depressive guilt, on the other hand, is associated with the painful awareness that harm has been done and a desire to make reparation to the damaged psychic object. This desire was manifest in the emergence of grass roots movements, such as Australians for Reconciliation, comprised mainly of white Australians, who organized their own responses to the stance taken by Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party. Australians who wished to amend past wrongs were frustrated by the inertia of the Wik debate, the failed referendum for a republic, the Treaty debate, and the dismantling of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. Ordinary citizens walked over bridges and contributed to the Sea of Hands in their tens of thousands to show their solidarity with

Aboriginal people. The “Sorry” books were in answer to the Howard administration’s steadfast refusal to make an apology and offer compensation to the Stolen Generations, as had been recommended by Wilson and Dodson’s (1997) *Bringing them Home Report*.

Chapter Six outlined the epistemological and methodological framework within which the research was conducted. In this section, the ethics of conducting research with indigenous communities has been presented, and the reasons for adopting a critical approach to psychological research are explained. The primary data from the interviews was presented in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. Data was organized into sections according to the main themes that were raised by the indigenous participants, accompanied by relevant commentary from the non-indigenous contributors. The analysis of the emergent themes has been presented alongside the data within each section.

In Chapter Seven, the guiding hypothesis that Bain’s (1992) *indices of difference* would be salient for a cohort of Aboriginal people living in urban and regional environments was partially supported. The Aboriginal participants’ subjective experience of their Aboriginal identity was explored In Chapter Eight. In Chapter Nine, Lacan’s concept that the unconscious is structured like a language, together with his emphasis on the role of metaphor in creating the illusion of fixed meanings, was used to investigate how Aboriginal narratives of identity have been influenced by representations of Aboriginality in both mainstream and indigenous communities. In Chapter Ten, a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations has been presented.

PROLOGUE: BENEATH THE SURFACE

For more than two hundred years, the Australian landscape has been a silent witness to the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the corresponding disruption to the intricate and highly evolved social relationship between country and self inherent to Aboriginal culture. Indigenous people have long tried to show white Australians that an understanding of the traditional relationship between an Aboriginal person and his/her country is fundamental to the understanding of an Aboriginal ontology and epistemology. This thesis will argue that it is here, in our respective relationships to the land itself that anxieties about belonging are most likely to evoke primitive defences within non-indigenous Australians. Ever since colonization and the arrival of western values and practices, the traditions which locate Aboriginal people within a particular place have been overridden by the values and aspirations of the dominant group. These differences between Aboriginal and white Australians are not just cultural. Rather, the one hides the other beneath the ordinary gaze.

The following two anecdotes provide evidence that the cultural differences between Aborigines and whites obscure white perceptions of land, of knowledge and of legal processes. Presented as *case studies*, they contain first person narrative accounts of two separate events which have influenced the course of the research. The first anecdote describes an event which occurred prior to my candidature and which prompted the decision to undertake a project which looked at cultural difference between Aboriginal and white Australians. The first case, *Lake Mungo*, will be used to orient the reader to the

philosophy of difference through reference to Wittgenstein's (1953/1968) concept of *language games* as "forms of life" and the associated literature on cultural *framing*. The second case, *Legend Rock*, concerns an incident which occurred towards the end of the data gathering phase of the project, and which led me to think about the fundamental impact that the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* has had on structural relations between Aboriginal and white Australians. The case of Legend Rock will be discussed in terms of psychodynamic theories about the role of identifications in subject formation and group behaviour.

Case Study One: Lake Mungo

In 1997, a group of students who had been enrolled in a fourth year subject called *Indigenous Psychologies* at Victoria University traveled to Lake Mungo, in New South Wales. The purpose of the field trip was to consolidate some of the learning that had occurred in the classroom with an experiential component. We were accompanied by our Aboriginal co-teacher, a Bunerwrong woman, some of her friends (who acted as caterers) and the course coordinator. As we drove along kilometre after kilometre of unsealed and corrugated road that led into the national park to get to our campsite, some of the group wanted to take a break and stretch their legs. Parked on the soft sand at the side of the gravel, the students surveyed the landscape of endless flat sandy desert and its patchy covering of spinifex and saltbush with curiosity. One proclaimed loudly to no-one in particular "There's nothing here, nothing at all."

The next day, we were taken by two of the traditional owners of the Mungo area (who were employed as rangers) to look at an Aboriginal flint quarry, where, we were told, for millennia the local indigenous people (the Barkantji, the Mutti Mutti and the Nyemba) had harvested the local hard stone shards to make tools to use and trade. To our surprise, they parked the four wheel drive not far from where we had stopped to rest the previous day, the very area where it had been perceived that there was “nothing”. We followed the rangers a little way off the main track, searching ahead for the expected excavation into the landscape. When the rangers stopped and knelt down on the sandy ground and began to gently pick up the pieces of rock that were lying there, it was a shock to realize that we were already “in” the quarry.

Rather than an open excavation cutting into the ground, the quarry site consisted of a multitude of stone shards, some worked and some still in their natural state, scattered horizontally over an area of several hundred square metres among the sparse saltbush which clung to the sandy soil. We had literally walked onto the quarry, and were only able to discover the signs of industry by a close inspection of the worked edges of half-finished tools and the smooth depressions in the larger grinding stones. It was an eerie feeling to stand among the scattered stones and bear witness to the evidence that this place, which to our white “Colonial Eye” had seemed only empty, was in fact full, its presence masked only by the bias inherent in our expectation of what was there to be seen.

Case Study Two: Legend Rock

In 2002 I undertook another field trip. This time I traveled alone through Southeastern Victoria to the small township of Metung, on the Gippsland Lakes. Renowned for its fishing, boating and other leisure activities, holiday-makers flock to the Lakes district in their thousands in the summer months. Metung, which has retained its original Aboriginal name, is a picturesque little township which sits as the meeting point of two great lakes, Lake King and Lake Victoria. Part of the “Victorian Riviera”, Metung boasts beautiful views across the lakes and a large marina. Waterside properties in Metung make highly desirable real estate, and are valued in the millions of dollars. The purpose of the trip was to make a photographic record of various sites that I had visited on previous occasions and wanted to use as data in this research. I had come to Metung, specifically, to take photos of Legend Rock. I had been told the story of Legend Rock a couple of years earlier by a man who belongs to that country. He had told me that the story associated with the rock was considered very important to the traditional custodians – the Gunai (also spelled Kurnai) people of East Gippsland. The story is a kind of teaching story, similar to the kinds of allegorical teaching stories found in the Bible. A plaque at the site outlines the story as follows:

One day some fishermen, who had hauled in many fish with their nets, ate their catch around a campfire.

The women, guardians of social law, saw that the men had eaten more than enough, but had not fed their dogs.

As punishment for their greed, the fishermen were turned to stone.

This story was one of many Gunai (Kurnai) stories that were told, and retold, to show that greed would bring punishment.

There were once three rocks associated with the legend here, but two were destroyed by road works. The remaining Legend Rock is now protected.

The story of Legend Rock illustrates how landscape is incorporated in a very literal sense into cultural transmission in traditional Aboriginal society. Without the rock, the story would lose its particular reference to place. Just as the rock enables the continuation of the story, the telling of the story marks the ones who tell it - the Gunai (Kurnai) as belonging specifically to that place (Metung). The owners of *that* story belong to *that* place. In the Aboriginal view, such a place is a *sacred site*. Where there are no traditional custodians left to tell the story, no other Aboriginal group can replace them. Writing in the early part of the twentieth century, Daisy Bates evocatively described the dual impact on the loss of relationship between clan and country as the Central Desert people walked out of their ancestral lands to her camp on the railway siding at Ooldea Soak. The country, deprived of its traditional custodians, became “orphan country”, with no one to look after it (Bates, 1944/1952).

In addition to the ancient story of Legend Rock, the bronze plaque reveals another, more recent story. The final sentence on the plaque mentions that the rock that stands at Metung was originally one of a group of three, but that the other two were removed to make way for a road. In the original story, there were three fishermen, represented by the three rocks. The remaining rock is situated beside a public jetty which allows access to boats moored in the marina. In the 1960s, construction workers who were building the jetty wanted to blast the remaining rock as well, because it was “in the way”. The remaining rock was only preserved when a local community group and the Gippsland and

East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative had an injunction issued under the Heritage Act of Victoria. The workers needed to alter the line of the jetty in order to fit around the rock. Regarded as little more than an obstacle to the developers, the rock had to be named and inscribed as Legend Rock to make its meaning visible to the Colonial Eye. No doubt every road and major construction in Australia has involved similar destruction of cultural markers, most of which have gone un-marked and un-remarked.

On my first visit to Metung, I had been taken to the rock by my friend. On the return trip I had difficulty locating it, and went into a shop in the township to ask for directions. The proprietor of the shop had no trouble indicating which road I should take. She was a mature woman who appeared middle class and well educated. On a whim, I asked if she could tell me about the legend associated with Legend Rock. She smiled in a coy kind of way and said “Oh, well that’s a matter of debate.” I asked what she meant and she said, “Well, you can read the plaque and see what you think, but there are rumors that there’s more to it than that.” Curious, I probed further, and she elaborated in a conspiratorial tone ... “Look, I probably shouldn’t say this, but there are those that say the rock was put there.” Because I had been told the story about the rock’s history outlined above, I had trouble grappling with her meaning at first. I was confused. Then it dawned on me ... “Do you mean ... that the rock was put there by Europeans?” “Yes”, she replied, “They say they brought it here, and put it in the lake, for the tourists.”

My confusion was born out of the dissonance between the conceptual model I had of the rock’s history from the perspective of a traditional custodian and this new concept – that

in fact white people, and not Aboriginal people, had “invented” the legend of Legend Rock. The latter view, which was more radical than I would ever have predicted, simultaneously acted to eradicate not only the political and economic struggle undertaken by Aboriginal people to retain their cultural heritage, but the cultural heritage itself. Remove the story of Legend Rock, and it becomes possible to elide all reference to Aboriginal history from Metung. Tony Birch (2003, p. 152), in his essay, *‘Nothing has Changed’: The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture* has written:

In order to uphold the lie of an empty land, Europeans have either denied the Indigenous people’s presence, or have completely devalued our cultures. These hegemonic histories take possession of others’ histories and silence them, or manipulate and ‘deform’ them.

These two narratives have been presented to the reader at the outset because, in different ways, they have contributed profoundly to the evolution of the current thesis. The first incident, at Lake Mungo, brought home to me in graphic terms how much we, as encultured individuals, are influenced by our expectations of the world, developed throughout life in terms of previous experience and the language that is available to us to describe that experience. As Derrida (1978/1987, p. 83) has aphoristically stated “Framing occurs, but there is no frame.” There is no frame, first because framing is an *act* rather than a stable given, and second, because even solid material frames tend to be naturalized by the viewer into near oblivion. Frames may take several forms. Material frames isolate an object or an image so that the frame’s content can be more easily seen and appreciated. Each frame gives its particular shape to the meanings of whatever

object, space, or situation it encloses. We use cognitive frames, or *schemas*, to help us to organize and interpret experience (Goffman, 1974).

Cultural framing

Just as the viewer remains only subliminally aware of the frame which supports a painting on the gallery wall, the conceptual frames that we use to frame our worlds tend to be so naturalized that they become invisible (MacLachlan & Reid, 1994). This quasi invisibility is true of all frames, both metaphorical and material. At the level of perception, Gestalt psychology has presented us with the obvious example of the image which alters according to whether we focus on the figure or the ground. Similarly, cognitive psychology has demonstrated that the “knowledge structures” or cultural “texts” of one cultural group, by providing a form of implicit framing, determine how that group will interpret and respond to the behaviour of another group (Schank & Abelson, 1977, p. 9). As Freund (1987) has argued, “... our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge, but a hermeneutic construct, for all perception is already an act of interpretation.” (cited in MacLachlan & Reid, 1994, p. 7)

My experience at Lake Mungo led me to think about the ways that language and other forms of cultural representation influence cultural understanding in terms of the personal operations which are dependent on our specific subject positions in time and place. The potential impact of the somewhat benign example of questions about cultural difference and the problems of translation raised by the Lake Mungo case is quite different, however, from the issues raised by the case of Legend Rock. My discussion with the

shopkeeper at Metung about the history of Legend Rock led me to think about the ways that white Australians are unconsciously motivated to place Aboriginal people outside the frame, and thereby render them invisible. Why, I wondered, would the white woman in the shop so easily accept a new myth, in which visible Aboriginal inscriptions of a landscape were willfully overwritten by the colonial story? What were the dynamics behind this drive to create a vacuum which acts to deny an Aboriginal presence? And finally, since it is always within representation that we recognize ourselves, what happens to those people, Aboriginal people, whose history and culture are elided in the process?

Land, belonging and identity are all necessarily interwoven with the ways we think about ourselves as “Australians”. In the introductory chapters of this thesis, I will argue that the lenses which white Australians use to view themselves have been shaped and ground by the colonial past, and that this past has carried Eurocentric concepts about the world into the post-colonial present. From this beginning, I will attempt to build a more three dimensional view of the Aboriginal/ white interface through an “archaeology of the present”, in which data gathered from multiple perspectives will be explored. Firstly, Aboriginal people were interviewed to gain a phenomenological perspective on Aboriginality and Aboriginal identity as seen from the inside. Secondly, white people who interact with Aborigines were interviewed about their subjective experiences of interaction with Aboriginal people. Thirdly, the psychodynamic lens cut by Freud and ground by Lacan has been used to glimpse into the shadows that the invasive vision of the colonial eye have cast over the Australian landscape and the Aboriginal people.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ABORIGINAL-WHITE ENCOUNTER

Prior to going on the trip to Lake Mungo, I had assumed that I, a white person, “knew something” about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal experience. This belief drew on an incipient interest in Aboriginal art and culture that pre-dated the fourth year unit in *Indigenous Psychologies*. What I had failed to take into account was my own “whiteness”, and the assumptions implicit to it. The implicit role of language in shaping perception is also critical here. In the example presented in the case of *Lake Mungo*, above, the expectations associated with the term *quarry* were explored in terms of how my a priori assumptions (that a quarry was a hole in the ground) rendered the actual quarry (not a hole in the ground) invisible to the white eye (“There’s nothing here, nothing at all.”) The quarry was a quarry “other than” the expected quarry, but was, nevertheless, undeniably a quarry.

1.1 Wittgenstein’s Language Games: How propositions become social facts

Ludwig Wittgenstein has characterized this kind of culturally specific use of language as a *language game*. In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein (1953/1968) argued that there is not only *one* logic of language, but many; language has no single essence, but is a vast collection of different *practices*, each with its own logic (cited in Grayling, 1996, p. 77). According to Wittgenstein, then, language is far from being inner or private to the mental life of an individual, but rather exists in the public domain. In this context, language is not restricted to spoken or written texts, but refers to social and cultural norms as well. The experience at Lake Mungo provided me with a subjective example of

Wittgenstein's contention that meaning, or its subjective interpretation, does not consist of a straightforward denoting of a pre-existent relation between words and things. Neither is it a simple relation between propositions and facts; rather, the meaning of an expression is its *use* in the multiplicity of practices which go to make up a language.

Each of us is born into an ongoing set of language games, which we must learn in order to be understood by and to understand others. From a sociological perspective, Erving Goffman (1959) described the performative aspects of social interaction in terms of the implicit "staging" which situates each player within a particular context and helps to frame the social action that occurs within that context. To further illustrate this concept, we could imagine that the assignment of a social role to a particular category of person (women, for example) constitutes a language game wherein women are defined, not only by "feminine" adjectives (nurturant, co-operative, etcetera), but also by a complete set of prescriptions for feminine behaviours that are congruent with the agreed cultural norm for women within a particular society. This means that language is not something which can be investigated independently of social considerations ...

Language is woven into all human activities and behaviour, and accordingly, our many different uses of it are given content and significance by our practical affairs, our work, our dealings with one another and with the world we inhabit – a language, in short – is part of the fabric of an inclusive 'form of life' (Wittgenstein, 1953, cited in Grayling, 1996, p. 83).

Durkheim was the first sociologist to assert that a social norm is nothing more than an accumulation of decisions made by a community over time (Sarup, 1996). What

Wittgenstein meant by a “form of life” was the underlying consensus of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, assumptions, practices, traditions, and natural propensities which humans, as social beings, share with one another, and is therefore presupposed in the language they use, language is woven into that pattern of human activity and character, and ... “meaning is conferred on its expressions by the shared outlook and nature of its users” (Wittgenstein, 1953, cited in Grayling, 1996, p. 84). This notion is reflected in Benedict Anderson’s (1983) conceptualization of nationhood as an “imagined community”. Similarly, Freud used the term “Weltanschauung” to refer to a shared outlook on the world that is reflected in social structures.

1.2 The Colonial Eye

The two cases presented in the *prologue*, above, led me to think about the ways that white Australians may be subject to a Eurocentric perspective, a *Colonial Eye*, which has become so naturalized that its influence as an implicit cultural frame remains outside of awareness. The historian Henry Reynolds (1981, p.3) has related a story told to him from “the other side of the frontier” by an old Murray Islander, who described how his forebears had scrutinized a sailing ship lying off the island and had seen the Europeans at the railing “... looking back at them through their telescopes or ‘white men’s eyes’.” The colonizer’s telescope is an apt metaphor for the particular frame through which the western gaze filtered Aboriginality at the time of first contact.

The lens that the colonial observer looked through was Eurocentrism, a world view which has been metaphorically referred to above as the Colonial Eye. The “eye” should not be

interpreted as a causal force, but rather in terms of its functions as an *organized* and *organizing* structure, which is used to frame any new encounter with objects, ideas and people in the world. The following quote illustrates how the implicitly held values and beliefs of the European colonists shaped their perceptions of, and responses to, Australia's indigenous peoples:

When Captain Cook sighted the Australian coastline in 1770, between 300,000 and one million people inhabited the continent which had been owned and occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for at least 50,000 years. Cook's instructions if he found the Great South Land uninhabited were that he should 'take possession of it in the name of His Majesty King George III as first discoverers'. If the land was inhabited, he was to 'seek the natives' consent [and] and take possession of convenient situations in the country'. Cook saw no crops or farms, so by his definition the land was available: thus the notion of terra nullius was born (Thorpe, 1993, p. 91).

The view that was available to Cook, as he gazed through his telescopic lens along the coast in search of a safe harbour, was as much determined by his conceptual vision of the world as it was by the science of optics which had produced the magnifying lens. In 1788, when Cook first arrived at the "fatal shore" described by Hughes (1988), the Colonial Eye was informed by and committed to a mechanistic science born of Enlightenment philosophy, atomistic physics, and clockwork linear time. The boundary of this world view was circumscribed by a cartography built on a contractual system of land ownership underwritten by legal documentation of grants of title, and its vision of

the self as a transcendent “self-contained” individual was governed by Christian monotheism (Flax, 1993).

From the moment of first contact to the present era, all attempts at communication between European and indigenous Australians have been shaped by what Henry Reynolds (1981, p. 4) has called “the politics of contact”. According to Reynolds, the political construction of Aboriginality began from the moment when James Cook and Joseph Banks returned to England after their 1769 voyage, and reported that the Great Southern Land, the east coast of which they had “discovered” and explored was a land that belonged to no-one – a *terra nullius* (Griffiths, 1995). The colonial observers on the *Endeavour*, who regarded the indigenous people they encountered as having no legal claim to the land that supported them, were using the British legal system as a textual determinant to frame Aboriginality within the context of an Imperial construct of land ownership and citizenship (Broome, 1990).

The assumption that Aborigines had no title to the land followed from the erroneous observation that they had no obvious system of government and law (Langton, 2003). We could hypothesize that the lack of visible markers (buildings and fences), which would indicate possession and boundary to the Colonial Eye, rendered the very real relationship between clan and country non-figural or invisible. Aboriginal people, however, did not map the land in terms of individual ownership, rather, “each tribal group (between 100 and 300 people) constituted a kind of ‘nation state’, which was collectively responsible for the maintenance of a defined area given by an Ancestor Spirit” (Charlesworth, 1997,

p. 56). Movement across country was ecologically determined by its capacity to sustain a clan's access to seasonal wildlife (Broome, 1990). These boundaries, being based on an Aboriginal empiricism and epistemology, were outside the frame of European convention, and thereby invisible to a European observer (Watson and Chambers, 1989).

Previously, the tendency to make such figure/ground distinctions in terms of prior experience and understanding was considered in light of Wittgenstein's (1953) notion that human perception is never separate from the culture and language in which we live, speak and act ... "Our actions, linguistic, conceptual and otherwise, only take on meaning within some socio-linguistic framework" (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1997, p. 8). For example, the question: "Who owns the land?" which is so critical to whites, would be nearly meaningless in an Aboriginal framework.

The notion that ontological truths are culturally inscribed through language games has wide ranging repercussions wherever the empirical assumptions of a dominant cultural group are used to speak for members of minority groups (Riley, 1998). This is particularly true of colonial societies, where the cultural norms of the colonists have historically been superimposed upon the colonized, as if the latter's "laws of subjectivity" (designated variously as inferior, incomprehensible, or non-existent) did not need to be accounted for (Flax, 1993).

If we accept Wittgenstein's contention that language games, as forms of life, help to shape the environment within which framing occurs, then it follows that the key reason

that individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds misinterpret one another's motivations is that they speak, or are spoken by, different assumptions. My subjective experience of myself as an Australian must always be coloured by the fact that I came here as a small child from somewhere else, and grew up in an era – the 1960s and 70s – which held particular social and political views about the status of Aboriginal people and the relative value of Aboriginal culture.

1.2.1 Aboriginality in Victoria: A culture of the past?

The predominant view that was evident in that time came from history books which presented Aboriginal people as belonging somewhere in the past. In 2003, Steven Hemming argued that Aboriginality in Southeastern Australia has been “managed” into the past through a series of practices which have historically represented Aboriginal culture as having value only in terms of Social Darwinian “scientism”. According to Hemming, the focus on archeological heritage sites, anthropological collections of human remains and artifacts housed in museums, and cultural tourism, present a composite fantasy of Aboriginal people locked within a “culture of the past”. Hemming (2003, pp. 1-3), described the representation of Aboriginal people in Southeastern Australia as an “anthropologically constructed image of a person in a possum skin cloak”, metonymically frozen into the extinct past. Hemming discussed the roles of history, anthropology and archeology in contributing to the authorizing of such representations by the placement of relics in museums.

In particular, Hemming's (2003) discussion was centred on an item housed at the South Australian Museum and referred to by museum staff as the "black box". The "black box" was a black, wooden, coffin-like box kept in the anthropology storeroom in the west crypt of the Museum. It held the remains of four indigenous people, a "representative, full-blood Southeastern family group". Hemming argued that the scientific interest in the preservation of these human remains (as anthropological specimens) was based on the white conception that the indigenous people from Australia's Southeastern States were extinct. The remains, along with the museum's artifact collections, anthropological notebooks and other records became a record of a race of people who have been, in Hemming's words "mapped and managed into the past."

1.2.2 The "real" Aborigines

Hemming situated the white need to place Southeastern indigenous people in an historical context with attempts to: "resurrect the pioneer myth and shore up the myth of the "settled Southeast" as the foundation of white Australia. For Hemming (2003, pp. 3-4) the idea of the settled Southeast was the "heartland" of an Australian "narrative of nation ... It is the normalized, mainstream, Australian space, that sits at the centre of the Australian state's contemporary engagement with Indigenous people." To this end:

Major public events celebrate the history of the conquering of the Australian landscape, the river systems, the ingenuity and adventurousness of the early settlers. Public re-enactments of the pioneer legend reinforce the history of the modernization of Australia – change is inevitable in a modernizing space. This story of modernity necessarily marginalizes indigenous people. It produces a set of foundational myths that are written by signs of development such as the bridge,

the jetty, the marina. They all represent the power of technology to overwrite the 'natural landscape', and assume that the indigenous place has been erased or covered over by layers of progress. Time and progress are represented by built environs and the layering of the landscape, archeology contributes to this story by adding its reading of the progress of time, civilizations, and development (Hemming, 2003, p. 8).

Hemming (2003, p.8) went on to argue that contemporary Aboriginal (Ngarrindjeri) people, some of whose ancestors were in the "black box", continued to struggle against being "boxed in" to preconceptions about their place in modern Australia, so that "Indigenous people are being transformed into tourism objects, objects of heritage interest, or 'relic' populations with connections to an archeological past – a substrata of settlement." As with all "forms of life", such views become active at a subliminal level, and do not need to be openly stated to have their effect.

One consequence of the continued representation of Aboriginal people and culture within the frame of "stone-age man" has been that contemporary Aboriginal people in Southeastern Australia have been rendered invisible in the public imagination outside of the museum context. The current strong debate about who "owns" the relics (artifacts and human remains) held by institutions¹ has highlighted the schism between representations of Aboriginal people as legitimate objects of historical research, and the position of

¹ In 2004, a group of indigenous people removed bark paintings from Victoria's State Museum in protest that social events held in close proximity to where the paintings were displayed was disrespectful to their ancestors (Trioli, 2004, July 31, *The Age*, p. 2). Similarly, the documentary film *Cracks in the mask* traced the unsuccessful efforts of a Torres Strait Islander man to repatriate human remains of his ancestors and artifacts made by them that were being held in the anthropology vault of the British Museum.

contemporary Aboriginal people – often the direct descendents of the original source of the relics – who confront white Australians with the statement “We’re still here.”

When I was growing up in Victoria, the “real” Aborigines were conceptualized as belonging somewhere else – “Up North”, or in “The Centre”. In Victorian homes, Aboriginal designs and portraits of indigenous people appeared as decoration on tea-towels and dinner plates, along with graphic reproductions of Australian flora and fauna. The perennial image was of the Aboriginal man in a red lap-lap, standing on one leg and leaning on his spear, one hand shielding his eyes from the sun as he stared into the distance. Women and their cherubic children, usually naked, were often depicted in groups or pairs, sitting cross-legged on the ground.

When the romantic sculptor, William Ricketts, wanted models for his highly idealized sculptures of Aboriginal people, he traveled from his studio in Mt Dandenong² all the way to Arnhem Land to find them. Ricketts, described as an eccentric who held strong views about the power of Aboriginal “spirituality” to heal the land, saw no contradiction in looking for the containers of that spirit in a faraway place, despite the fact that the traditional custodians of the place where he lived and worked still lived in Victoria. The appropriation of Aboriginal motifs and the romanticized depiction of tribal peoples by white film directors, artists and designers could be regarded as paradoxical, given that the popularity of these cultural products coincided with a period in which Aboriginal people themselves were often treated very poorly and relegated a social position that could, at best, be described as marginal.

² Rickett’s work is on view to the public at the William Ricketts Sanctuary, Mt Dandenong, Victoria.

For more than 200 years, the cultural differences between Aborigines and whites in Australia have been interpreted according to the perceptions of the white majority, which has constructed Aboriginality as either the exotic or the abject Other. In the current era, the representation of Aboriginal people remains fairly stereotypical. Despite the recent advent of a spate of films that have sensitively portrayed Aboriginal themes³, indigenous representation in the entertainment industry has tended to present Aboriginal people in stereotypical roles oriented towards an historical approach. At the time of writing, only three indigenous entertainers (the actors Deborah Mailman and Aaron Pederson and television presenter Ernie Dingo) were seen regularly on television or in films in contemporary urban roles that did not depend on the fact that they were Aboriginal.

The main premise of the current thesis is that cultural differences exist between Aboriginal and white Australians, differences which have contributed to misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two groups at the cultural interface. As long ago as the 1930s, William Cooper (Attwood & Markus, 2004) asserted that white Australians needed to learn to “think black”, in order to truly understand the country itself and our place in it. Before we can attempt to think black, however, white Australians first need to recognize and accept the ways that the cultural frames which hold our individual identities in place have been based on “thinking white”.

³ *The Tracker*, *Rabbit-proof Fence* and *Ten Canoes* are three relatively high profile examples, while the short feature, *One Night the Moon* offers a more low-budget “art-house” example of such depictions.

My central argument here is that, before white Australians can enter into a dialogue of reciprocal relations with indigenous Australians, they/we need to come to an understanding of the ways that the cultural frame of whiteness has led to Australian identities being imagined and represented in particular ways, and that these “white” frames have acted to exclude or marginalize the Aboriginal presence in Australia.

1.3 A white Australia

The constitutional reality of a unified Australia did not exist until 1901, when Federation joined the formerly separated States and Territories within Australia. As its inaugural act, the new Federal Parliament passed two pieces of legislation which have come to be known as the “White Australia Policy”. The following extract (cited in Fullilove, 2005, pp. 130-135) from Alfred Deakin’s speech: *A White Australia*, given in Melbourne on 12 September, 1901, shows the extent to which Federalism was tied to the imaginary concept of racial purity in the form of whiteness:

The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry, and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, and an aspiration toward the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought – the same constitutional training and tradition – a people qualified to live under this Constitution – the broadest and the most liberal perhaps the world has yet seen.

Unity of race is an absolute essential to the unity of Australia. It is more, actually more in the last resort, than any other unity. After all, when the period of confused

local policies and temporary political divisions was swept aside it was this real unity that made the Commonwealth possible.

I am speaking not merely for myself, but for the Government, when I say how entirely and absolutely they realize the fundamental character of the principle which lies below their declaration for a white Australia, and that it may be seen that there is no uncertain note, there is no divided feeling, there is no conflict of opinion within this House, or without it, that the unity of Australia must be secured on this question if not on any other; that we stand shoulder to shoulder with practically an inconsiderable minority against us, so small as to be scarcely discoverable.

At the very first instant of our national career we are as one for a white Australia ... Members on both sides of the House, and of all sections of all parties – those in office and those out of office – with the people behind them, are all united in the unalterable resolve that the Commonwealth of Australia shall mean a ‘White Australia’, and that from now henceforward all alien elements within it shall be diminished. We are united in the resolve that this Commonwealth shall be established on the firm foundation of unity of race, so as to enable it to fulfill the promise of its founders, and enjoy the fullest extent the charter of liberty under the Crown which we now cherish.

Deakin’s speech also made several references to the need to prohibit “all alien coloured immigration” and to “by reasonable and just means” implement policies which would lead to the “deportation or reduction of the number of aliens now in our midst” with the aim of securing a White Australia. The absence of any mention of Australia’s indigenous peoples in this moment of nationhood is notable, but not surprising. The unmarked nature of whiteness as a natural, or normative, state has meant that the ways in which the Australian national identity has been structured as white have remained relatively

unexamined. In effect, the sentiments expressed so unequivocally by Deakin left no place for Aboriginal people in the minds of white Australians except that of the “alien within”.

Given the ascendancy of multiculturalism over the last 40 years, the description of mainstream Australia as “white” may be regarded as somewhat contentious. In his 1997 book, *White*, Richard Dyer has traced the imaginary associations between embodied whiteness, purity of spirit, and the capacity to transcend the body. The use of the term *white* in this thesis should be read in terms of Dyer’s (1997) characterization of “whiteness” as an ideological category, and not merely as a reference to skin colour or ethnicity per se. Dyer (1997) emphasized that the construct of Whiteness was inextricably linked to the concept of enterprise which is at the heart of the Enlightenment ideal of unlimited human progress. In his 2006 Australia Day address, Prime Minister John Howard embraced contemporary Australia’s cultural diversity as “one of our nation’s greatest assets”. At the same time, his stress on the need to recognize sameness echoed the sentiments included in Deakin’s speech more than 100 years ago:

Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them. Our dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture (Howard, 2006, January 26, *The Age*, p. 13).

From this perspective, different ethnic minorities within Australia have been more or less successful in “assimilating” to the ideologically white mainstream, while maintaining their cultural distinctness at a social level. There is a poignant irony in the fact that

Aboriginal people, who are by definition always already Australian, are often more distanced from mainstream values and access to political power than recent arrivals. This is no accidental phenomenon, for, as the Aboriginal activist William Cooper pointed out repeatedly ... the children of persons of any nationality ... **except Aborigines** ... were granted all the legal and social entitlements inherent to the status of citizenship, from the moment they were born on Australian soil (Attwood & Markus, 2004).

The rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which encourage engagement with the polis, are the primary form of inclusion through which new arrivals to Australia have been acculturated. From the time of Federation, migrants have been encouraged to adopt Australian citizenship, which offers rights as well as demanding responsibilities. For example, all Australian citizens are offered protection through centrally funded social services in order to ensure minimum supports in the advent of unemployment or sickness.

The fact that all citizens are also required to engage in the democratic political process through voting in elections across the three levels of government, local, state and federal, has been critical to the successful advocacy of the needs of minority groups by members of those groups who have been elected to represent them. It is no accident that Al Grassby, the so-called “father of multiculturalism”, was a blend of races, nationalities and cultures – his mother was Irish and his father Spanish – that is typical of modern Australia (MacCallum, 2005, April 28, *The Age*, p. 23).

While there are obvious parallels between the minority status of ethnic migrant groups and indigenous Australians (who, as with Vietnamese and Greek Australians, represent about two percent of the population), it will be argued here that Aborigines have a uniquely problematic relationship with the ideological mainstream. Further, it will be argued that this relationship is, at its core, problematic for whites precisely because Aboriginal people are the only Australians who have not arrived on Australian shores from somewhere else; they were “here first”.

Although the specific articulation of Whiteness as a formative element of a distinct Australian identity occurred at the beginning of the 20th Century, the notion of white superiority which lay behind the project of Empire had been coupled inextricably with the “enlightened” concept of human progress from the 18th Century (Hage, 2003; Merchant, 1992; Seidman, 1994). As Seidman⁴ has argued, the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers like Comte about the inherent superiority of Europeans over every other race effectively reduced the entire non-Western world to a mere footnote in human history.

Because of their geographic isolation over millennia, the Australian Aborigine was considered to be the “missing link” between Stone Age man and the more evolved European ideal. Linda Burney (2006) has described how it felt for her to sit in a classroom at the age of thirteen and hear her people described as “savages” and the closest example to Stone Age man living today: “I felt ashamed and embarrassed. I

⁴ Seidman’s (1994) summary, from his book *Contested knowledge: Social theory in the post-modern era*, contains a thorough examination of the ways that Enlightenment thinkers have influenced history. For the interested reader, excerpts from Auguste Comte *The positivist philosophy*, translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau, John Chapman, 1853, 2 Vols., can be found in *Sociological perspectives*, edited by Kenneth Thompson and Jeremy Tunstall (1971), Penguin Books Australia Ltd, pp. 18-32.

vividly recall wanting to turn into a piece of paper and slip quietly through the crack in the floor.”⁵

A growing body of literature has now begun to interrogate the way that indigenous peoples have been constructed variously by Eurocentric interpretations as “savage”; “heathen”; “childlike”; “in-educable”; and “doomed”, a view of human progress which led to Aboriginal peoples being classified as less-than-human along with the flora and fauna of Australia. As such, between 1788 and 1967, Aboriginal people were excluded from any form of symbolic representation as human agents with a role to play in the shaping of their own destiny. In this context, the occlusion of the Aboriginal story of *Legend Rock* can be viewed as a specific example of the general function of whiteness as a normalizing principle.

The first person narrative about Lake Mungo was used to illustrate the ways that surface appearances have generated blindness in the Colonial Eye when it looks towards the Aboriginal presence in Australia. With this in mind, I began to read and to listen more about the ways that Aboriginal peoples interpret landscape, and to begin to understand the profound differences in the relationship to land that exist between Aborigines and whites. From listening to the Aboriginal voice from “the other side of the frontier”, I learned that the indigenous view of country is incorporated within a larger ontology which has very little in common with a western democratic tradition, and that the

⁵ This quote comes from Linda Burney’s oration for the 7th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, broadcast on ABC Radio National’s *Away!* Program on 1/09/2006.

relationship to “country” has been critical to the ways that economic and social structures have developed within Aboriginal communities.

At the most fundamental level, it has been argued that the dominant Eurocentric view of the self-contained individual, whose subjectivity is circumscribed by a cartography of private ownership and political nationhood, may be incommensurate with an indigenous subjectivity based on the community body extended into landscape and maintained by intergenerational exchange through story and functional ritual (Cochrane, 1994; Griffiths, 1995). In *After the Dreaming* (1968/2001, pp. 230-231), the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner gave an account of the divergence between the traditional significance of land for Aboriginal people and the dominant western paradigm:

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word ‘home’, as warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean ‘camp’, ‘heart’, ‘country’, ‘everlasting home’, ‘totem place’, ‘life source’, ‘spirit centre’ and much else in one. Our word land is too spare and meager. We cannot now scarcely use it except with economic overtones, unless we happen to be poets ... the Aboriginal would speak of earth and use it in a rich, symbolic way to mean his ‘shoulder’, or his ‘side’. I have seen an Aboriginal embrace the earth he worked on ... a different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance (Stanner, 1968).

According to Michael Dodson (1997, pp. 41-43), the significance of land to indigenous people needs to be understood in terms of the integration of spiritual, cultural and economic interests:

Everything about Aboriginal society is inextricably interwoven with and connected to the land. Culture is the land ... our cultural beliefs or reason for existence is the land. You take that away and you take away our reason for existence. We have grown the land up. We are dancing, singing and painting for the land. We are celebrating the land. Removed from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves.

This concept of land as the foundation of identity goes beyond the western concept of an appreciation of natural beauty or attachment to a familiar landscape. Westerners are capable of a detached relationship to land as property, and are therefore able to see land in purely economic terms. Even the loss of land to which white Australians are sentimentally tied can be sustained without a corresponding loss of cultural identity or social role. One piece of land can be exchanged for another with relative ease. For traditional indigenous people, however, such detachment is impossible, because land is the ... “map for physical and spiritual survival, memory and development” (Dodson, 1997, p. 41).

1.4 Caring for country: an Aboriginal ontology

British appropriation of the land we now know as Australia was first implemented by establishing boundaries and allocating European place names to the areas so partitioned. These boundaries did not account for the pre-existing boundaries that had been established over millennia by their Aboriginal occupants. Ignoring the subtle, but highly sophisticated regimes of land tenure and usage, the new settlers set about making the land their own by creating a new, and in the main, arbitrary set of boundaries, based on

abstract principles which were largely unrelated to the topography, climate, plant and animal life of the land itself. In doing so, they also disregarded the obligations of its prior occupants to maintain sacred ritual through song, dance and ceremony (Watson and Chambers, 1989).

In their book: *Singing the land, signing the land*, Watson and Chambers (1989), investigated the ways in which Aboriginal people (in this case, the Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land) systematically organized every aspect of the social and physical world according to their relationship with a particular geographical location. These authors noted that, because Aboriginal peoples construe relationships between humans and natural things according to perceived ancestral or familial linkages that go back to the earliest time (the Dreaming), no distinction is made between nature and culture in traditional Aboriginal society (Turnbull, 1989).

“Caring for country” involves being responsible for the spiritual health of a particular portion of the land, which Aboriginal people have traditionally conceived of as their “mother” (Dodson, 1997). The concept that the land “owns” its Aboriginal custodians, rather than the other way around, is a profoundly alternate conception to that of the European in that it assumes that the land is not separate from humans, but is itself animate and responsive to human action. From an Aboriginal perspective, the spiritual health of country depends on the continued performance of a series of human practices, including story, song and dance.

Here, the temporal distinctions that Europeans make between past, present and future do not apply. Actions in the present are vitally connected to past events, and the Ancestral beings are considered as present within country that they have helped to form, have named, and have handed down to their descendants, the current “custodians”. Because the Ancestral beings handed over the land to particular human groups, the maintenance of the world in its proper state is conditional on those groups continuing to perform ceremonies and produce the paintings and ceremonial objects that “commemorate the creative acts of the Ancestors” (Turnbull, 1989, p. 36).

Discrete sites within the landscape carry their own itineraries and stories, or Dreamings, parts of which are described and represented in the geographical maps that white Australians think of as “art” (Petitjean, 2000). Since the majority of Dreamings are accounts of the travels of the ancestral beings (Ancestors), the sites to and from which these journeys led – for example, a resting place or a cluster of places where a battle between two ancestral beings took place – are of great importance. For the initiated, the evidence of these stories of ancestral travel is still “visible” in the landscape. The features of the landscape, hills, creeks, rivers, lakes and trees – are the record, or the story, of what happened in the Dreaming, and all identified places are linked into a whole. The whole country is constituted by a network of tracks which intersect and define a framework for the political and economic processes of a particular Aboriginal society, and this is the country owned by that person or group.

Petitjean (2000, p. 68), in a recent investigation of Western Desert painting, has described the relationship between the design patterns in Aboriginal art and existing geographical sites that are associated with a Dreaming. Unlike the works of white Australian artists, these works do not “stand alone” as part of an artist’s oeuvre, rather, each painting represents one fragment of the web of journeys and sites which are only meaningful in the context of the Dreaming story and the related practices (song and dance) which are meant to accompany the painting/map. In this sense, the land itself becomes the text upon which Aboriginal stories of identity are inscribed.

1.5 Country and kinship

It has been suggested that the complex interrelationship between a defined area of country and its human custodians forms the basis of a distinct Aboriginal ontology (Bain, 1992; Petitjean, 2000). In Aboriginal society, this ontological position is supported through the rules and practices around social engagement, which have evolved to form the epistemological base through which a distinct Aboriginal world view is expressed. The story of Legend Rock is an apt example of how the features of the landscape can be read as both a record of the actions of the Ancestors in response to human greed, and an active prescription for social engagement and moral behaviour (in this case, the sharing of resources) applicable to current generations of Aboriginal people. I have described Legend Rock as an apt example because, if landscape, or country, is the collective text within which an individual Aborigine’s Dreaming is written, then moiety and kinship obligation are the media through which all legal and social relationships are organized.

This relationship is circular: land, kinship, law, social role and status are intricately woven together into what Watson and Chambers (1989, p.31) have defined as “systems of genealogical patterning.” Using the Yolngu people as an example, these authors have stated that, to be a “real” entity in social life, a person, or place, must be named, and thus located within the *genealogical order*. This is why, when a stranger with whom some ongoing personal contact is expected is invited into the community, that person must be given a name within the genealogical system before he or she can contribute in any meaningful way to the society. Once the name is decided upon, it will designate the relation with a particular Yolngu person, which will then determine the relationship with all other Yolngu, as well as with specified aspects of the natural world.

The complexity of the genealogical order is such that, when a non-Aboriginal person is recognized in this way, he or she will have established, in one moment, formal family relationships and responsibilities involving several hundreds of people:

The most important function of the system is the orderliness it imposes on the relations of individuals and groups to each other, to the land, and to all things in the Yolngu world. To give a few disparate examples, the system determines potential marriage partners; it designates the precise parcels of land which individuals and groups ‘own’ and for which they are responsible; it provides a coherent spiritual account of the genesis of life on earth; and, when combined with ‘messages’ delivered by living agents within the system, it provides practical information about which plants and animals are available for harvesting. It designates the various sets of people responsible during a burial ceremony. At a general level, it is a formally articulated system of beholdenness: it orders degrees and types of indebtedness (Watson & Chambers, 1989, p. 37).

Watson and Chambers (1989) have provided evidence that Aborigines and whites work not only with different conceptual systems, but also have different ways of using conceptual systems. For Aborigines, the *genealogical pattern* of kinship explains all relationships in both the social world *and* the world of nature, whereas European Australians order and classify the world according to a conceptualization of the world where nature and culture are separate. Thus, while European identities are formed through marked landscapes (all that has been constructed), traditional Aboriginal texts of identity are inscribed in country (all that stands) (Healey, 1993).

In European systems, kinship classifications are discontinuous and discrete. Beyond an interest in individual biological determinism and the social contracts surrounding paternity, they tell us little or nothing about the world of nature. As Watson and Chambers (1989) have wryly observed, if Westerners should lie about their genealogy, the world would not collapse. In traditional Aboriginal culture, the cosmos is conceptualized as one in which Ancestral Beings created meaning in the world in their actions of social living, and these actions need to be maintained by the current generation in order for the world to continue as it is. European Australians, by contrast, assume that their language represents and signifies “the world as it is”, paying scant attention to how meaning has been created. Nor do they see such questions as related to their daily life.

Writing in the latter part of the twentieth century, Margaret Bain (1992), in her seminal study of the Aranda and Pitjatjanjara people based around the semi-remote township of

Finke, in Central Australia, investigated the Aboriginal relationship between land, kinship, social structure and economic activity. Bain found that Aboriginal subjective reality differed in substantial ways from that of mainstream Australians, and offered several ontologically based *indices of difference* between Aboriginal values and those of the white mainstream.

Bain's central contention, that paradigmatic differences between the ontological positions and conceptual systems of Aborigines and whites was founded in their differential perceptions and interpretations about landscape and their relationship to it, forms an important empirical paradigm for the current program of research. The guiding hypothesis outlined in my initial research proposal: that cultural differences have led to communicative problems and misunderstandings between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, was based on Bain's distinction between Aboriginal *interactional* and white *transactional* conceptual models.

1.6 Bain's Study: The Aboriginal-white encounter

Bain's major work: *The Aboriginal-White Encounter: Towards Better Communication*, was informed by 17 years of close interaction with Aboriginal people in Central and Northern Australia, including seven years living with a semi-remote Aboriginal community at Finke (south of Alice Springs in Central Australia) as a community advisor. This research, which was published in 1992, was driven by a search for the underlying causes of continued miscommunication between Aboriginal and European Australians that Bain observed at Finke and elsewhere.

In her role as community advisor, Bain observed that Aboriginal people and whites had different expectations of the same events and that various explanations were given for the difference. Whites attributed problems rather vaguely to traditional Aboriginal custom or social practice, to Aboriginal unreliability or to lack of knowledge. For their part, many Aborigines held that whites were insincere, unreliable, greedy, and that they deliberately withheld information. For Bain, these explanations seemed superficial, in that they dealt largely with surface phenomena, and not with causes. Bain wanted to explain why these two groups were not fully “in conversation” with each other, particularly what aspects of their discussions caused fruitless misunderstandings.

This question, which is also central to the current project, was partly answered through her careful analysis of Aboriginal ritual, which revealed significant differences in Aboriginal and western world views and conceptual systems. Using a methodology which incorporated close participant observation, structured questionnaires and discourse analysis (of both conversation and interview protocols), Bain came to the conclusion that Aborigines and whites each interpret the other’s society and culture according to their own model, and that “these models were often inimical” (Bain, 1992, p. 11).

Bain’s research, particularly as it elucidates the Aboriginal relationship between land, kinship, social structure, and economic activity, offers important insights into how Aboriginal subjective reality may differ in substantial ways from the mainstream. The most significant of these is Bain’s definition of the overarching Aboriginal conceptual

model as one of *interaction*, and the European model as essentially *transactional*. Bain concluded that the Aboriginal/white miscommunication she so often encountered at Finke could be essentially attributed to a clash between these two models.

1.6.1 Aboriginal interaction

According to Bain, Aboriginal society is strictly circumscribed by *interactional* processes which are defined through kinship systems. In providing a pattern for all Aboriginal social action, kin relationship also provides a pattern that contains the action within specified limits. Accordingly: “interaction does not occur indiscriminately throughout society, but only in approved ways between those who are appropriately related” (Bain, 1992, p. 141). This concept is essentially commensurate with Watson and Chambers’ (1989) description of the genealogical system in Yolngu society.

In short, Bain found that, in Aboriginal society, sacred and secular actions alike are interactions, and both types of interaction are based on kinship. Bain defined interactional processes as: “social action undertaken by individuals or groups when its occurrence and content is determined by the kin relatedness of those taking part.” Specific relationship determines whether or not an action can or should occur, and it sets parameters on the content of that interaction (Bain, 1992, p. 142). At Finke, Aborigines engaged in interaction and could extend relationships, together with appropriate behaviour, to non-kin with whom they interacted, through the process of naming described above, which allowed whites to fit into the classificatory kinship system.

1.6.2 European transaction

In white society, interactional processes also occur within the family or among friends, although the content is not prescribed. Bain (1992) argued, however, that interaction is not adequate to cover the requirements of a large and complex society. She noted that, outside personal relationships, whites are able to form business and professional relationships, such as employer/employee, doctor/patient, trader/customer and so on. Associations of this type can be terminated and are bounded by set limits, such as goal, relevant skills and training, as well as quantitative concepts, such as profit and loss, wealth, surplus, waste, and control of assets.

In these cases, kinship is irrelevant to the action which occurs, being replaced by the assumption of a formal role. Bain referred to *transactional* process in terms of its central role in economic, legal and political relationships in white society, and contrasted this with the absence of such a concept in Aboriginal social practice at Finke. Importantly, the white practice of transaction can be entered into by agreement between any persons, whereas interaction depends on specific kin relationship. Thus, the necessity for a “skin” name for whites who interact with Aborigines in traditional communities.

Another important distinction that Bain noted was that, in Aboriginal culture, time is measured along both diachronic and synchronic axes, so that the past and the present are not distinguished in the way that they usually are for European Australians. Furthermore, as we have seen, Aborigines make the ontological assumption that physical existence and/or life requires maintenance by human beings. Bain argued, therefore, that

Aborigines treat process in nature as primarily interactional, for which chronological time is unimportant, and not as a series of events that occur over time. Rather, things are as they are, as they have always been. This concept is exemplified by the *Dreaming*, a time which is neither past nor future, but contains both while resonating in the present. The focus on caring for country is based on the premise that, if the land is looked after properly today, it will continue to provide all the requirements for the future.

While other researchers have conceptualized these differences in other ways (as discussed above, Watson & Chambers (1989) have distinguished between genealogical and number systems), Bain argued that the focus on either interaction or transaction was the major difference between Aborigines and whites in their daily encounters. In western society, it is possible for the two forms of process to co-exist. In a family business, for example, interaction can put pressure on transaction. Nevertheless, while such a business can accommodate some partiality towards kin and friends, the impartiality of transaction must dominate if the business is to survive. In the Aboriginal social setting, by contrast, kinship, totem and country must take precedence.

Bain (1992) argued that the absence of transaction meant that the process of interaction permeated every facet of Aboriginal social life. In the field of economics, for instance, social relatedness provided a means of channeling and limiting the distribution of goods and services. Giving and receiving only occurred between specific and appropriate kin, that is, when there was obligation to give and right to receive; but equally, it did not

occur when those rights and duties were absent. Under those circumstances, any refusal to take up an obligation amounted to rejection of relationship.

1.6.3 “Miscommunication”

Through many everyday examples, Bain showed how these functional aspects of the Aboriginal kinship system were interpreted by whites in terms of their own conceptual system, which is based on the possibility of separating the material and spiritual and the economic and the social. Many of these interpretations formed into negative value judgments about intent, rather than being seen as expressions of different cultural values. Thus, sharing of resources among kin was often interpreted by white Australians as nepotism, and immediate distribution of surplus with no apparent thought to the future was regarded as squandering.

Similarly, the Aborigine’s non-adherence to chronological time was seen as personal laziness and unreliability. The western notions of reciprocal obligations and authority, which often go unrecognized by Aboriginal friends or employees because there is no ritual obligation to comply, was interpreted by whites as selfishness. On the other hand, in the small community at Finke, Bain (1992) observed the difficulties Aborigines experienced when forced to assume western transactional processes and noted that Aborigines were often placed in an unenviable position – between two worlds which were coterminous. For example, when having to work with a person they were ritually barred from communicating with, or when a subordinate clan member was given a

position of authority over more senior kin, to whom he would then be obliged to give the company Toyota for the weekend.

While Bain's (1992) research focused on a semi-remote community, other investigators have found similar distinctive social and cultural patterns among urban Aboriginal communities. Examples include: Michael Houseman's (1997) research of Aboriginal kinship patterns; and ongoing longitudinal studies conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Policy Research (see, for example, Hunter & Smith, 2000; Taylor, 1993; 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; and Taylor & Bell, 1996; 1999) into the demography of contemporary indigenous Australians. Cumulatively, previous research and anecdotal evidence offer support to O'Shane's (1993, p.196) speculation that, by and large, urban Aboriginal families, and other community sub-groupings, "continue to be organized according to traditional practices and the social imperatives arising out of that form of social organization."

Bain's (1992) research highlighted the fundamental ontological differences between the Aboriginal focus on social interaction and the white emphasis on transaction. Among other things, Bain's research has indicated that, by its very nature, the western practice of democratic process is likely to sit uneasily with an indigenous social structure based on localized authority linked to a particular geographic area and the kinship obligations associated with that authority. Lowitja O'Donoghue has pointed out that many of the major difficulties which have emerged at the interface between Aborigines and whites are due to the fact that "democracy is at odds with Aboriginal culture" (2004, cited in Schubert, Rintoul & Maiden, *The Australian*, April 16, p. 4).

The notion that identity (both personal and national) is formed through language games as “cultural tropes” is central to the location of gaps in understanding between cultural groups (Kitayama, Markus & Matsumoto, 1995). The current program of study has been informed by the notion that recognition and acceptance of fundamental cultural difference is a necessary first step in breaking down stereotypical representations of contemporary Aboriginal people. Because of their minority status within Australia, Aboriginal people have long struggled to work within the dominant white paradigm, while at the same time attempting to hold true to their traditional cultural norms. In Australia, the overarching concept of the individual citizen which is inherent to the rubric of “democracy” has tended to over-ride the basic tenets of Aboriginal society – collective land ownership, collective decision-making and collective social responsibility.

1.7 The dilemma of difference

The recognition that there is an Aboriginal subjectivity which the Colonial Eye has occluded, and that such a distinct subjectivity may have value on its own terms, forms the central theme of this research. It also creates a dilemma for the social researcher, for if there is no tradition of Aboriginal detachment, how can an empirical psychology begin to address Aboriginal subjectivity? It has now been well established that, while psychology aspires to determine general laws through empirical methodologies, generalities can only refer to particular subjects governed by similar laws of subjectivity (Gergen, 1992).

For most of the last 218 years, Aboriginality has been represented as problematic, compared to whiteness, which has always been represented as natural. Whiteness, being assumed as the natural and superior state, has not been represented at all. In a very real sense, Aboriginal people in Australia have been denied a voice, or rather, a *place* from which to speak and be heard. Australia is unique among former British colonies in that no treaty was made with indigenous people recognizing their title to the country of which they were dispossessed (McKendrick & Thorpe, 1994; O’Shane, 1995). As mentioned above, Aboriginal people were not recognized in the Australian census until 1967, and therefore were literally not “counted” prior to that date (Swan & Raphael, 1995).

Indigenous peoples did not gain a representative voice at the national level until 1989, when the Hawke Labor government set up the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) through an act of parliament. In April, 2004, Australia’s “experiment in self determination for its indigenous population” was deemed a “failure” and, as a consequence, another act of parliament sanctioned its official demise (ATSIC was finally decommissioned in mid 2005). At present, “Australia is the only Western country with an indigenous population and no indigenous representative body” (Malcolm Fraser, cited in Gordon, 2005, April 28, *The Age*, p.8)⁶.

Jane Flax, in her book: *Disputed subjects: Essays on psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy*, has argued that there is a political dimension to language games as hegemonic discourses, or discourses of power. In acquiring linguistic skills, we also “take on a way of life and enter into specific circuits of power” (Flax, 1993, p. 49). According

⁶ Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister of Australia between 1975 and 1983.

to Flax, the relationship between language and discourses as “circuits of power” means that language cannot be a transparent, passive or neutral instrument. In her 1999 book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith has illustrated how dominant narratives, or hegemonies, serve to exclude those who are different. She has described how members of minority groups have struggled to find themselves reflected in the discourse which describes them only in terms of being “Other”.

As both a Maori woman and an academic, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has argued that she has been forced to orient herself to a text world in which the centre of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe and in which words such as *we*, *us*, *our* and *I* act to exclude her, even when those texts have purported to be *about* black women. Here, Tuhiwai Smith has used her subjective experience of exclusion to say something about the positioning of black women in colonial discourse in general. This nomothetic view of the effects of Eurocentric hegemony on colonized peoples contains within it the idiographic perspective of what it is like *for her* to be positioned outside the dominant discourse. At this experiential level, Tuhiwai Smith has highlighted the function of the personal pronoun in identifying who belongs to the group and who remains outside of it.

In 1934⁷, Karl Buhler published his seminal work: *The Theory of Language*, in which he described the pointing, or *indexical* function, of personal pronouns as operating within the *deictic field*. The deictic field is comprised of all those words that signal to us our

⁷ Buhler’s work has been widely disseminated in the German-speaking world, but was only published in English translation in 1990.

situational position as *I* or *Thou* in a specific time (*now* or *then*) and at a specific place (*here* or *there*). Buhler traced the origin of these *personalia* from the Greek *prosopon*, meaning, “countenance, mask or role” (1934/1990, p. 94). Tuhiwai Smith’s comments about her feelings of being excluded as the subject of the texts she has read from Europe and North America have illustrated the way that speech acts which use personal pronouns designate the particular roles (subject positions) that are available within the deictic field. If a European author uses the word *we*, for example, he/she is addressing a receiver who is also presumed to be European. If the same author then uses *them* to indicate, say, all non-Europeans, anyone who is not European can make no mistake about the fact that the text has not been addressed to them. In other words, inclusion in the deictic field designates a position from which it is possible to enunciate as a subjective agent.

Buhler (1934/1990), who wrote: *The Theory of Language* long before Wittgenstein had developed his thesis of the ways in which society is structured through language games, conceptualized language as operating within *two fields*. He argued that, while the deictic field situates us contextually in space and time (as in “I am here”) as speakers/writers and listeners/readers, a second domain, which incorporated the naming words, is also active. Naming, especially through the use of the proper noun, acts to locate that which is named within what Buhler called the *symbolic field*.

As an example of how the use of the proper noun situates the subject, when William Cooper was helping to set up the Australian Aborigines’ Advancement League in the 1930s, he consciously included the possessive apostrophe in the word *Aborigines’* to

signal his intention that the League should be an organization that was both “owned” and organized by Aboriginal people (Attwood & Markus, 2004). By insisting on the possessive apostrophe, Cooper distinguished his organization from the many white organizations that used the word Aborigine/s or Aboriginal in their title, most notably the hated Aboriginal Protection Board. This example aptly illustrates Buhler’s argument that subject positions can be conferred and altered within the symbolic field through the use of the proper noun. What is acknowledged and shared is *ours*, while *they*, *them* and *theirs* highlight alterity, and act as exclusionary signifiers of all that is Other.

The Other, is a term that appears frequently throughout a wide range of literature from various disciplines to refer to “other people” in a general way. Usually, the Other simply makes reference to those others who represent categorical difference in some shape or form, such as through their gender, sexual identity, race, or their religious and ethnic affiliations. In this reading, the Other is essentially used to describe members of an *out-group* versus members of an *in-group*. Linguistic equivalents to this reading of otherness can be seen in the following pairs, where the word representing Other has been italicized: *us/them*, *normal/deviant*, and *unmarked/marked*.

According to postmodern theories of identity formation, identity is only conceivable in and through difference, but difference is also associated with anxiety (Sarup, 1996). The process of identification of the Other as either belonging to “our” group as one of “us” or as not belonging and therefore being outside the group as one of “them”, is essential to group formation and maintenance. It is the tie which holds the group together and allows

it to have a life of its own. In psychoanalytic terms, the function of designating the Other as “them” is a defensive measure which enables the individual or group to maintain an identity against a perceived threat from that which is different (Allingham, 1987). On an individual, family, and societal level, identifications are an essential element of the positive formation of a coherent and integrated personality, or ego. On an interpersonal, interfamilial and intercultural level, however, perceived threats to identity can lead to attacks on the Other in the form of scapegoating and racism (Becker and Arnold, 1986).

In a critique that began in 1978 with Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, numerous authors (including Dyer, 1997; Hage, 1998; 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004), have pointed out that the implicit value of whiteness has acted to place people who were not white outside discourses of power/knowledge in colonial countries. Moreton-Robinson (2003) and others have referred to the naturalized whiteness of colonial discourses in a similar vein to Dale Spender’s (1980; 1982) claim that masculine pronouns in historical texts, such as the Bible and Plato’s *Republic*, were “unmarked”, in that they framed both the protagonist and the reader in the text as male.

Similarly, white identities have remained unmarked, but have carried within them unspoken assumptions that are embedded in the ways that white Australians think about themselves and the language that they use to describe themselves. For example, the description of this island continent as “The Great South land” indicates a perspective of the world in which the Northern Hemisphere is assumed to be the point of origin. Discussions of Australia as a “new” country belie the fact that, geologically, Australia is

among the world's most ancient land masses, and Australia's indigenous people are members of the oldest continuing culture on Earth⁸.

1.8 Positions of enunciation

Stuart Hall (1990, p. 222) has argued that practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write, which he calls "the positions of enunciation". Positions of enunciation are, at least in part, governed by what Allingham (1987) has described as "unconscious contracts". The ontological position of the one who enunciates, although often hidden, is implicit to every speech act. As Žižek (1992, pp. 98-99) has pointed out, ontological discourses are themselves sustained by "indirect speech acts" which proclaim that "the world is like that" while, at the same time, the fact that the declaration itself (the enunciation) enables the ontological proposition to be regarded as "true" is concealed.

Žižek used the example of the child who declared "The Emperor has no clothes!" in Hans Christian Anderson's folk tale to illustrate the "magical power" of the declarative speech act. Before the child spoke, everyone had assumed that the Emperor appeared naked only to themselves, and that their failure to "see" was due to their own lack of refinement and ignorance. In Žižek's (1992, p. 98) terms, it took the declaration of an innocent (a person outside the discourse of power) to "blow up the entire established network of intersubjective relations."

⁸ John Mulvaney, of the Australian National University, has estimated that Aboriginal culture is at least 50,000 years old (see Mulvaney & Kamminga, 1999).

To return to Wittgenstein's (1953/1968) premise, this means that declarative speech acts are always interpreted contextually, and their acceptance by others as either "true" or "false" will often depend on the social position of the speaker or the institution that they represent. As Searle (cited in Žižek, 1992, p. 99) has stated: "It is only given such institutions as the church, the law, private property, the state, and a special position of the speaker and hearer within these institutions ... "that one can accomplish a declaration at all." Žižek concluded that ... "Authority is ultimately the name of a gesture which establishes (constitutes, creates, sets up) a certain state of things in the very act of establishing (certifying, stating, ascertaining) that 'things are thus'."

One way that implicit assumptions are revealed is in the phrasing of those sentences which begin with "everybody knows" Authority, then, emerges from the field of socially recognized knowledge (one does not question the King!), and socially recognized knowledge acts to confirm ontological positions as true. As the example of *The Emperor's New Clothes* has shown, this can occur even when the evidence of our senses should lead us to question the veracity of some truth claims.

One of the "sleights of hand" employed in the nineteenth century by the European colonists, in Australia and elsewhere, was to reduce the "heathen" (that is, non-Christian) people encountered in colonized countries to the same category of "less-than-human" that was employed by the Nazi's against the Jews in the twentieth (Arendt, 1963/1994). Ghassan Hage (2003, p. 49) has argued that, despite the existence of a general category of "humanity" derived from Christianity, ... "the European tribes of colonial capitalism

constructed themselves as the ideal type of what it means to be a 'human being'. What the history of the rise of European colonialism shows is how this 'being the best type of human being' became associated with being white." Thus, the taking up of land for the economic and social benefit of the invader could be rationalized on grounds that the bringing of "civilization" to the heathen was a "Christian" duty.

Hage (2003) has suggested that, by creating a category of less-than-human, Christian settlers could enact inhuman atrocities against colonized peoples without diminishing their ontological position as Christian. At the same time, stories of atrocities perpetrated against colonized peoples could be dismissed as "fabrications" because Christians were, by definition, "good people" and therefore incapable of such acts. The ontological view that Christianity was the "one true religion" meant that non-Christians were regarded as having no religion. Within this schema, evidence of religious ceremony in non-Christian societies could only be interpreted as "heathen ritual".

1.9 Unconscious motivation

Freud used the term *Weltanschauung* to denote necessary, unconscious and anonymous forms of thought that seems close to Kuhn's (1970) exploration of *paradigms* as group beliefs within scientific communities. Freud argued that this term encapsulated "a specifically German notion", which "would be difficult to translate into a foreign language." In the following quote, Freud (cited in Fodor & Gaynor, 1950/1975, p. 99) attempted to provide an explanation of its meaning:

By Weltanschauung ... I mean an intellectual construction, which gives a unified solution to all the problems of our existence in virtue of a comprehensive hypothesis, a construction, therefore, in which no question is left open and in which everything in which we are interested finds a place. It is easy to see that the possession of such a Weltanschauung is one of the ideal wishes of mankind. When one believes in such a thing, one feels secure in life, one knows what one ought to strive after, and one ought to organize one's emotions and interests to the best purpose.

Freud pointed to the central role played by the unconscious in human affairs when he revealed the extent to which the related structures of fantasy and identification can determine the fate of individuals, communities and entire nations. In works which include *The Future of an Illusion* (1927/2001), *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/1995) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1938/2001), Freud devoted a great deal of his time to the exploration of links between the nature and institutions of society and the underlying and typically unconscious aims of its members:

What characterizes psychoanalysis as a science is not the material which it handles but the technique with which it works. It can be applied to the history of civilization, to the science of religion and to mythology, no less than to the theory of the neuroses, without doing violence to its essential nature. What it aims at and achieves is nothing other than the uncovering of what is unconscious in mental life (Freud, 1917/1963, p. 389).

Since the principle discovery of Freudian analysis is that all conscious desires, feelings and beliefs are, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by unconscious processes, the aim of any psychoanalytic enquiry is to discover the nature and extent of these processes. The

primary aim of any application of psychoanalytic theory to politics and culture, therefore, is to discover the nature and extent of whatever unconscious processes may influence our political and cultural desires, feelings and beliefs (Money-Kyrle, 1951).

By its very nature, however, our unconscious acceptance of cultural and social norms makes them difficult to observe directly because they are presented in subliminal ways and we identify with them without our knowing it. Freud's (1900/1978) revolutionary discovery, that the unconscious speaks: in dreams, slips of the tongue (parapraxes) and jokes, can be used as a tool to investigate how the language games that are played out in the social realm will reveal something of the unconscious processes working at the level of the family, community and the nation.

For Freud, symbols emerged in dream interpretation as "mute elements", because their manifest content contained latent meanings outside of the dreamer's conscious awareness. Freud (1900/1978) reserved a special place for symbolism in his thinking about the products of the unconscious, especially in his theory of dreams and the practice of interpretation. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1904/1978) and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905/2001), Freud extended his investigation of the role of the "symptom as symbol" to show that the unconscious meanings of everyday occurrences can be interpreted on a cultural level, as well as through the interpretation of the individual dreamer's associations.

Lacan (1953/2002) has argued that the entire process of subject formation is dependent on the installation of a representational system. Beginning with the proper name which situates the child in a particular family constellation, each human being is a story and lives in a narrative reality. The ordinary and everyday stories that we learn and tell about ourselves, and the metaphors through which we communicate experience ... “serve as vehicles for rendering selves intelligible” (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 17). Stories are the social glue that gives order, coherence and meaning to our experiences. Stories also structure our relationships with others.

There is a core of stories at the centre of each society – some fictional, some mythical, and some actual (Flanagan, 1998, *The Age*, 18 April, p.6). If we accept that all stories constitute *signifying acts* through which meaning is made and identity is formed, then the fictional, mythical and actual coalesce to become a *signifying system* which operates dynamically within particular cultural frameworks through the production of symbols. The *Macquarie Concise Dictionary – 3rd Edition* (1998, p. 1185) defines the symbol as something which “expresses, through suggestion, an idea or mood which would otherwise remain inexpressible or incomprehensible.”

In psychoanalytic theory, the symbol is the meeting point of many analogies, and is also used to indicate figures of speech and linguistic functions, such as the simile, metaphor or allegory, metonymy and synecdoche. Freud argued that the essence of symbolism consists in a “constant relation” between a manifest element and its equivalent or equivalents. This constancy is found, not only in dreams, but in other diverse forms of

expression which constitute the products of the unconscious (symptoms, myths, folklore and religion), as well as in other aspects of the cultural sphere.

In the psychoanalysis of politics and culture, it is instructive to note which metaphors are valorized, and which are ignored, because signifiers which evoke a strong emotional response are always a sure sign that the unconscious is at work. In Australia, for example, the ANZAC legend, particularly as it has emerged from the historical focus on the role of Australian forces in the Gallipoli campaign and the “blood and bandages” of the trench warfare fought on the Western Front during the First World War, have been associated in the national psyche with stoic sacrifice and heroic bravery, an association which has only been further embellished as the last of the original “diggers” have died.

Lacan (1955-56, p. 303) used the term *point de capiton* (“quilting point” or “anchoring point”) to describe the concept that, despite the continual slippage of the signified under the signifier, there are certain fundamental attachment points where this slippage is temporarily halted through the creation of metaphor. Symbolic representations, such as flags, anthems and folk songs or the old school tie, evoke a sense of inclusion through identification with a collective ego-ideal.

Tropes such as these, through the process of metaphor and synecdoche, offer us a place to belong as subjects in the symbolic field of national culture. Noting that such “anchoring points” were not present in patients suffering from psychotic illness, Lacan concluded that a certain minimal number of anchoring points are necessary for people to develop a

normal sense of identity. Because of their links with the earliest identifications first formed in childhood, these anchoring points hold a great deal of emotional power. The importance of the anchoring function of metaphor is reflected in the common phrase “the metaphors we live by”. For example, the novelist Patrick White’s portrayal of the “great Australian emptiness” resonated with a culture that has survived at the margins of this island continent, always glancing over its shoulder to the “home” country, England.

The recent emergence of the names given to four wheel drive vehicles, like *Territory*, *Jackaroo/Nullabor*, *Nomad*, *Longreach*, *Patrol*, *Pathfinder* and *Outback* have tapped into conceptions about the difficulties inherent to “taming” the centre of the land itself. This movement has only recently been accompanied a shift from old metaphors about Australia’s “dead heart” to a new conception of the accessibility of the “outback”. Strictly speaking, the outback refers to the centre of the continent, but, for the white settlers, the inland regions of Australia were (and perhaps still are) always perceived of as “behind” the coastal periphery that the majority of the population clings to.

Stable national signifiers are particularly attractive to us in times of individual change and/or crisis (including periods of separation from loved ones, or being away from home) because they function as reassuring reminders that we belong to *that* group and come from *that* place, to which we will return. This is why jars of Vegemite, the Qantas kangaroo, the smell of eucalyptus, and the strains of *Waltzing Matilda* are more evocative to the Australian traveling overseas than they can ever be to the Australian at home.

The significance of the ANZAC legend as an anchoring point in the Australian psyche is reflected in the amount of energy that has been invested in enshrining the ANZAC story through ceremony and ritual. At the same time, cultural signifiers can act to exclude all of those who fail to meet the ideal. It seems almost unnecessary to remind the reader that the emblematic national character invoked by Australian stories of identity has invariably been white, male and Anglo-Celtic. The fact that, until very recently, there was no mention of Aboriginal people outside of history books provides just one example of how the colonial project in Australia has acted to displace Aboriginal texts of identity to the margins of the mainstream Australian story. The many other omissions include the lack of reference to the pivotal role played by Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry (Bunbury, 2001), and the way that Aboriginal ex-servicemen and women and their dependents were denied benefits that were universally applied to returned soldiers who were white (Kidd, 1997). The same thinking is reflected in language that defines farmers as deserving recipients of “subsidies”, while Aboriginal communities in similarly desperate circumstances receive “handouts”.

Rather than add to the mass of data which has shown clearly that, on most indices, Aboriginal people are clearly the most disadvantaged group within Australian society, the current program of research has attempted to investigate the structural reasons for the fact that Aboriginal communities suffer more than their fair share of social problems (Altman, 2000; Altman & Hunter, 2003; Australian Psychological Society, 1997; Calma, 2005; Davidson, Sanson & Gridley, 2000; Hunter, 1999; Hunter, 2000; Sanders, 2001; Sanson & Dudgeon, 2000; Schwab, 1999).

CHAPTER TWO: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT

Freud, in a celebrated passage, likened the human mind to the city of Rome, conceived four dimensionally so that all, or at least many, of its former buildings coexisted with later ones built upon their sites. This simile, through its very self-contradictions, vividly portrays the relationship between the workings of signification in the unconscious and the conscious conception of the world (Symington, 1986, p. 69).

2.1 Archaeological “sleuthing”

By using Freud’s concept of unconscious motivation as an epistemological tool, and borrowing from his model of psychoanalysis as an archaeological history of the present, it will be argued that there is a structural relationship between historical events and the current position of Aboriginal people. Here, Lacan’s (1953/2002) assertion that the unconscious has its own logic or signifying structure, and that it is structured like a language, will be central to my discussion of the ways that hegemonic discourses have been used to rationalize the marginalization of the Aboriginal as Other in Australia.

Freud’s analogy between the city of Rome and the human mind (as paraphrased by Symington, above), has illustrated the ways in which the past continues to resonate in the present, even where the “foundations” of our present thoughts and actions have been obscured or covered over. Freud famously used the metaphor of archaeology to describe the process of psychoanalysis (Nobus, 2000). In his case studies of Dora (1905/1990), Little Hans (1909/2001), The Wolf Man (1918[1914]/1991) and The Rat Man (1909/2001), Freud provided his readers with fascinating first-hand accounts of how he

developed the analytic method to uncover the sense of his patients' symptoms by tracing backwards from the present. For Freud, the past was expected to have a lasting, yet unconscious impact on the present. The role of the analyst was to uncover this connection:

[Impressions] which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal: after the passage of decades, they behave as if they had just occurred. They can only be recognized as belonging to the past, can only lose their importance ... when they have been made conscious by the work of analysis, and it is on this that the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment rests to no small extent. Again and again I have had the impression that we have made too little theoretical use of this fact ... of the unalterability by time of the repressed (Freud, 1933 [1932], cited in Nobus, 2000, pp. 60-61).

As such, Freud conducted an analysis in the present perfect tense: patients were urged to come to terms with their present symptoms by acknowledging “what has been” (Nobus, 2000, p. 59). In his description of Freud’s inferential method as “archaeological sleuthing”, Nobus has likened Freud’s approach to the symptom to that of a detective at the scene of a crime. Like the detective, Freud proceeded in an analysis by paying closer attention to the apparently meaningless trifles in the patient’s everyday life than to the more obviously salient aspects of the patient’s account. Slips of the tongue, dreams and lapses of memory were used as clues in the chain of evidence to unearth the repressed origin of the symptom. Like the crime scene, however, the symptom presented many false clues and red herrings in the form of “screens”. The foundation of the symptoms

could only be revealed by employing an inferential inductive process, through which Freud could eventually penetrate into the patient's "submerged psychic architecture".

2.2 Freud's divided subject

A major effect of psychoanalytic thought, as developed by Freud and his followers, was to rupture the notion that self-reflection is possible through a consciousness transparent to itself. In place of the *cogito* ("I think therefore I am") of the Cartesian unitary subject, Freud posited a view of the ego (the "I" that thinks) as anything but a "master in its own house". In Freud's schema, the ego, or "I", defends against the threats to identity presented by otherness through unconscious defence mechanisms, which include denial, disavowal, projection and foreclosure.

The concept that difference needs to be defended against has been central to the post-modern project of addressing all forms of difference (race, gender, sexuality and class), especially in terms of the tendency to overcome the anxiety invoked by difference by reducing those who are different from "us" to the status of "mere things" (May, 1997, p.8). It is in this broader political sense that the second narrative, the case of *Legend Rock*, can be used as an example of how we are, in May's terms, unconsciously driven to "reduce difference to the logic of the same" by disallowing that which is different a representational place within the symbolic field.

2.3 From mistranslation to the occlusion of the Aboriginal other

Bain's (1992) findings, as discussed above, explained breaches of communication in the Aboriginal-white encounter in terms of mistranslation. The case of *Lake Mungo*, which explored the interpretation of a simple word (quarry) to illustrate the use of language games as cultural forms of life, has supported Bain's conclusion that difficulties of translation can be assumed to be inherent in any encounter between Aborigines and whites. Mistranslation, however, does not adequately explain the dynamics behind the willful occlusion of the Aboriginal story by the white shopkeeper in the case of *Legend Rock*. This narrative has been used to highlight the fact that recognition of the presence of an Aboriginal Other has the capacity to shatter the assumptions of white Australians in anxiety provoking ways. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the recognition of a distinct Aboriginal subjectivity (which, according to Bain and others is based on the intimate relationship between an Aboriginal person and his/her country), somehow represents a threat to the non-indigenous subjective experience of belonging and identity.

2.4 Initial Research Questions

Over time, I began to think about the phenomena I had experienced at Lake Mungo and Legend Rock in light of the psychodynamic theories of group process and identity formation first articulated by Freud and later elaborated by Lacan in his "return to Freud". In addition, the literature on psychopathology, especially Melanie Klein's work on primitive defences, informed my thinking about the potential meanings of the incident at Legend Rock. The unexpected reply of the white shopkeeper to the question: "What can you tell me about the legend associated with Legend Rock?" highlighted the

difficulties associated with the Aboriginal presence for white Australians. Gradually, I came to see both cases as representative of the problematic relationship between Aborigines and whites: the case of *Lake Mungo* signified the widespread misunderstandings among white Australians about a separate Aboriginal ontology; while that of *Legend Rock* symbolized the defensive denial of an Aboriginal presence by whites. This line of thought led to the formulation of two specific research questions:

1. “Why does the existence of an Aboriginal Other threaten a white sense of belonging?” and;
2. “What are the mechanisms and purposes of aggression towards, or exclusion of, that which represents otherness in the Australian context?”

2.5 The sense of symptoms

In Part III of his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud (1917/1963, p.320) wrote about “the sense of symptoms”, in terms of the connection between neurotic symptoms and the unconscious:

... every time we come upon a symptom we can infer that there are certain definite unconscious processes in the patient which contain the sense of the symptoms. But it is also necessary for that sense to be unconscious in order that the symptom can come about. Symptoms are never constructed from conscious processes; as soon as the unconscious processes concerned have become conscious, the symptom must disappear.

Freud argued that all symptoms have a meaning, no matter how illogical they may at first seem and that all symptoms could be traced to reveal their original purpose. According to Freud (1917/1963, p. 336-337), the precondition for the construction of symptoms is *repression*. Freud posited the notion of a “watchman”, or “censor”, whose job is to guard the conscious mind from inadmissible ideas or memories. He linked the symptom to the point where a memory or thought should have entered consciousness, but was prevented from doing so by the action of the censor, so that the content became repressed and unavailable to consciousness. The symptom emerges whenever an event threatens to re-voke the original repressed material. Thus, a neurotic symptom is the result of a “kind of ignorance – a not-knowing about mental events that one ought to know of” (Freud, 1917/1963, p. 280).

If my experience at Lake Mungo made me question my own assumptions about the Australian landscape and my place in it as a white person, the defensive negation of the Aboriginal story of Legend Rock by the white shopkeeper, endorsed by unnamed others, indicated that this retelling was symptomatic of a wider structural malaise. The nature of this malaise has been informed by the work of Jennifer Rutherford (2000), who, in her intriguing thesis: *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australia Fantasy*, has argued cogently that an aggression towards the Other has been endemic in white Australian history, but has been masked by a fantasy of Australia as the “good nation”. According to Rutherford (p. 196):

The fantasy of a Good Australia relies on denying the continuities of past and present; aggression, racism and misogyny are always located in a past the good

present has overcome. Witness the shock caused by the sudden emergence of One Nation, just when Australians were congratulating themselves that ‘all that’ was in the past.

From a psychodynamic perspective, the occlusion of the Aboriginal story in the narrative of *Legend Rock* can be regarded as a symptomatic act (i.e., a wish fulfillment). As mentioned above, in the investigation of this example, we are forced beyond the benign recognition that cultural difference leads to misunderstanding between members of different groups, to consider how the majority group within a culture can be unconsciously motivated to eradicate the signs of difference altogether.

The two stories of Legend Rock (the white story and the Aboriginal) will now be presented as an extension of Wittgenstein’s (1953/1968) concept of language games into the Freudian/Lacanian realm of identifications, wherein it will be argued that the Aboriginal version of the story has been rejected because it invokes a sense of guilt which destabilizes the fantasy of a white wholeness and sense of identity.

2.6 The return of the repressed

Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Tony Birch (2003) have provided a clue to the motivation of whites to occlude the Aboriginal story of Legend Rock in their contributions to *Blacklines*, an anthology of contemporary critical writings by indigenous Australians. In her introduction, Moreton-Robinson (2003, p. 129) has supported Birch (quoted in the *prologue*, above) by referring to the colonizer’s need to ... “forget the past and erase the Indigenous presence and knowledge of the landscape.” If we accept Freud’s (1900/1978)

contention that every dream contains an unconscious wish, the hidden wish that seems to lie behind the shopkeeper's occlusion of the story of Legend Rock is that the colonists' legal right to the land be unproblematic.

This premise is directly contradicted by the presence of the Aboriginal story of Legend Rock, which enables Aboriginality to occupy a symbolic position in relation to land that is *prior to* white settlement. Whenever Aboriginal people speak from a subject position within the broader Australian community, the inevitable truth that was stated simply by one of the indigenous participants in the current research, "We were here first", is invoked. By a process of displacement, the white myth of Legend Rock has inverted the order of events so that there was no Legend Rock prior to white settlement. The wish, therefore, is to deny the prior Aboriginal presence, and thereby conceal the underlying awareness that the proposition that Australia was an "empty land" in 1788 is far from the truth: that in fact the white presence in Metung began with what would, in common law terms, normally be considered as trespass.

From a psychodynamic perspective, the appropriation of the simple story of Legend Rock so that the Aboriginal story becomes a "white myth" would appear to have unconsciously re-enacted the repetition of *terra nullius* and the foreclosure of indigenous meaning and identity. Psychologically, the mechanism of psychosis has its origin in the foreclosure of the position of the subject (Lacan, 1955-56/2002). By reconstituting the order of events and their meanings, the white myth of Legend Rock has successfully shifted the awareness of white trespass out of consciousness, but in so doing has also foreclosed any

possibility of an Aboriginal subject who “speaks” from a stable, recognized place. Rather, the Aboriginal has become the imaginary object of white desire and remains trapped outside the realm of signification as Other. In this delusional place, it is the Aboriginal, not the whites, who do not “belong”.

Questions about belonging inevitably invoke questions of identity, and, since identity depends on identifications, the way that we identify ourselves as “Australian” is central to our sense of belonging, of being “at home” in this country where we live. But what is home? Quite simply, home is where we feel included, where we find ourselves among people with whom we can identify and by whom we are accepted. Being “at home with oneself” describes the state of being comfortable inside one’s own skin; to feel a sense of wholeness and bodily integrity. Home is family and friends. It is being among people with whom we identify through our shared values, traditions and beliefs – people who may look like us, think like us, or both (Rutherford, 1990).

Home, then, is more than a place. It is an internal sense of belonging that we can carry with us wherever we go. The antithesis of being at home is to not belong, to be an outsider, a foreigner, an exile, or a stranger. According to Sarup (1996, p. 10), the stranger is someone who refuses to remain confined to the “far-away” land or to go away from our own. S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. The stranger, is, therefore, an uncanny anomaly, one who “stands on the borderline between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, friend and enemy.” To be designated as a stranger is akin to living in a nightmare: The stranger is a foreigner in a strange land: one who is

literally or metaphorically ... “uprooted, alienated and adrift in a world of organized others” (Sarup, 1996, p.11). If one’s own group shores up identity by providing a reference point with which to identify, the stranger – the Other who is neither friend nor enemy – provides a point of rupture which throws identity into question.

2.7 The “uncanny”

In his 1919 essay: *The Uncanny*, Freud wrote about the “uncanny” as the experience of finding the unfamiliar in the familiar. What is uncanny belongs to “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (1919/2003, pp. 124-125). In order to investigate the anxiety associated with this experience, which is very different to the normal fear of a threat which originates outside the self, Freud traced the etymology of *heimlich*, the German word for “home” or “homely”, to find that it was merged with what at first appeared to be its formal antonym *unheimlich*, meaning those strange, unhomely or unfamiliar experiences that we associate with horror. In answer to his own question: “How can this be – under what conditions can the familiar become unfamiliar and frightening?”, because, after all, “not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening”, Freud found that while the *heimlich* is a place that is “free of ghostly influences”, the term *unheimlich* (uncanny) applies to “everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open” (Freud, 1919/2003, pp. 132-133).

In the Australian context, Gelder and Jacobs (1998) have pointed out that the recognition that Aboriginality is itself a construct of the colonial gaze exposes the colonists as

foreigners in their/our own land. The uncanny truth that is revealed by the case of *Legend Rock*, where the bronze plaque names Metung as belonging to the Gurnai/Kurnai people and thereby places the legitimacy of white occupancy in question, is that the stranger is white Australia itself. In their book, *Uncanny Australia*, Gelder and Jacobs (1998) have presented a view of the Australian psyche as being profoundly disturbed by the “Aboriginal Question”. They have argued that, as white Australians learn more about the realities of the colonial past, the more “unsettled” the settlers become:

In post-colonial Australia, and in particular after the Mabo decision in 1992, Freud’s uncanny might well be applied directly to those emergent (that is, yet to established) procedures for determining rights over land. In this moment of decolonization, what is ‘ours’ is also potentially, or even always already, ‘theirs’: the one is becoming the other, the familiar is becoming strange (Gelder & Jacobs, 1998, p. 23).

According to Gelder and Jacobs, the question of white occupancy and the marginalization of Aboriginal people which has been its consequence, has plagued white Australia for more than two centuries. The Aboriginal presence and the history of dispossession lie just below the surface of the very land that white Australians wish to identify as “home”. If we peel back the layers of colonial influence the Aboriginal presence is written all over the land. Beneath Ayer’s Rock lies Uluru, the Grampians become Gariwerd. As one of the indigenous participants in this research has pointed out ... “the whole of Australia is a sacred site, there’s no part of the country that’s not sacred to Aboriginal people.” Like the Gettysburg field of the American civil war, and the strip of land off the Turkish coast at Gallipoli, the cultural relics and the bones of the dead are concealed just below the

surface, ready to be revealed by the slightest disturbance. These tensions need to be acknowledged as underlying factors in the relationship between black and white Australia.

2.8 The Freedom Ride revisited – Black-White relations 1965-2005

The extent to which Aboriginal people have been subject to both official and unofficial forms of racial discrimination was highlighted by the famous Freedom Ride of 1965, when Charles Perkins traveled with a group of students from Sydney university on a bus through regional and remote New South Wales. Sue Johnston⁹, one of the students who took part in the original protest, said that she was motivated to join the Freedom Ride when she became aware of the segregation laws which separated the community along race lines ... “it dawned on me how incredibly great the divide was between black people and white people.”

The Freedom Ride achieved one of its aims by providing a media focus on the race based policies of segregation that were routinely enacted to the disadvantage of indigenous people at that time. Aboriginal ex-servicemen, for example, were not allowed to enter the Walgett RSL club to have a drink with mates they had served with in either of the two World Wars and Korea. Aborigines were not allowed to belong to the golf club, or to go into certain shops in the town. Blacks sat “downstairs” at the cinema, while the whites sat above them in the gallery. Single story movie theatres restricted Aboriginal people to the

⁹ Sue Johnston was one of the white students who had joined the Freedom Ride. In 2005, she was one of 25 of the original Freedom Riders who participated in a re-enactment of the ride to mark its 40th anniversary. The protesters revisited the towns that the bus had passed through in 1965, and met with some of the Aboriginal people who had been children at the time. The re-enactment was broadcast on ABC Radio National’s indigenous arts and culture program, *Awaye!*, on March 26, 2005.

seats at the front of the cinema, where they were forced to look up at the screen. In other variations on this theme, a dividing tape ran down the middle of the auditorium, on one side of which sat whites while the blacks were on the other. At Moree, Aboriginal children were not permitted to swim with whites in the municipal swimming pool, ostensibly on the grounds that they would contaminate the water with disease.

All this, which was occurring at the same time that white Australians were protesting about the apartheid system in South Africa during the Springbok tour of Australia, was revealed on the nightly news as the media followed the Freedom Bus through the heart of mainstream Australia. Racial discrimination, especially the unofficial segregation policies that disallowed Aboriginal people from sharing community facilities enjoyed by whites, was accepted as “natural” by locals, who deeply resented the “troublemakers” from the city criticizing their treatment of Aboriginal people.

At Walgett, the Freedom Bus was run off the road. In Moree, the “Freedom Riders” were met by an angry mob when they picketed the local swimming pool and refused to allow anyone to enter unless the local Aboriginal children were admitted. Darryl French, from Moree, was ten years old when the Freedom Riders came to his town. Daryl and his father joined Charles Perkins and the other Freedom Riders at the picket-line. In a program commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the event (aired on ABC Radio National’s *Awaye* program on March 26, 2005), Daryl remembered the ...“wall of hostility that was projected at us as Aboriginal people” ... by the local whites. He

described his fear that something terrible would happen to his father ... “I was clinging to my father’s trouser leg, and I kept saying to my dad, I want to go home.”

Like Daryl French, Diane Creighton was ten years old in 1965, and she also had vivid memories of that day ... “I remember when they came, that day, they talked to the Elders, and they said we want the kids to come on the bus with us.” Diane’s mother would not let her go ... “I ran and asked my mum, ‘Can I go with the people on the bus?’ And my mother said ... ‘If you get on that bus you’ll never come back’ ... This is the only time that I remember that my mother ever spoke about the Stolen Generations.” The incident at Moree swimming pool is now regarded as one of the pivotal symbolic moments in the fight for Aboriginal rights. Daryl French described that day as “The politicization of my life.” He said ... “We thought incredible change was going to occur because of the Freedom Ride ... Because of the things Uncle Charlie had brought to the surface, we thought, “No, we can’t be treated like this, we have rights.” For ten year old Diane Creighton, nothing would ever be the same again ... “I thank Charlie and all the Freedom Riders for the way my life was changed from that day ... On that day I decided that I’m not going to live like my mother and my grandmother.” Creighton decided then and there that she would get an education so that she could avoid the life of domestic service which was the only employment that had been available to her mother and grandmother.

Speaking 40 years after the Freedom Ride, Diane Creighton and Daryl French were positive about the many changes that had occurred in the lives of Aboriginal people in the interim. Speaking from the steps of the Walgett Town Hall, Creighton made the comment

that, as an Aboriginal person in 1965, she would not have been allowed to stand on those steps. Others spoke of gaining citizenship and land rights and said that many white people had started to think differently about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the oldest race in the world, and to recognize the things that have impacted on them in the past. The Freedom Riders were especially moved by speakers at commemorative events who, like Creighton and French, had witnessed the 1965 events as children, and who spoke about the inspiration that the protesters had given to them. In her 2005 address to the Dr Charles Perkins AO Annual Memorial Oration, Professor Larissa Behrendt spoke about how her views had been shaped by Charles Perkins' visionary approach to equal rights, self-determination and land justice for Aboriginal Australians.

Despite the gains, however, Beth Henderson, one of the original Freedom Riders, expressed the view that the situation between indigenous and non-indigenous people was still "far from equal". In her oratorical address, Behrendt lamented that, in 2005, much of what Charles Perkins had worked for and believed in was under attack, and that Aboriginal issues in Australia appeared to be "sliding backwards rather than marching forwards" in the current political climate. Although the more overt forms of racism, including officially imposed segregation, were no longer evident, some contributors to the Freedom Ride reenactment were skeptical about the concept that white and black Australia had begun to be reconciled. Sylvie Elsmore, from Walgett, stated that race based prejudice was still rife in rural Australian towns, and argued that it had merely "gone underground". She related the following example:

This is not something that's happening 50, 80, 100 years ago, this is happening now. I was in a shop, last year, in 2004, with my eldest boy, and we were in a shop, it was a souvenir shop, and he was told not to touch anything white – and what he was looking at were boomerangs, with Aboriginal painting on it, and he was told not to touch anything white, and it was part of his culture – it was as if they thought the black would rub off.

Creighton agreed that very little had changed at the grass roots level in 40 years. Aged in her 50s at the time the program went to air, she said that she had recently been prevented from carrying a pillow onto a bus, because of the fear that it may contain head lice. She reflected on the place of Aboriginal people in white society as an absence ... “Look into it, you're looking into the mirror all the time. You look around and there are bridges, there are parks and streets, named after graziers and politicians, there's nothing about Aboriginality ... and when you ask, ‘When are we going to get some recognition? When are we going to get something named after an Aboriginal person?’ they say, ‘We'll look into it’ ... but then nothing happens.” As these examples have illustrated, both the silence surrounding the place of Aboriginality as a contemporary presence in Australia and the exclusion of Aboriginal representation from cultural markers of Australian national identity continues to have wide ranging repercussions for the indigenous peoples of Australia into the present.

To return briefly to the earlier discussion of Wittgenstein's concept of language games, it is notable that the anniversary of the day of landing, January 28, 1788, is celebrated as a public holiday by mainstream Australians as *Australia Day*. Aboriginal people, by contrast, describe the coming of the Europeans as “Invasion Day”, and regard it as a day

of mourning, a *Sorry Day*. For reasons that by now should be obvious, the benign term “settlement”, used by the white Australian mainstream, acts to deny the negative connotations of the more aggressive terms “invasion” or “occupation”.

A history of dispossession and oppression, enforced separations from family and institutionalization have contributed to significant and entrenched risks for the mental health of indigenous people (Australian Psychological Society [APS], 1997; Chamarette, 2000; Dodson, 1997; 2000; Koolmatrie & Williams, 2000; McKendrick, Cutter, Mackenzie & Chiu, 1992; McKendrick & Thorpe, 1993; 1994; O’Shane, 1995; Riley, 1998; Sanson & Dudgeon, 2000; Swan & Raphael, 1995). The failure of initial attempts to deny Aboriginal presence (*terra nullius*) and later, to absorb it (assimilation) have compounded the problematic relationship between Aborigines and white Australians.

These historical factors were the basis for the late Rob Riley’s (1998) statement that understanding Aboriginal psychology demands recognition that the mental health of Aboriginal Australia is synonymous with social justice. According to Riley, the problematic mental health status of Aboriginal people could be traced directly to social justice, or the lack of it. In Australia, the Colonial Eye has failed to apprehend Aboriginal subjectivity on its own terms, and psychological discourse has been used, however unwittingly, to maintain the status quo and thereby further secure the ascendancy of the dominant group, where the power to decide the criteria for normality always lies.

2.9 The “Aboriginal Question”

Reflecting on the 30 plus years since the Commonwealth Referendum of 1967 which allowed Aboriginal people to have “de facto citizenship” by including them in the national census and allowing for the Commonwealth to legislate in Aboriginal affairs, Ernest Hunter has pointed out that the issue of social justice remains as relevant ever in the new millennium. Hunter (2000, p.356), in his review of indigenous health in Australia, lamented that the optimism engendered by the “heady days of protest and planning” in the 1970s and early 1980s had evaporated in the face of “persistent disadvantage”:

In the late 1980s, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) focused national attention on the social issues underlying the massive overrepresentation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the criminal justice system. A decade later, social justice issues were raised with the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People from their Families – *Bringing them Home* (1997). The Commission examined the history of state-sanctioned intrusion into indigenous cultural and family life, including the abduction of children to dormitories and foster care.

Hunter made the point that this practice has “only recently” stopped, and that:

Most Australian health professionals are now aware of the deplorable health status and entrenched disadvantage experienced by indigenous populations. In terms of morbidity, mortality, life expectancy, injury, suicide, violence, unemployment, adult and juvenile arrest, incarceration, school retention, substitute care, substance use, adolescent pregnancy, and fetal and infant growth,

the health statistics for indigenous people remain uniformly dismal. However, fewer health professionals are aware that not only are these statistics all significantly worse than those for non-indigenous Australians, but that they are also substantially worse than those for indigenous populations living in similar settings elsewhere in the world.

More than thirty years ago, Diane Barwick (1972) wrote about the curious paternalism of Australian administrators. In 1998, Riley was especially scathing about those practices which have perpetrated welfarism and fostered co-dependency between Aboriginal communities and government bureaucracy. Riley described these paternalistic practices as “administrative genocide” (p. 12). In 1990, at the beginning of what has come to be known as the *Reconciliation Decade*, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was set up¹⁰ with the primary aim of delivering power and representation to indigenous people. One of the key roles of ATSIC’s 35 Regional Councils was to move Aboriginal people towards self-determination through the provision of programs specifically targeted to the diverse needs of indigenous communities.

In April, 2004, in the wake of the announcement that ATSIC was to be dismantled, and that service provision would revert from ATSIC’s Regional Councils back to Government departments, Aboriginal leaders were divided about the success or otherwise of ATSIC’s 14 years of operation, but were universal in their condemnation of the concept that a return to the old model of “mainstreaming” services to Aboriginal people

¹⁰ ATSIC was the brainchild of former Aboriginal affairs minister in the Hawke administration, Gerry Hand.

would lead to any form of material improvement in their day to day lives (Anderson; Clark; Dodson; Robinson; O'Donoghue; and Pearson, cited in Schubert, Rintoul & Maiden, 2004, April 16, *The Australian*, p. 4).

Noel Pearson, who has often been cited by whites as the driving force behind “mutual obligation” as an alternative to “passive welfare”, or “sit down money” in his Cape York community (Pearson, 2000), was unequivocal about his belief that attempts to mainstream services to indigenous people represented a “folly” that put indigenous policy “two steps back”. Speaking on ABC TV's *7.30 Report*, Pearson (2004, April 15) told interviewer Maxine McKew that putting Indigenous programs back into the hands of state and territory governments would only lead to same failures that were evident from 20 years of mainstreaming prior to ATSIC:

I think the Prime Minister is completely wrong when he assumes that mainstreaming is the solution. We are going to return to, in fact, a big government service delivery, welfare delivery paradigm in Indigenous affairs and ... at least in Cape York Peninsula, that's what we've been trying to get away from. We've been trying to get away from the notion that government has all the answers, that government responsibility is the key to Indigenous uplift. The key to Indigenous uplift is welfare reform.

One of the nation's most respected Aboriginal leaders, Patrick Dodson, said that abolishing ATSIC and putting nothing in its place took Aboriginal affairs “back to the days when Aborigines should be seen but not heard, and preferably not seen at all” (Dodson, 2004, as cited in Schubert, Rintoul & Maiden, *The Australian*, p. 4). Despite the

clear indication that Aboriginal people want fewer bureaucratic controls and more autonomy, successive governments have continued to focus on the “management” of Aboriginal affairs and to neglect the kinds of measures which might assist capacity building and promote independence within Aboriginal communities. In 2004, the then ATSIC Commissioner, Alison Anderson (speaking on ABC TV’s *Lateline*, April 16, 2004), stated that: “200 years ago the non-indigenous people when they came into Australia, they actually gave our people quick death by gun, they shot ‘em. But the life that we have as indigenous people in Australia today is a slow death by policy.”

2.9.1 Aboriginal disadvantage as a symptom

By using Freud’s theory of unconscious motivation as an underlying theoretical base, I hope to have illustrated that the illogic of the white negation of the Aboriginal story of Legend Rock can begin to make sense when seen in light of the Freudian concept of repression and its associated defense mechanisms (denial, intellectualization, reaction formation, disavowal, foreclosure, projective identification, splitting and scapegoating¹¹). The particular mechanism operative in the white story of Legend Rock was hypothesized as foreclosure, a very primitive defensive maneuver which equates to the negation of the (Aboriginal) subject in the symbolic field.

In 1968, W.E.H. Stanner delivered his series of Boyer lectures (2001) – *After the Dreaming*. In his second lecture, titled *The Great Australian Silence*, Stanner (1968) pointed to the willful occlusion of Aboriginality in the Australian psyche:

¹¹ See Anna Freud (1946) *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*.

Inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.

Paradoxically, a very high value is placed on Aboriginal cultural products, especially those which draw from traditional knowledge and practices based on the connection to place associated with Ancestral Dreamings (Petitjean, 2000). For the people themselves, however, an entirely different set of attitudes has prevailed. The evidence of continued disadvantage and dysfunction within many Aboriginal communities, despite the best attempts of successive governments and countless individuals (black and white) to improve the situation, would suggest that Aboriginality itself functions as a symptom for the white mainstream, a symptom which has been perennially obscured and overwritten by the various discourses around the Aboriginal Question.

These discourses have been unconsciously invested in maintaining the entrenched negative position of Aboriginal people at the margins of Australian society. The high profile perennially given to Aboriginal issues in the national media indicates that the Aboriginal Question remains “unfinished business” (Bunbury, 2001). Before the broader structural implications of the Aboriginal Question can be addressed, therefore, we must first come to some understanding about how an investment in Aboriginal disadvantage

may function as a symptom within the white mainstream, and to investigate what function this investment unconsciously fulfils.

Gelder and Jacobs (1998) have characterized the perennial reference to Aboriginality as the “return of the repressed”, and argue that its symptoms are manifest in the body-politic of Australian life. In the current era, the ambivalent relationship between mainstream and Aboriginal Australia has been played out in an ongoing and emotive debate about the appropriate level of responsibility that current generations of white Australians should take for past practices and policies which have contributed to Aboriginal disadvantage. In the first years of the twenty-first century, the debate around the Aboriginal Question has come to be described as the “history wars” (Hanson, 2001; Manne, 2001; Read, 1999; Reynolds, 1990; 1996; 1998; 1999; and Windschuttle, 2002, among others).

The national debate about the need for an apology to the Stolen Generations, the concept of the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into a Bill of Rights as First Nation people, Bridge Walks, the Sea of Hands, Sorry Day and ideas about a Treaty with indigenous people have been countered by phrases like: the “Aboriginal Industry”, the “Black Mafia”, “New Racism” and “Black Armband” history. In the dying days of the 20th century, the hope that had been evoked by Mabo and Paul Keating’s Redfern Park speech (see Section 5.4) was replaced by the lawyers’ bonanza that was the Wik ten point plan and the current Government’s practical reconciliation platform. The symbolic ideals of achieving land rights and self-determination have now been overridden by a new rhetoric of “mutual obligation” and “mainstreaming”.

While themes such as guilt, apology (saying sorry) and restitution are recognized as valid by many Aboriginal and mainstream Australians, there is a corresponding resistance to the acknowledgment of, and compensation for the effects of dispossession and child removal within large segments of white Australia. By incorporating historical and contemporary data into an embedded case study design, this thesis hopes to add to an understanding of the psychology behind this resistance and thereby contribute to our understanding of how Aboriginality continues to exist as both a subtext and an opposition to cultural identity for white Australians.

CHAPTER THREE: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT USING A CASE

STUDY APPROACH

Most of us have been trained not to encounter other's unique specificity, but to reduce them to one of our discipline's categories, while ignoring the social, historical and political roots of those very categories. Because the task set for us is political, and because our traditional science has taught us that the psychological must be separated from the political, we will need to reconsider a separation that sustains the privilege of some at the expense of the many (Sampson, 1993, p.1228).

3.1 Psychological research in the antipodes

Sonia Smallacombe (1998) has argued that indigenous people have been worthy of research insofar as they were exotic, distant and remote¹². Historically, therefore, ethnographic, sociological and anthropological research focused on cultural ceremony (song, dance and art), language, ritual, kinship and marriage patterns (examples include: Bates, 1952/1944; Durkheim 1947; Elkin, 1945/1977; Fison & Howitt, 1880/1991; Fraser, 1892; Stanner, 1965; Strehlow, 1971; Tindale, 1974).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the role of psychologists and other social scientists was to provide scientific data, in the form of physiological and intellectual measurement, which was added to cultural description in a bid to locate hard evidence of the “missing link” between stone-age man and the European ideal. Not surprisingly, when Aboriginal

¹² In Australia, the impetus for early anthropological research was based on a Social Darwinian paradigm, which held that the Australian Aborigines were remnants of an inferior “dying race”, whose cultural characteristics needed to be captured before its immanent extinction (Smallacombe, 1998).

people who were measured by instruments designed for educated English speakers tended to perform less “well” than their European counterparts, the conclusion was generally that such results added to the extant “knowledge” that Aboriginal people were childlike and, therefore, incapable of performing anything but the most basic of menial tasks (Henry & Brabham, 1994). Conversely, when Aboriginal people showed initiative and demonstrated their capacity to learn, they were regarded as exceptions to the rule.¹³

The equation that was made by adherents of the Social Darwinian perspective between “primitive” people and children (as well as the “feeble minded” and women), was an essential spoke in the wheel of hegemonic discourses around race in the first two centuries of the colony. In the current era of post-colonialism, it has become somewhat fashionable to express self-righteous outrage at such obviously mistaken thinking and action. While there is no doubt that many white administrators were malicious in their contempt of Aboriginal people,¹⁴ many of the “enlighteners” were socially progressive, charitable individuals, who maintained a strong belief in the humanist ethos and had great empathy for the Aboriginal cause. Nevertheless, for most of the last two hundred years, the anxiety felt by Europeans towards Aboriginality has been masked by rationalizations about the evolutionary right of the colonizers, as representatives of a “superior” racial group, to extend the boundaries of Empire.

¹³ Phillip Stewart, the first indigenous school teacher in Western Australia, illustrated this at the 1997 APS Annual Conference with a story about how his mother had been described in letters between one local authority and another as “a very intelligent woman, for an Aboriginal.”

¹⁴ See William Cooper, for example, in Attwood & Markus, 2004,

The comparison of Aboriginal people with a European norm was founded on and legitimized by positivist ideas that had become entrenched well before the publication of Darwin's: *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 (Henry & Brabham, 1994). Historically, the measurement of Aboriginal people according to a Eurocentric standard has lent itself to the mistaken construction of "Aboriginal Australian" as a subset of the more general category – "Australian". Neither the category nor its supposed sets, however, have ever existed outside a European context.

In colonial countries, social definitions of race, based on external, physically visible features, such as skin colour, gained importance precisely because society had loaded them with cultural significance and differential social value (Healy, 1997). Most popular discussions about race, therefore, are really about social categories and lay understandings of group differences (Young, 1992). Such confusion has made objective discussion and communication concerning the nature and meaning of alleged "racial" differences very difficult (*APS Position Paper on Racism and Prejudice*, Sanson, Augoustinos, Gridley, Kyrios, Reser and Turner, 1997).

3.2 The psychology of difference

Smallacombe (1998) has highlighted the impossibility of the westerner attempting to be an impartial observer when undertaking research with Aboriginal communities. This is because psychologists belong to a profession that is historically conservative and seen to identify with the dominant cultural tradition of Australia, that is, Anglo-based and western European (Sanson et al, 1997). Davidson, Sanson and Gridley (2000) have

argued that psychology in Australia has been unacceptably slow to embrace a social justice narrative in relation to the aims and aspirations of indigenous people. The assumption of a white norm within psychology has meant that, until relatively recently, Aboriginal perspectives have been largely ignored in favor of a research focus *on* or *about* Aboriginal people from a mainstream perspective (Davidson, 1995), but without attempting to address structural difference and social exclusion as causal factors in Aboriginal disadvantage.

Looking at “Aboriginality” as an object of research has led to a plethora of what could be characterized as “outcome” studies on “problem” variables (Sanson & Dudgeon, 2000). A continued focus on Aboriginal lack compared with a white Australian norm, however, leads us no closer to the core issues which concern Aboriginal people, and may even be damaging to them (Smallacombe, 1998). Sanson et al (1997) and Prilleltensky (1997) have argued that psychological explanations and constructions of social problems have often given support to those espousing a racist agenda by providing deterministic explanations for cultural differences.

For example, instead of regarding high levels of psychopathology within Aboriginal communities as a *product* of dispossession from country and the breakdown of traditional social structure and authority, patterns of symptomatic behaviour (such as alcoholism) have sometimes been presented as evidence of the perceived *deficits* that were presupposed to be inherent to non-white racial groups (Wetherall & Potter, 1992). Over

time, Smallacombe (1998) has argued, Aboriginal people have come to see western methodologies as oppressive, reflective of the dominant ideologies of colonial academics. To cast the issue in terms common to many critical psychologists, the problem has been “... how to avoid reducing difference to the logic of the same” (May, 1997, p.2).

Bain’s (1992) research, which provided an account of the differences between the conceptual systems of Aborigines and whites, stands out as an exception to the general tendency to conduct research *on* rather than *with* Aboriginal people, and has offered an alternative to the view of Aboriginality as a “thing in itself”, rather than as a contextual position within a broader cultural milieu. Unfortunately, even Bain’s sensitivity to Aboriginal perspectives did not prevent her from inappropriately employing a Piagetian cognitive framework in her analysis of why Aboriginal people did not conceptualize number in the same way as whites.

This question has been more adequately answered by Watson and Chambers (1989), as presented in section 1.5, above. In their distinction between the western *number system* and the Aboriginal *genealogical system* these authors have allowed for the fact that the ontological explanations for the way the world works and the epistemological tools associated with them are equally complex for Aborigines and whites, but that each conforms to a profoundly different view of the place of humans in the world of nature.

3.3 Propositions to be tested by the current study

The Freudian concept of unconscious motivation will be used to illustrate my argument that white Australia has constructed a veil around cultural difference in order to defend against acknowledging the fact that Aboriginal peoples have been profoundly damaged by the practices and processes of colonization, and that these practices and processes continue to impact negatively on current generations of Aboriginal people. In this context, the specific questions which emerged from consideration of the cases of *Lake Mungo* and *Legend Rock*, respectively, form the background to the two central propositions which underlie the objectives and design of the current study:

1. The first proposition, illustrated by the *Lake Mungo* case, is that cultural differences exist and are played out in social institutions through language games. This proposition has been informed by Bain's (1992) research into the Aboriginal-white encounter, which found that cultural difference resulted in communicative difficulties and misunderstandings at the interface between these two groups. Primary data gathered through interviews with contemporary Aboriginal people and whites who interact with Aboriginal people and communities will be used to test this proposition, using Bain's hypothetical *indices of difference* as an empirical base.

2. The second proposition, illustrated by the *Legend Rock* case, is that these differences have been obscured to enable white Australians to feel more "relaxed and comfortable", both about the past treatment of indigenous Australians and the

continued difficulties experienced by Aboriginal communities in the present. In the introductory chapters, data from a variety of secondary sources has been used to present the concept that the unconscious construction of Australia as a good, white and Christian nation has acted to overwrite Aboriginal perspectives and to position Aboriginal people at the margins of society. Primary interview data will be used to explore the link between national discourses around the Aboriginal Question and the experiences of contemporary Aboriginal people and the whites with whom they interact.

The problem here has been to design a methodology capable of embracing both the phenomenological experience of individual actors and the way identity is structured through social institutions. Both, in different ways, were regarded as integral to the aim of exploring difference within the context of what constitutes an Australian identity. Freud's presupposition that there is a strict congruence between events in the past and their representations in the present has also meant that the temporal relationship between the current state of affairs and historical factors would need to be considered in a longitudinal design. This focus was central to the aims and objectives of the current study, because, as both of the cases presented in the *prologue* have indicated, the relationships between Aboriginal and white Australians have been influenced by contextual factors that are highly pertinent to the ways that cultural differences in general, and Aboriginality in particular, have been interpreted historically.

3.4 The case study approach.

As a research strategy, the case study has been long used to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena (Yin, 2003). Freud's entire opus, for example, was built on the model of case study research. A case study approach has been selected here because, in contrast to other models of research design, the case study allows for the "entangled situation between phenomenon and context" to be considered, where context is fundamental to the social phenomena being investigated (Yin, 2003, p, 13).

The case study has been described as the most appropriate research model when contemporary phenomena are the subject of investigation, but where it is not possible to manipulate the phenomenon as it occurs. According to Yin, this is particularly true when a set of "how" or "why" questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control. Specifically, Yin (2003, p.13) has described the case study as an empirical enquiry that, first and foremost:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when;
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Case studies, like single experiments, may be exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or a combination of these (Yin, 2003, p. 3). According to Yin, the historical predominance of exploratory and descriptive designs in case study research has led to confusion between

the case study approach and other qualitative approaches. Where related methods, such as ethnography (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and “grounded theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), deliberately avoid specifying any theoretical propositions at the outset of an enquiry, theory development is an essential component of case study research. The theory “should elaborate a hypothetical story about why acts, events, structure and thoughts occur” (Sutton and Straw, 1995, cited in Yin, p. 29). This is true whether the purpose of the study is to develop or test theory.

3.5 Criticisms of the case study approach

Although case studies have been extensively used in psychology, sociology, political science, social work, and historiography, many social scientists disdain the case study as a research tool, and regard case studies as only appropriate for the exploratory, or “pilot”, phase of an investigation. The reasons behind the perception that the case study is an inferior form of “soft science” have been elaborated by Yin (2003), in his comprehensive text *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Primarily, case studies have been considered a weak basis for research because they have come to be associated with descriptive applications in naturalistic settings, such as “participant observation”, which cannot be used to describe or test propositions. The common criticism leveled against case study research concerns questions of sampling and subjectivity. It has been suggested that researchers using this model have used “subjective” judgments to collect the data from a limited pool and have made inferences without first developing a sufficiently operational set of measures (Yin 2003, p. 35).

For Yin (2003, pp. 10-11), however, the argument that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the case study as a distinctive form of empirical enquiry. The key feature of the case study design as a research strategy, Yin has argued, lies in its different assumptions about the nature of “sampling” and about the relationship between theoretical propositions and the generalizations that can be drawn from research results.

While the conclusions drawn from either a single case study or multiple case studies cannot be generalized to a population, Yin has argued that case studies, like experiments, *can* be generalized, but only to the theoretical propositions which they have set out to test. Like the single experiment, the case study does not attempt represent a sample, and the goal is not to enumerate frequencies, as is the case for statistical generalization, but rather to expand and generalize theories through *analytic generalization*.

In analytic generalization, a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. This means that the normal distinction between the epistemological and methodological aspects of an investigation does not apply in case study research. Rather, the case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis. In this sense, the case study is neither merely a tactic for data collection nor is it simply a design feature, but a comprehensive research strategy with a specific logic.

Yin (2003, p. 89) has listed the six primary sources that can be used to provide evidence in case study research as: *documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation* and *physical artefacts*. The use of multiple sources of evidence in the current study will allow a broader range of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues to be addressed than would otherwise be the case. Most importantly, however, the use of information from multiple sources will allow the development of “converging lines of enquiry” (Yin, 2003, p. 98).

The advantages of convergence are twofold: Firstly, the data can be triangulated (see Huberman & Miles, 1984; Patton, 1980/1990), and secondly, the design is not limited to a static or cross-sectional analysis, but can include both historical and contemporary sources in a longitudinal design. This allows data to be looked at in terms of chronological sequences of events, which can then be linked back to the case study’s initial theoretical postulates to make causal inferences which incorporate a logical model of cause-effect-cause-effect patterns.

3.6 The current study: An investigation of cultural difference

The two cases presented in the *prologue: Lake Mungo* and *Legend Rock*, occurred “in the field” without prior planning. Cases such as these have been described by Yin (2003) as *revelatory cases*. These are cases where the investigator, often through chance, gains access to a situation that would not normally be available to an investigator for analysis. In the current project, the initial case, *Lake Mungo*, prompted ideas about cultural

difference and led to the theoretical investigation of the relationship between language games and discourses of power/knowledge which have been outlined in Chapter One.

My chance encounter with the white shopkeeper at *Legend Rock* prompted the two questions: “Why does the existence of an Aboriginal Other threaten a white sense of belonging?” and “What are the mechanisms and purposes of aggression towards, or exclusion of, that which represents otherness in the Australian context?” These questions will be explored in light of the Freudian concept of unconscious motivation and the role of the defences in symptom formation. Multiple sources on topics concerned with national identity will be used to describe the overarching values of the white mainstream, as reflected through media representations, editorial opinion, news and current affairs commentary, public debates and lectures, and academic sources.

In this exploratory phase of the research, primary interview data will be analyzed alongside the secondary data to map out and develop a picture of national identity along both diachronic (historical) and synchronic (contemporary) axes. By including archival data from the public record, current events and attitudes pertaining to Aboriginal issues will be considered in terms of the historical contexts and antecedents which have helped to shape the perceptions of white Australians about those issues that have been defined as the “Aboriginal Question”.

3.6.1 How a case study approach will be used to test the propositions of the current study

In order to test the proposition that cultural differences exist, and to discuss the effects of a dominant white mainstream on the lives of Aboriginal people, as well as the implications of these effects at the cultural interface, the current research will use an embedded multiple case study design to address the hypothesis that there may be a distinct Aboriginal subjectivity and to investigate how it may be constituted from two directions. Firstly, from the subjective position of Aboriginal people themselves, and secondly, from the perspective of the whites with whom they interact. The nature of the hypothesized differences claimed in the first proposition will be investigated in terms of Margaret Bain's *indices of difference* through the analysis of primary interview data, which will form the empirical base of the thesis.

With respect to the second proposition, data from a variety of secondary sources will be used to present the concept that the unconscious construction of Australia as a good, white and Christian nation has acted to overwrite Aboriginal perspectives and to position Aboriginal people at the margins of society. The psychodynamic literature on group behaviour and identity formation will be applied to the relevant mainstream discourses concerning national identity and Aboriginality to identify mainstream ontological assumptions about subjectivity and national identity and to investigate how mainstream anxieties about difference contribute to structural inequality between Aborigines and whites in our time.

3.6.2 Bain's indices of difference

In order to operationalize the theoretical construct of cultural difference, several hypothesized indices of Aboriginal cultural identity, drawn from Margaret Bain's (1992) empirical study of a semi-remote Aboriginal community, have been incorporated into the current case study design as embedded units of analysis. While the suggested indices of difference outlined below were based on the findings of Bain's research, they also concur with a more general reading of Aboriginal authors and academics about the fundamental constructs through which Aboriginal people define subjectivity:

- Aboriginal ontology (world view)
- Relationship to land, inheritance
- Kinship systems and associated obligations
- Traditional Law and authority
- Interpretation of time
- Interpretation of space

Bain's six *indices of difference* have been used as the empirical base to test the first proposition of the thesis. Insofar as they have offered hypothetical indications about how Aboriginal core constructs may differ substantially from mainstream views about "being in the world", Bain's indices will be used as *units of analysis* in the analysis of the interview data. The interview process will follow the model of open-ended guided conversations (see Yin, 2003, p. 89), where the discussion will be based on a series of general themes derived from Bain's model.

Data from the interviews, in the form of interview transcripts, will be used to test the reliability of the proposition that cultural differences exist between Aborigines and whites, using Bain's indices as a template. In order to protect the identities of individual contributors, common patterns of responses across all of the interview transcripts will be organized thematically and presented in summary form. The primary focus of analysis will be to look at how data from each participant fits with, or differs from the indices of difference suggested by Bain's research.

3.6.3 Reliability and validity

Yin (2003) has stressed that the very qualities which make case studies so potentially valuable can be easily undermined when the tests of reliability and validity common to all social science methods are ignored. Case studies have been perceived as open to researcher bias, whereby it could be argued that the data has been interpreted according to the prior expectations of the researcher. In answer to the problem of "subjectivity", Bar-Tal (1990) has invoked the Popperian (1959) emphasis on refutation as the basis of scientific rigor, and suggested that the aim of social science should not be to prove a given proposition, but rather to provide good reasons to back our claims as to what the value of the proposition may be.

To the extent that a pre-existing construct has been provided in the form of Bain's *indices of difference*, the construct of difference on which the first proposition of the study is based can be assumed to have some validity, at least for the cohort of Aboriginal people

in Bain's study. However, in Popper's view, all knowledge is subject to criticism and consequent revision or rejection. Because "there is nothing known that can be said to be true all the time and for all time", the role of the social scientist is to look for evidence which disconfirms the theory, rather than the other way around (Weimer, 1979, cited in Bar-Tal, 1990, p. 6). Using Popper's (1959) emphasis on refutation, the interview data will be analyzed according to the assumption that some or all of Bain's indices *may not* be relevant for Aboriginal people living in an urban or regional setting.

The question to be addressed here concerns whether or not the *indices* derived from Bain's work with a semi-remote Central Australian Aboriginal community are salient for a different cohort of Aboriginal people. The *construct validity* of Bain's *indices* will only be supported if the interview data from the current research reveals similar themes and categories of difference as those identified by Bain in her 1992 study. In other words, through the same logic of replication, or "pattern matching" (Yin, 2003, p. 34) that is used to support the results of single experiments.

If the interview data from the current study supports all or some of Bain's findings about cultural difference, then the indices of difference that she has proposed can be said to demonstrate both *internal* and *external validity*, and can therefore probably be reliably applied to diverse Aboriginal communities across different demographic areas. In order to support the *reliability*, *construct validity* and *external validity* of Bain's indices as units of analysis, and to provide a context within which to read the accounts provided by the

contributors to the current project, a wide range of data from a variety of sources has been incorporated into both the review of the literature and the data sections of the thesis.

3.6.4 Rationale - The need for culturally sensitive service provision

While previous research into traditional Aboriginal cultures has been (and continues to be) historically significant, it does not help us to understand how Aboriginality is lived and experienced by current generations of indigenous people who have little or no access to traditional land, language, or ceremony. The few notable exceptions to this general rule include Diane Barwick (1962; 1972), in Victoria; Berndt & Berndt (1999)¹⁵ in South Australia; Marcia Langton & Deborah Rose (1984); and Deborah Rose (1988; 1992). None of these researchers, however, have their base within the discipline of psychology. As well, contemporary demographic and sociological research has indicated that the majority of indigenous Australians live in urban environments, in both regional and metropolitan centres, and that the number living a more or less traditional lifestyle represents only a very small percentage of the indigenous population (Taylor, 1993; 1996; 1997a 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; Taylor & Bell, 1996; 1999).

This is particularly true for members of indigenous communities who live in Southeastern Australia, where the combination of massacre, dispossession, and assimilationist policies have led to the loss of both language and access to culturally significant sites on traditional custodial land (Barwick, 1962; Davidson, Sanson & Gridley, 2000; McKendrick, Cutter, McKenzie, Austin, Roberts, Duke & Chiu, 1990; Sanson & Dudgeon, 2000; Thorpe, 1998). Social and clinical psychologists have addressed this

¹⁵ See Berndt & Berndt, 1999, for an excellent and comprehensive review of anthropological research.

group, predominantly in terms of the high levels of pathology (morbidity and mortality) it displays relative to the general population. Because of this, psychological research has been largely limited to outcome studies, where Aboriginal people tend to be grouped along various indices shared by members of other minority or disadvantaged groups (Australian Psychological Association, 1997).

Essentially, the rationale for this research is that cultural differences need to be understood by psychologists and other health professionals (including educators and support workers) who work with Aboriginal clients in community health and clinical settings, as well as by Aboriginal people themselves (McKendrick et al, 1990; McKendrick et al, 1992; McKendrick & Thorpe, 1993; 1994; O'Shane, 1995; Riley, 1998). The late Rob Riley¹⁶ (1998, p. 16) stressed the role of psychologists in assisting in the improvement of Aboriginal mental health by developing partnerships with indigenous communities. Riley (1998) referred to Patrick Dodson's summary¹⁷ of the myriad of social welfare variables identified by the Aboriginal community as contributing to negative mental health in Aboriginal communities. The paper identified:

- the ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal matters in areas of government policy and practice at federal, state and local levels;
- misinformed beliefs and practices towards Aboriginal people among many sectors of non-Aboriginal society, that impact on the day to day lives of Aboriginal people

¹⁶ In the posthumous adaptation of his keynote address to the 1995 APS conference.

¹⁷ Included in the *Underlying Issues* paper as part of the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991.

- the ongoing effects of missions and other forms of institutionalization on the socio-cultural and economic lives of Aboriginal people; and
- some of the adverse effects of contemporary Aboriginal social life brought about by Aborigines themselves, as well as those from outside of Aboriginal society.

For Riley (1998, p. 6), "... the essence of good Aboriginal mental health is empowerment and self-determination ... regaining control over the processes of change that affect one's life ... in a real and meaningful way." However ... "white Australia needs to know more about black Australia and the aspirations of Aboriginal people [and to] commit ourselves to further and more rapid progress." On a broader community level, it is also important for psychologists and other professionals to understand how the subjective experience of belonging to a minority group impacts on individuals and communities.

3.7 Guiding hypothesis

The guiding hypothesis for the current study was that cultural differences have led to communicative problems and misunderstandings between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. This proposition was initially based on Margaret Bain's (1992) seminal study into breaches of communication in the Aboriginal-white encounter. Bain's central distinction between Aboriginal *interactional* and white *transactional* conceptual models, has been discussed in Chapter 1.5, under the heading *The Aboriginal-White Encounter*.

3.8 Aims and objectives of current study

The central aim of the current research is to explore patterns of difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in terms of their reference to cultural frames as “organizing principles” or “discourses”. The investigation will focus on how identity, or the psychology of self, may be differently mediated by group membership.

Specifically, the research will attempt to address the question – Does Bain’s conceptual framework of indigenous culture as primarily *interactional* and non-indigenous culture as primarily *transactional* hold true for a sample of contemporary Aboriginal people living in an urban environment? If so, how does this impact on the relationship between Aborigines and whites?

The APS *Position Paper on Racism and Prejudice* (1997) recommends that ...

“clinicians engage in appropriate training to ensure that they can provide culturally appropriate services, [and that] ... in research and practice, psychologists attempt to correct the historical overemphasis on ‘deficits’ in minority groups, and focus more on competency based models.” The current project will further contribute to research which has provided some insight into differential markers of Aboriginal subjectivity that will be useful both in clinical practice and community education.

3.9 Contribution to knowledge statement

Despite a growing body of research into the lived experience of urban Aboriginal communities, the construction of Aboriginal people as belonging to the remote past

seems to have been based on the assumption that urban populations are sufficiently assimilated into the mainstream as to not warrant research into their cultural distinction.

The contribution to knowledge offered by this project is that will allow an ethical psychological investigation of the direct experience of maintaining an Aboriginal identity within a predominantly non-indigenous urban community in the contemporary context. As well as asking Aboriginal people to describe how they subjectively perceive/describe their indigenous identities, psychodynamic theories of unconscious motivation will be used to **generate hypotheses** about the various functions Aboriginal disadvantage may perform within the white mainstream. By reflexively comparing these hypotheses with an analysis of first person accounts from contemporary Aboriginal people and the whites who interact with them, this study hopes to seek out transformative definitions of difference in order to facilitate psychological understanding and dialogue.

CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY AND THE OTHER

A person's sense of self, the particular knowledge of who "I" am, within a general cultural framework, is re-created from moment to moment in all the signifying acts of all the relations in all the events that make up a person's life (Bonnie Urciuoli, 1995: *The Indexical Structure of Visibility*).

In order to understand the impact of the confrontation with cultural difference in the form of an Aboriginal Other, an explanation of the developmental role of identifications in ego formation is required. Because these processes are universal, they apply equally to indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Here, Lacan's (1949-1957) concept of the *mirror stage*, together with other elaborations of Freudian theory in Lacan's "return to Freud", will be fundamental to the discussion of the central role played by the Other in the formation of an individual identity.

The processes which help each of us to form a sense of a stable identity can be applied to the formation of a coherent group identity. The psychodynamic literature on group process is especially useful if we want to consider the broader issues of identity formation as it pertains to group behaviour, particularly in terms of primitive defence mechanisms such as *splitting, projective identification, and scapegoating*. The work of Melanie Klein, which has added immeasurably to our understanding of the evolution of the ego through object relatedness, will be used in the further analysis of the defensive processes at work in the case of *Legend Rock*.

4.1 Relational theories of identity

All theories of development begin with the prematurity of the human infant at birth. Unlike other mammals, the little baby is utterly dependent on its caregivers for an extended period of time. As more than 50 years of infant observation has shown, being cared for by loving adults in a nurturing environment is not only critical to the infant's psychological health, but to its very survival (Miller, Rustin & Shuttleworth, 1989; Trevarthen, 1999; 2001). John Bowlby (1969; 1988) has called this the "secure base", while Donald Winnicott (1965; 1971) has termed it the "facilitating environment".

Because the ego, or *I*, is only gradually integrated from the mass of uncoordinated sensory and motor sensations that are present in the early months of an infant's life, the provision of predictable and reliable care is critical to normal healthy development. This fact led Donald Winnicott to famously proclaim that "there is no such thing as an infant, meaning, of course, that whenever one finds an infant, one finds maternal care, and without maternal care, there would be no infant."¹⁸ To explain this phenomenon, we need go no further than Freud's insight that individual psychology is first and foremost a social psychology. Freud (1921/1959, p. 1), in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, argued that:

In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well.

¹⁸ This quotation was cited by M. Masud R. Khan (1958, p.xxxvii), in his introduction to *D.W. Winnicott: Through paediatrics to psychoanalysis – Collected papers*.

There has been some discussion about the point at which the ego first emerges from the undifferentiated mass of id drives which characterize the earliest period of development. Freud (1905/1991) conceptualized the ego as a consequence of the resolution of the Oedipus stage, while Melanie Klein (1928/1975; 1945/1975; 1952/1975; 1959/1975), Donald Winnicott (1965; 1971) and Ronald Fairbairn (1952; 1954) have argued for the presence of a nascent ego at birth. Lacan (1949/2002) has posited yet another view by designating what he called the *mirror stage*, as constitutive of the emergence of an *I*.

4.1.1 The formation of the subject, reflections in the social mirror

Lacan used the concept of the mirror stage¹⁹ to describe the formation of the ego via the process of identification, where the ego is the result of identifying with one's own reflected, or *specular* image, to illustrate that our identities are literally created in the image of the Other (Lacan, 1949/2002). Although various theorists have disagreed about the exact timing of the emergence of what we call the ego, all agree that the infant's early experiences of relationship contribute to ego development through processes which include *introjection*, *identification* and *projection* (Verhaeghe, 2004). Loewald (1986, p. 393) has described how the process of ego development begins from the first interactions between a mother and her baby:

The child, by internalizing aspects of the parent, also internalizes the parent's image of the child – an image which is mediated to the child in the thousand different ways of being handled, bodily and emotionally. Early identification as

¹⁹ A more detailed explanation of the workings of the mirror stage can be found in the Appendices (see Appendix E)

part of ego development, built up through introjection of maternal aspects, includes introjection of the mother's image of the child ... The bodily handling of and concern with the child, the manner in which the child is fed, touched, cleaned, the way it is looked at, talked to, called by name, recognized and re-recognized – all these and many other ways of communicating with the child, and communicating to him his identity, sameness, unity and individuality, shape and mold him so that he can begin to identify himself, to feel and recognize himself as one and as separate from others yet with others. The child begins to experience himself as a centred unit by being centred upon.

Because the early months of life are characterized by a lack of object constancy, the infant is entirely dependent on the caregiver to hold all the disparate “bits” of experience together. Even brief failures in the environment expose the infant to extreme anxiety, which it cannot contain for itself. To quote from Symington (1986, p. 257): “The psyche is not a unity, we like to think that we are one but we are not. The psyche, in its dual nature of subject and object, is all split up and, as a consequence ... the world is in bits.” The role of the Other is keep the “bits” together and thereby enable the infant to maintain the sense of “going-on-being” described by Winnicott (1951; 1971). During moments of tension, such as during a period of parental absence in an unfamiliar environment, the infantile ego is faced with an unavoidable anxiety which can lead to the experience of the self as fragmentary and partial. In psychopathological terms, this is similar to the experience described as “fragmentation” in a psychotic break.

The centrality of the role of the Other²⁰ explains the emergence of acute separation anxiety during the mirror stage (often called the “eight months anxiety” because of the typical age at which it occurs), which can only be contained by the reassuring presence of the familiar Other (usually the mother), whose sympathetic and empathic response to the infant’s distress enables him or her to manage anxiety in the face of threatening stimuli which would otherwise overwhelm the infantile ego (Verhaeghe, 2004). If the anxiety cannot be contained, the infant experiences itself as dis-integrating. The Other literally holds the child’s ego together by reflecting back to it an image of continuity, regularity and wholeness (Klein, 1946/1975; 1948/1975).

In Bion’s (1959b/1988) view, the primary role of the mother in early infancy is to be a “container” for the frustration and pain that the child’s infantile ego is too fragile to contain. Through the process of projective identification, the infant attempts to get rid of the experience of distress by projecting it into the mother. The mother then, as it were, digests the infant’s anxiety and gives it back in a form that can be tolerated. Eventually, the child is able to internalize (introject) the Other as an ego-ideal and make use of transitional objects (a blanket or a toy from home) to sustain the sense of an integrated and coherent identity in the absence of the parents or parent substitutes (Winnicott, 1951/1975).

²⁰ From 1955 onwards, Lacan further defined the term “the other” by drawing a distinction between the “little other” (the other) and the “big Other” (with the O in Other capitalized). According to Evans (1996), Lacan distinguished between the little other and big Other as a result of the evolution of his ideas about the interplay of the three psychic registers: the *symbolic*, the *imaginary*, and the *real*. The concept of the other/Other has been described by Evans (1996, pp. 132-133) as “perhaps the most complex term in Lacan’s work.”

All of the child's experiences of being cared for, handled, spoken to and spoken about are incorporated into the gestalt image that the child has available to themselves through the family narrative, which is both contemporary and historical. These dimensions have been defined as synchronic and diachronic, respectively. The developing child forms attachments (Bowlby, 1969) to its caregivers which, if they are "good enough" to provide "basic trust" (Erikson, 1950/1963), contribute to the sense of "going-on-being" (Winnicott, 1951/1975) and become the basis of a healthy and integrated ego, or sense of identity. As the child matures, the social experiences and sense of self gained through these early social bonds enable the boy and girl, as little men and little women, to gradually extend their relationships beyond the limits of the family and into the community – at school and with peers.

Through his metaphoric reference to the mirror stage, Lacan (1949/2002) argued that subjectivity can only be brought into awareness from outside of itself, through the dual process of reflection and recognition by another person. The sense of belonging – to the parents, the family, the social community and, finally, to the nation, is the cornerstone of identity formation, and remains central to our narcissistic sense of self throughout life (Freud, 1914/1995). Threats to belonging, such as social ostracism, or the elevation of a rival above ourselves, represent a narcissistic wound, and have been shown to be causally linked to psychopathology. Even the most well adjusted person will experience anxiety when rejected by peers (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco & Baumeister, 2001; Williams, 2001; Williams & Zadro, 2001). In an attempt to close the gap that separates us from the

Other, we identify with those most like ourselves, and define ourselves against those who are different (Sarup, 1996).

4.1.2 The ego-ideal

Lacan used Freud's (1923/1995) tripartite configuration of the ego (ideal-ego, ego-ideal and superego)²¹ to explain how identifications can travel in two directions. Narcissistic identifications with all those who are "like me" belong in the imaginary realm of the ideal-ego, while identifications with the "big" Other occur on the symbolic plane and are related to the installation of the ego-ideal. The ego-ideal is internalized as a result of a psychological process of socialization and is central to the formation and coherence of human groups (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1985). Freud's use of the term ego-ideal refers to the ever-present human desire to try to recapture the narcissistic perfection of childhood through our relations with others. As distinct from the ideal-ego, the ego-ideal is a referent to introjected aspects of an ideal Other that provides a model to aspire toward. Lacan emphasized the role of the ego-ideal in the child's entry into the symbolic order: the world of social limits, rules, prohibitions and conscience that is presided over by the superego. In *The New Introductory Lectures* (1932/2001, p. 92), Freud has outlined the

²¹ Lacan argued that the three "formations of the ego" - the ideal-ego, the ego-ideal and the superego - are quite distinct concepts which should not be confused with one another. He distinguished between the three terms as follows: The ego-ideal and the superego are both linked with the father and the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. The superego is an unconscious agency whose function is to repress sexual desire for the mother, whereas the ego-ideal exerts a conscious pressure towards sublimation and provides the coordinates which enable the subject to take up a sexual position as a man or a woman (Lacan, 1938, pp. 59-62). In his Seminar of 1953-4, Lacan argued that the ego-ideal is a symbolic introjection, whereas the ideal-ego is the source of imaginary projection. The ego-ideal guides the subject's position in the symbolic order. The ideal-ego, on the other hand, originates in the specular image of the mirror stage; it is a promise of the future synthesis towards which the ego tends, the illusion of unity on which the ego is built. The ideal-ego always accompanies the ego, as an ever-present attempt to regain the omnipotence of the pre-oedipal dual-relation. Though formed in primary identification, the ideal-ego continues to play a role in secondary identifications (Evans, 1996, p. 52).

relationship between the ego-ideal and the super-ego. In the following quote, Freud has emphasized the role of parental introjects in the formation of the ego-ideal:

We have now to mention another important activity which is to be ascribed to the super-ego. It is also the vehicle of the ego-ideal, by which the ego measures itself, towards which it strives, and whose demands for ever-increasing perfection it is always striving to fulfill. No doubt this ego-ideal is a precipitation of the old idea of the parents, an expression of the admiration which the child felt for the perfection which it at that time ascribed to them.

Usually, the ego-ideal is derived from narcissistic identification with the parents, particularly the parent of the same sex. As Freud has pointed out, however, such identifications can also occur with parent substitutes and collective ideals. In his slim volume: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921/1959, p. 116), Freud explored the ways that ... “a number of subjects have put one and the same object in place of their ego-ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego.” The collective ideal is made possible through the convergence of many individual ego-ideals within any given cultural and political milieu. Inclusion in the group, among people “like us”, enables individuals to re-experience the jubilation made possible by the sense of integrity and wholeness offered by the specular image reflected by the Other during the mirror stage. For Freud, the phenomena of amorous fascination with celebrity, the submission to political leaders, and the capacity to engage in “group-think”, or mass hypnotism, could all be traced back to this convergence of the ego-ideal among groups and communities (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1985).

Through identifications, other people can come to “embody” the Other as an ego-ideal or superego. Whether they are husbands, wives, teachers, analysts, or authority figures such as police, these Others all act as referents, in some shape or form, to the original Other. In this sense, the specular image creates a psychic link between the ideal-ego on the imaginary plane, the ego-ideal, which has a symbolic function first activated during the mirror stage, and the superego. The symbolic element to the mirroring role that the parent performs for the infant is built into the parent’s words that help to solidify, through acts of signification, the child as belonging to the group in a particular way.

For Lacan (1949-1957), the mirror stage represents a fundamental aspect of the structure of subjectivity, insofar as it describes the formation of the ego via the process of identification first postulated by Freud. Lacan’s emphasis on the symbolic dimension can also be directly related to the earlier discussion of Buhler’s (1934/1990) concept of the *symbolic field*. Every “I” – every person – takes some position with regard to the social and natural world, and it is from within this position that the specific nature of “who it is that ‘I’ am” within the deictic field emerges. Verhaeghe (2004, p.1) has argued that, because what we call the “self”, the “ego” or the “I”, is socially constituted, there is no such thing as individual pathology ... “it is always pathology in relation to the Other.” A healthy ego results from identification with mature and responsive objects, a crippled ego results from identifications with an object which has failed the infant in some crucial way (Symington, 1986).

4.1.3 Melanie Klein – the fear of annihilation

While Lacan focused on the role of language and signification in ego formation, Melanie Klein, along with others in the British school of object relations (whose members included Fairbairn, Guntrip and Winnicott), viewed development as organized around the vicissitudes of object relationships. Klein (1952) stated that ... “The analysis of very young children has taught me that there is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words object relations are at the centre of emotional life” (as cited in Symington, 1986, p. 257). An important distinction, however, between Klein and the other members of the British school was her retention of Freud’s emphasis on internal drives, including his concept of the death drive – or Thanatos. Where the other object relations theorists placed more emphasis on libidinous impulses (the drive for love), Klein took the fear of annihilation as her starting point. For Klein, then, the ultimate fate of the personality depended on the development and resolution of libidinal *and* destructive impulses, both of which she believed emanated from within the infant.

The basis for Klein’s clinical theory was Freud’s (1920/1978) dual-drive formulation as laid out in: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There, Freud emphasized the tendency, beginning in earliest infancy, to find pleasure in and seek out those experiences which promote our survival and that of our group, and to avoid as painful those experiences which threaten our survival. Freud contended that, just as the mind as a whole seeks pleasurable and avoids painful sensations, consciousness tends to admit and retain pleasurable (ego-syntonic) and to exclude or repress painful (ego-dystonic) images

(Money-Kyrle, 1951). In the object relations literature these distinct entities are described as being either “good” or “bad” objects, which are internalized in infancy through the process of introjection.

4.1.4 Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position

According to Symington (1986, p. 268), the mother who does not receive the child’s love becomes a rejecting, painful object. In the first four months of life, which Klein (1937/1964) designated as the period representing the *paranoid/schizoid position*, this inner object, together with the part of the ego that has tried to offer its love, becomes split off from the main body of the ego. Because the object is part of its structure, the ego cannot altogether sever relations with it. Instead, the ego separates the object into good and bad “part objects”. The good part objects are idealized and incorporated into the ego, while the bad part objects are split off from the ego and projected on to external objects in the real world:

Through the introjection of good objects, the infant begins to think of himself as being made up of these good objects, and also as a whole object, as opposed to a discordant collection of sensations and feelings. In other words, his concept of himself as something with a stable and permanent existence (his sense of his won reality) is largely based on introjections of this kind. But either because his very greed is essentially aggressive, or because oral aggression is used from the beginning to destroy or master bad objects as well as to acquire good ones, he often feels that bad objects too have got inside, and must be destroyed there, or projected outwards, onto objects in the real world, which are then perceived to contain the ‘bad bits’ of himself (Klein, 1937/1964, p. 52).

4.1.5 Infantile phantasy: Splitting, projection, and projective identification

Klein (1937/1964) emphasized the role of infantile *phantasy* in the primitive defensive processes that predominate during the paranoid/schizoid position. She postulated that the infant attributes positive (love) or negative (hate and rage) qualities to phantasised good or bad part objects, and then experiences these as not only the source of pleasure or pain but also as “friendly” or “hostile” in themselves. Because the paranoid/schizoid defence originates in the oral stage of very early infancy, the split is often referred to as being between the “good breast”, which assuages the pain of hunger, and the “bad breast” of the withholding mother. Through the mechanism of “splitting” the infant is able to reduce anxiety by dealing with contradictory feelings one at a time. Splitting holds ambivalence at bay by re-presenting either good or bad aspects of a single object as a *part-object*, an object with only one particular quality, such as “frustrating”. Since the child projects his or her own love or hate upon them, the good one is felt to be loving and protective, and the bad one to be relentless in its persecutory hatred of the infant and all that he loves (Klein, 1937/1964, p.48):

Under the influence of his or her own anger, the small child’s world may be perceived of as hostile and dangerous in a wholly unrealistic way. At such times, he feels threatened by enemies that not only attack him from without but also take possession of his body and who, as the projected representation of his own aggression, become yet more dangerous in proportion to his efforts to defend himself against them. The infant’s liability to this sense of persecution is often expressed in screaming tantrums and negativistic moods during which, for example, food may be rejected as if it were poison.

Although common in infancy, Klein recognized these feelings as the basis of the persecutory feelings of adult paranoids. In the “paranoid” or “persecutory position” of early infancy, Klein (1937/1964, p.50) argued that what the infant takes in or gets rid of in phantasy ...

... plays a most important role in the construction of his early picture of, and beliefs about, his own bodily ego and the world about him. The imaginary acts by which an object is taken in, and then believed to be inside the self, or expelled and believed to be outside the self are known as “introjection” and “projection” (thus the word ‘projection’ is used both for the attribution of affects to their object and for the imaginary ejection of objects believed to be inside the body).

Klein (1937/1964; 1959/1975) thought that these primitive defense mechanisms (splitting, projection, and projective identification) were normative and that they were critical in the first few months of life, because they helped the infant to deal with strong contradictory feelings, such as love/hate and pleasure/ frustration. Because the infant can only keep one of these thoughts or feelings in its immature awareness at the same time, the infant’s inability to cope with the ambivalence elicited by complex emotions produces anxiety. Klein thought that the ego was called into presence at birth in order to deal with the anxiety invoked by experiences of “unpleasure”, and that this was its prime role. In particular, Klein postulated that it is the infant’s own aggressive impulses which give rise to an immediate “annihilation anxiety”, which is then defended against through the mechanisms of splitting and projection.

4.1.6 The depressive position

Once the concepts of enduring good and bad objects and an enduring ego have developed, the infant becomes sufficiently mature to discover that some good and bad objects belong to the same person, who is then recognized as being both loved and hated. The ambivalence associated with this recognition, which is extremely painful to the infant, ushers in what Klein (1935/1975) has called the *depressive position*. Depression, then, is associated with the guilt evoked by the new realization that the object that the infant has so vehemently attacked in a fit of rage is the same object that is loved and revered (Klein, 1948/1975). The discovery that good and bad objects are different aspects of the same person is so painful that the infant at first tries to deny it by regressing, or partially regressing, to the earlier phase in which one aspect is idealized and loved and the other denigrated and hated – a process which, while it in one sense “lets the infant off the hook”, also involves some corresponding splitting of the ego. The infant may choose to take the less painful route of a return to the paranoid/ schizoid position, bypassing the depressive position altogether. Without help, such a choice destines the individual to continue to use regression as a defence against depression into adulthood.

For Klein, paranoia, persecutory anxiety, schizoid states and the sense of guilt all have their common origins in infancy and can be traced back to the resolution of the paranoid/schizoid and the depressive positions. Klein conceptualized these positions as epigenetic, in the sense that the more or less successful resolution of the paranoid/ schizoid position ushers in the development of the more adaptive depressive position, which she associated with the period of weaning. Klein, however, was at pains to point

out that the effects specific to each of these developmental positions continue to be felt throughout life, and are not limited to the period of infancy (1959/1975). Even in healthy children, at least some part of the inner persecution experienced in the depressive position survives in a modified form to compose one element – a persecutory element – in that specifically human feeling known as a sense of guilt. According to Klein, guilt is always associated with real or imagined attacks on the (M)other which are common to the paranoid-schizoid position.

In severely disturbed adults, paranoid states return them to a position where everything outside the self is experienced as persecutory and dangerous, while the inner world is perceived as trustworthy and wholly good. In the schizoid state, the opposite is true. Everything outside the self is experienced as good, while the inner world is felt to be depleted and worthless, with the individual engulfed by feelings of guilt and depression. Both forms of splitting make meaningful relationship with others impossible, because in the delusional world of the sufferer, other people are experienced as phantasised part-objects, that is, as idealized or hated others. In some patients, these two positions alternate as the defensive organization attempts to deal with actual situations in their environments. Either way, a regression to the paranoid/schizoid position of infancy presents symptomatically as the “fragmentation” or “disintegration” of psychosis.

4.1.7 A “normative” psychotic core

Loewald (2000) has argued that, just as the Oedipus complex, the neurotic core, wanes but is never definitively destroyed, rising again at different times throughout life, so too

does a more archaic “psychotic core” remain with us. The concept of a normative psychotic core was given early support by Klein’s clinical work. As we have seen, Klein conceptualized the dynamics of all forms of psychopathology as object relationship conflicts. Klein posited that each of us, even in adulthood, remains open to primitive forms of splitting and projective identification when our narcissistic ego is threatened. Klein’s work, then, has been especially important to our understanding of the primitive defensive processes of splitting, projection and projective identification as they are played out in both individual and group behaviour. Thus:

...the concept of normality is relative. Norms of conduct, behaviour, convention, thought, of what is rational, realistic and ‘ego-syntonic’ are interdependent with the stability of a civilization. The whole realm of identification and empathy, where subject/object boundaries are temporarily suspended or inoperative, plays a significant part in everyday interpersonal relations (Loewald, 2000, p. 248).

Freud argued that the study of human institutions was inseparable from the study of human nature. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/1995), Freud discussed the problem of modernity as the age old dilemma that humanity has faced from the beginning of civilization: individuals, in order to coexist in social communities, must relinquish their infantile drive for omnipotence and accept the limits (legal, moral and social) imposed by society. The rewards of this exchange, in simple terms, are evident for those who have someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to (Freud’s famous “love, work and ordinary unhappiness”). In societies where contingent events threaten these basic human needs (Maslow, 1970), the social barriers against reverting to primitive forms of relating are much harder to maintain. In periods of political and

economic instability, such as in wartime or during periods of mass unemployment, the whole edifice of civilized society is liable to collapse.

4.2 The banality of evil

Freud (1930/1995, p. 747) has alerted us to the difficulties inherent to two of the “ideal demands of civilized society” as presented in the Christian Bible: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*” and “*Love thine enemies*”. For Freud (pp. 749-750), the problem was that:

...men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. ‘Homo hominus lupus’ [‘man is a wolf to man’]. As a rule, this cruel aggressiveness waits for some provocation or puts itself at the service of some other purpose, whose goal might also have been reached by milder measures. In circumstances that are favourable to it when the mental counter-forces which ordinarily inhibit it are out of action, it also manifests itself spontaneously and reveals man as a savage beast to whom consideration of his own kind is something alien. Anyone who calls to mind the atrocities committed during the racial migrations or the invasions of the Huns ... or the capture of Jerusalem by the pious Crusaders, or even, indeed, the horrors of the recent World War – anyone who calls these things to mind will have to bow humbly before the truth of this view.

The central premise of the psychoanalytical theory of groups is that the adult, when brought into emotional contact with the group, unconsciously re-experiences all the primitive anxieties first experienced in infancy (Rustin, 1991). As a result, the adult is likely to re-employ infantile paranoid and depressive defences, like splitting and projection. Studies of group behaviour have shown that even the most consistent individuals can become volatile in a group, a process that is associated with a regression from using normally adaptive to using psychotic mechanisms (Allingham, 1987; Scheidlinger, 1952). The greater the sense of threat, the more defensive the group is likely to become. Thus, according to Allingham (1987, p. 52), group behaviour is “essentially, rather than exceptionally, irrational”. This regression, which is both involuntary and unconscious, exists underneath the individual’s continued sense of his or her own adult identity and rational attempts to meet the needs of the group. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that group behaviour can be impulsive, extreme and intolerant.

For Bell, any explanatory model of humanity is wanting if it does not take into account the centrality of hatred and phantasy in human affairs. Drawing from Arendt’s (1963/1994) analysis of the “banality of evil”, Bell (2004) has suggested that it would be a mistake to regard the hatred that is directed toward a designated Other (a scapegoat) as the exception to the rule of “civilized society”. Rather, the potential for attacks upon this Other and the wish to eject them as if they were a disease which endangered the health of the nation state should be regarded as “an immanent element of modernity.” The strange Other may be ostracized through cultural exclusion; they can also be distanced by being placed inside an impervious shell of exoticism; alternatively, they can be marginalized by

stigmatization and scapegoating. Although each of these defensive mechanisms is different, their effect is the same. The stranger is constructed as a permanent Other in order to stave off the anxiety engendered by difference (Sarup, 1996).

4.3 Projection and splitting in the name of the nation state

In her book: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: The banality of evil*, Hannah Arendt (1963/1994, p.39) has argued that, in Hitler's Germany, Jews were gradually constructed as "superfluous" people, as stateless "non-citizens", and that this enabled the "good citizens" in the general population to either turn a "blind eye" to their fate or to project hatred onto them. This concept can be used to explain one of the most disturbing events in modern history, which occurred in November, 1938, in Germany. During the infamous *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), seventy-five hundred Jewish shop windows were broken, all synagogues went up in flames, and twenty thousand Jewish men were taken off to concentration camps. These events graphically illustrate the way that stereotypes, as representations and constructions of groups, are used unconsciously and ideologically to justify and legitimate existing power and social relations within a society (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

In his book *Against paranoid nationalism*, Hage (2003) has alerted us to the dangers inherent to a mute acceptance of discourses which position one category of people as less-than-human. Once the categories of "non-citizens" and "less-than-human" have been created, hatred can be safely projected onto all those who do not meet the ego-ideal endorsed by the nation state. In 1930s in Germany, all non-Aryans became subject to

being categorized in this way. The regime as Law, instead of protecting the people thus categorized (Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill and the physically disabled), was able to expel them from the body-politic, using the same logic as that applied when a gangrenous limb is surgically excised to ensure the survival of the individual (Sichrovsky, 1988).

In the 1930s, William Cooper's Aborigines' Advancement League was a Christian organization based on the premise that, through education, Aborigines were capable of "uplift" to take their place alongside white Australians as citizens and British subjects. Cooper expressed outrage on several occasions that the children of any other nationality (citing Chinese and Japanese as examples) were immediately granted citizenship if they happened to be born in Australia, whereas Aboriginal people had no such status and were afforded no such protection by the British sovereign (King George). Cooper placed great emphasis on the contradiction between the Enlightenment values espoused by the political and religious leaders of his day, and their actual behaviour towards indigenous people. An important event in Cooper's tenure (as secretary of the League) was his much delayed *Petition to the King*, protesting about conditions of Australian Aborigines.

In the following segment of a letter detailing the appalling conditions in which Aborigines were forced to live at Cummeragunga Mission, Cooper specifically compared the Australian Government's treatment of Aboriginal people with Hitler's treatment of the Jews in the period leading up to the Second World War.

What an indignity, to have these [educated blacks] branded as unfit to exercise the privileges of citizenship or to receive the benefits that accrue to the white person. If the white man wanted to think out an indignity for the man he has displaced, he could not do better than he has done by the natives. We feel that while we are all indignant over Hitler's treatment of the Jews, we are getting the same treatment here and we would like this fact duly considered (William Cooper, cited in Attwood & Markus, 2004, pp. 110-111).

Cooper's main complaint was that Aboriginal people, as non-citizens, were equivalent in status to the Jews of Europe, and were not allocated the same rights as other Australians. In the ironic phrasing of Paul Kelly's popular song, Aboriginal people in Australia were given "special treatment", which entailed State authorities dictating every aspect of their daily lives. The wages of Aboriginal workers were held "in trust", they were not permitted to move freely or live where they chose, it was illegal for Aborigines and whites to marry, and children of mixed heritage were routinely taken away to be raised in white institutions, where they were frequently subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

The psychodynamic theories of projection and projective identification, as developed by Melanie Klein, have become central to an understanding of phenomena which otherwise appears to be simply "mad", or "monstrous". The treatment of Aboriginal people is just one example of the way in which the defensive mechanisms of splitting and projection are used to force the Other into a position of what Bell (2004) called "embodied superfluosity". The release of "sickening" images²² from Abu Ghraib prison, showing

²² On February 15, 2006, SBS TV's *Dateline* program broadcast about 60 previously unpublished photographs depicting continued prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison. A story about the release appeared in *The Age* newspaper the following day.

the extent of torture that has been inflicted on Iraqi detainees in 2004 and again in 2006 has only reinforced Freud's pessimistic assertion that "man is a wolf to man" (Moore, 2006, *The Age* newspaper, February 16, p. 14). Other contemporary examples include the physical, sexual or mental abuse of State wards in homes established to protect them, the sexual abuse of children by clergy, or, as is all too common, the abuse of children by their own parent/s.

4.4 Identification with the aggressor

Klein's ideas also help to explain how, over time, the institutionalized and systematic attributions of negative qualities onto minority groups can come to be internalized by members of those groups. In his studies of the impact of colonization on the colonized, Franz Fanon referred to such negative introjections as the *identification with the aggressor* (see Fanon, 1963; 1967). Aboriginal Magistrate Pat O'Shane (1993) used the concept of identification with the aggressor to explain the form of self-abuse that Aboriginal people call "mucking up". In particular, O'Shane concurred with Fanon's assertion (in his 1963 book, *Wretched of the Earth*) that these internalized negative self-attributions were directly related to the very high levels of family breakdown, mental illness, and family and individual violence within Aboriginal communities.

Stuart Hall (1990, p. 226), has quoted from Fanon's book *Black skin, White masks* (1967) to illustrate how the "inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms [the colonized]." Citing Fanon, Hall has argued ... "If its silences are not resisted, negative introjections can produce, in Fanon's vivid phrase ... individuals without an anchor,

without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels.” The widespread belief in the genetic superiority of whiteness made skin colour a significant determinant in the fate of children with mixed parentage²³. Because Aboriginal people are genetically Caucasian, interrelationship with whites has the effect of producing light skinned children, and it was this group who were particularly targeted by the authorities for removal from Aboriginal communities to be raised as “white”.

Taken in infancy or early childhood, the only mirroring that many of these children received was as the projected part-object of white administrators and mission managers, who talked about Aboriginal people in derogatory ways. Predictably, as O’Shane has argued, many Aboriginal people who have come to regard themselves as “bad”, “worthless” and “no good” as children, act upon this belief through anti-social or self destructive behaviour as adults. Given what we know about the importance of the mirroring function of the Other in the process of ego formation, it should also be no surprise that this is especially true for those members of the Stolen Generations who were separated from their families and raised in white institutions²⁴

4.5 Horizontal violence

Paternalistic institutions, then, invite the return of the repressed. As was true for children with a mixed Aboriginal-white parentage in the era of assimilation, whole groups may be

²³ In a telling example, the Aboriginal co-teacher in the *Indigenous Psychologies* course referred to in the *prologue* mentioned anecdotally (in 1997) that, in her mother’s time, it was common for Aboriginal people to use the self-deprecating term “half-caste for nothing”, meaning that an Aboriginal person was still “no good”, despite having one good (white) parent.

²⁴ See Dodson & Wilson, 1997 *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*.

targeted, based on some definable characteristic, such as skin colour, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. Such arbitrary distinctions enable hatred to be projected onto minorities as part-objects, and are then internalized by those minorities through introjection and projective identification. In hierarchical institutions, unchecked projective identifications can lead to *horizontal violence* (see Freire, 1970; 1978) directed toward peers, or to patients. This is especially true for those institutions where the client is vulnerable, such as in hospitals, prisons, mental health settings and homes for the disabled (Duffy, 1995; McCall, 1996).

An important aspect of horizontal violence is the curious behaviour of members of oppressed groups who lash out at their peers in response to oppression instead of attacking their oppressors. Phenomena including backstabbing, undermining, humiliation, ostracism and sabotage have been well documented with respect to nurses, who work in an environment where male physicians and specialists have traditionally held almost all of the power and authority in the medical field, and where nurse practitioners are on the bottom rung of the hospital hierarchy (Duffy, 1995; Glass, 1997; McCall, 1995; Roberts, 1996). In the armed services, the systematic abuse of new recruits, known as “bastardization” (literally, the failure of the paternal duty of care as a symbolic function), is another example of the unconscious displacement of aggressive impulses onto peers.

Money-Kyrle (1951, p. 74), in a discussion of the authoritarian character structure, described the role of the primitive defences in relation to the development of an “authoritarian morality”:

The authoritarian morality, which parades obedience to some external power or inner code as the highest form of virtue, is based on the unconscious denial of two painful truths; On the one hand, there is denial that the feared internal figure (the autocratic and punitive father) has 'bad' or hated qualities, or that such qualities, if admitted, are unconsciously hated. On the other hand, there is the denial that the loved object (the submissive and persecuted mother) which has been deserted out of fear, has qualities which make it loveable and that its desertion therefore merits feelings of depressive guilt. While the former explains the processes of rationalization invoked by those who create hells for those who disagree with them, whereby noxious institutions are described as 'benevolent reformatories', the latter explains the tendency of those who surrender other people's interests to a powerful enemy to argue that those who have been deserted have deserved their fate. Religion is another form of psychotherapy which promotes a belief in the existence of idealized good objects as a defense against persecutory and depressive guilt.

As Freud has warned us, the temptation to abuse power is an immanent human trait. The tendency to unleash our load of "emotional baggage" on those who are more vulnerable is particularly dangerous when marginalized groups do not have anyone to represent their interests against those who have a "barrow to push". Previous generations of Aboriginal people came to regard the Aboriginal Protection Board as synonymous with the systematic and wanton destruction of indigenous culture and society.

Like the Aboriginal "Protectors", those whose positions of authority give them control over the lives of others are especially vulnerable to acting out their internalized persecutory objects by adopting an autocratic and authoritarian stance (see, for example,

William Cooper on the behaviour of Police and religious figures in relation to Aboriginal people, in Markus & Attwood, 2004). Similarly, the *Bringing them Home Report* (Dodson & Wilson, 1997) has pointed to the devastating impact of assimilation policies on every aspect of indigenous culture and social welfare for indigenous people who, both in childhood and as adults, were regarded as wards of the State until 1967.

4.6 A mythical ego-ideal: The Australian “being without lack”

The concept that groups defend against difference through primitive regressions designed to protect the collective ego-ideal goes part of the way to answering the questions that were raised by the narrative of *Legend Rock* (see section 2.4, above): “Why does the existence of an Aboriginal Other threaten a white sense of belonging?” and; “What are the mechanisms and purposes of aggression towards, or exclusion of, that which represents otherness in the Australian context?”

Rutherford (2000), in her argument that in Australian culture, the narcissistic myth of equality – of all being the same – has filled the place of an Australian ego-ideal, has helped to explain why the aggression within the Australian psyche is not only directed toward the Aboriginal Other, but extends to otherness in general – to women, tall poppies, intellectuals and the ruling class. More specifically, Rutherford (p. 117) has suggested that Australians are socially bonded by the identification with an ideal that is complete unto itself, a *being-without-lack*.

Rutherford has linked the Australian ideal of being-all-the-same to Freud's concept that the logic of such an ideal is that no-one has to experience castration. It is as though all the "sons" of Freud's "primal father" did not need to give anything away to attain a position in the symbolic order. That is, they only needed to give away competition with each other, to be all the same as each other. According to Rutherford (2000), this view explains the intense emotions evoked by the ANZAC legend. The ANZACS – the band of "sons" of Empire, who thumbed their noses at the inept British authority who sent them to their slaughter, represent the archetypal egalitarian horde. Their stoic sacrifice, a payment in blood on foreign soil, expiated the guilt associated with the appropriation of the land "for all of us"²⁵. In this sense, the being-without-lack that forms the basis of the Australian ego-ideal in Rutherford's thesis reflects Lacan's (1938) emphasis on the imaginary element in identifications based on the specular image and the ideal-ego.

In this scenario, identifications, based on a perceived likeness between the subject and the other are essentially narcissistic. Difference, therefore, represents a threat to the omnipotent fantasies which have accompanied the appropriation of the Australian continent in the name of Empire and the concept that all Australians share (or should share) particular qualities that are associated with the project of Empire building. The implicit association between whiteness and Empire in colonial discourses was discussed in terms of how indigenous Others have been constructed by colonial discourses as "less than white" (Dyer, 2003; Hage, 2003; Smallacombe, 1998).

²⁵ The phrase "for all of us" was used as an advertising slogan by the National/Liberal coalition in the 1996 election campaign. The coalition won Government from the Keating Labor Government and went on to win three successive elections, in 1998, 2001 and 2004.

This contention helps to explain why all those who do not meet the criteria of “like me” cannot be symbolized except in terms of their difference, which, as we recall, equates to lack. Because the awareness of lack evokes anxiety, all signifiers of lack become subject to expulsion. Anything that is experienced as an “object-as-something-Other” than that which fits with the ideal of similitude - the masculine, the “down to earth” battler, the rebel and the larrikin - is stigmatized and rejected from the national psyche as un-Australian.

4.7 Tolerating difference: Multiculturalism in Australia

While on the surface, Australians appear sanguine about multiculturalism, each new group has endured various degrees of prejudice and antagonism directed toward them as Other. In the 1970s, the advent of the first group of Asian migrants tested the capacity of Australians’ tolerance of difference to the limit, and engendered many heated discussions about migration policy and population control (in the 1980s, Geoffrey Blainey’s attack on Asian migration was pivotal to the debate). In recent times, there has been much discussion about the advent of a Muslim other, in the form of asylum seekers from Iraq and Afghanistan, which has reflected deep anxieties about potential threats to the Good Australia as a Christian nation. Peter Manning (2004), in his analysis of reportage concerning Arabic and Muslim people in Sydney newspapers, concluded that the simplistic representations of these groups amounted to a new kind of racism, whereby: “All Arabs are Muslims, all Muslims are violent, all violent Muslims are against the interests of the west and personally a threat to our women.”

In December, 2005, headlines including “Race Hate: A shameful day for our nation” (Lawrence & McIlveen, 2005, December 12, *Herald/Sun*, pp. 1; 4) and “Racist furor as mobs riot” (Kennedy & Murphy, 2005, December 12, *The Age*, p. 1), ran above articles describing events in the Northern Sydney beachside suburbs of Cronulla and Brighton le Sands that led up to physical attacks on anyone who happened to be “of Middle Eastern appearance”. The following quotation is an excerpt from the story which appeared on the front page of the Melbourne Age:

The violence followed a week of simmering tension following an attack the previous Sunday on two lifesavers. Appeals by text message for “Aussies” to descend on the beach to reclaim it drew a crowd estimated at 5000 people, but a carnival atmosphere in the morning gave way to an ugly mood as the day wore on ... As the crowd moved along the beach and foreshore area, a man on the back of a utility began to shout “No more Lebs”, a chant picked up by the group around him. Members of the mob set about their prey with fists, flags and beer bottles. Two paramedics were injured as they tried to get the victims out of the North Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club, where they had fled to escape the rioters. The crowd broke the windows of the ambulance and kicked its doors as the officers attempted to get the group out. Police, who used capsicum spray and batons in their battle to quell the rioters, were also pelted with beer bottles, and in some cases their cars were swamped and stomped on as they tried to move from one violent flare-up to the next. They sometimes appeared powerless to keep up with the moving mob. The mob wore varied uniforms. A few sported black swastika sweatshirts, but most the emblem of the Australian flag, the Eureka Stockade flag, or with hand-written graffiti on their bodies such as “save nulla, f... Allah” (Kennedy & Murphy, 2005, December 12, *The Age*, p.1).

Although racism is perennial, mass violence of this type is relatively rare in Australia. Nevertheless, such displays of “mob rule” should not surprise us. Allingham (1987, p. 53) has argued that, for such unconscious regression to infantile mechanisms in a group to occur, the individuals in the group must first believe that the group exists – a belief which can then become self-fulfilling when the individuals who comprise the “group” regress as a whole. Psychodynamic models of group behaviour, such as that offered by Allingham, suggest that the group is formed when its members unconsciously share some “basic assumption” about the group, and it is this self-fulfilling belief which gives the group a life of its own. At Cronulla, an otherwise disparate group of individuals were joined together by a mutual identification as “Aussies”, on the singular and superficial basis of their supposed difference from “Lebs” (Lebanese Australians).

The leader of the group has an important function in the containment or escalation of potential violence in groups where a basic assumption is predominant, because groups only cohere around a leader with whom group members unconsciously identify. It is therefore through identification with the leader that group members indirectly identify with one another and the group as a whole (Scheidlinger, 1952). In novel situations which demand a response of one form or another, the leader, in the place of the big Other, directs the group’s perceptions about whether or not a threat exists, and, through his or her own reactions, provides a model to the group about how best to respond.

Judith Brett²⁶ (2005, p. 44) described the way that recent Government policy has been driven by anxiety about “border protection” since the fall of the twin towers of the World

²⁶ In her *Quarterly Essay*, entitled *Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party in Australia*.

Trade Centre in New York, on September 11, 2001. Brett noted that the advent of asylum seekers from the Middle East just prior to “9/11” provided Prime Minister John Howard with a ready-made opportunity to show strong leadership during the 2001 election campaign, a campaign which, according to Brett, exploited the public’s anxieties about the threat of terrorism: “From champion of the nation’s centre he [Howard] became the defender of its borders”, and appealed to the public with unequivocal statements like: “We decide who comes here and the circumstances in which they come.” The basic assumption here can be traced back to what Rutherford (2000) referred to as the Good Australia as being-all-the-same. In this context, it is instructive to compare the humanist response of the Fraser coalition government to Indochinese refugees 30 years ago with the response of the current national leadership to asylum seekers from the Middle East.

The Fraser administration’s humanitarian response to the first wave of Indochinese refugees (the so called “boat people”) in the mid 1970s asked “What can we do for them?” whereas the response of the current Government with respect to the latest wave of boat people has been to defensively question “What do they want to take from us?” This question, which mimics almost exactly Pauline Hanson’s One Nation response to the question of land rights for Aboriginal people, has been accompanied by debates about what constitutes the legitimate claims of refugees versus the illegitimate claims of illegal immigrants, or “queue jumpers”. The use of this form of terminology has highlighted, once again, the role of language as a mechanism of exclusion in pursuit of a supposed egalitarian ideal, but which at the same time actively undermines that ideal.

Robert Manne²⁷ (2005) has argued that the success of multiculturalism in Australia has been due to strong leadership and public policies which have favoured inclusion while recognizing and respecting cultural difference. Manne has suggested that the question “What can we do for them?”, in relation to Indochinese refugees fleeing totalitarian regimes in Vietnam and Cambodia, depended upon the then government’s capacity to empathize with the boat people as “people like us” through enacting what Martin Buber (1923/1970) described as an *I-Thou* relation. The *I-Thou* relationship, as posited by Buber, is a domain where subjective identification of one’s own position in the social and natural world is set aside, or suspended, in order to enter into what Buber has described as a true “meeting” with the Other. In this situation, the Other and the self are in a relation that requires neither fusion nor separation, but rather exist in a dialogue of “consummate reciprocity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 196).

4.8 The unassimilable Other

The second question, “What do they want from us?”, as has been applied to Middle Eastern refugees by the current Government, reflects Buber’s conception of the *I-It* relation, a form of defensive interpersonal relating that is devoid of empathy for the Other’s humanity, and regards difference as a threat. In Buber’s analysis, the *I-It* manifests as a subject/object relationship, which in group terms could be characterized as “us” and “them”. It is a measure of our times that, although there have been many voices of dissent, the majority of Australians have accepted without question the fact that, as stateless non-citizens awaiting decisions about the legitimacy of their claims, refugees

²⁷ Robert Manne, in conversation with Terry Lane, on *The National Interest*, ABC Radio National, broadcast on December 28, 2005 (repeat).

from the Middle East (only some of whom are Muslim) have been held for indeterminate periods in detention centres situated in remote parts of the country or on offshore islands, such as Nauru (the “Pacific Solution”). To further illustrate the analogy with amputation, the Australian Government has recently legislated to cut-off various small islands which stand just off the coast of Northern Australia, so that, should those claiming refugee status land on these islands, the Australian Government will not be under any obligation to take them in *as* refugees (Shaw, 2005b, September 1, *The Age*, p. 6).

Through its responses to 9/11 and asylum seekers, the incumbent Government has, both implicitly and explicitly, encouraged Australians to adhere to the paranoid basic assumption that asylum seekers are, at worst, potential terrorists, who will undermine the Good Australia if “we” are not alert to “their” sinister purpose. On the other hand, even if the asylum seekers are not terrorists, they will undermine the Good Australian aspiration to “fairness”, since they have arrived on our shores without waiting their turn as other aspiring migrants have had to do, and (so the argument goes) this is not fair to those other potential migrants who have waited patiently in line for their applications to be processed. The fact that asylum seekers, as refugees, are not in a position to apply for migration through the normal bureaucratic processes, and that the argument concerning fairness is therefore spurious, has been largely overlooked. A similar basic assumption would appear to have been operative during the 2005 Cronulla riots, where the unassimilable Other (in the form of Lebanese Australians) were perceived to have “unfairly” taken over “our” beach.

While white Australians are apt to congratulate themselves for a capacity for inclusiveness and tolerance of difference, it should be remembered that “tolerance” is itself defined in terms of the capacity to withstand the toxic effects of noxious substances. In his 2006 Australia Day address (January 26, *The Age*, p. 13), Prime Minister Howard embraced contemporary Australia’s cultural diversity as “one of our nation’s greatest assets.” In his response to the race-based violence at Cronulla, Howard argued that: “These events brought shame on all involved. Australians, whatever their background, deserve to be treated with tolerance and with respect.” Racial intolerance, Howard said, “is incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.” At the same time, Howard stressed that:

This nation’s unswerving commitment to racial equality [should be] coupled with an absolute determination to ensure that all sections of the Australian community are fully integrated into the mainstream of our national life.

4.9 An Australian way of life

The rich cultural and ethnic diversity which is currently held up as a mirror to Australians as representative of the sense of fair play and inclusive “mate-ship” inherent in the “Australian way of life” is both relatively new and contingent on newcomers to Australia fitting in with the “dominant cultural pattern” which has been defined by Howard as “the mainstream of our national life.” In Australia, differences of ethnicity and religion have been tolerated up to the point where such differences would lead to separate forms of identity that may supersede the ideal of being-all-the-same.

The media coverage of the so called “children overboard” incident of 2001, whether wittingly or not, amplified the idea that the refugees who were taken on board the Tampa from their dangerously overloaded Indonesian vessel were so unlike “us” that they had engaged in throwing their children into the sea as a politically motivated ploy to gain access to asylum in Australia. The Prime Minister was reported to have personally declaimed the asylum seekers as “un-Australian” and “evil” (Shaw, 2005, September 1, *The Age*, p. 6).

One of the greatest ironies of this sad episode in Australian history is that children born into detention while their parents’ refugee status was assessed, have been damaged in ways that were both predictable and preventable. Where previous groups of refugees were absorbed into the community while awaiting their refugee claims to be processed, new arrivals from the Middle East in the 21st century, including women and children, have been held behind razor wire in institutions run by the same private company that has been contracted to manage private prisons.

To a very large extent, the success of multiculturalism in Australia has been due to the adherence of successive waves of migrants to the ideal of assimilation into the Australian way of life. The advent of a Muslim Other and the recent riots at Cronulla have highlighted Rutherford’s (2000) concept of the Good Australia, which was based on Freud’s original contention that collective ideals cohere around identifications with those who share our cultural values. Psychodynamic theories of group behaviour emphasize the general tendency of groups to revert to primitive defences in response to the anxiety

evoked by difference which resists assimilation. Arguably, the guilt evoked by the Aboriginal presence makes this group more fundamentally problematic to Australian identity than that of any other.

CHAPTER FIVE: THIS WHISPERING IN OUR HEARTS

Until we give back to the black man some of what we have taken from him, and give it back in the same spirit that it was taken – without provision or strings to snatch it back, we shall remain where we have always been, a people without a past, not a nation, but a community of thieves (Xavier Herbert, as cited in Chamarette, 2000, p. 169-170).

5.1 Love, guilt and reparation

Despite the fact that indigenous Australians currently account for about two percent of the population, a tangible sense of disquiet around questions of legitimate occupation of the land by all those who have, like myself, come from “somewhere else” pervades white Australia. The repressed “secret” that lies behind this sense of disquiet is based on three simple facts: Australia belonged to Aboriginal people in 1788; the land was taken from them illegally; and sovereignty has never been rescinded.

As Haebich (1998) and Kidd (1997) have argued, in the wake of Mabo, the recognition of the “primal crime” of dispossession has discredited notions of benign settlement and “doomed race” which filled our history books until the early 1970s. Henry Reynolds (1998), one historian who has revealed the extent of Aboriginal resistance at the time of settlement, gives form to the “uncanny” sense that white Australia has of not-being-at-home, not being comfortable, feeling somehow guilty but without knowing why, as ... *this whispering in our hearts.*

The title of Reynold's book: *This Whispering in Our Hearts*, refers to a public lecture delivered in 1842 by Sydney barrister Richard Windeyer, in which Windeyer comprehensively reasserted the doctrine of terra nullius and thereby refuted Aboriginal land ownership. Windeyer, nevertheless, concluded his address with the questions: "How is it that our minds are not satisfied? What means this whispering in our hearts?" Perhaps ironically, a documentary (broadcast on SBS television on May 24, 2003), which traced the events surrounding the massacre of Aborigines at Mowla Bluff through the oral histories of descendants of survivors, was given the title: *This Whispering in Our Hearts*. The documentary was pieced together through stories that the film's director, Mitch Torres, had been told by her uncle and grandfather over thirty-five years ago. For the Aboriginal participants, the "whispering" of the title did not refer to unconscious guilt, but to very real fears of further reprisal:

For a long time our people couldn't tell the story fully. Being able to breathe and tell our story, you know, without the fear that someone will shut you down or something will happen to your family, you'll lose your job, your children will be taken away, so the fears are still valid now ... they've carried these stories for a long time and whenever they had the chance to talk about it, it was always in whispers and small bits and you never got the full story, because with a story like that it's a community owned and shared story (Mitch Torres, 2002).

5.2 This "Sorry business"

If revisionist historians, including Reynolds (1991; 1996; 1998; 1999), have raised anxieties within white Australia by openly discussing the often brutal realities of conflict between Aborigines and whites at the frontier, the effect on Aboriginal people may be

likened to the opening of a wound never healed. *Sorry business* is an Aboriginal term which is used to define the rituals and rites around the deaths and funerals of clan members. It denotes all aspects of the process more commonly referred to in white Australia as “grieving” (Williams, 2000). In the psychological literature, the normative experience of grief can be complicated for a number of reasons. In situations where a loved one is missing and “presumed dead”, for example, in the case of suicide, where a death has occurred during an estrangement, or when our last contact with the deceased was on bad terms.

For Aboriginal people, the term sorry business refers to the collective grief around the forced separation of children from their families, but also includes the grief imposed by the removal of people from their traditional lands which was justified under the principle of *terra nullius*. According to Williams (2000, p. 137), the harm done to Aboriginal peoples by white colonization has meant that they “constitute a massively damaged object in the Australian psyche.” Therefore, Williams has argued, any attempt to improve Aboriginal-white relations first needs to address the issue of guilt.

5.3 Persecutory and depressive guilt

Chamarette (2000, p. 169-170) has argued that the main source of guilt in white Australia is the unacknowledged theft of land. In *Psychoanalysis and politics*, Money-Kyrle (1951, p. 54) defined guilt as a compound phenomenon with at least two elements – a persecutory component, which is based “almost wholly on the fear of punishment” - and a depressive component “based almost wholly on the fear of injuring, deserting or

disappointing something that is loved.” The first type, *persecutory guilt*, is associated with the fear and anxiety characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position of early infancy. Persecutory guilt is defended against by the denial, splitting off and projection of unwanted feelings by expressions of resentment and the blaming of an external scapegoat. The second type, *depressive guilt*, is associated with the depressive position and the process of grieving. Depressive guilt is, in some ways, much harder to bear than persecutory guilt, because it cannot so easily be projected onto others. The person will experience the guilt themselves, in the form of depression, concern, a sense of responsibility and a desire to make reparation to the damaged object.

Such unconscious guilt can be aroused in conflicts where it would seem least justified by the actual situation, and is even more likely to be aroused in conflicts with groups which have done very little to injure us or our friends or values. For instance, if it is our own nation that has been aggressive, both the guilt feeling aroused and the difficulty of accepting it, may be so great that we can defend ourselves against it only by a definite delusion – the delusion that we have been attacked²⁸. According to Money-Kyle (1951), the projection of guilt onto a scapegoated other presupposes its denial. Therefore the many defenses against the sense of guilt, which include denial and projection, involve various degrees of self-deceit. As we have seen with the white reversal of the story of Legend Rock, a kind of private myth is often built on the foundations of this initial denial of an intolerable truth.

²⁸ The recent treatment of asylum seekers from the Middle East, discussed above, presents one example of this kind of defensive maneuver.

When large groups or nations commit crimes, the phenomena of collective defences are complex, and discussion of guilt cannot be separated from the political process (Williams, 2000). A multitude of examples can be evoked to illustrate the fact that people are capable of great self-deception and cruelty when it is done in the name of “the good society”, however defined. In Australia, the advent of the Mabo decision, brought down by the High Court of Australia in June, 1992, forced the issue about land rights and the legitimacy of white occupation into the public imagination in a completely new way. In the wake of Mabo, which overturned the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, public debate about the repercussions for contemporary Australia escalated, with opinion divided along two separate axes which roughly corresponded with Money-Kyrle’s (1951) definitions of persecutory and depressive guilt.

5.4 Paul Keating’s Redfern Park speech

Those who believed that the continued disadvantage of Aboriginal peoples was a result of a history of dispossession and continuing acts of oppression by the white majority have been described as having a “black armband” view of history (Manne, 2001). This view, which corresponds with depressive guilt, is perhaps best exemplified by Paul Keating’s Redfern Park speech (1992), in which the then Prime Minister accepted responsibility for past wrongs and spoke about the need to make reparation on behalf of all white Australians. In the following excerpt (cited in Fullilove, 2005, pp.157-160), Keating acknowledged the great wrongs done to Australia’s indigenous peoples with a remarkable candor and a depth of emotional commitment that is rarely evident in a political speech:

This is a fundamental test of our social growth and national will: our ability to say to ourselves and to the rest of the world that Australia is a first rate social democracy, that we are what we should be – truly the land of the fair go and the better chance. There is no more basic test of how seriously we mean these things. It is a test of our self-knowledge. Of how well we know the land we live in. How well we know our history. How well we recognize the fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia. Redfern is a good place to contemplate these things. Just a mile or two from the place where the first European settlers landed, in too many ways it tells us that their failure to bring much more than devastation and demoralization to Aboriginal Australia continues to be our failure. More I think than most Australians recognize, the plight of Aboriginal Australians affects us all. In Redfern, it might be tempting to think that the reality Aboriginal Australians face is somehow contained here, and that the rest of us are insulated from it. But, of course, while all the dilemmas may exist here, they are far from contained. We know the same dilemmas and more are faced all over Australia ... It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

At the end of the Redfern Park speech, Keating (cited in Fullilove, 2005, p.160), confidently predicted that, after Mabo, the “bizarre conceit that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans” could be relinquished and, as a result, a true reconciliation between Aborigines and whites could be achieved “in this decade” (the decade of the 1990s). The twin planks of land rights and self-determination formed the basis of Keating’s reconciliation platform, which aimed to work in an equal partnership

with Aboriginal communities. Five years later, at the height of public controversy about the proper response to Mick Dodson and Ronald Wilson's (1997) *Bringing them Home* report, the new incumbent, John Howard, had a very different view. The term black armband, which originated with historian Geoffrey Blainey as a derogatory reference to revisionist historians, including Peter Read and Henry Reynolds, was quickly adopted by Prime Minister John Howard as a rhetorical tool in the service of denial (Hall, 1998).

5.5 The Stolen Generations – a denial

In particular, Howard objected to the term *Stolen Generations*, first coined by Peter Read (1999) to refer to the thousands of children of mixed descent who had been separated from their mothers and families. Because the removal of children - with the purpose of destroying, in whole or in part, the racial or ethnic group to which they belong, is one definition of genocide, the Wilson-Dodson enquiry concluded that the term genocide could reasonably be applied to the practice of child removal as it occurred in Australia between 1910 and 1970. In stark contrast to Keating's position, Howard disputed the claims of the report that the removal of Aboriginal children from their families amounted to genocide, and made disparaging references to the "guilt industry" (Williams, 2000) and "navel gazing" (Manne, 2001). Where the Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, openly wept while reading individual testimonies contained in the *Bringing them Home* report into Hansard, Howard and his supporters maintained that the report was seriously flawed, and aimed to manufacture and manipulate unnecessary feelings of white guilt.

The debate about whether or not children really had been “stolen” from their Aboriginal families was central to questions about who should be held responsible, and whether or not the Australian Parliament should offer a formal apology and compensation, as had been recommended by Wilson and Dodson in 1997. On February 23, 2001, Howard seized on a tabloid report headlined “I Wasn’t Stolen”, in which the author, journalist Andrew Bolt, claimed that Lowitja O’Donoghue, a prominent and well-respected Aboriginal woman, had agreed that the word “removed” was better suited than the word “stolen” to the personal circumstances of her case. Speaking to a commercial radio audience on the day that Bolt’s story appeared in Melbourne’s *Herald/Sun* daily newspaper, the Prime Minister said that the revelation that O’Donoghue was not stolen was a “highly significant” fact (Manne, 2001, p. 3).

In response to what he considered to be an extremely low blow in the interests of political expediency, Manne, who has traditionally been associated with the conservative right, wrote a polemical article titled: *In Denial – The Stolen Generations and The Right*, which outlined the facts of O’Donoghue’s case to counter what she herself later referred to as a “simplistic, sensationalist, misleading and mischievous report” (O’Donoghue, cited in Manne, 2001, p.3). According to Manne, Howard used the story to “vindicate his government’s famous denial of the existence of the stolen generation and his even more famous refusal to apologize.” Those who wish to deny any feelings of guilt for the current disadvantage of Australia’s Aboriginal peoples very often use the argument of temporal distance: “Why should I feel guilty for something that happened 200 years ago?” Williams (2000, p. 137), in his discussion of the workings of persecutory guilt, has

pointed out that the question itself represents “a defence, searching for an accuser”, and that the terms “genocide” and “guilt” are not simply unfortunate aspects of the relations between the terms *White Australian* and *Aboriginal*, but are central to their mutual definition because ... “the accusation and its denial are built into the words.”

5.6 A history of denial

In his book: *Born guilty: Children of Nazi families*, Peter Sichrovsky (1998) investigated the psychology of German nationals whose parents had been active members of the Nazi Party during the 30s and 40s. Sichrovsky found that depressive guilt was a driving force in the lives of the participants who, as adults, had come to realize that their parent/s or grandparents had personally been involved in wartime atrocities. For many of the children of Nazi parents, the realization that their mothers and fathers had been complicit in the holocaust irrevocably altered their sense of self-worth:

This feeling guilty for something one hadn't done oneself yet which also hadn't been done by just anybody but by one's own father hit me unexpectedly and took me by surprise ... Of course I'd known before what had happened under the Nazis ... but until this time these were only stories, things that had happened in other places to other people. Only the involvement of my father and Grandpa made it personal. There was no longer a way out, no escape into the stories of others, no shaking of the head over the barbarity of strangers. My own father had suddenly become one of them (“Werner”, cited in Sichrovsky, 1988, pp. 154-155).

The recognition of the personal complicity of one's forebears in perpetrating harm evoked a sense of depressive guilt in the children of Nazis, while the perpetrators

themselves defended against persecutory guilt through denial. Money-Kyrle (1951, p.86) has made the wry point that, in a very troubled world, or in a very pathological society, “those who take flight from reality may well be happier than those who are unable to do so.” But, insofar as guilt is acknowledged, rather than evaded, it inevitably becomes the stimulus to attempts at reparation.

Higher levels of insight awakened during the depressive phase bring greater self-understanding, and may even allow us to find sympathy for our enemies, especially those that are no longer dangerous. In a normal person, therefore, the reparative impulses, which contribute so largely to creativeness, will be well developed and will be a positive and constructive force in his or her life. While they remain capable of hatred directed against those who injure the people and things that they love, but, since these individuals do not also need to be scapegoats for projected guilt, the response is less likely to be vindictive and cruel.

Unfortunately, however, as the continued capacity for human atrocity bears witness, the model of human rationality to which we aspire is always in danger of collapse. According to cognitive psychologists, like Lerner (1980), the essence of “victim-blaming” and “scapegoating” is based on the capacity of socially disturbing phenomena (such as manifest injustice and unfairness) to disrupt our need to perceive the world as coherent and accountable. Because we want to hold on the illusion that the world is just, we place the blame for an out-group’s disadvantaged status on some characteristic or flaw within the group. Klein’s work has shown us that the cognitive component is only one part of

the picture. In cultural terms, those who are most recognizably different from ourselves (such as members of another racial group) become ready receptacles for scapegoating precisely because we are more able to project our own aggressive and hateful qualities onto members of minorities (Frosh, 1989; 2002).

5.7 Hanson's One Nation: The manic defence of the white mainstream

Klein's conceptualization of persecutory guilt as arising from the paranoid/schizoid position of early infancy helps to explain the arguments presented in the mid to late 1990s by Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, which amplified the defensive response of the white shopkeeper to the Aboriginal story of Legend Rock on a national scale. In both situations, the Aboriginal claim to land and the persecutory guilt associated with its appropriation was able to be negated by a *manic defence*, by means of which the Aboriginal demand for recognition through land rights could be interpreted by whites as illegitimate or overstated.

Hanson's main contention was that positive discrimination policies directed towards Aboriginal people gave them an "unfair advantage" over the "ordinary Australian battlers" with whom Hanson identified herself. In her appeal to her constituents, Hanson went to great lengths to present herself as an "ordinary" Australian, simply trying to come to terms with an unreasonable demand. Here, the "reasonable" mainstream view was used as counterpoint to representations of "greedy" and "unreasonable" Aboriginal people.

Mark Rapley (1997, p.119), in a paper titled: *Only a Fish and Chip Shop Lady*, has provided an interesting deconstruction of the ways in which Hanson deployed a range of rhetorical devices that were precisely constructed in order to emphasize the “ordinariness, reasonableness and commonsensical mass appeal of her views.” Rapley was particularly interested in the ways that Hanson manipulated her own image to represent herself as an “ordinary” constituent of mainstream Australia, rather than as a political power-broker who was able to influence national policy on immigration, relations with Asia and the treatment of Indigenous Australians.

In the opening to her maiden speech as Member for Oxley, Hanson stated “I come here not as a polished politician but as woman who has had her fair share of life’s knocks. My view on issues is based on common sense, and my experience as a mother of four children, as a sole parent, and as a business woman running a fish and chip shop” (Hansard, 1996, September 10). Rapley (1997) has argued that it was Hanson’s constructed version of herself as exemplifying “ordinary Australian-ness”, and her invocation of the prototypical Australian discourse of the “fair go” that enabled her outspoken views to be accepted as reasonable by a large minority of voters at that time. To quote again from Hanson’s maiden speech:

I won the seat of Oxley largely on an issue that has resulted in me being called a racist. That issue related to my comment that Aboriginals received more benefits than non-Aboriginals. We now have a situation where a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians by those who promote political correctness and those who control the various taxpayer funded ‘industries’ that flourish in our society servicing Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority

groups. In response to my call for equality for all Australians, the most noisy criticism came from the fat cats, bureaucrats and the do-gooders. They screamed the loudest because they stand to lose the most – their money, power and position, all funded by ordinary Australian taxpayers.

Hanson evoked the defence of temporal distance to argue that she, along with other white Australians, had no need to feel responsible for past treatment of Aboriginal people because she “had no say” at that time. The temporal defence is worded to locate any guilty actions in the colonial past, as in: “I’m not responsible for something that happened 200 years ago.” In this context, talk of past wrongs really does seem to be “harping on” about the actions of unknown protagonists in a distant time of “long ago”.

Using this defence, the difficult aspects of the more recent past can be relegated a place outside consciousness. For example, the children and grandchildren of those who perpetrated the Coniston massacre in Western Australia in 1927 are not much further removed in time than the children of those who committed war crimes in the 1930s. In the context of heated public discussion around the need for white Australia to offer an apology to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for past practices of genocide and assimilation, Hanson (1996, cited in Chamarette, 2000, p. 171) stated:

My concern now is for the future. How can you expect this race to help themselves when government showers them with money, facilities and opportunities that only these people can obtain, no matter how minute the Indigenous blood that is flowing through their veins, and this is what is causing racism. Until government wake up to themselves and start looking at equality, not colour, then we might start to work together as one.

Across the Tasman, similar tensions have been evident between Pakeha and Maori, where discussions framed around terms like “New Racism” and “Treaty Grievance Industry” emerged in the lead up to the 2004 general election. In arguments very reminiscent of Hanson’s One Nation in Australia, Maori people were represented (by opposition leader Don Brash) as greedy in their demands for “privileges” not available to Pakeha (white), on the basis of past wrongs. In a radio broadcast (2004, March 4, ABC Radio National: *The Media Report*) discussing race issues in New Zealand, Gary Wilson from Mana Maori Media lamented the lack of historical and cultural knowledge which, he argued, was the underlying force behind anxiety about programs aimed at restitution and self-determination in New Zealand:

There’s enormous ignorance and out of ignorance comes unease, and out of unease comes prejudice and sometimes something beyond that, because people are naturally ... it’s human nature to be a little bit fearful that ‘the other bugger’ is getting more than I am.

These examples illustrate Money-Kryle’s (1951) conception of the mechanisms of persecutory guilt, whereby the perpetrator adheres to the delusion that it is the victim who is doing the attacking. Evidence of the prevalence of the persecutory position in the Australian mainstream was provided by the success of One Nation at the very moment when the discussion about symbolic inclusion for Aboriginal people was at its height. While Pauline Hanson was eventually dropped as a Liberal candidate for expressing the view that Aboriginal peoples received “special treatment” in comparison to ordinary

Australian battlers, she received enough public support to be elected as the independent Member for Oxley in 1996 (Chamarette, 2000).

Like Rapley (1997), Chamarette has paid close attention to the language employed in Hanson's maiden speech in the Federal Parliament. At a critical time in the nation's history, Hanson helped to articulate a wish to deflect the psychological difficulties inherent to adopting the depressive position for a "large minority" of Australians with respect to Aboriginal people. The following excerpt, which is diametrically opposed to the sentiments expressed by Keating in his Redfern Park speech four years earlier, illustrates the ways that scapegoating and victim blaming were used by Hanson to successfully defend against persecutory guilt:

Present governments [the Keating administration] are encouraging separatism in Australia by providing opportunities, land, moneys and facilities available only to Aboriginals. Along with millions of Australians, I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged people in Australia. I do not believe the colour of one's skin determines whether or not you are disadvantaged. As Paul Hasluck said in parliament in October 1955 when he was Minister for Territories ... 'A social problem concerns the way in which people live together in one society. A racial problem is a problem which confronts two different races who live in two separate societies, even if those societies are side by side. We do not want a society in Australia in which one group enjoy one set of privileges and another group enjoy another set of privileges.'

Hasluck's vision was of a single society in which racial emphases were rejected and social issues addressed. I totally agree with him and so would the majority of Australians. But remember, when he gave his speech, he was talking about the privileges that white Australians were seen to be enjoying over Aborigines. Today, 41 years later, I talk about the exact opposite – the privileges Aborigines enjoy over other Australians.

The most usual consequence of unconscious persecutory anxiety aroused by the identification of some other group with a “bad” phantasy object is to make us unduly suspicious of it, and, in extreme cases, make us attack it unnecessarily in the supposed interests of self-defence. Money-Kyrle (1951) stressed the way that the primitive splitting mechanisms characteristic of early infancy tend to distort our political thinking so far as this is concerned with inter-group relations. In this context, Melanie Klein's (1937/1964) conceptualization of the relationship between primitive infantile states and adult psychopathology has much to teach us about the mechanisms inherent to the use of scapegoating and racism as a manic defence.

Bell (2004)²⁹ has argued that, because mind is embedded in world, individual belief systems have a parallel in political ideology. As Lecouteur and Augoustinos (2001) have pointed out, negative constructions of indigenous peoples can be invoked through the liberal language of individual rights, fairness, and equality, as well as through blatantly racist attributions. Hanson's One Nation has been credited with prompting John Howard to use the “race card” in the 1996 election campaign (Manne, 2001), to target anxiety

²⁹ Dr David Bell expressed these ideas in a lecture entitled: *Anything is possible and everything is permitted: Psychoanalytic reflections on Hannah Arendt's "Elements of totalitarianism"*, presented in Melbourne on August 3rd, 2004 (sponsored by The Melbourne Institute for Psychoanalysis).

about the 1992 Mabo and the 1996 Wik decisions in the High Court. The Mabo decision led to the passing of the Native Title Act the following year, while legislation concerning Wik was delayed for 18 months until the Howard – Harradine compromise, known as the Ten Point Plan, was finally passed in 1998.

5.8 The myth of privilege

In his book: *The Myth of Privilege*, Mickler (1998) has outlined the ways in which the Liberal-National Party Coalition (then in opposition) paved the way for One Nation by suggesting that demands for Indigenous rights were somehow illegitimate, illegal, or greedy in the lead-up to the 1996 Federal election. Hanson had played on fears that the Native Title Act would threaten the freehold title to land (“our backyards”) held by ordinary Australians (“the battlers”). Leaving aside the orchestrated campaign of pastoralists and the mining industry, who felt directly threatened by the concept of Native Title after Mabo, all of these examples have highlighted that anxiety and conflict occurs at the margins of cultural difference, where debates around concepts of Australian-ness and who has the right to belong become paramount.

As the anecdotal narratives about the author’s field trips to Lake Mungo and Legend Rock have illustrated, the existence of an Aboriginal Other destabilizes the sense of belonging for white Australians in two ways. Firstly, the attempt to include Aboriginality into the national psyche in a meaningful way demands a conscious attempt to understand cultural difference. In Rutherford’s (2000) terms, this would require an admission of not-being-all-the-same which, by highlighting “whiteness” as only one category of

“Australian-ness”, has the effect of undermining the egalitarian ego-ideal. The second (and related) destabilizing effect is produced through the uncanny sense that is evoked when the myth of *terra nullius* is laid bare by the recognition of Aboriginality as *both* a prior and continuing presence in white Australia.

Aboriginality as a legitimate presence acts to destabilize internalized perceptions of what Rutherford (2000) has described as the Good Australia, in a way that previous conceptualizations of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures as belonging in the past (such as, for example, *smoothing the pillow for a dying race*)³⁰ did not. Previously, it was argued that, by definition, Aboriginality as a *presence* renders non-Aboriginal Australians as foreign. It has been suggested here that white Australians are prone to either persecutory or depressive guilt. Persecutory guilt is manifest in the very rhetoric about the “guilt industry” which acts to deny it, while depressive guilt can be seen in all those actions which are designed to make reparation. In this context Freud’s (1919/2003) concept of the primary role of *anxiety* in contributing to the subjective experience of the *unheimlich* helps us to understand the relationship between threats to identity, the process of repression, and the emergence of symptoms.

5.9 The lucky country

The representation of Australia as the land of the “fair go” and the celebration of “mateship”, have been used to underpin the Australian aspiration to the egalitarian ideal described by Rutherford (2000). Linda Burney (2006), in her address to the 7th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, reminded us that Frank Hardy, who documented the story of

³⁰ This was a central theme of Daisy Bates’ 1944 book: *The Passing of the Aborigine*.

the struggle of the Gurindji people in their claim for equal wages at Wave Hill station during the 1960s, specifically countered the notion of the lucky country with the title of his book about that struggle: *The Unlucky Australians*. It is perhaps an irony that the common reference to Australia as the “lucky country” is itself a mistaken translation of Donald Horne’s meaning when he published his book of that name over 40 years ago.

Sean Carney, writing in *The Age* newspaper in November, 2003, reminded readers that Horne began the final chapter of his 1964 book: *The Lucky Country*, with the sentence: “Australia is a lucky country, run by second-rate people who share its luck.” According to Carney, the book directly challenged the comfortable, triumphant self-image of Australia at the height of the long period of post-war economic prosperity and, as a piece of social criticism, was a sensation when it was first published. Far from celebrating Australia as a nation of intrepid and resourceful individuals, Horne’s argument was that most of what was good in Australia happened through inadvertence and good fortune and in spite of a weak entrepreneurial culture, unimaginative politicians, plus a stifling adherence to social conformity and bureaucracy.

As Rutherford (2000) has argued, the ideal of being-all-the-same defines the national antipathy to the “tall poppy”, so that anyone who gains too great a stature, is too self-righteous, or who puts too many “labels” on themselves, is open to ridicule. In the current era, the term un-Australian has been used to describe those Australians who accept alterity and thereby invite the awareness of lack. They have become the “chattering classes” (an attribution which conflates the feminine and the facile) who “sip

chardonnay” (leisured class as opposed to the real battlers). They harp on about a “black armband” view of history (mourning is associated with loss, which cannot be acknowledged). The latter can be directly related to the impossibility of apology for past injustices to Aboriginal people from those most wedded to the idea of the ego-ideal, among whose numbers can be included Australia’s current Prime Minister.

Verhaeghe (2004) has reiterated Freud’s description of the processes of identification to remind us that the love bonds which constitute individual identity are the same ones that allow a sense of inclusion into the social collective: the introjection of the Other, the production of symptoms at the site of identification, and the modeling of the ego on the idealized Other which then becomes the basis for both the ego-ideal and the superego, or conscience. From the very first exchange between the child and the Other, the Other is held responsible for the success of this relationship. When we call others by their name, we constitute them as subjects through our discourse:

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me (Lacan, 1953, cited in Sarup, 1996, p. 37).

What we think about as our identity is embedded in what Lacan (1953/2002) called the discourse of the Other, where the words, gestures, and response of the Other to our words, gestures and actions maintains or disrupts our sense of belonging to the social collective. The denial of the Aboriginal story by the white shopkeeper, which was linked

to the process of persecutory guilt associated with the dispossession of Aborigines by whites, has provided an illustration of how contemporary events are unconsciously “knotted” to the events of the past.

The analysis of the case of *Legend Rock* reveals the value of Lacan’s contention that the process of signification occurs along both synchronic and diachronic axes, and that the symptom is revealed at the juncture of these two dimensions through metaphors which emerge in the present (the synchronic). Since identities are formed through both imagination and representation, any investigation of cultural identity involves interrogating how the worlds of imagination and representation come together at the cultural interface in a particular place and at a particular time.

CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY

Knowledge implies interactions, and we cannot step out of our domain of interactions, which is closed. We live, therefore, in a domain of subject-dependent knowledge and subject-dependent reality ... As a consequence, because the domain of descriptions is closed, the observer can make the following ontological statement: The logic of the description is isomorphic to the logic of the describing system (Maturana, 1978, p. 60).

6.1 The critical position within psychology

It may help the reader to locate the epistemological position of the current research in terms of the *critical psychology* philosophical paradigm which underlines this project. The critical paradigm has provided psychology with both a theoretical position and a methodological base³¹ from which to acknowledge cultural diversity and celebrate difference (Gergen, 1985; 1989; 1992; Kvale, 1992; Wetherall & Potter, 1992). Gergen (1992, p. 24) has argued that a critical psychology needs to aim toward cultural critique and the “construction of new worlds”, and that knowledge should be concerned with timely and societally located practices, rather than with the search for context free general laws (Gergen, 1985; Coyle, 1995; Crary, 1995).

Unlike some phenomenological and hermeneutic models, which aim to present an uncritical picture of the “lived experience” of individuals and groups, critical theory looks for deep structures which may explain the historical and dynamic aspects of that

³¹ Since the “ethical revolution” of the 1980s, various qualitative methods have enabled social scientists to explore the effects of social structures on individuals in ways which were excluded by quantitative methods (Coyle, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gubrium, 1988; Hedrick, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Neuman, 1991; Patton, 1980/1990; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997; Silverman, 1993).

lived experience and evaluate the impacts that these structures have on people's lives. The goal of critical theory is therefore far from neutral, it aims to supply people with a resource that helps them both "understand *and* change the world" (Neuman, 1991, p. 59. emphasis added). On this basis, the critical paradigm has been adopted by psychologists who have been concerned with questions of cultural difference from a social justice perspective (Prilleltensky, 1990; 1997).

To mitigate the possibility of bias, critical psychologists place themselves in context and acknowledge that stories of identity are told by observers who are themselves subject to personal histories experienced during particular eras and within specific geographic locales (Gellner, 1985). My particular position as an Australian citizen born to British parents, who migrated to this country in the late 1950s, will be markedly different to the position of an Aboriginal Australian. As I hope to have illustrated with the first case study in the *prologue* at the start of the thesis, my cultural inheritance includes many hidden assumptions about the world which may differ in essential ways from an indigenous ontology and cosmology.

6.2 Ethical ground rules

Smallacombe (1998) has suggested that researchers working within Aboriginal communities need to: Recognize Aboriginal participants as co-authors; involve participants at an early stage of the research; respect men's business and women's business; recognize that terms such as "half-caste", "full-blood", and "part Aboriginal" are highly offensive; recognize that shared community knowledge cannot become the

property of a single researcher; and finally; that the primary aim of conducting research should be to benefit the indigenous community in some way.

6.3 The “warranting voice”

The concept of the “warranting voice” (Gergen, 1989; 1992; Sampson, 1993) has been central to many of the post-positivist research models used by critical psychologists to “deconstruct” the impact of dominant narratives and power elites over individuals and minorities. In general, this ethical approach includes regarding the people researched as expert colleagues, rather than subjects, and to search for human specificity rather than general “truths”. This model fits Sanson et al’s (1997) recommendation that psychology as a discipline should position itself to work with rather than work on minority groups, while at the same time not attempting to speak for and theorize about these groups.

Smallacombe (1998), in her discussion of the ethical dimensions inherent to working with indigenous communities, has stated that any research process which involves indigenous people needs to be inclusive of their concerns and to show respect for their person. This is equally true for non-indigenous participants (Prilleltensky, 1997). Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) have advocated that one way to achieve the appropriate level of respect is to regard the person or persons who are the subject of the investigation as expert co-researchers or co-contributors to the research:

The method, or path, that seems natural to obtain a proper description of human experience is that of dialogue in which one member of the dialogic pair, normally called **the investigator**, assumes a respectful position vis-à-vis the real expert, the

subject, or more appropriately, the co-researcher. In this way, a path toward understanding emerges from the common respect and concern of two people committed to exploring the life world of one of them (Pollio, Henley and Thompson, 1997, pp. 28-56).

The guided conversational interview model (Yin, 2003) was considered to meet the ethical demands inherent to cross-cultural research, because it enabled the participants to give voice to their own concerns regarding the issues being discussed, rather than merely responding to the demands of the researcher. Interview respondents were encouraged to view themselves as co-contributors and were invited to bring their own insights to the research in the form of questions, comments and alterations. To this end, the terms *participant* and *contributor* have been used throughout the thesis.

6.4 A note on purposeful sampling

In contrast to probability sampling, which depends on selecting a truly random and statistically representative sample that will permit confident generalization from that sample to a larger population, purposeful sampling uses *information rich* cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1980/1990). According to Patton's definition: "Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" ... thus ... "The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1980/1990, p. 167).

As outlined above (in Section 3.5.1), the purpose of sampling in case study research is not to enable generalization of findings to a population, but to expand and generalize

theory through analytic generalization (Yin, 2003). Thus, while the interview data was expected to yield a “thick” description of the participants’ lived experience and their perceptions of cultural differences between Aborigines and whites in Australia, the findings from this study cannot be assumed to be representative of the experience of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians as a whole. Rather, the data from the interviews will be used to test the propositions that were set out in Section 3.3, above.

6.4.1 Criterion sampling

Participation in the indigenous sample was predicated on the basic criteria used to identify an individual as Aboriginal: That an individual identify themselves as an Aboriginal person and that they are accepted by the Aboriginal community in which they live. The application of the criteria of Aboriginality for inclusion in the sample fits with Patton’s (1980/1990) definition of *criterion sampling*, a method of sampling that falls under the broader heading of purposeful sampling, remembering that purposeful sampling is based on the selection of information rich cases.

Similarly, the non-indigenous participants were selected on the basis of their capacity to comment on their subjective experience of interaction with an Aboriginal person or community. The invitation to participate stipulated that the interaction may currently occur, or have occurred, in either an official capacity (e.g., through employment in an area which provides services to Aboriginal people) or in an informal capacity (as a friend, family member, or colleague). The main criterion for selection (included in the Plain Language Statement) was that non-indigenous participants needed to have been involved

at a significant level with an indigenous person or an indigenous community for a period of at least two years.

6.4.2 Snowballing

Six of the indigenous participants were inducted into the research through word of mouth, and were introduced to the researcher by friends or university colleagues. This kind of sampling method has been described as “snowballing” (or chain sampling). Thus, while criterion sampling was used to define the main characteristic of Aboriginality, snowballing was used to locate specific informants who met that criterion (Patton, 1980/1990, p. 176). One participant (“Uncle”) made contact with the researcher after hearing about an interview that had been conducted with one of his relatives. Uncle was interviewed twice, once in Melbourne, and again on a field trip to the rural area where he lived. Two interviews were conducted with couples, who elected to be interviewed together. In both cases, the female partner was the point of contact, and their male partners were inducted on the day of the interview.

The five non-indigenous participants were similarly inducted into the research by word of mouth through friends and colleagues of the researcher. As with the indigenous sample, the criterion for inclusion was facilitated through snowballing, where those who had completed the interview or who had heard about the research recommended others who might be included.

6.4.3 Redundancy

Some qualitative researchers have used the concept of *redundancy* (Patton, 1980/1990) to guide the limits of their data pool. Redundancy occurs when the same or similar themes begin to recur across the interview protocols, so that the researcher may reasonably assume that inducting more participants into the sample would be unlikely to yield new information. In the case of the current study, it could be argued that any number of participants would each bring a new and unique perspective to questions of identity. In fact, the rich and complex volume of data obtained from thirteen interviews meant that more data from additional participants would have raised concerns about the capacity of a single project to provide the scope required to adequately analyze all the data.

In the interests of parsimony, therefore, it was decided that the data obtained from the thirteen interviews would be sufficient for analysis. This was decided when similarities and convergences in the main themes began to emerge across the data set which were also reflected in data from indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives gathered from the public domain. Supporting data drawn from statements and reflections made by indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in academic papers and books, as well as in the print and electronic media, confirmed that the themes raised by the participants in the current study did indeed reflect many of the experiences and preoccupations of indigenous people in Australia more generally.

6.5 The interviews

The interviews varied in duration from between two and a half to three hours, although many more hours were spent with individuals and the two couples in the indigenous sample. With respect to the field interview with Uncle, recorded data was gathered in segments over a period of two days. Written notes were made during each of three field trips. Interviews were preceded by a preliminary discussion about the nature and purpose of the research. All interviews were audio taped, and transcripts were made from the recorded conversations. Permission to turn on the tape recorder was requested once rapport had been established and discussion was under way.

Although interview guides (provided below) were prepared in advance, written prompts were rarely needed. The informal nature of the interview process had the advantage of allowing the participant and/or the researcher to return to themes introduced early in the interview to clarify or elaborate on the points made then. Many important new themes were introduced by the participants themselves, which highlighted the value of the guided conversational interview as a methodology in exploring questions of subjectivity. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to consider if there was anything else that they thought was significant, but had not been touched on in the interview. They were also invited to contact the researcher by telephone if they thought of something that they wanted to include subsequent to the interview.

6.5.1 Ethics

Ethical guidelines, as set out in the Plain Language Statement for each group (see Appendices A and B), were strictly adhered to, and participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C). The participants who took part in the study were all adults aged over eighteen years. All were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time, and that all raw data, in the form of audio-tapes, transcripts, consent forms and other material which may identify individuals, would be kept in a locked metal filing cabinet.

6.5.2 Confidentiality

In the report below, all participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Because confidentiality was a concern for most participants, specific features pertaining to individuals have been kept to a minimum. Place names, clan groups, places of employment and family names have been excluded from the report. Convergent data drawn from indigenous and non-indigenous commentators on the public record has been included to supplement the interview data. Throughout the thesis, public statements made by indigenous and non-indigenous commentators have been attributed to those individuals by name, since confidentiality was not relevant to previously published data.

6.5.3 The interview setting

The interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participants, the majority of whom elected to be interviewed in their own home. Two contributors were interviewed at their place of work, one in an outdoor café, and one at the home of the researcher. As

mentioned above, a second interview with Uncle was conducted in a National Park. This followed Uncle's assertion that, if white people were serious about understanding something about indigenous people, they would need to spend some time "walking through country." The additional data obtained during this field trip proved to be very valuable on a number of levels. In particular, it led to the subsequent conversation with the white shop-keeper discussed in the case study of *Legend Rock*. An earlier trip to New South Wales provided the data for the case study of *Lake Mungo*.

6.5.4 The interview process

Following the model offered by Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) and Yin (2003), the interviews took the form of free-flowing dialogues across a variety of topics introduced by both the participant and the researcher. The main topic areas of interest, cultural identity and cultural difference, were presented by the researcher to the participants in the initial telephone conversation and again in the Plain Language Statements for each group. Participants were asked to think about these topics prior to the interview, and were encouraged to contribute any information that they felt was important to the discussion. During the interviews, the researcher performed the role of both prompt and active listener. This form of active listening utilized the same model of "free-floating-attention" used by psychologists within the therapeutic session with clients.

The researcher, through years of training and practice working within a therapeutic "frame", was well equipped to manage the often difficult task of working within an unstructured interview format. Training in clinical skills also proved useful, since data of

an emotionally sensitive and traumatic nature was not infrequent, especially in the interviews with the indigenous participants. The capacity to hear, empathize, and sit with the more difficult aspects of indigenous experience that were being related was critical to the maintenance of a respectful relationship with the participants. In some cases, a participant asked for the tape recorder to be turned off so that they could speak off the record. Any information provided in such circumstances has been excluded from the report. When emotionally difficult material emerged as part of the interview process, the researcher volunteered to stop recording. Recording recommenced only when the participant signaled that they were willing to continue.

During the interviews, particular attention was paid to dialogue which touched on the themes around cultural difference presented in Bain's (1992) research. In most interviews, these themes emerged spontaneously and the contributor was asked for further comment and elaboration. Contradictions to and convergences with Bain's hypothesized *indices of difference* were noted. Themes and topics introduced by the participant were also encouraged and discussed, even if they appeared unrelated to the hypothesis of cultural difference. There was only one structured question that was asked of each indigenous participant at the end of each interview ("How do you describe yourself?") and themes were not introduced in any particular order. If the themes of interest did not emerge without some initial prompting, the indigenous participants were asked directly for comment along the lines outlined below:

- The Aboriginal concepts of kinship (interaction) and their associated obligations, including whether or not these clash with (transactional) work values.
- Discussion around Aboriginal concepts of identity, country, authority, private ownership, time and space.
- The importance of Aboriginal identity to the participant, e.g., “How central is it to a sense of self?”
- It was also of interest to the project to ask Aboriginal participants to outline which differences (if any) between themselves and the mainstream community they found most problematic and/or most likely to be misinterpreted
- Aborigines were asked to comment about their sense of social inclusion within the mainstream community and compare this to membership within an Aboriginal community

Topic areas presented for comment and elaboration by non-indigenous participants were similar to those discussed with Aboriginal participants, except that they focused on the Aboriginal-white encounter from a white perspective. Particular emphasis was placed on the “pattern matching” model recommended by Yin (2003) for case study research, in terms of data which pertained to Bain’s distinction between *interaction* and *transaction*. The focus for the non-indigenous interviews was guided towards:

- Areas of Aboriginal practice that were noticeably different from the participant's own, at work or at home. In what ways were they different?
- How were the observed differences between Aborigines and whites interpreted by the participant, were they seen as cultural, or as individual traits?
- How were differences dealt with by the participant or others, were they openly spoken about with the Aboriginal person/people involved, or not discussed at all?

6.6 The participants

As part of the embedded case study design (Yin, 2003), a total of 13 open ended interviews were conducted with 12 participants (one participant was interviewed twice). The overall sample included seven indigenous and five non-indigenous participants, who were interviewed between October, 1999 and March, 2002. Participation was completely voluntary, and contributors did not receive any remuneration for their time. For the interested reader, a more detailed introduction to each of the participants can be found in Appendix D. The characteristics of each group are presented below, beginning with the indigenous cohort.

6.6.1 Demographics of the indigenous participants

There were seven indigenous participants in all, three males and four females. The ages of the indigenous participants ranged from twenty-one to sixty-nine. Education level ranged from grade three of primary school to post-graduate tertiary qualifications. Of the

participants who were in paid employment, two were public servants, one was an academic involved in a program for indigenous students at the tertiary level, another was engaged as an indigenous cultural awareness officer on a time limited training scheme (Community Development Program), and one was self employed. Another participant was engaged in home duties and caring for small children, while the final participant was working as a researcher in an Aboriginal organization.

6.6.2 Limitations of the indigenous sample:

An important feature of the indigenous sample was that it was self-selected. Individual participants had heard about the research through word of mouth and responded because of their prior interest in the topic areas of Aboriginal subjectivity and cultural difference. As a whole, the indigenous participants were insightful and articulate, and demonstrated a high level of commitment to contributing to the broader public awareness of indigenous issues. It cannot be assumed, however, that all Aboriginal people would be as willing to offer their in-depth reflections on aspects of “What it means to be Aboriginal”, especially with a non-indigenous researcher. As one participant put it: “Most Aboriginal people aren’t that interested, ‘cause they’re too busy just surviving, you know, they’re just worried about getting food on the table and looking after their kids, most Aboriginal people have a hard time of it just living day to day.”

Self-evidently, since Aboriginal people who may fall into this category were not included in the sample, this research cannot purport to represent the kinds of experiences they might report. Another related issue in conducting research with indigenous people is that

many are understandably wary of the white researcher and the uses to which the research may be put. Finally, there is another group of indigenous people who are simply hostile to whites and would refuse to participate on that basis. As the data will illustrate, the experience of indigenous people is heterogeneous, and cannot be encapsulated in the views of a few individuals.

6.6.3 Demographics of the non-indigenous sample:

There were five non-indigenous participants in the study, four males and one female. The youngest non-indigenous participant was in his early thirties, while the oldest was in his fifties and approaching retirement. Four had completed tertiary education and one had completed secondary school, followed by on-the-job training in the technical field where he currently worked as a freelancer. All the non-indigenous participants were interviewed in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

6.6.4 Limitations of the non-indigenous sample

As with the indigenous participants, the non-indigenous contributors were self-selected on the basis of their prior interest in the topic areas of Aboriginality and cultural difference. Individual participants who agreed to take part in the research did so because they wanted to contribute something to a project which looked at cultural difference from a social justice perspective. These individuals offered insightful and considered views that would not necessarily be evident in the general population. As with the indigenous participants, it cannot be assumed that all non-indigenous people would share their views

or be able to offer similarly in-depth reflections on the interface between Aborigines and whites.

6.7 Data analysis

A total of 21 hours of audio-taped material was generated by the interviews, which yielded 360 pages of (single spaced) transcript data. One of the tasks of the analysis of the interview protocols was to determine whether or not Bain's (1992) *indices of difference* may be applicable for a cohort of Aborigines living in non-traditional urban settings and the whites who interact with them. The major themes and sub-themes derived from analysis of the interview transcripts are presented in Section 6.7.3, below.

Themes pertaining to cultural identity from an Aboriginal perspective were used to triangulate the hypothesized differences between indigenous and non-indigenous "referential frames" identified by Bain. Non-indigenous interpretations of indigenous "value systems" or "organizing principles" were incorporated into the thematic analysis of indigenous interpretations of culturally valuable beliefs and practices.

As mentioned above, Aboriginal perspectives from supplementary sources were triangulated with the primary data obtained from the interviews with the contributors to the current research. This additional data provided the "converging lines of enquiry" described by Yin (2003, p.98), whereby the interview data was compared with data from contemporary sources and historical accounts in a triangulated and longitudinal design.

6.7.1 Analysis of interview transcripts

Interview transcripts were analyzed primarily with a view to testing the two propositions presented in Section 3.3. The first proposition was informed by Bain's (1992) research into the Aboriginal-white encounter, on which the underlying hypothesis that cultural differences would be found between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians was based. The primary focus of analysis was to look at how data from each contributor fitted with, or differed from the indices of difference suggested by Bain's research. Interview material, in the form of transcripts and hand-written notes, was closely analyzed to identify themes which matched the pattern of Bain's *indices of difference* and to describe the nature of those differences where they occurred.

The second proposition, illustrated by the case study of *Legend Rock*, was based on the exploratory concept that the unconscious construction of Australia as a good, white and Christian nation has acted to overwrite Aboriginal perspectives and to position Aboriginal people at the margins of society. Primary interview data was used to explore the link between national discourses around the Aboriginal Question and the experiences of contemporary Aboriginal people and the whites with whom they interact.

6.7.2 The problem of interpretation and researcher bias

Since the possibility of self-presentational and other biases is always present, "it is important that the analyst should remain open to alternative readings of the text and to the need to reject hypotheses that the text fails to support" Coyle (1995, p. 248). The primary means of doing this has been to allow the reader to follow the logical progression of

analysis and interpretation by providing many examples from the transcripts which saturate the hypothesized categories. This process illuminates the data so that the reader can decide whether the conclusions drawn by the researcher are valid. Where appropriate, indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives, as gathered from both historical and contemporary published records, have been included to further validate the findings.

Pollio, Henley and Thompson (1997) have recommended that validation can be further enhanced by checking interpretations with the participants during the research process. This process has been likened to a feedback loop – data is interpreted and arranged thematically by the researcher, themes are taken back to the data source for appraisal, and the refined themes are formed into categories. The connection made between themes and categories, together with their interpretation as findings, can be further validated by a third person (i.e., someone other than the primary researcher³²).

6.7.3 Emergent themes

Overall, the data yielded seven major themes and forty-eight sub-themes. The emergent themes derived from the interview transcripts are summarized below:

1. “The whole of Australia is a sacred site”
 - a. - Parallel worlds
 - b. - “Wheels within wheels”: The bureaucracy of Native Title
 - c. - Relationship to land: Past and present

³² Both the principle supervisor and one of the indigenous contributors provided further validation by checking that interpretations and subsequent findings were generated from within the data.

- d. - A clash between cultures
- e. - Demographics: Urban versus rural?
- f. - The Koori Grapevine
- g. - Mainstream mapping

2. Family, kinship and community

- a. - “Who’s your mob?”
- b. - Kinship as an organizing structure
- c. - The social family
- d. - Caring and sharing within indigenous communities
- e. - Obligation to kin: “There’d be no ‘No’”

3. Aboriginal politics

- a. - The “Aboriginal industry”
- b. - Speaking the whitefella way
- c. - A level playing field?
- d. - Capacity building and mutual obligation
- e. - The role of social support in capacity building
- f. - A three tier model of authority: Family, community, Elders
- g. - The “cause” and the “struggle”
- h. - “I’m not racist – but ...”
- i. - Affiliations and identity – schisms in reclaimed culture

4. Aboriginal identity

- a. - Tradition - the “lost object”
- b. - Hybrid Aborigines
- c. - Stolen identities: Aboriginality as a bureaucratic category
- d. - Stuart’s story
- e. - “Am I a man or a boy?”
- f. - Knowing the culture, learning the culture
- g. - Reconstructing culture
- h. - The transmission of knowledge
- i. - Gendered knowledge: Men’s business and women’s business
- j. - Cultural artifacts or cultural fictions
- k. - Burn out: Struggling with the cause
- l. - Horizontal violence
- m. - Unresolved grief

5. The “Tall Poppy” syndrome within Aboriginal Australia

- a. - Flash blacks”
- b. - “Tall poppies”
- c. - “Nine-to-five blacks”
- d. - “Coconuts”
- e. - The “New Assimilationists”
- f. - The underdog has to remain an underdog
- g. - Internalized racism: Denial of denial

- h. - Manufacturing Aboriginality

6. Symbolic inclusion

- a. - Renaming country
- b. - The Aboriginal flag
- c. - Indigenous role models
- d. - The Freeman factor
- e. - Winmar's jumper - a modern icon

7. Healing the damaged Aboriginal object

- a. - The significance of a formal apology

6.7.4 Conceptual reduction of themes

The multiple themes derived from the primary data were further condensed into three conceptually distinct areas of analysis contained in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. In Chapter Seven, data from the current study will be presented to test the relevance of Margaret Bain's (1992) hypothesized *indices of difference* when applied to a contemporary cohort of Aboriginal people. In Chapter Eight, the data pertaining to the participants' subjective experiences of being Aboriginal will be explored in light of the theoretical perspectives on identity formation and group behaviour detailed in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Nine will present data that illustrates Buhler's (1934) argument that inclusion in the dietic and symbolic fields represents a necessary first step in the reconciliation process through enabling the healing of past injustices.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AN ABORIGINAL ONTOLOGY - A COMPARISON WITH BAIN'S STUDY

7.1 An overview of the chapter

This chapter of the thesis will include an analysis of the emergent themes that were related to five of Bain's original six hypothesized *indices of difference*³³:

- Aboriginal ontology (world view)
- Relationship to land, inheritance
- Kinship systems and associated obligations
- Traditional Law and authority
- Interpretation of time

The contributions of both indigenous and non-indigenous participants were investigated in terms of whether or not Bain's (1992) conclusions about the ontological assumptions and related social practices of a semi-remote Aboriginal community can be applied to a contemporary cohort of Aboriginal people living in urban and regional centres. In keeping with the aims and objectives outlined in Section 3.3, the analysis of data was also directed toward identifying the points at which cultural differences may have led to miscommunication and misunderstandings between Aborigines and whites. The contributions of the non-indigenous cohort and secondary data have been incorporated in the analysis to illustrate the nature of cultural differences where they have been identified, as well as the perceived effects they have had at the cultural interface.

³³ The sixth of Bain's *indices* – Interpretation of space – has not been included in the analysis, since the material related to this theme was minimal and did not appear to be salient to the majority of contributors in the current study.

7.2 “The whole of Australia is a sacred site”

In Chapter One, the notion that the relationship between an Aboriginal person and his or her country was the basis of a distinct Aboriginal ontology was discussed. In Bain’s (1992) research, the relationship to country formed the core of an Aboriginal person’s sense of identity and all social relationships were prescribed by belonging to a particular place. The historical realities of colonization, however, have meant that many members of the Stolen Generations were removed from their land and separated from their families. Within Victoria, the early and widespread taking up of land by whites using western concepts of land tenure, together with the failure of Native Title claims, have effectively prevented many Kooris from enacting the custodial practices associated with caring for country. Thus, while each of the indigenous participants spoke about the importance of a connection to country to their Aboriginal identity, the lived reality of this connection was varied according to their personal histories.

Having grown up in Victoria, the concept that much of it (or all of it) was regarded by indigenous people as “their” traditional land was quite a startling revelation to me. Uncle described the relationship to country as central to his sense of identity: “We know where we’re from, and all our connection, spiritually, with our land, has never been lost.”

According to Uncle, “the whole of Australia is a sacred site”:

I mean, wherever you go in your country, your heritage is there ... Australia is one significant site, you can’t put it into little boxes ... when you walk this land our heritage is there ... you can’t say, we all certainly had our borders, and that was protected by [Aboriginal] law, but in terms of one site, Australia is one

significant site, to indigenous people ... 'cause we lived all over this country, walked all over this country, we shared this country in ceremony, we shared in times of gatherings, for exchange, marriages, trade, and that was the time when tribal groups came together ... so, and a lot of things took place at those gatherings and during that season ... and still today, we know our tribal boundaries, we don't look at borders like Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, we have our own tribal boundaries.

Field trips made at the beginning and the conclusion of the data gathering phase of the current research resulted in the case studies of *Lake Mungo* and *Legend Rock*, which were presented in the *Prologue*. At Uncle's invitation, another field trip was conducted which resulted in a follow-up interview with Uncle in country of which he was a traditional owner, or custodian. The area was within the boundaries of a National Park run by Parks Victoria, about a day's drive from Melbourne. Uncle began by describing his childhood memories of the place:

When I was a little boy, I came here with my Aunt and Uncle ... it was a gravel road then ... I come down here and camped here ... and fished off the rocks and swam in the river and the ocean, and then the other uncle come down in the old car and picked us up after a week here, we lived off the water and the land, and these types of food, and we brought lots of food with us of course, made sure we had something to eat ... but it was very quiet in them days, not too many people ... lots of people come in here now ... lots of noise ... then it was nice and peaceful ... I like the river, there's fresh water, and you can see the moon come up, over the mountains, and you can see the sun come up, early in the morning, so you're getting the best part, both parts, late in the night when the moon comes up and it just sort of hangs there and doesn't move, and the same with the sun ... you see the rays of the sun coming over the ranges, then all of a sudden you see the

first glare of the sun, of the sun itself, and then it just sort of sits there and then it goes ... that's very magic ... and when it's very misty ... and there's a lot of fog around, the mist on the mountains really looks, it's a very magic scene, very beautiful, the mountains ... yeah, that's my favourite spot ... This place, just imagine what it was like a long time ago ... how beautiful it was, and it still is beautiful, but it's got all these foreign objects here now, you know, people come here to enjoy this beautiful park, which is quite good, but you have to wonder ... I suppose people have a right ...

Here, Uncle's description of "foreign objects" is linked not only with the buildings and other "civilizing" influences which have proliferated over the years, but also with the (white) people who come to enjoy the park. His statement, "I suppose people have a right" took the form of a question, as if he struggled with the concept that whites should have free access to this part of his country.

Uncle's use of the unfamiliar Aboriginal name for the park was an echo of my experience of cultural difference at Lake Mungo. The white name for the place where many personal associations were held: it was the place where I had camped with my family as a child, had gone bushwalking as a young adult, and had introduced to my children in more recent times. While these associations enabled me to think of it as "my Park" and, by extrapolation, "our Park", a place belonging to all Australians, Uncle's use of the Aboriginal name forced the uncanny awareness that it was also "his Park". More than this, his Park was also "their Park", since all the members of Uncle's clan had shared ownership over that part of the country. Uncle's act of naming fundamentally shifted my relationship to that place.

Peter Read (2000, p. 22) has described a similar experience in his book *Belonging*, when he discovered that his beloved North Shore was also Gai-mariagal country, the traditional home of the Eora people. Having discovered that members of the Gai-mariagal clan continued to occupy parts of their country through a chance meeting with his Aboriginal “shadow brother”, Dennis Foley, Read recalled that ... “The hairs on the back of my neck rose as Dennis began unfolding his living Gai-mariagal culture on site after site of my own childhood.” Mark McKenna (2002) has also written about the experience of realizing that the property that he had bought in the Eden-Monaro district of southern New South Wales, close to the Victorian border, looked across the river to “Blackfella’s Point”, once an Aboriginal camping ground and meeting place. In his attempts to find out more, McKenna recalled a conversation with BJ Cruse, an Aboriginal officer with the Land Council in Eden, who told him “If you want to know where our sites are, just look around you, we like the same spots you do” (pp. 4-5).

7.2.1 Parallel worlds

As at Lake Mungo and Legend Rock, the field trip with Uncle helped to amplify the point that Aboriginal and white Australians coexist in what might perhaps best be described as parallel realities. Almost as soon as we had arrived at the National Park, the difficulties of living in two worlds emerged. Uncle had been conducting workshops on indigenous cultural heritage with groups of (white) school students for most of the day. When he had finished we spent some time walking through the bush, where Uncle pointed out various features and gave local indigenous names to the birds and animals we came across. He

spoke about imagining the “old people” and the way that they used to live prior to colonization. As we walked, he showed me which grasses the women would soften to make woven baskets, which plants were good for bush tucker, how to watch out for the seasonal movement of snakes, and how to make a clay poultice to heal a wound. Uncle described the land as home, church, supermarket, and pharmacy all in one.

Late in the afternoon, I began to wonder about where to set up the tent I had brought to sleep for the night. Prior to camping, however, it was necessary to go to the Parks Rangers’ office and pay for an overnight campsite. Uncle objected to this, saying that there was no need to pay, as my daughter and I were his invited guests in his own country. Uncle engaged himself in an imagined conversation with a hypothetical ranger: “If the Ranger comes in here and says: ‘You can’t stay here tonight’, I’ll say, ‘Why mate, I’m not camping, I’m just sitting here talking, so, you know, what’s the problem?’ ... I’m not camping ... you have to put up a tent to camp.” In his view, an Aboriginal person shouldn’t need permission to camp on traditional land ... “I get so frustrated and angry because I’m restricted.” In the end, we slept in our respective cars, I with some anxiety that a Ranger may turn up at any time and ask us to move on. The night was cold, but there was no possibility of a campfire.

This incident highlighted the ambiguous position of Aboriginal people in relation to land. Although he was nominally recognized as a traditional custodian, and frequently obtained employment in cultural awareness programs on this basis, Uncle had no more authority to do as he wished on it than any other person. This theme, of not having the right to act in

accordance with Aboriginal cultural values recurred throughout the indigenous interviews. For other participants, as we will see, the sense of emasculation emerged out of an absence of cultural knowledge, but for Uncle it was the incapacity to own the knowledge that had been handed down to him and act in a way that was consistent with customary lore [in this case, in terms of hospitality and caring for country].

The term “custodian” is synonymous with “guard, protector, watcher” (Roget, 1972), all active verbs. Historically, each clan had an obligation to preserve the land passed down to them by their Ancestors, following the maxim “If you look after the land, the land will look after you” (Wettenhall, 1999). The old view that Aborigines “did nothing with the land” has begun to be replaced by the more recent understanding that land was actively managed through fire farming and through ritual and kinship duties. Prohibitions against eating certain foods, maintenance of water holes and bans on killing animals in the breeding season all worked to protect and preserve resources through successive generations. The weight of this custodial duty sat heavily on Uncle’s shoulders, especially because, unlike his ancestors before colonization, he had no statutory authority of any kind in relation to the land he called “my country”. In this regard, he gave the impression of a man with one hand tied behind his back. Uncle struggled to express how he felt about this reality:

My feeling is ... this country of ours, that we share it and look after it together ... protect all of our heritage, whether it’s white man’s heritage or black man’s heritage, that we protect it together. Then there’s no ... um ... there’s no division ... but the only way we could do that is to create it from government, from the top

... but, it's not in their interests ... and this is my own personal thinking ... to have harmony amongst communities.

Uncle went on to describe the ways in which government bodies and individual politicians gave lip service to the idea of indigenous rights, including Native Title rights, but then failed to provide the infrastructure that would be required to implement these rights ... “To give the black man his land back, his country back, parts of it ... it's there but he can't develop it, 'cause they'll draw up another lease or another policy, and they [Aboriginal people] can't use that country for economic development.” Uncle described the process of “shifting the goal posts”, where indigenous people no sooner had managed to grasp the implications of one set of legislation when new legislation was added to the old, with the general effect of undermining the gains made previously.

Like, if an indigenous person speaks up about his country, about his rights, they [the politicians] say: ‘We hear you, we hear what you're saying’, but when it comes to looking to the future, to making policy on that, there's always a postponement, there's always some reason why it can't be done.

7.2.2 “Wheels within wheels”: The bureaucracy of Native Title:

Uncle used the example of the National Park land that we were on, and asked: “Why couldn't a place like this be run by the traditional owners? Why couldn't that be so?”

Earlier, Uncle had been speaking about his desire to have at least one indigenous Ranger employed by Parks Victoria, to act as a cultural awareness officer to help educate Park visitors about the area's indigenous heritage. The employment of indigenous people was not least among Uncle's considerations concerning economic development, with cultural

tourism being the most obvious possibility. Uncle felt that Aboriginal people could be given a sense of ownership over their traditional land simply by renaming the park with its original Aboriginal title. Aware that renaming would be likely to provoke anxiety, Uncle reiterated the point that Aboriginal people wanted to have some say in how their land was managed and to be recognized as traditional owners, not to exclude whites:

I would like to see both parties, the traditional owners as well as the Government ... arrange to put both names in brackets ... put the Aboriginal name first and foremost, and then the current name afterwards, so that in any documentation or any other papers people can look at it and recognize that it's still got the old name, so that people are more accepting of the change ... there's no reason why that can't be maintained under a joint management agreement.

Similarly, Uncle felt that it was important to mark territory as having links with a particular clan through "Welcome to country" highway signage, to enhance the awareness of non-indigenous people that they were entering and traveling through Aboriginal land. Eventually, his dream was for joint management between Parks Victoria and traditional custodians, with an area set aside for Aboriginal activities. As mentioned above, this kind of arrangement has worked successfully in other National Park sites, notably Gariwerd-Grampians National Park which houses the Brambuk Cultural Center, and Lake Mungo National Park.

Success stories, however, appear to be the exception rather than the rule in Victoria, where, to date, no Native Title claims have been endorsed. In a public meeting in July 2003, Paul Briggs, of the Yorta Yorta clan, spoke about the long history of his people's

17 attempts to gain Native Title since the 1800s. In part, Briggs (2003) was responding to the failure of the most recent Yorta Yorta claim at the High Court of Australia, but the frustration that he expressed was not restricted to the claims of Victorian Aboriginal groups. At the same meeting, Marcia Langton (2003) spoke about a particular 1998 judgment that managed to interpret the phrase “trade in the resource of the sea” in such a way that claimants from Croker Island, who were well documented to have long traded in trepang with the Maccasans, were nevertheless decreed to have never been engaged in such trade. On the basis of the legal interpretation of the word “trade”, the Croker Islanders’ definition of trade was overridden by the white definition, and on this basis their claim to rights over the sea was rejected.

Langton (2003) went so far as to argue that, with both Mabo and Wik, the “wheels within wheels” of legal definitions constitute a tautological system which acts to foreclose the possibility of Native Title ever being granted to traditional owners. For Langton, the competing versions of Aboriginal oral history and white legal discourse create discordant present-day experiences that are reflective of the omnipresence of colonization. Tony Birch (2003) has stated that, because the legal process of Native Title is caught up in the supremacy of the historical document, the people taken to have the authority to speak on matters of prior occupancy are often not Aboriginal, but white settlers, anthropologists and social historians. According to Briggs (2003), oral history given by Elders in the Yorta Yorta case was not given the same value as the written history of squatters and others who took the land from traditional owners. Langton has suggested that, in the

Croker Island case, the courts willfully misinterpreted oral history evidence in ways which not only insulted the claimants, but insulted Australian scholarship as well (2003).

Like Langton, Gary Foley (2003) has noted that the colonial wheels always turn to the detriment of Native Title, and has therefore concluded that the only hope for land rights lies in a dialogue outside government bureaucracy. The phenomena of white discourses, or legalese, which have precluded Aboriginal access to Native Title after Mabo can be directly related to the earlier discussion (see sections 1.7 and 1.8) of how knowledge claims are dependent upon the perceived authority of the one who speaks. Hall (1990) described positions of authority as “positions of enunciation”, a concept which was illustrated by the emphasis placed by Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Cooper (in Attwood & Markus, 2004) on the critical function of the proper noun in positioning the subject. Uncle’s suggestion that an Aboriginal proper noun be reinstated in the naming of country and the acknowledgment of prior occupancy through signage are solutions which show an implicit understanding of Buhler’s (1934/1990) concept of the relationship between the deictic and symbolic fields in enabling Aboriginal people to speak from positions of authority as subjective agents (see section 1.7).

7.2.3 Relationship to land: Past and present

Uncle spoke in terms of his “country” not as a specific place (as someone might say “I’m from Wagga”, or “I’m from Shepparton”), but as a whole region within Victoria.

According to Uncle’s account, the main highway that linked the major centers across his traditional country followed the route used by his forebears for thousands of years. Prior

to colonization, other tribal groups based around what is now Port Phillip Bay, Westernport Bay and the Mornington Peninsula would travel the same route from the Melbourne end to an area shared between the groups. Stops along the way were made at “special places”, where water and game were plentiful, and where trees or rocks provided shade and shelter. Uncle emphasized the importance of the aesthetic values of a site, and in many instances the attributes of these special places attracted white settlers so that they later became the sites of rural towns and cities.

Uncle described how ceremonial places would be located in sheltered areas with plenty of game and close to water, so that large numbers of people could be sustained over prolonged periods of corroboree. These sites would also be likely to contain ochre and clay mines, which were used for decoration of the dancers and initiates. Often, sites were selected because they allowed an extended view of the surrounding landscape, thus allowing for surveillance in case of intrusions from neighboring tribal groups. For those who know what to look for, almost every natural feature in the landscape bears witness to the prior occupancy of indigenous people. Shell middens³⁴ are legion along Victoria’s coastline. Rock art sites abound in Gariwerd National Park.

Many places that were regarded as special by indigenous people are the very places that are now highly valued by the mainstream society for obvious aesthetic and practical

³⁴ Shell middens are coastal sites where Aborigines have returned for thousands of years. The middens themselves consist of multiple layers of discarded shells, which the people threw away after eating the shellfish. There are many such sites all along coastal Victoria, often unmarked. The Gurnai-Kurnai left middens along the coast of Waratah Bay and Corner Inlet off Wilson’s Promontory. At Portarlington, on the Bellarine Peninsula (about an hours drive from Melbourne), there is an extensive midden line all along the beach. A little further around is a sacred women’s place, a small sheltered cave, which the women used for birthing. All of these sites were unmarked at the time the current research was conducted.

reasons. National Parks, which whites have preserved for their “wilderness” value, are among the few places that Victorian Aborigines can still gain access to their country. Other special places in Victoria include picnic places by the Yarra river, along with swimming holes and fishing spots. Elevated areas, like the MCG, were used for ceremonial events long before the advent of cricket and football, which Uncle suggested was invented by Aboriginal people. These sorts of sites are not the same as sacred ceremonial sites, although there is no doubt that some overlap exists.

Uncle described how the network between such places was replicated throughout the state and across the whole country in the days before white settlement. Networks across what is now the State of Victoria and the adjoining States were used for trade between groups, for seasonal harvesting of game and other food sources, and for cultural ceremony. Then, as now, all movement was directed towards social engagement. More recently, the networking between centers has taken an actively political dimension.

When Uncle was a young man in the 1940s and 1950s, the activists for indigenous rights would carry the “message stick” from rural center to rural center, crisscrossing the State of Victoria and into New South Wales and South Australia. These days, Uncle himself continued to traverse the same territory to carry the message stick between communities. Overall, urban indigenous people maintained their connections with rural indigenous communities through a continuous movement within Victoria as well as interstate.

7.2.4 A clash between cultures

The history that was uniformly taught in the Victorian State School curriculum in the 1960s presented Aboriginal people and their culture as an historical phenomenon, rather than a present reality. Listening to Uncle's description of the indigenous "highways" and "special places" put the claims of European exploration and discovery into a new context, in the sense that his story graphically illustrated that every "new discovery" had been made well before colonization.

There is now a growing body of literature which has set out to reinstate the Aboriginal presence in landscapes where it has been obscured. The frustration that Uncle felt at not being able to exercise his rights and responsibilities on his traditional land was amplified by a continuous "shifting the goal-posts" in policy and legal argument around the issue of Native Title. The main obstacle to the granting of Native Title for Victorian clans has been the difficulty meeting the criteria of proving an unbroken line of continuous cultural practice within specific boundaries. This has been especially problematic where cultural practice has been defined in terms of the written records of white anthropologists.

As has been well established, much of the traditional knowledge of Aborigines living in Southeastern Australia, and especially language, was effectively forced underground through successive generations. Uncle's parents and grandparents were raised on missions and in institutions where Aboriginal language and culture were denigrated and represented as forbidden practices. Because of this, Uncle said, cultural knowledge is closely guarded by those who hold it. As well, Aboriginal custodians were reluctant to

reveal the location of ceremonial sites and burial grounds, because they had learned that whites often took the opportunity to vandalize and desecrate culturally significant sites. The desire to protect important sites, however, restricts Aboriginal people in their claim for Native Title, because the legal process requires that this information is disclosed.

White people have often been quick to jump on any potential contradiction within the statements made by indigenous people, especially in relation to restraints on development based on the heritage value of sacred sites. The Hindmarsh Bridge incident³⁵ was played out on front pages of newspapers and took up airtime on television news bulletins for an extended period in the 1990s. Evidence of ruptures and discrepancies in Aboriginal accounts of the secret/sacred nature of the “womens’ business” on the island were seized upon with glee by the mainstream media. The terms “secret men’s/women’s business” have since been appropriated by the mainstream and have become part of the common vernacular. Whites, however, have shifted the meaning of “secret business” away from the Aboriginal emphasis on cultural ceremony, and applied these terms to gendered events with trivial associations from mainstream perspectives. Mark, one of the non-indigenous contributors, explained such reactions as follows:

My perception of the reason why a lot of the whole sacred site issue is really weird and hard for whites to comprehend is that no one’ll tell you what they’re really for. It’s a secret. It’s like what happened in South Australia, you know, the

³⁵ See Margaret Simons (2003) book, *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair*, for a discussion of how the need to keep sacred knowledge “secret” led to the failure of the Ngarrindjeri women’s attempt to stop a bridge being built between the mainland and Hindmarsh Island. The womens’ action was based on their claim that the Island was a sacred site, but this claim was rejected as spurious. Simons has argued that the Hindmarsh Island affair forms part of a larger debate about the continued failure of white Australia to regard Aboriginal oral history as valid.

whole Hindmarsh Island thing. Right from the start, they were never going to say what the site was really about, but unless they said what it was about, they weren't going to win the case, so they were in, you know, a dilemma ... of course, in Aboriginal Lore, there's no dilemma. If something's secret it's secret. It's secret for a reason. People accept that it's secret for a reason, whereas in our culture, we don't tend to accept that as an answer.

Overall, the data revealed that the relationship to land for the indigenous participants was complex and heterogeneous. Uncle, Chrissy and Graham, who had always lived on their clan's traditional land, all expressed a strong sense of belonging to place, while Becky and Trish expressed anger at the fact that they had been denied this aspect of their heritage. For these contributors, the relationship to land and the traditional cultural practices associated with caring for country had been cut by their separation from family and clan during the era of assimilation. Nan was able to access her family and community, but had chosen to devote herself to the Aboriginal cause while living in another location. Stuart's situation was different again because his parents came from different parts of Australia. .

The fact that Stuart, who was born in Victoria but whose father is from Northern Australia, had both an Aboriginal mother and an Aboriginal father, enabled him to access a different form of cultural heritage than that available to most Victorian Aborigines. "I've got two clans" [as distinct from] ... most of the Koori people I know [who] have either got just one Aboriginal mother or one Aboriginal father, or their Grandfather's not Aboriginal or their Grandmother's not Aboriginal, or something like that."

7.2.5 Demographics – urban versus rural?

Researchers and policy makers have divided Aboriginal people into three distinct demographic groups: *urban, regional and remote*. Indigenous author and academic, Larissa Behrendt (2004)³⁶, has been critical of the focus that government policy and funding agencies have placed on outback communities, given that only 26% of Aboriginal people live within remote areas. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the contemporary indigenous population live in regional and urban centres, the image of the “real” Aborigine in the public imagination remains conflated with conceptions of the “outback” and the remnant tribal groups who live in outstations on their traditional lands. Similarly, remote communities have long been the center of interest for white anthropologists and social scientists of various other disciplines, and this focus has tended to obscure the ways that Aboriginal people who live in urban and rural centres relate to their traditional country.

The interview data revealed a fact that has always been understood by indigenous people, but not well understood by most whites. In talking to indigenous participants who lived in urban centers or outer suburbs of Melbourne, it became evident that the demographic distinction between urban and regional indigenous populations was problematic. Most of the indigenous participants described a fluid movement between rural areas and the city, with city dwellers often spending a portion of their time in country towns. This was especially true of indigenous people who were raised on or around mission stations, like

³⁶ Larissa Behrendt (2004, September 27), in an interview with Julie McCrossin on ABC Radio National program *Life Matters*.

Cummeragunga, Framlingham, Korranderrk, Lake Condah or Lake Tyers. According to Trish:

There are a lot of people who just move from Melbourne to the mission, from Melbourne to the mission, they just constantly, you know, things get a bit too overwhelming in the city and all the pressures and all the rest of it, and it's go home to mission and family ... and then the bush gets a bit much, and it's back to the city.

Trish used the example of her father, who would often "Go walkabout" for three months at a time, following seasonal work. Although the search for work is not specific to indigenous people, the data indicated that this explained only part of the motivation to move between country and city. Stuart emphasized the important role that family played in motivations to travel ... "They've got their family here, and they've also got their family in the country, like in country towns and that." Movement from urban to rural areas was often motivated by visiting relatives and friends. Stuart said that ... "We could go to any bush town and there'd be somebody there we knew."

Graham and Chrissy were less motivated to travel from their small rural town, because they had young children and were surrounded by their respective extended families. For them, a visit to the city was more likely to mean catching up with friends or attending specific events. Uncle, by contrast, moved between regional centers frequently and often came into the city for meetings and business. Despite this, Uncle's activities remained focused on his traditional country ... "I don't leave my country. I mean, I might go and

visit another State, I go and visit other countries [country belonging to other clans], I go by the traditional owners and I'm welcomed and highly respected by those people."

7.2.6 The Koori grapevine

The links between city and country were further strengthened by more structured Aboriginal cultural events, such as the annual State football/netball carnival. Trish and Stuart were looking forward to going ...

It's all over Victoria, it happens in one different country town, they turn it around every year, it just depends on who wants it, 'cause there's money there for them to run a carnival, and it happens in October every year³⁷, it's a chance for all of the community to get together ... just an opportunity for the whole Victorian community to get together and have a chat and mingle.

When they were asked how so many people were organized without any permanent structure set up to co-ordinate, Stuart explained ... "it doesn't really take much organizing, because everybody speaks to each other, like everybody just rocks up, this year it's at Echuca, and every Koori in Victoria will basically be at the border." Teams were organized on a regional basis. Because clans are organized around regions, the teams are selected on the basis of clan membership, in other words, on family. About two or three weeks after the Victorian carnival, a State side is chosen to go and play against the South Australian State side, which is chosen through the same process.

³⁷ This information was quite new to the researcher, as a member of the white mainstream community. The annual indigenous sporting carnival, which appears to be a highlight of every Aborigine's calendar of events, has not been covered by any of the mainstream media in Victoria, so far as could be observed.

Stuart indicated that it would be difficult to have a Melbourne team, because all the Kooris who live in Melbourne actually have a regional base “Like, there’d only be a handful of people from Melbourne, there wouldn’t be very many at all”. The close connections between urban and rural indigenous groups, together with the fact that “everyone knows everyone” contributed positively to very effective communication channels in Aboriginal society, which was referred to as the “Koori grapevine”. Trish used the example of organizing a group of children for the scouting movement to describe the high degree of social engagement that exists within and across Aboriginal communities:

Yeah, it’s just amazing, like even starting the scouts, they were amazed that there were no notices put up, there was nothing organized – I just grabbed the bus one week and went around and knocked on people’s doors and said, ‘I’ve got this form, we’re doing scouts, can we take your kids?’ ‘Oh yeah, I’ve got my sister’s kids too, take them I’ll sign the form for them too.’ We ended up with 40 something kids, they only expected about eleven or twelve, something like that. There we were with this big barrage of kids coming through the door, one after another, it really freaked them out ... the scout leader didn’t think that we’d be able to get that many kids together in such short notice.

The Koori Grapevine facilitated communication whenever a group activity or event was being organized. The negative side to this was that it was difficult for Aboriginal people to maintain individual privacy, with everyone “knowing about everyone else’s business” in the community. This latter fact highlighted the importance of confidentiality when non-indigenous people conduct research in Aboriginal communities. John, one of the non-indigenous contributors, who held a senior role within an indigenous organization

responsible for providing housing to indigenous communities, spoke about the effects of the Koori grapevine on his capacity to make discrete choices about granting individual requests:

You may see a need and you may want to assist that particular person by granting a specific request, but, the trouble is, if you go out on too much of a limb, there's always the precedent, and the Koori grapevine, you know ... doesn't take long to pick up that ... Mrs. Smith in Wodonga ... was given ... or we've gone out on a limb for her ... and someone in Ballarat or ... people talk, you know ... so, the Koori grapevine, it's very quick, it gets from one part of Victoria to another quick as a flash, and they're usually pretty accurate too.

7.2.7 Mainstream mapping

John suggested that one of the difficulties inherent to the interface between Aboriginal communities and the various levels of white bureaucracy that are responsible for providing services to those communities is directly related to differences in the way regions are mapped within Victoria. John outlined the “whitefella” regional boundaries across Victoria as follows: “You have the Barwon-Glenelg, the Grampians region, which is the Central Highlands-Wimmera region, the Loddon-Mallee, the Goulburn-Murray, Gippsland, Westernport, which covers Frankston and Dandenong, and the Metropolitan region, which is broken into two regions.”

These regions are based on local government constituencies, and also form the basis for the division of responsibility for each area by different branches of various Government departments, including the Department of Human Services (DHS), which administers

Centrelink, the Office of Housing, and Corrections. Clan boundaries, however, do not map directly on to DHS boundaries, and this creates obvious difficulties for Aboriginal people who move frequently between areas administered by different local governments and different Centrelink offices. The issues around breaching, or failing to comply with the rules set out for the receipt of unemployment and other benefits which depend on funding from State or local government are particularly salient here.

The data provided by the indigenous participants in the current study showed that a continued distinction between urban and rural Aboriginal populations was, as Berendt (2004) has suggested, problematic. The data also amplified the error of the (still) common belief among white Australians that Aboriginal “walkabout” was undirected and without purpose. On the contrary, the participants’ accounts indicated that movement between urban, rural and regional centers continued to be based on political networking, economic opportunities, recreation, and meeting social obligations associated with clan membership, such as looking after country and attending funerals: all of which were determined by social conventions in the individual’s particular indigenous community.

The relationship between family, clan and country was still very strong for indigenous communities within Victoria. For example, Uncle’s family members were the direct descendents of one of the original five clans from his region, and, except for short periods spent interstate, he had never left his ancestral country. This was also true for Graham and Chrissy. Stuart was looking forward (albeit with some trepidation) to going through the process of initiation in his Grandfather’s country in Northern Australia. Becky and

Trish, whose parents and grandparents had been removed from their communities as part of the Stolen Generations, were more disconnected from their traditional country, as was Nan. All knew where their families had come from and an awareness of regional affiliations remained important, even when they were not actively pursued.

7.3 Family, Kinship and community

While the relationship to country as part of their Aboriginal identity varied between the indigenous participants, there was remarkable consistency when it came to the analysis of Bain's (1992) description of social relatedness as an expression of a distinct Aboriginal subjectivity. According to Uncle, clan and kinship remained at the core of Aboriginal identity, even in urban areas:

[It's] still out there, and you'll see in the city, in the urban areas, that a lot of Kooris still live that sort of tribal, uh, clan structure system of family, immediate and extended family living in certain suburbs, so that part of the culture is still very strong.

This section will investigate whether or not Bain's finding, that the adherence to the obligations associated with kinship was fundamental to social cohesion within the semi-remote Aboriginal community at Finke, can be applied to the indigenous participants in the current study. The data will be further analysed to look at how Aboriginal kinship systems and their associated obligations have been interpreted by whites, with a view to determining if the same misunderstandings identified by Bain as leading to problems with communication between the two groups is supported by data from the current study.

7.3.1 “Who’s your mob?”

In each of the indigenous interviews, the concept of the family group as clan emerged as a strong theme that could be distinguished from the usual use of the term “family” by white Australians. Aboriginal people commonly refer to their clan as “Us mob” or “Our mob”. According to Trish, the first greeting exchanged between Aborigines meeting for the first time is likely to be: “Who’s your mob?” In traditional Aboriginal society, the answer to this question would also supply the answer to the question more commonly asked by non-indigenous people in similar circumstances: “Where are you from?”

Because clan groups were traditionally linked to specific locations with clearly demarcated boundaries, the tribal name would simultaneously provide information about an individual’s geographic location. In contemporary Victoria, tribal or clan names have often been subsumed by family names, which, because of the high incidence of intermarriage between Aborigines and Europeans, are now likely to be European in origin. Thus, in contemporary Aboriginal society in Southeastern Australia, the regional clan affiliations of particular individuals are often indicated by European names.

Stuart used the example of AFL football to emphasize the mediating role of family in every aspect of indigenous life, including inter-clan rivalry: “Like, up in the Northern Territory, they’ve got certain football teams that each certain family plays for, and so, if you wanted to play for a different team up there, not your family team, a different team, you’d get disowned from the family.” According to Stuart, the fierceness of these

rivalries was such that a national competition was discontinued (about ten years ago) because “it just came into heaps of fighting and stuff.” Trish’s father had relatives in the Northern Territory, and often told stories of his travels “up North”:

Like I know that my dad says when he goes up to the Northern Territory, and he’ll go and watch the football, and there’ll be two Aboriginal sides, playing against each other, or there might be one Aboriginal side and a white side playing, and the Aboriginal team that are playing, everybody from their tribe will barrack for them, but every other blackfella in the Northern Territory will go for the white team, because there’s such rivalries between groups.

Here, it is worthwhile remembering that the indigenous clan structure is essentially a grouping of family members³⁸. Non-indigenous people commonly use the term “family” to refer to members of their immediate family (mother, father, sister and brother). In Aboriginal terms, family is not limited to one’s immediate (nuclear) family, but incorporates extended family including grandparents and first and second cousins, as well as non-kin. Thus, when Stuart spoke about going camping with his family as a child, he did not mean that he went camping with his mother and father and siblings. Rather, the family to which he referred consisted of “thirty or forty kids, all members of one family.” When the researcher expressed surprise at the number of children who were related to each other, Stuart explained: “My dad’s mum had 16 kids in her family, and probably each of those had four or five kids there.”

³⁸ This point is especially relevant when we consider the issues around how Government funding is distributed among different indigenous groups.

Stuart and Trish acted as voluntary coordinators of a Koori Scout group made up of local children. When Stuart and Trish spoke about “picking up the kids to take them to Scouts” it transpired that there were fifteen to twenty children in the group, all of whom were related to each other. They said that they felt an immediate affinity with the way the Scouting movement focused on a sense of mutual obligation and belonging, which they described as being similar to belonging to a clan. Stuart was quite taken with the resemblance between the terms “Jamboree/Corroboree”. Importantly, the Scouts “very much see themselves like a big family” ... “a mob”.

The differences between mainstream and indigenous definitions of what constitutes family have implications for the ways that funding is allocated. Trish used the following example to illustrate the inadequacy of mainstream definitions of family for members of the Stolen Generations who wanted to access Link-Up, an organization that helps indigenous people to locate their indigenous families:

Yeah, well, with the Stolen Generations they have an exemption on paying fees, so they waiver fees for family ... FAMILY ... being a very broad, open definition, depending on what culture you belong to. For them [the white bureaucracy], being parents and children, whereas for the Koori community, there's no way ... in fact, a lot of people don't live with their parents and their children, they live with their aunties and uncles and cousins.

A friend of Stuart had three mothers ... “I'm sure if we asked some of the Elders, they'd be able to tell us who the mother was, but you ask him, and he says they are all his mothers”. Trish added ...

He hasn't got any records. I remember when he applied for a passport to go overseas there was this whole big drama about his date of birth, because nobody could work out what was going on, and I think they just made one up.

The indigenous person without records is not as strange as it may initially seem. As mentioned above, the records of many Aboriginal people have been held by the state run children's homes and mission stations where they were raised. According to Trish, some Aboriginal people who are today in their late 30s or older do not have any proof of the time and place of their birth. Sometimes children born outside institutions were hidden from the authorities and moved around between relatives to avoid their being taken away. This would be particularly relevant for a mother who had previously had children removed. In such cases, extended family and community would commonly "fill-in" the parenting role.

This was true of Uncle, who as a young child was sent interstate to live for a time with an Aunty and Uncle to avoid "the Welfare". As another example, Chrissy was raised by her grandparents: "I don't call my mum 'mum', I call her by her name, I never lived with her, you see? ... She's more like a big sister to me ... she's the eldest out of ten." As a child, Chrissy's mother was sent to a Christian school and lived with white people when her parents were unable to support their large rural brood on a subsistence income. She spent part of her early life in a girl's home in Melbourne, where her three children were later born. Although Chrissy saw her father, a white man, at his mother's funeral, she didn't

actually speak to him, nor did he speak to her. The funeral was two weeks before her twenty-third birthday.

Chrissy was very ambivalent about the white side of her family: “I’ve only ever known my Koori side, see ... I’ve just been around Kooris all me life.” She had made contact with her father’s mother two years before her death:

I’ve only seen her once, well she had blue eyes too, that’s where the baby [Chrissy’s daughter] gets her blue eyes from ... I used to ring her up, so that’s the only contact I’ve had, and I seen me father at me Nan’s funeral then, that was two years later, so I got to meet her and then she dies, eh ... but it wasn’t a big deal to me, or it was, because I got to feel sort of hurt a bit, ‘cause I met her, like I wouldn’t have worried if I hadn’t met her, if I wouldn’t have met her, I wouldn’t have gone to the funeral, ‘cause I don’t know her properly, see.

When her mother’s alcohol abuse became a problem, Chrissy’s maternal grandparents took over the care of Chrissy and her sister ... “Me Nan had to go down [to Melbourne] on the train and pick us up, that’s when me brother was born, so if she didn’t take us then, we would have been in the homes too.” Chrissy called her grandfather “Dad”. In his sixties at the time of the interview, he played an important role as the “only grandfather alive”. Chrissy’s partner, Graham, emphasized that Chrissy’s experience was not particularly unusual: “A lot of Koori people today, they were taken away as young kids and grown up in institutions and stuff, and when they’re old enough to really understand who they are and where they come from, they soon go back looking for their roots and so

forth.” Under the current arrangements, however, no funding would be available for members of the Stolen Generations looking for extended family.

As well as issues around identification and funding support through Government and non-Government agencies, the definition of what constitutes family has a bearing on the perception of non-indigenous people that problems with Aboriginal youth are the result of inadequate parenting, especially poor parental monitoring of children. The emphasis placed on parental monitoring of children in non-indigenous culture contrasted with the role of parents. Stuart described how, when camping, the older family members would “drop a whole bunch of food on us and leave us at the campsite and they’d go back into town and check up on us in the morning.” At such times, the oldest girl (Stuart’s cousin), was placed in charge of “thirty or forty kids”. The participants highlighted the fact that the role of extended family continued to be central in indigenous communities, as evidenced by Stuart and Trish’s extensive engagement with large numbers of nephews, nieces and cousins.

7.4 Kinship as an organizing structure

In contemporary Aboriginal society, an Aboriginal person might be referred to as “unc” (uncle), aunty, “cous” (cousin), “sis” (sister) or “bro” (brother). These terms appear to roughly follow traditional kinship systems in a way that allows for the reality of widespread dispersal of clan groups outside of traditional clan boundaries. Apart from the Elder’s system and within Aboriginal communities in general, people of approximately equal status may be referred to as “Cous”, “Bro” or “Sis”. “Cous”, or cousin, may be

used to address age peers, but equally may be used to address individuals who are older or younger. “Bro” and “Sis” are gender specific forms of address applied to anyone of about the same age group, and seem to serve a similar function to the way the term “mate” is used as a general form of address among non-kin in the mainstream community.

Chrissy (from rural Victoria), for example, described how any Koori she met on the street in Melbourne would greet her with: “Hey Cous, or Sis.” She said it was a kind of reciprocal recognition of shared identity, which made country people (Kooris) feel welcome in the big city: “That’s just the way we Kooris are, it makes us feel welcome in their country, you know, it’s their turf, their territory, eh.” All of the above terms were used by the indigenous interviewees in ways that suggested a fluidity of meanings and potential interrelationships within and across various indigenous communities.

In close communities with a relatively intact clan structure, such as Uncle’s, the designated term was more likely to be based on actual kin relations, including non-biological kin who were absorbed into the relational structure of the clan group. Thus, Uncle and Stewart would refer to men of their fathers’ generation as “Uncle”, and women of that generation as “Aunty”. Uncle called women and men of his own age “sister” and “brother”, and these were the people that he had grown up with and known all his life. The use of familial nomenclature in these forms of address reinforced the concept that Aboriginal people, in both urban and rural settings, continue to place family/clan at the center of their social organization.

“Uncle” and “Aunty” designate mature persons who are treated with respect, have status within the community and often take on responsibility for the welfare and education of young indigenous people, including those outside their particular clan group. Above them are the community Elders, who are often the heads of large families. Far from democratic, the Elders’ system is based on bloodlines, with Elders selected from the “top families”, much as royalty is based on succession and judicious marriage between royal households. Attwood & Markus (2004, p.36) quote the following from an old *Cinesound Review* (No. 100, 29 September, 1933³⁹) to illustrate the concept of Aboriginal royalty: “Before the white man set foot in Australia, my ancestors were as Kings in their own right, and I, Aboriginal chief Burruga, am a direct descendent of the royal line.”

Succession, however, does not immediately fall to the first-born child of royal parents, but seems to be based on individual merit and aptitude. Uncle, for example, was the youngest of the children in his family, but was selected by his mother and grandmother to learn about his Aboriginal culture. Uncle said that this was because he was the one who expressed most interest in learning ...

It is the responsibility of generations, in terms of their Elders, to take and have that responsibility for custodianship of their country ... now I was given that, by my old people, because they could see that I had a lot of feeling for my country, and a lot of feeling about our heritage, and that’s why I continue doing what I’m doing today.

³⁹ “*Australian Royalty pleads for his people: Burruga, chief of Aboriginal Thirroul tribe, to petition the King for black’s representation in Federal Parliament*”.

Select family members were then groomed by the Elders to take on their role as community leaders in the future, and some of these eventually may become Elders. This raised the question of the place of genetic inheritance, or bloodlines, in contemporary Aboriginal society. Stuart was equivocal about whether or not blood-lines remained important for urban Aborigines: “Hmm ... it is and it isn’t ... blood is thick in the family line, but not in other places ...” Uncle spoke about himself in terms of his “direct bloodline” in a similar way to Burruga, although without using words like “chief” or “royal”. For Uncle, it was the continued relationship of his clan with their traditional land that was important:

Put it this way ... when people speak for their country, traditional owners of country, in their bloodline, they’re the only people to speak ... because that is by traditional lore that is still carried up in semi-tribal areas and tribal areas today, they’re the only people who may speak ... not outsiders, not historic blacks⁴⁰, not people because they’re born there, we have to listen to what they [traditional custodians] have to say, when it comes to the final decision, it has to be made by the traditional people of their country.

The connection between bloodlines and specific areas of country currently provides one of the key elements of a claim to Native Title, with evidence of continued and unbroken relationship to the land in question being prerequisite to a claim being considered. The

⁴⁰ Uncle defined historic blacks as Aboriginal people whose parents and grandparents had been removed from their traditional country and been born and raised in another clan’s country where they had no custodial or obligatory relationship. In this way, historic blacks are similar to migrants, with the difference that migrants, when naturalized, have the same rights and responsibilities as Australians born in Australia.

disruption to the Elders' system emerged as one of the major problems resulting from dispossession from country, both in terms of Native Title and social cohesion.

According to Nan, Elders were never commonplace, and there has been a lack of leadership from Elders in urban communities for a few generations. She described the place of Elders in contemporary Aboriginal communities as "confused":

I think that now we erroneously call anyone who is over a certain age an Elder, and it's not so ... they're actually elderly, they're not an Elder, an Elder is someone who is wise and who has special standing in the group, so, I don't think every old person automatically became an Elder, I think you had to earn that ... you had to become expert in certain things, like in spiritual matters, and you had to have a positive care for the whole group. I've only met two or three who I'd call proper Elders.

Nan followed the model offered by Canadian Indians to distinguish between Elders and statesmen, or spokespeople: "Statesmen and spokespeople don't need to be old, Elders are at a different level, free from malice or jealousy, they've got time for people and issues, that's my imagining of what an Elder would be." Some Aunties and Uncles who act as spokespersons may be in their mid-forties (for example the AFL footballer, Michael Long, would be referred to as Uncle⁴¹), but would still have to defer to the Elders of his clan. Confusingly, Elders are also referred to as "Aunty" or "Uncle",

⁴¹ Long brought Aboriginal issues to the national headlines in December, 2004, and again in 2005, when he commenced a much publicized "long walk" from Melbourne to Canberra (Meaghan Shaw and Michael Gordon, 2004, December 4: "Howard joins the Long journey", *The Age*, p.1). Long was inspired by the story of Rosa Parks, who famously refused to stand up for a white man on a bus in Alabama in 1955. The Long Walk was timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Parks' action, which sparked the civil rights movement in America. Long's aim was to meet with Prime Minister John Howard in order to discuss indigenous social justice issues. The two men did meet, on December 3, 2004.

although female Elders are sometimes called “Mum” (the male equivalent “Dad”, did not seem to be used, perhaps because the average life expectancy of Aboriginal men is low).

Overall, the interview data showed that there were important differences in the ways that indigenous and non-indigenous people define the word family. On the issue of parental monitoring, for example, a recent tragedy in Redfern⁴², where a teenage boy was killed while being pursued by the police, raised cries of “Where were his parents?” in the mainstream media. Perhaps a more appropriate question would be “Where were his Uncles?” Specifically, family relationships in indigenous communities were defined in ways that tend to resonate with definitions of kinship structures discussed by Bain (1992) and other anthropologists in their reports of research conducted in remote communities. The biggest difference was that many Aboriginal people have been separated from both kin and country, so that traditional protocols (around skin names and moiety) were not reported. Perhaps because of this, there was a clear tendency for family and community to merge in ways that would probably not occur in traditional society.

7.5 The social family

This section will look in more detail at the way that the indigenous participants described their social interactions at the community level. The data showed that the experience of Aboriginal people who had “grown up white”, like Becky and Trish, contrasted with that of the indigenous participants who had been raised within the Aboriginal community.

⁴² In 2004, Thomas “TJ” Hickey was impaled on a metal picket fence. Reports from witnesses, including the boy’s Uncle, claimed that he was being chased by police “moments” before impact (Kennedy, 2004, February 19, *The Age*, p.9). Widespread rioting broke out in Redfern following this incident, which the community claimed to be another example of police harassment of Aboriginal people.

Becky made a point that people like herself, who had grown up in a non-Aboriginal environment through adoption, were well placed to highlight the close relationship between Aboriginal identity and the kinship structure through which the Aboriginal community is organized. She stressed the distinction between the cultures:

It's the two worlds thing, the approach really is different, the names, the traditional stuff of how you belong ... um ... if you belong in a certain kinship structure ... they say, 'Ok, you're a [father's clan name] and you're from [name of State] and you grew up here, that's why you're name is a white man's name, that's that girl' ... that's how they communicate to you and how you belong and how you fit in, if they don't know in the community, where you are and who you are and how you fit in, they don't know how to relate to you, so you don't get a response, but once you've fitted in and they know that's where you belong and that's how it is, that's how I relate to you ... that still happens today.

Members of the Stolen Generations who have been estranged from their family often found a definite place within the Aboriginal community, even when they were not biologically related to anyone in their community of choice. Becky described how social life has evolved around a form of ersatz clan membership for some members of the Stolen Generations, where individuals who have been separated from extended family and disconnected from country cohere together as best they can in urban communities. An example of one such community would be "The Block", in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. The following story, told by Trish, illustrates the way that Koori culture incorporates members of the Stolen Generations within a form of social "family":

There's this girl that we're very good friends with, and she was adopted out as a young girl, she was adopted by a white family who also adopted a boy (he was non-Aboriginal), and all sorts of things happened when they got moved and everything, but these two kids always stayed together ... and she never knew who she was, like she didn't even know that she was Aboriginal, she can remember seeing an Aborigine one day and thinking, I look a bit like her, maybe I'm related ... but she had no sense of who she was or where she came from, and it wasn't until she was 18 and living in Melbourne that she started to come in contact with Koori people, who would walk up to her and ask 'Hey, where you from, who's your mob?', and she was really, you know, 'I don't know' ... and it happened one day that she bumped into this Koori Aunty, who asks her "Who's your mob?" and my friend says 'I dunno, I was adopted, I don't know who my family was' ... she knew she was adopted ... and this Aunty says 'Oh, you've gotta be one of those (names family) mob, from up around (names rural city), you've gotta be, you look so much like a (family name)' ... so she drives my friend to (rural city) and BANG, there's the family, brothers, sisters, everything ... she was one of them, and the Aunty could tell, just by looking at her face.

The social organization of indigenous people can create frictions when white employers and agencies fail to understand the ways in which Kooris prioritize family and community above other relationships. As with Bain's (1992) sample, all the indigenous participants spoke about "Koori time" or "Thursday Island time" as distinct from mainstream concepts of chronological time. Koori time gave precedence to community events (most commonly funerals), and kinship obligation, where everything else would be dropped at a moments notice.

Fred, one of the non-indigenous participants involved in training indigenous young people, expressed frustration that one young woman, who had shown aptitude in media

production and in whom he had invested great hopes, had suddenly felt the need to go interstate before the completion of her training. Fred:

She said she had to go and see her brother ... I said 'you can see your brother anytime, can't you just wait for a couple more weeks and finish [the training] and then go and see your brother?' and she said no, she had to go now.

Fred found the imperative to visit family difficult to understand, because in the white world, employment opportunities took precedence over family. As Fred's comments have shown, this also tends to impact on black-white relations, where whites find it hard to understand that an Aboriginal person will suddenly "drop everything" to pay attention to family concerns. This tendency to ignore mainstream assumptions of cultural norms concerning time, and the equation that is commonly made between timeliness (including keeping to a pre-ordained schedule) and responsibility, was cited as a major source of conflict for Kooris employed in mainstream organizations. According to Graham:

Those sorts of issues are the highlight of them all, I reckon ... at least to try and explain to people in government agencies and all that, things like that, 'cause we ran cultural awareness workshops with schoolteachers and people like that, to try and explain the roles in the Koori community, how they work, from an organization to a Koori community point of view, family structures, you know, just how we as Kooris operate within our own society ... and bosses and leaders or business people [need to] understand those issues.

Graham emphasized the need for non-indigenous people to be able to understand and negotiate the roles and responsibilities that exist in the Koori community as critical, sometimes even a matter of life and death ...

... like, if anything happens in shops in town or with the school, the police or the owners of those shops, they ring the Co-op and ask to speak to someone who can give them advice ... if any Koori kids are muckin' up, or there's people drinking in front of their shops, they'll get the sobering up center ... it's their job to go and pick that drunken person up, take 'em to the sobering up center, feed 'em, give 'em a shower and they can just have a lie down, and when they're sober they can go home ... that's to stop the deaths in custody.

This comment aptly illustrates the importance of a community intervention model based on the concept of the Aboriginal community as a social family outlined above. In the following quote, Mark (one of the non-indigenous contributors) described the experience of making contact with the extended family of a young boy that he and his partner had been asked to look after (by the boy's mother) during a time of particular crisis for his family:

I said, 'Where's your Auntie at?' So let's drive to (names suburb). So we go there, and we go to this house ... it's a three bedroom house with maybe three families living in it, with maybe twenty, thirty people, there's no power, you know, we're right into the third world ... in (names suburb). So when people, a lot of white people have this idea that what's going on, the shitty stuff that's going on in the black community is somewhere up North, in the bush somewhere, you know what I mean, whereas it's in ... (names suburb), it's in East St Kilda, Fitzroy, it's in

Heidelberg, and there's, you know, you see people living in Bali and Africa and living in conditions ... like that.

The term "crisis" hardly seemed adequate to describe the chronic nature of the extreme difficulties faced by the boy's family, who lived in and around suburban Melbourne:

At this stage, he was ten, he'd lived on the street most of his life, and you know ... he was no stranger to drugs, violence, and you know, all that kind of stuff that goes with being on the street and being a black person ... everyone in that family is either drinking or on drugs ... and um, you know, a number of the young men that I was close to they're, you know, they're no longer with us.

The boy lived with Mark and his partner for about 18 months, during which time they kept an open-house to the boy's extended family ... "this was a family who had nothing to do with white people, EVER, you know, they resisted any form of outside contact, because they'd been so hurt by assimilationist policies, or whatever you want them to be called, they didn't mix with any gubbas at all." Mark explained that the boy's mother had been unable to live in a house, because as a child she had been fostered to a white family where, as punishment, she had been beaten and locked in a cupboard. Mark described his contact with this group while looking after the boy as "a really raw experience, more than a lot of other stuff, because I mean, I'd come up against Aboriginal people from the time I was born, I'd never come up against the people doing it so hard."

For Mark, as a non-indigenous person, engaging with black Australia is like being in another country: "The indigenous cultures in Australia are the absolute antithesis of

western capitalist society, absolute antithesis. You couldn't ... in every respect, it's the opposite, the main beliefs are the opposite of what western capitalist society believes." Asked to elaborate on this statement, Mark said: "Core beliefs, you know, core values, which for indigenous people are all to do with family, family and land, family and land is culture ... people's egos are irrelevant."

7.6 Caring and sharing within indigenous communities

Aboriginal life was based on the sharing of all resources for the good of the group. The family unit was not the restricted modern nuclear family but an extended family of sharing and caring. Everybody was related and all relations were important, individual interests were subordinate to the lore. Aboriginal society was an all-inclusive network of reciprocal obligations of giving and receiving, which reinforced the bonds of kinship (Elvie Kelly, Victorian Koori Kids Mental Health Network, submission 758 (as cited in Dodson & Wilson, 1997, p.215)

The negative effect of past policies on the lives of indigenous people, which was clearly evident in all of the indigenous interviews, may explain the fact that the indigenous participants, without exception, tended toward acceptance and compassion rather than judgment of Aboriginal people who were situated on the margins of what the mainstream community would find acceptable. This compassion was extended to non-indigenous people who were disadvantaged in one way or another. Trish:

It's amazing that the Koori community is so accepting of people that are a little bit different ... people with a mental illness, people with a disability, that may be

ostracized by their family and different people ... within the broader community. I mean ... this guy that we know, obviously had a mental illness when he was younger, and he got involved with drugs ... he took an acid trip once and never came back, but he gets looked after within the community.

Despite the anecdotal evidence that there were high levels of disability within the indigenous community, the access to disability services was comparatively low. According to Trish, fewer than 20 Aboriginal people were listed with a disability in the Department of Human Services in Victoria. Parents of children with Down's Syndrome, for example, were reported to be reluctant to register for the support services to which they were entitled. Trish explained this reluctance as follows: "When you look at past policies and the close family and connectedness of Kooris, of course people like that would stay within the family". Another, more sinister explanation followed: "If they took away kids that were normal, why wouldn't they remove kids that, you know, were perceived to have something wrong with them?"

Victorian Aboriginal people used the word *gubba* to describe white people. This word is usually used in a derogatory sense, and is derived from the word government. According to Uncle, Aborigines pronounced government as "gub'ment", which was then abbreviated into "gubba". Many instances were cited in the course of the interviews where Aboriginal people were wary of Government officials or having anything to do with Government institutions. One of the legacies of past practices where indigenous children were removed from their families included a general reluctance to be involved

with Government departments felt by most Aboriginal people, even where the need for services and benefits provided by Government agencies was high.

A simple example, provided by John, was that Aboriginal public housing tenants would not open any correspondence with a Government logo on the envelope. This meant that important information never reached its intended recipients. Problems with breaching unemployment benefits or bail conditions were also cited. More immediately, Stewart spoke about a young man he knew who was too ashamed to admit that he was illiterate, and unable to fill-in the form to apply for a Centrelink allowance. This youth was in remand after being arrested and tried for multiple petty theft offences, mainly of food stolen from convenience stores.

The compassion extended to even the most apparently abject indigenous person also applied to Aboriginal people who had been in trouble with the law. Uncle had recently been to visit a nephew in prison. He said ... “eight out of ten Aboriginal men have been incarcerated at one time or another ... we call it college.” Uncle frequently visited Aboriginal men in prison and said that he felt great sorrow for those indigenous people who had been isolated and become suicidal whilst incarcerated, no matter what their crime ... “every indigenous person in jail should be regarded as a political prisoner”, he said⁴³. Uncle linked the high suicide rates of indigenous people in prison or in holding

⁴³The problematic relationship that exists between indigenous people and the police has a long history, dating from the first days of settlement. William Cooper, in a series of letters regarding the management of Cumeragunja Mission (Attwood & Markus, 2004), sets out the case against continued employment of a policeman as Aboriginal Protector at the Mission, based on the long standing hostilities between Aborigines and police: “We strongly deprecate the policy of placing us under the supervision of the police. Many of my people shun the aboriginal stations controlled by the Aboriginal Protection Boards because of this and its gaol-like conditions. Police and gaols are inseparable in the mind of an aborigine, and this

cells with isolation ... “in our [traditional] culture, no-one would ever have had to cope with their difficulties all alone, like they are expected to do today.”

Although the participants had different ways of dealing with the implicit obligation to share resources, all of them were affected by the assumption that community well being was more important than individual wealth. Trish described the sense of obligation as “pressure”, which she and Stuart had responded to by “being very clear about the way in which you want to live, and ... set up certain boundaries, then people become aware of them and don’t push them.” Trish said that one of the reasons she and Stuart had chosen to live in a new suburb was that distance from the CBD made it more difficult for kin and non-kin to drop in. Trish described a friend who did not impose any boundaries around visitors ... “Her door’s open, if you want to stay there, everyone goes there, if you’re there everyone gets fed.”

As a result, her friend was reported to have constant house-guests, which amounted to an abuse of hospitality. Despite feelings of resentment, Trish said that her friend “can’t ask them to leave.” Nan described a similar predicament... “I’ve just happily waved one of them [relatives] off this morning, he came to stay for a week but he stayed for two and a half weeks.” According to Trish, many Aboriginal people felt unable to refuse hospitality, even when their own resources were limited. Further, uninvited (and often unwanted) guests who overstayed their welcome rarely offered to contribute to the

association does not tend to elevate, but depress him” (William Cooper in a letter to the *Melbourne Herald*, 24 March, 1930, cited in (Attwood & Markus, 2004, p.33)

household resources. Nan was ambivalent, caught between a sense of duty and a desire for personal space: “There’s always lots of obligations, good and bad, towards relations. I’m Aboriginal, but sometimes I go through these guilt trips like, you know, I consider myself a bad relation ... I like being on my own, which is very un-Aboriginal.” Nan’s personal preference for isolation clashed with what Trish referred to as the “caring/sharing” attitude, a phrase which was repeated again and again by indigenous participants along the lines of ... “caring and sharing is the Aboriginal way.”

Stuart added that sharing was not just to do with giving people a place to stay, but that Aboriginal people were expected to share other resources as well ... “money wise and clothes wise and stuff like that.” The recipient of material assistance may be any Koori in need (of cash, clothing or food), and not necessarily known by or related to the donor. Stuart, for example, said that: “Ages ago, all my relations were giving money over to the Parkies ... these days now, they can’t, so now they go like, ‘Sorry I haven’t got the money either’.” He defined Parkies as ... “the Kooris that just sit in the park and drink flat out, and then they go home, like, they either stay at a hostel or they stay at a friend’s place or something like that.” Sometimes, the Parkies were also community Elders. Stuart and Trish described how indigenous people with access to cash through their employment would have particular difficulty saying no to Kooris who asked them for money. Thus, when they worked in an indigenous community centre ... “People would come in every night. If we were allowed, we would have handed out everything in the cash register.” In the era of greater accountability, however, this had become impossible.

For Trish and Stuart, who aspired to own their own home, the need to maintain a regular work schedule would have been compromised if they did not impose limits and restrictions from the outset. As mentioned above, their choice of suburb was partly influenced by its distance from the CBD⁴⁴. Because many Aboriginal people from rural areas can't afford to maintain their own car and rely on public transport or taxis to get around the city, living at a greater distance placed a natural limit on the frequency of drop-in guests. The fact that the whole scout group (fifteen children) often slept overnight on their lounge-room floor seemed at odds with the assertion that Stuart and Trish had imposed boundaries around kinship obligations. It should be noted, however, that the couple had made a conscious commitment to be involved with the scout group, and had a certain amount of control over who stayed and for how long, a situation which contrasted positively with the example of their friend given above.

7.7 Obligation to kin: There'd be no "No"

Kinship obligation was described as a more refined version of caring and sharing, where particular people are situated in an obligatory relationship to one another. In Bain's (1992) study of tribal Aborigines in the Central Desert, kinship obligation created difficulties for indigenous people who held formal positions, especially (but not exclusively) those who had responsibility for monies or funding. Bain gave the example of an indigenous Park Ranger whose entitlements included the use of a Toyota Land Cruiser. The Ranger's employment contract prohibited him from using the Toyota on

⁴⁴ In Melbourne, Aboriginal people have historically congregated in inner city suburbs, like Northcote, Fitzroy and St Kilda. More recently, the distribution has become more diffuse, but service organizations like the Aboriginal Health Service tend to be located in areas where there was previously a high density of indigenous residents.

weekends, but if the Ranger's Uncle asked to borrow the Toyota to go into town on the weekend, the Ranger would not be able to refuse. Bain described this as a clash between *transactional* (non-indigenous criteria, such as that between employee and employer) and *interactional* (kinship obligation) relationship criteria.

While data from the current study showed that there were some similarities between the experiences of participants from the current study and Bain's (1992) sample, the more or less voluntary aspect of social support offered by Kooris to other indigenous people in general can be contrasted with the expectations of kin who share a systemic genealogical relationship. Nevertheless, there were some direct comparisons with the types of kinship obligations described by Bain. For example, Trish reminded Stuart that there were some people who he would not be able to refuse ... "Just think, if you bumped into Uncle, and he wanted you to go for a beer, there'd just be no way ...," to which Stuart agreed "There'd be no 'No' ..." Stuart elaborated on this particular relationship:

Like, when I first come to the city, this Uncle was the first person I seen. But the problem with that is he's not even my real Uncle. My dad's just taught me to grow up with that respect, you know. My dad said, you have to call him Uncle, and now, now all of a sudden, my sort of ... sort of people that I had to call Uncle, all their kids are growing up, and now they have to call me Uncle, and it's freaking me out at the moment.

Stuart indicated that the traditional avuncular kinship patterns were alive and well within his family. His father had clearly defined the men to whom Stuart stood in an obligatory reciprocal relationship. On their part, his Uncles were placed in the position of looking

out for him (when he first arrived in the city, for example), just as he would be expected to go with them for a beer, or offer them a meal or a place to stay if they should ask for it. In turn, he was responsible for the welfare of his Uncles' children, who now had to call him "Uncle". The word "respect" can be interpreted here as the need to show respect for the traditional Aboriginal social hierarchy, even where an individual may perceive that compliance with a request may be problematic. Stuart described differences between definitions of family in Victoria and Northern Australia:

Up there ... the family thing's totally different again ... it's like, not your cousins, or anything like that, you're all brothers and sisters, and your uncles are not your uncles, they're sort of like your fathers, and aunties aren't your aunties, they're like your mothers, and that's the way you've gotta treat them, and no different or nothing else like that ... it's really weird how that works out.

For Stuart, who had grown up with his mother's clan in Victoria, the social system of his father's family was hard to come to terms with. Stuart's statement "it's freaking me out at the moment" can be seen in the context of his complex emotions around his father's expectation that he would travel to Northern Australia at some point in the near future in order to begin initiation into tribal lore. Stuart's father had discussed this concept with him extensively over the previous decade, beginning when Stuart was in his early teens. The expectation within Stuart's family that he would undertake an initiatory experience brought a perspective to the concept of kinship and obligation that was unique among the indigenous participants. On a more mundane level, Uncle expressed frustration about some of the material consequences of obligation to family:

A lot of Aboriginal people have worked all their life, but don't have much to show for it 'cause they're sharing it with their family, doesn't leave 'em with very much ... any wealthy black men you hear of in this country? ... Well ... there's a couple, no names, that have done very well thank you, working for the Government.

Where Uncle thought that some family members had taken undue advantage of his capacity for hard work, Graham was more pragmatic about Aboriginal disadvantage: "We look to family, make sure they're right and protected, you know, just helping each other out, if someone needs a ride, or is a bit short on food or money or something." Chrissy placed family obligation in a social context: "Well, we've just got to look after each other ... like, kids are still taken away from their families today, so it's up to the family members to get up all the kids and make sure they don't go with white people."

For Chrissy, whose mother was placed in State care, the phenomenon of Aboriginal children being fostered out to whites or raised in institutions was not an issue of the past ... "That's what happens with all Kooris down this way." Her partner, Graham, agreed: "This is only setting up problems, so they're alienating the children, so families and extended families get in there before the children can be taken." In 2005, Aboriginal children were 12 times more likely to be placed in care than other Victorian children, and made up about ten percent of the 4,200 children in out-of-home care (Gooch, 2005, September 1, *The Age*, p. 6). Chrissy was very clear about the role of family support in situations where there was a risk of Aboriginal children being removed from the community:

You'd do anything rather than let them go with another family. My sister, if something was wrong with her and her partner, like if they didn't have food and, you know, real bad, I'll bring her kids here rather than letting them go somewhere else.

Nan was a little more removed from her own extended family:

I grew up in a different city [to the one she was living in at the time of the interview], and went back to visit my community only occasionally, so I probably didn't get embedded much into my local culture as others have ... and I've got a big mob of rellies (relatives) there which I would happily avoid ... because there's lots of obligations with rellies and that, and they give you the poos.

This led Nan to speculate about how things might have been different, had she stayed closer to family:

I'm in an odd kind of position I guess, had I been brought up in my home town [names town], and my commitments and obligations to my relations were much thicker than they are now, I might be a different person. Had I been brought up and taken away from my family and didn't know who I was, I might be different to how I am now as well.

7.8 Aboriginal politics

According to Trish, particular family groups monopolized certain areas of community advocacy, and these tended to follow the regional clan groupings. Over time, members of prominent families who have become politically active in certain sections of community development and advocacy, based on the predominant needs of their clan. Thus, it was

not surprising that the people who have been involved in community organizations and committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in their local area would be related to each other. At times, inter-clan rivalries, as well as clan affiliations, influenced the success or failure of projects undertaken at the community level.

Penny had funding approved for a major community arts project, which involved training unemployed indigenous young people in Melbourne, the traditional country of the Wurundjeri people. The geographic area that was the subject of the work to be produced, however, crossed clan boundaries, and members of other clans were also involved. After two years of bitter infighting and debate about issues around copyright and who had the rights to reproduce particular indigenous designs, the project had not yet started. Penny said that, in normal circumstances, a project of that size and scope would have been finished long before.

7.8.1 The “Aboriginal industry”

The interactional approach to community organization is antithetical to mainstream concepts about autonomy and accountability, and is probably at the heart of accusations about the “Aboriginal industry” made by some white Australians, including Pauline Hanson and her supporters. Trish outlined some evident problems in indigenous politics where clan affiliations have led to some groups holding more power than other, less prominent groups:

I think there are a few members of the (indigenous) community who hold way too much power, and they have so much control over such a big area ... like, I had to

go and speak with one of the Government funding bodies about putting a Koori family service out for tendering ... and, I went up there and spoke to [the manager] about putting a tender together, and I'd worked out the deliverables and the objectives and all of the stuff, and it was just a matter of getting a grasp on this tender document ... and he said 'You're putting it out for public tender?' and I said, 'No, select tender', and he said 'How can you do that?' and I said 'Well, it's not appropriate for a mainstream organization to run a Koori family service, they don't know anything about it ...' and he said 'Oh, ok, whatever your reasoning is' ... so I said, 'Well, I've invited four or five organizations to apply for the tender'.

He said 'Ok, you can let each of them know, but confidentiality is of the utmost importance, so none of them are allowed to know who else has been invited'. So I said, 'The Koori community is very small', and he said 'I don't understand' ... I said 'That's going to be very difficult for them not to know', and he said 'Well, why is that so difficult?' and I said, 'Well, basically, here you go ...'

Trish went on to describe how she had informed the administrator that all the Aboriginal organizations that would be in a position to put in a tender were headed by members of the same families or people related by marriage. In other words, all Koori organizations, in Victoria and elsewhere, had strong local and regional links with particular clans. The critical influence of Aboriginal family networks in indigenous politics illustrates the difficulty of negotiating the normal issues and protocols around confidentiality and conflict of interest when negotiating with Aboriginal organizations.

When asked whether he thought that there was an "indigenous way" of organizing things within indigenous communities, with specific reference to clan affiliations, Barry

responded in the negative: “No, I think in Victoria I’ve seen virtually none of that.” Barry then went on to talk about the role of family ...

... but what does come into play is family groupings, rather than clan ... people play very heavily in favor of family ... but whether that is historical, again controversially, whether that is for historical reasons in culture, or whether its for their own ends, which is a whitefella thing ...?

This exchange illustrated that non-indigenous people, even someone as experienced in Aboriginal ways of doing things as was Barry, tend to miss the confluence that exists between family and clan. Without reference to clan affiliations, any favoring of family above other community members may be interpreted as straightforward nepotism, a word which Barry carefully circumscribed by referral to “a whitefella thing”. Asked for an example, Barry responded as follows:

Oh things like, decisions will be made within a community to do something that to me isn’t logical, but I happen to know for a fact that there is a material gain, the benefit goes directly to that person or a family member, through the back door.

As part of his job, Barry would carry out a needs analysis of work to be undertaken within a given community. When presenting a list of prioritized items that needed to be addressed, however, he would often be placed under “pressure” by a senior community member to alter the priorities. Barry stressed that this pressure was often very subtle, but because Barry was unable to act without the consent of the community members, the result would often be that “illogical” decisions were acted upon. For example, a less

critical structural task may be given priority over a task which logically (for sound engineering reasons) should have been addressed more immediately. The result of critical maintenance tasks not being attended to in a timely way was often that the overall costs to the community were greater than they would have been, had the more urgent task been attended to first.

The interactional and familial nature of the Aboriginal social structure does not sit easily with a Western democratic model. The potential for clan affiliations to lead directly to the inappropriate use of funds designed to be equitably distributed among community members became central to criticisms of ATSIC, and ultimately contributed to rationalizations for its demise. The issue of clan affiliations was referred to frequently by the non-indigenous participants. John reported that:

There are lots of issues and relating problems between clans and family groups right across Victoria ... and look, I've had some dealings with [a community] over the past couple of years, and one of the problems is that, at any particular time a family might have a really big majority in that particular area ... there might be another strong family in the area as well, and it depends on who has the numbers that can force changes ... so the two family groups are competing for power and authority in that particular area.

According to John, this meant that a member of the strongest family might gain membership on the local regional council, and he or she would then be in a position to make decisions which directly impacted on other family groups. Thus, very frequently, important decisions regarding indigenous affairs in a particular region would depend on

which family group happened to be in the ascendancy at any given time. This would not necessarily be a problem, if it were always the case that every regional councilor made decisions which only had repercussions for his or her particular family. As mentioned above, clan boundaries were never taken into account when regional boundaries were mapped by the early colonial surveyors. As result, there is always some overlap between traditional clan boundaries and local Government boundaries.

The question of which group has the right to speak for a particular geographic area has been further complicated by the fact that many Aboriginal people were forced to “migrate” from their traditional country as they were forced off their lands into missions and institutions. Uncle outlined the fact that, while some clans were traditional affiliates, other groups were sworn enemies. Thus, it was hardly surprising that warfare should erupt when rival clans were thrown together. Through the democratic process, where each vote is accorded equal value, it is quite possible that a person with no links to country may be elected to a position of authority over others who do have traditional links. This, understandably, has been and continues to be the cause of conflicts about authority within Aboriginal communities, which were never based on democratic principles, but on hereditary bloodlines.

7.8.2 Speaking the whitefella way

Nan made a clear distinction between authority and respect: while all older indigenous people command respect, they do not necessarily wield authority or aspire to do so.

People such as Michael Long may be referred to as community leaders, but it should be

remembered that an indigenous person's professional status or employment role does not hold the same autonomy as it would within the wider community. The relevance of this point to questions of funding and autonomy is critical, since mainstream agencies are often more at ease in talking to educated black leaders who hold university qualifications that are recognized in mainstream society and "can talk in the whitefella way"⁴⁵. For Uncle, articulation was linked to the ability to think, rather than passively accept what successive governments offered:

If you're going to be told all the time, what is right for you, by non-indigenous people, you're not going to be able to work it out and think for yourself, what is properly right for you, because there's always, within the structured system of government, and the bureaucratic system, when it looks like something's going to work [in favour of Aboriginal people] ... they move the goal posts.

The data revealed that generational differences in educational opportunity had led to difficulties in the maintenance of traditional structures of authority within Aboriginal communities. Not only did the white bureaucrats take more notice of educated blacks who "speak their language", but the views of older, less well educated Aboriginal people were sometimes overridden by younger community leaders as well. Uncle felt that the old people (including himself), who had "lived the hard life, on the river banks and in humpies made out of corrugated iron, and had to deal with all that", were just as worthy of respect as any university educated Aboriginal person.

⁴⁵ According to Uncle, problems can occur when whites assume that these spokespersons are authorized to make decisions for the group without consultation, and unscrupulous individuals have been known to take advantage of white ignorance concerning matters of authority in indigenous communities for personal gain or to advantage their particular family.

Community Elders of the current generation were likely to have had very little education and to have largely kept to themselves within their own indigenous communities. Uncle and Nan both reported that these individuals, who represent the real authority within their respective communities, tend to let the younger and more educated spokespeople do the negotiating on their behalf, or depend on white administrators who hold key positions in Aboriginal organizations. The lack of qualified professionals, especially financial administrators, within the Aboriginal community, has made it necessary for those organizations to employ whites in order to meet the requirements of funding bodies, such as the now defunct ATSIC. One of Chrissy's main concerns on this subject was that white administrators use language that intimidates indigenous people (including the directors of Cooperative organizations). She called this language "jawbreaker words".

Chrissy's partner, Graham, agreed: "They need to break it down so that Kooris can understand what they're talking about, they're [the indigenous directors of community organizations] just not confident." When it was suggested that this might be an issue about education, Chrissy agreed:

That's what I've tried to tell 'em ... when there's a Koori meeting going on, just talk Koori way, don't talk jawbreakin' words and that, because some of our old people, some of the oldfellas, they never had much schoolin' and they had children young and just reared kids up all the time and done this and done that ... they're [the administrators] just tryin' to make out that they're big shots, most of 'em, that's what I reckon anyway.

7.8.3 A level playing field?

Barry, the white engineer, described the kinds of misunderstandings that could occur between indigenous representatives and white professionals: “[in a meeting] everyone’s nodding, ‘Yeah, we’re all going this way’, it’s all hunky dory, people are nodding yes, no worries, but in fact they don’t want that at all.” Barry attributed such surface compliance to a lack of understanding on the part of community members of the issue they were being asked to make a decision about: “... in all the communities, what I’ve found is, when people don’t understand fully what’s going on, they haven’t had time, in their terms, to think about it, they’ll agree.” Barry attributed the lack of understanding to a lack of education ...

... so if you go and talk to a group, rather than saying they don’t understand, they’ll just say ‘Yeah, it sounds like a good idea’, and they’re very clever at doing it ... I think I’d equate it with somebody, not that I’ve ever come across somebody who’s illiterate, but I think it’s that same sort of reaction.

Uncle said that many Aboriginal people are ashamed of their lack of knowledge: “There’s a big shame thing there. It’s been there amongst a lot of our people for a long while ... they’ve been taught to be ashamed of who they are.” As Chrissy and Uncles’ statements have indicated, many Aboriginal people have received limited formal education, and are therefore ill equipped to meet white professionals on equal ground. Barry thought that the lack of equivalence sometimes created embarrassment, because the indigenous leaders ... “don’t want to be seen to not know” ... so they will agree to a plan which is designed to benefit the community, while not fully understanding the implications of that plan. According to Barry, this had led to situations where plans which

have been agreed to by the indigenous community ... “unravel later”, after the plan has been implemented. Barry provided an example of the sort of thing he had observed:

When I was in a community meeting with the project manager, and we'd taken down all these plans to show the committee, and I was sort of standing back and watching, you know, taking it all in, and he had the plans out on the table and people were looking over them, and he'd point, you know, this was that and this was that, and I looked at the people, and it was only afterwards, when we were driving home, that I thought ... they didn't have a clue what he was talking about, but they won't say that.

As a non-indigenous person, Barry spoke about the difficulties in building relationships within indigenous communities, and related the possibility of relationship to trust:

As an outsider, coming in, trust is difficult to gain and easy to lose ... with Kooris, its not overt, you wouldn't necessarily know that you didn't have trust ... when I first went to [Aboriginal community], they're courteous to you ... but they'll hold back, it'll be on a very superficial level, when they talk to you, and over time you'll get down to a deeper level and be able to talk about the bones of an issue, but it may take some time. In the discrete communities⁴⁶ in particular they have whitefellas coming in from every organization six times a day ... the major problem I see with indigenous communities is that whitefellas have got Department of Human Services in this box, and they do that, and there's the Aboriginal Housing Board, and they do that, and the Aboriginal Housing Services Unit does this, Centrelink does that ... Drug and Alcohol does another thing, and there's all these little pieces of pie ... and all they see is every person, who each

⁴⁶ The term “discrete communities” refers to the Framlingham and Lake Tyers Aboriginal communities. These communities live on Aboriginal land in housing provided and maintained by government agencies. Aboriginal people pay rent as tenants, a situation that many community members resent.

thinks they're very important in their little piece of the pie, turning up and saying we can do this, we can do that ... then the next guy turns up, but there's no coordination ... so, the mere fact that you've got some whitefella rolling up every other day, you're just one more of them, and the next time you roll up, you gain a little bit more acceptance ... it may be on the fiftieth trip they'll go, 'Oh, here's this guy, we know him'. Some communities I've been going to for four or five years now, and I know everyone and they know me, if they've got problems they'll ring me at work.

Barry described the endless line of helpers as themselves introducing stressors into the lives of the people they are ostensibly there to help ...

... they're all helped out ... everyone's wanting to help, everyone's wanting to help, but, in my opinion, what Aboriginal communities need, what they need is one person who they know and they trust and ... it can be a blackfella, public servant, whoever ... who funnels every, or almost every other person coming in to the joint, basically, so that they can focus on what they bring, and that person, then can talk to people in the community, that's what they need.

According to Barry, trust may take years to establish, so that brief or sporadic contacts with Aboriginal community or cooperative trust members are not likely to yield positive and lasting results. This problem is not limited to Victorian Aboriginal communities.

Leon Melpi, a respected Elder at Wadeye, was fed up with bureaucrats coming to the community with pieces of paper to discuss one solution or another:

They should stay away and do their business and not come back until they have a final solution ... we want to deal directly with the people who actually make the decisions that affect us. We want to cut out the middle man. We just want to be a

normal part of Australia with all the services that are available to the rest of you (Melpi, as cited in Murdoch, 2005a, September 15, *The Age*, p. 11).

The problem of short-term relationships with whites who engaged with Aboriginal communities for brief periods of time was exacerbated by the high turnover of cooperative committee members with whom the white bureaucrat wants to liaise. In a period of two years, Barry had worked with four different people in one community, which he said had made it difficult to maintain momentum with various projects. Barry:

It's very variable ... in terms of say the Chairman of the Trust, which is the Koori people and the boards they sit on ... its theoretically very democratic and people are elected on, but at the end of the day, people have limited abilities in terms of administration and the level of interest in administration is varied. I equate it to an Australian footy team ... if you've got one or two people who are really driven to make it work ... you need two or three people who are really committed to making the community run very well, and it might run well, but if you have one of those people leave, or you don't have them to begin with, it all falls on its backside.

7.8.4 Capacity building and mutual obligation

Barry's observations have direct implications for the ways that Aboriginal communities are capable of negotiating with mainstream service providers. Bill Palmer (2006), a community facilitator for the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal community in regional N.S.W., has argued that the policy of mainstreaming Aboriginal service provision cannot work, because:

To say that we should mainstream indigenous policy is saying that we work on a level playing field, that Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal communities are all operating from the same place. The fact is ... they're not. Aboriginal communities do not have the same level of capacities, and skills, as non-Aboriginal communities, and part of that is because ... no matter how much money has been put into Aboriginal communities, no community has ever been taught how to manage for success ... the fundamentals of fiscal accountability and project management have never been taught, they've been acquired ... so, given everything, Aboriginal communities cannot compete in a mainstream environment (Palmer, 2006, March 12, ABC Radio National *Background Briefing*).

Furthermore, the argument that mutual obligation would make it easier for Aboriginal people to speak directly to government in order to access funds has been contradicted by some of those involved in the process. For example, Palmer stated that some SRAs involved up to eight different Government departments, each contributing various amounts of money or in-kind support. The complexity of managing information between so many layers of bureaucracy would be difficult for an experienced administrator, but for untrained Aboriginal community members, the task is well nigh impossible.

Speaking on ABC Radio National's, *Background Briefing* (2006, March 12), one community worker from Brewarrina, in New South Wales, claimed that he had to provide quarterly reports to five Federal and State departments involved in one SRA in his region. One of those departments required a 50 page report every three months on how its money was being spent, despite the community having only received part of the funds promised under the agreement. Labor's Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Chris Evans, has

suggested that a further problem for local communities is that they have been precluded from seeking assistance from representative Aboriginal bodies, like Land Councils, which may be able to offer guidance through access to people with the necessary skills in planning and negotiation. According to Evans:

Under SRAs they've [the Government] actually made sure they won't negotiate with anybody who represents indigenous organizations, they're going direct to the community. Well, often those communities are lacking in people with skills to negotiate, without full information of what they're involved in, and I think a lot of them are not really clear what they're doing (Evans, 2006, March 12, ABC Radio National, *Background Briefing*).

These problems were reported to be endemic across Australia. Tracker Tilmouth, a former head of the Central Land Council, in a discussion about the recent initiatives to broker SRAs in remote communities described the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) trials as ... "a Band-Aid solution and a waste of time ... There are so many meetings that they have to hold more meetings to discuss the problem of so many meetings."

7.8.5 The role of social support in capacity building

Several of the participants placed a great emphasis on the need for indigenous people to be supported in education and professional roles – the role of indigenous people in the public service, for example, was regarded as critical to self-determination. For Uncle, the support of young men to become "strong in their culture" was especially critical, but this needed to be matched by the capacity to stand up and speak in mainstream contexts.

Thus, while education in mainstream society is primarily regarded as the road to individual achievement (with family advantage usually a secondary consideration), Aboriginal communities have developed strategic models to enable young Kooris to be educated for the benefit of the community as a whole. Nan, an academic, was very clear about the need for Aboriginal students to receive specific supports while undertaking tertiary education:

We offer our own programs, that are accredited, for our own mob, and they're like community based courses, as well, so they're done in block release, they're very much pitched to social transformation of Aboriginal communities, and so we've got one in management and one in health, and a counseling arm in the health one ... and then we've got some courses that target students into mainstream, so there's courses that stand alone and the students would have very little to do with mainstream, and they graduate with mainstream and everything else, but it's about choices and having options available for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people were "always given first preference for everything" in all policies and strategies on the premise that: "It's black money, let's use it on black people." Nan said that, even when offering mainstream units to non-indigenous students who were interested in learning about Aboriginal culture ... "we're still engaging in social action and we're still transforming ... well I hope we are, transforming society, so indirectly, we're benefiting Aboriginal people." As Nan saw it, this aspect of the program was less of a priority than facilitating learning for indigenous students, with the broader aim of empowering indigenous communities. Nan's emphasis on the necessity for positive

discrimination extended to the employment of whites. Thus: “While we value our white staff, we’re very clear on their role in our path to self-determination.”

Uncle, in his role of community Elder, had selected young people in his community over a period of twenty years and mentored them all the way through school to a university degree in strategic areas that the Elders felt would be of use to the community in the future. As part of this strategic plan, the Elders made sure that rural students attended university or TAFE colleges in pairs or small groups, so that they could support each other in the “daunting world” of the white education system. This kind of support system has been put into place for Aboriginal footballers who have been drafted into elite AFL clubs from regional and remote areas.

For example, ex-footballer, Jimmy Krakouer, currently acts as a mentor to three young Aboriginal players at Arden St, in Melbourne. One of the trio, Daniel Wells, spoke to reporter Karen Lyon (2005, April 28, *The Age*, p. 3) about the importance of having an indigenous role model to help negotiate the predominantly white world of Australian Rules football:

He just tells me the simple things that everybody else seems to forget to tell you ... He says: ‘just go and have fun and enjoy yourself; if you have had a bad game forget about it, there is always next week to redeem yourself’ ... just the simple small things.

Daniel Motlop said that he drew inspiration from witnessing the respect that Krakouer commanded from other players:

It's how they speak about him. I haven't heard many people spoken about like that. You get Wayne Carey, about how good he was, and Jimmy, and because he is indigenous too, and I know how much they respect him. That helps me.

Uncle said that indigenous people who had been successful in their chosen fields played a central role by acting as role models for young Aborigines.

We have role models in various fields, whether they're young activists, getting the message across about your rights, whether it's in sport, like Cathy Freeman, or Michael Long or Nicky Winmar, who have done so much to highlight racism in AFL football, whether it's in the academic world, like Marcia Langton, who is now a professor, or in a profession, like anthropology or medicine ... we've got Koori doctors now, we never had those before ... could never have dreamed it ... that some day we'd have Koori doctors!

Uncle also referred to high profile indigenous political figures like Aden Ridgeway and Noel Pearson to illustrate this point:

They're part of the young brigade that's out there now and they know what the issues are, and they've been part of the indigenous struggle in the country for social justice and rights ... and they've been brought up in their community and their family structure knowing this, and so they've been tutored ... in their learning, to be able to respond to questions that are asked by non-indigenous people and to talk the white man's language, at his level, around the table.

For Uncle, who had himself been inspired by leaders including Uncle Jack Patton and Pastor Doug Nicholls, this was an important part of the role of Aboriginal leaders:

[We are] ... bringing the young people through ... in their learning and developing, to be able to understand and speak the [whitefella] language ... they're doing it very well today, a few of them, and they're smart enough to be able to interpret and to pick up the main points of the issues that are being discussed in the various forums ... in other words, they've been sharpened up and as they've got older they're learning more by being involved with the community, by dealing with non-indigenous people like bureaucrats and government and they're able to speak to them in a way to get them to understand what it's about.

Graham also felt empowered by hearing articulate blacks, like Mick Dodson and Noel Pearson: "We need people like that ... brings 'em [whites] to the same level, eh ... brings 'em down." The combined impact of poverty, lack of educational opportunity and poor self image has left many older Aboriginal people profoundly disadvantaged in their attempts to maintain their dignity and claim their rights as the "first Australians". The participants indicated that things were very different for the current generation of young Kooris in terms of access to education, which, as Uncle's and Nan's testimonies have indicated, can be largely attributed to the "hidden hand" of successful planning, begun a generation ago by community Elders.

As with every other aspect of life in Aboriginal communities, education of young Kooris was incorporated into a vision for community well-being as the overarching principle and

motivating force. Young people who succeeded in gaining qualifications were expected to bring their expertise for use by the community. Thus, while relatively young people may hold professional roles and responsibilities in the mainstream community and in Aboriginal organizations, they would nevertheless have to defer to community Elders in any decision involving the community. Chrissy talked about the protocols that needed to be observed by young indigenous people wanting to find out about aspects of their cultural history ... “just say if I wanted to go and do something, like with history, you’ve gotta go and talk with other communities, their Elders, and ask them if it’s alright.”

7.8.6 A three tier model of authority: Family, community, Elders

Essentially, the social functioning within any given Aboriginal community appeared to be based on a three tier hierarchical system, with family as the base, community leaders acting as spokespersons in the middle, and a group of Elders at the top. Given the fact that family is equivalent to clan, which in some cases is still linked to a particular geographical region, this three-tier system in indigenous society appeared to function in a similar way to the way the three-tier system of government (local, state and federal) operates to support civic society in mainstream Australia. As with Bain’s (1992) sample, the functional relationship between region and family appeared to be critical to the effective maintenance of the three tier system within indigenous communities in Southeastern Australia.

The interview data revealed that, even where the relationship to land had been disrupted, the community continued to operate according to the social elements of the system. There

were, however, many difficulties inherent to this adherence to a social structure where the three tier system had broken down due to family disruption and dislocation of regional alliances. In some cases, like Redfern and Palm Island, the whole community is made up of members of the Diaspora. Penny observed that, because there is no ancestral link with country in such communities, the channels of authority were much more liable to be factionalized, with authority being sometimes based on “the loudest voice” and “the strongest arm”. These communities have particular difficulty with internal authority structures, and, in the absence of the “glue” of a clan structure, are always on the brink of imploding. It should be no surprise that these are the very communities which most noticeably seem to require the imposition of an authority from outside, usually in the form of police intervention.

The “State as parent” in such cases is extremely problematic, just as it is for institutionalized individuals, in that it tends towards demoralizing disempowerment. As a result, individuals living in such unsymbolized spaces oscillate between internal destructive behaviours (to combat the low self-esteem associated with impotence), horizontal violence (where peers and those of equal social status are attacked or undermined) and external expressions of rage (symptomatic of an attempt to assert some form of autonomy over their environment). The participants’ descriptions of community social structure, presented above, provided a great deal of insight about the nature and extent of the difficulties faced by Aboriginal communities, both in their struggle for autonomy within a white mainstream bureaucracy, and in their relationships with other communities.

7.8.7 The “cause” and the “struggle”

Becky cited the Aboriginal Provisional Government, an organization led by Michael Mansell in Tasmania as an example of how disenfranchised some indigenous people have become from mainstream Australia:

Their approach is quite separatist ... they say that we never ... as an Aboriginal community ... we never invited Australia here, we never called it Australia, Australia's not their home, Australia's not their country, and they don't want to be part of Australia, because it's not them ... so, you know, why should we be Australian citizens, why should we go under these laws that we've never even wanted, never been asked, never negotiated, nothing ... it's the power difference.

Although indigenous people have always advocated for Aboriginal rights, a renewed interest in Aboriginal culture and identity began in the 1980s with national movements for land rights and self determination. The inauguration of ATSIC in 1990 further enhanced the awareness of indigenous issues at the national level. As well as giving indigenous people a representative voice, ATSIC made an attempt to address Aboriginal disadvantage through federally funded Government programs.

Building on this early momentum into the 1990s, a general consensus emerged about the need to reclaim cultural knowledge which was in danger of being lost. Taken together, these developments in the world of indigenous affairs, affiliated as they were with a growing awareness among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians of the damage done to Aboriginal people by past policies, contributed to a shift within Aboriginal communities which has been referred to as a cultural “renaissance”.

To be Aboriginal, in the sense of being consciously engaged with issues around Aboriginal identity such as land rights, was synonymous with holding an essentially political position. The participants referred to this level of politicization as being involved with “the cause”, or “the struggle”. Nan defined the cause as ... “for me, it’s about the recognition, because don’t forget we grew up in a society where nothing positive was said about Aboriginal people ... we were either invisible or mentioned in derogatory ways.” Nan pinpointed the period at which she had first become politicized, and linked her conscious engagement with the cause to changes in the ways that Aboriginal history was represented:

... I can remember the moment ... I think it was in the seventies, eighties, a different type of writing about Aboriginal history occurred, and that was about Aboriginal people as resisters and warriors, and reading about the genocide and resistance, and what had happened during colonization in Australia ... and the awful history of our people that has been kept quiet and then the current inequity and inequality and racism that still exists.

Nan, Becky, Trish and Chrissy all described the advent of the history wars, particularly the work of historians including Henry Reynolds and Peter Read, as an awakening to “the big lie” inherent in previous versions of the history of colonization in Australia. For Nan, this new awareness had led directly to her becoming involved in the social justice movement ...

... and so you'd make a commitment that you're going to do your darndest in your different paths that's going to make things right, and that's what the cause is to me, it's political and cultural, and it's about changing things for the better ... I guess my work [as an academic] has probably been my commitment to the cause ... to me, every Aboriginal person is part of the cause.

Uncle was angry about the ways that indigenous people continued to be positioned within mainstream Australian society as “undeserving” and “lazy”. He was especially incensed about the negative stereotype of Aboriginal people as getting “fat on the proceeds of the Aboriginal industry”:

We've got to benefit from the economy of this country, the wealth of this country, 'cause they took it off us when they took our land, they took our wealth away from us, and what we get ... is always identified as ... people say that the blacks are getting all this taxpayer's money, they seem to love talking about the taxpayer this and the taxpayer that, but, do they realize that a lot of us have worked and paid taxes all our lives, a lot of Aboriginal people have paid taxes, you know?

7.8.8 “I'm not racist – but ...”

The interview data highlighted the many ways in which the negative aspects of their personal and collective experience of black/white relations had impacted and continued to shape the daily lives of indigenous people. As a reminder of the recent past, Penny recalled an event that occurred in the late 1970s, when she went to visit her parents in Darwin:

Something simple ... my parents lived across the harbour from Darwin, there's a ferry and there's an Aboriginal settlement out there, so if you catch a ferry, you get to sit with Aboriginal people, or if you're like me ... curious about people's lives, you get to talk with them ... I got off the ferry once, and there's a pub there, right where you get off the ferry ... so, at the time ... I didn't realize it, but they preferred that the Aboriginal people drank out the back of the hotel, and the white people drank out the front, where all the lawns and the beach was ... So, I had this Aboriginal person with me that I'd got off the boat with, I must have quite liked talking to him or something, and mum and dad were sitting up and having a drink with some people, so I took him over and I started to introduce this Aboriginal person to my parents, and the people sitting with my parents got up and left the table ... that's when I discovered that there were some things that weren't done, you know, that weren't approved of ... even in the late 70s.

All of the indigenous participants reported personal experiences of racism. For those who had "Grown up black", the racist taunts began at school, where the non-indigenous children called them names based on their Aboriginality. The insulting terms: "Bung", "nigger" and "abo" were common taunts, often prefaced by "dirty". Chrissy, who went to school in rural Victoria, made the comment that ...

... Kooris were always first with the head lice and that [when lice appeared at the school] ... they blamed the Koori kids all the time ... and, at school, the kids'd be all talking about ya ... that's why you'd go and hit 'em or something, you know, 'cause you can't handle it, when you're a kid, you can't hold ya temper.

Both Chrissy and Graham attended local primary schools, where the majority of students were non-indigenous. Chrissy could remember being invited to only one birthday party at the home of a white school friend. Graham said that he had two or three white friends,

but he never mixed with them on the weekends. Chrissy told the story of her Aunty, who had lived with a white man as his wife and had raised ten children with him. This man lived with his sister, but had to build another house for himself and his Aboriginal partner, because his sister refused to acknowledge the inter-racial relationship, despite the fact that the sister was “glad to have the Kooris working for them on their property”. Chrissy remembered her Aunt telling her “They’d go into town and she’d feel funny, the way the white people’d look at her in the shops.” The couple never married because, at the time, intermarriage between Aborigines and whites was against the law.

Racism also manifested in more subtle ways. Uncle, a light-skinned indigenous man, described walking down the main shopping street of a busy rural city with his two dark-skinned nephews. A little way ahead, he observed that a white mother glanced at them nervously before hurrying her small daughter into the car, where she quickly locked all the doors. With pain in his voice he asked “What did she think we were going to do, rape her little girl? We were just walking down the street for God’s sake.”

Sir Gustav Nossal (2000, September 4, *The Age*, p.13), described an incident which occurred during question time at a talk on reconciliation at a prominent girl’s school in suburban Melbourne. One girl approached him to ask: “Aren’t you ever scared of Aboriginal people?” When he replied that he wasn’t, she said: “I live in St Kilda, and every time I see an Aboriginal person on my side of the street, I immediately cross to the other side. I’m frightened that I might get bashed.” Aborigines also engaged in voluntary separatism, based on a similar and arguably more realistic sense of the Other as a threat.

At times, it seemed as though there were two separate worlds, with the indigenous world on the margins of the non-indigenous mainstream. Small references brought out the subtle nature of the informal division between the two groups. On a hot day, for example, all the Kooris in a rural seaside town would go to a part of the beach not used by “gubbas” (“we go to the left of the bridge”), or else they would go to a favourite river swimming hole later in the day, when the whites had gone home. On one occasion, Uncle steered me away from an attractive looking café on the main street of a country town and into another place on a side street. When I asked him about his choice he said “They’re rednecks in that other place, racists.” Uncle, a mild man in his late sixties, described how he would always stand with his back to the wall in a pub, so he could have a clear view of anyone who might “want to have a go” (get involved in a fight).

Racism can be overt or covert. The reactions of whites to the indigenous participants, described above, were often marked by open aggression, but sometimes the aggression was more masked. Barry, the engineer, described an incident that occurred when he was out with a dark-skinned Aboriginal work colleague with whom he had formed a friendship:

My friend was sitting at a table in a pub one night, just drinking a beer, and I was sitting next to him, and there was a pool table, and this guy playing pool came by close to him and nudged him, “Oh, sorry mate”. My friend didn’t do anything ... just kept drinking his beer ... next shot, the guy came by again, nudged him again, and again, you know, “Oh, so sorry mate”, and that was all it was ... that really cut me up, I thought “Why?” you know ... and when I talked to my friend about

it, he said it happens all the time. The other thing that I noticed, he'll go up to get a drink at the bar, and he'll get there first, won't get served ... then I'll go up, and they'll come straight to me ... again, I don't understand why ... so it's ... all these little things, that Aboriginal people have to live with, just as an undercurrent, all the time ... and the thing is, if you asked the people if they were racist, they'd say no, but things come out anyway.

This quiet incident in a cosmopolitan hotel went unnoticed by all but the central protagonists, but could easily have erupted into a war of words or a physical confrontation. The only thing which prevented an escalation of violence appeared to be the fact that Barry's friend refused to respond to the covert challenge. The retelling of this incident from a white perspective underlined the difficulties that the Aboriginal contributors described in their day to day in interaction with whites. Richard Frankland (2004) the indigenous playwright, described an encounter with a non-indigenous man⁴⁷ who asked him: "If you're a real abo, where's your man scars?" This aggressive (and racist) challenge refers to the traditional practice of scarification associated with ceremonies of initiation for tribal men⁴⁸.

Uncle spoke about how he frequently "tutored" young Aboriginal men in ways to avoid responding to racist taunts such as these, because violence usually led to more trouble for Aboriginal people and often led to incarceration, even when it was a white person who had started the fight: "Us blackfellas usually get the rough end of the stick," he said.

⁴⁷ Richard Frankland (2004, October 29) - Panel discussion on *Awaye!*, indigenous arts and culture program aired on ABC Radio National.

⁴⁸ As it happens, circumcision and subincision were not traditionally practiced among Victorian Aborigines (Berndt & Berndt, 1999, p. 169).

Uncle's description of the model of avoidance that he had taught to his children and young nephews was reminiscent of the conscious use of cognitive restructuring techniques used by behavioural psychologists, whereby the Aboriginal person would be prompted to remind themselves that the aggressor was nothing but a "stupid redneck whitefella" (or some such negative attribution), who did not deserve to be given the satisfaction of a response.

Sometimes the racism had a more institutional form. Trish, the blonde haired, blue-eyed participant, described being pulled over by the police while driving with her partner Stuart and her dark skinned cousins in a rural town. The police, who assumed she was non-indigenous, wanted to know if she needed any assistance. Presumably, they were taken aback when the potential "threats" turned out to be family members. While this young woman had never before drawn any attention from the police, the same could not be said for her companions, for whom such an incident was a regular occurrence. Perhaps the most telling example of racism was Stuart's story of being accosted by a belligerent white man who shouted at him to "Go back to your own country." Telling the story, Stuart made a gesture of defeat, and asked ... "What am I supposed to say to someone like that? Where does he think I'm going to go?"

Becky said that, because of their negative experiences, some members of the Aboriginal community did not think of themselves as Australian, but as Aboriginal. Nan called this group the "anti-colonials", and said that they refused to engage with the mainstream on

principle. Nan explained the anti-colonial stance in the context of the role of education in awakening a sense of injustice in indigenous people:

When I learned the real history, when I was a teenager, it was quite a transformative experience for me ... you start looking at the world with different eyes, and you know, realizing why things are, and I mean close things, not just abstract or distant, why your family is like it is, and you do become a bit anti-white. There's a kind of identity crisis that Aboriginal people go through ... that is part of the de-colonizing or reclaiming your culture, and so sometimes you can become a bit anti-white, but you need to work through that ... so, part of the cause is reclaiming yourself and your own history, reclaiming that pride in yourself and your culture ... I hear students saying it now ... 'Our culture goes back more than 40,000 years' and that's a fine feeling, knowing that your mob were here on this continent, before the beginning of time ... so it's all that stuff, and starting to look at Aboriginal traditional culture through new eyes, knowing that they were the original egalitarian society ... very immaterialistic and all that ... so, you get right into it and you love it ...

7.9 Affiliations and identity: Schisms in reclaimed culture

The black man sticks to his brethren, and always keeps the rules which were laid down before the white man put foot upon these shores. One of the greatest laws among the Aboriginals was to love one another (Aboriginal chief Burruga, 1933, in Attwood & Marcus, 2004, p. 36).

According to Wettenhall (1999), Aboriginal people have moved through two phases since their dispossession – *resistance* and *persistence* – now they have entered a third phase, *renewal*. Similarly, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2003) has used the terms *resistance*,

recovery and revitalization to describe a progressive movement within Aboriginal Australia. These authors have emphasized that the reclaiming of indigenous culture is equivalent to taking a political stance. Far from being based on a nostalgic “harking back”, cultural renewal has to do with a strengthening of Aboriginal identity in opposition to white projections of their culture as being situated in the past. Cultural renewal is also, in part, directed to the white mainstream, insofar as it presents a clear expression of the statement, “We’re still here.”

In recent years, the surge in the numbers of people who were interested in the preservation of aspects of indigenous culture and identity has been accompanied by a growing tendency to be concerned about specific aspects of cultural heritage, including the heritage and social welfare of particular clans. This shift towards clan affiliations has created new challenges for Aboriginal communities. Nan:

When I started (in the early 1980s) we were pretty well all unified, we were all Aboriginal together and there was very little distinguishing between us, I guess, but now there’s more consciousness of where your family or your original affiliations are from, before they were sort of given but they weren’t that important but now ... I think Native Title has had an impact on that as well ... I don’t think it’s a bad thing, I think it’s a good thing ...

As regional affiliations have begun to take precedence over more global issues of basic rights, differences between groups in terms of history, language, story and ceremony have emerged as central to questions of identity for specific clan groups. Uncle felt that, in some ways, the shift from a national to a local agenda had weakened the fight for

Aboriginal rights, because individual clans were not as effective in lobbying for self determination as were large groups working together. Uncle:

Our people were really united and strong under native title, it gave us a vehicle to stand up on a united front, you know, and be there to support the other mobs ... the Yorta Yorta case was a classic example of not enough support ... people say they were supporting it, but to be there physically, visible, showing their support, that was really minimal.

According to Nan, whose clan background is outside the area where she lives, the moves toward regional solidarity have brought other difficulties. Specifically, some of the traditional custodians from her local area began to assume authority over community members from elsewhere. The result was intra-indigenous conflict within the close community where she worked: “Um well, people started using community meetings to run other people down, it was a sort of airing of grievances, and so the people who were run down obviously didn’t like that, I was one of them, and I didn’t like it at all, and I was a bit pissed off.” Nan attempted to address this problem in a meeting:

I had to approach the people who were organizing it to have a meeting ...just to resolve things and bring to an open table any concerns people had, some of it was because I wasn’t from here, and I can understand that, I know initially when that was brought up it was a bit fearful, because us non-[clan name] thought ‘Well, where do we fit?’ you know, ‘We’re being rejected’ ... that was a bit of a shock to me, it was confusing and frightening.

The initial difficulty, for Nan, was related to the fact that there had been no attempt at open dialogue about how to deal with issues around intra-indigenous differences. Instead of debate being conducted in an open forum, members of the local clan group were worried that their non-local colleagues would be resentful of being left out, so ... “the way they went about doing it, some of them, was not constructive ... it was a bit sneaky and probably a bit frightened.” This lack of openness upset her:

I got really angry and thought, you know ‘How dare they?’ ... But then I thought about it and I thought, hang on, I’m reacting like some of the white people that work with us and we can’t tenure them and we have to move them on after a while and I thought, hell, I’m doing this white thing, you know, this is no good ... that’s when I thought, if you’re into empowerment ... we have to walk that diversity, we have to walk the talk, and I keep on thinking, well, how would I want to interact with white people, and I have to do what I would expect white people would do when we’re asking for our independence and empowerment.

By “walking the talk”, Nan eventually managed to overcome her emotional response to being excluded from involvement in aspects of programs that were directed toward members of the local clan:

We worked through that, and we thought, well, we have an Aboriginal policy ... where we won’t have non-Aboriginal staff in a host of activities, now if we can’t walk the talk ourselves there’s something wrong, so we accept that and honour that, actually ... the issue is that the [clan name] people, people of this particular country, need to reclaim their culture and be proud of who they are, they need to have spaces to go away and talk about [clan name] issues between themselves, its about honouring our differences and our diversity.

Ironically, the resurgence of interest in Aboriginal identity has raised issues around how that identity should be defined. The concept of “authentic” Aboriginality has been a hot potato within Aboriginal bureaucracies in recent times. Questions about authenticity have been highlighted by the revelations of “ethnic fraud” (prominent cases have included Mudrooroo and Roberta Sykes, both of whom have been denied Aboriginal identity by the Aboriginal community).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CULTURAL IDENTITIES

8.1 Aboriginal identity

The only structured question asked of each of the indigenous participants was “How would you describe yourself?” All of the participants described themselves as “Aboriginal Australian”, although with differences in their emphasis on each of these terms. Chrissy said: “I’m Aboriginal, and I’m also Australian ... Koori first ... or, if they say ‘What are you?’ ... I’d say Australian Aborigine.” Uncle and Nan both described themselves in terms of their clan names, which took precedence over both “Aboriginal” and “Australian”. This was also true for Trish, while Graham, Becky and Stuart, like Chrissy, were content to say that they were Aboriginal Australians.

8.1.1 Tradition – the “lost object”

All of the indigenous participants spoke about the negative impact of the loss of traditional culture, and some expressed a nostalgic yearning for an imagined part of themselves that identified with what had been lost. Stuart, for example, likened the Scouting movement’s emphasis on teaching self-reliance skills and bush-craft to his people’s traditional lifestyle “in the bush.” He perceived that the Scouting movement helped to instill a sense of self-reliance, especially in the experience of bush camps, where children in the Scouts became used to ... “depending on Nature” ... and “making do with what they’ve got” ... “like what Kooris used to do, back in the olden days.” Stuart’s reminiscence was similar to Uncle’s description of how he “imagines the old

people” when he travels through country. On the coast, for example, he “can see them making fish traps”.... and ... “see the children playing and hear their laughter.” This form of a rich imaginary appears similar to the Western perception of Arcadia, a lost paradise of an earlier (pre-contact) time.

The complete control over every aspect of indigenous life assumed by successive government and church agencies from the early days of European settlement put an end to many traditional practices in Victoria. Once Aboriginal people were contained on missions, even when they were in close proximity to their traditional country, they were taught in English and punished for speaking their mother tongue. Without access to ceremonial sites, ritual ceremonies could not be performed.

In particular, the removal of children with shared indigenous and European parentage (who were labeled as “half-castes”, “quadroons” or “octoroons”) from reserves and settlements, together with the segregation of Aborigines with mixed parentage from their Aboriginal relatives, effectively created an often insurmountable breach between generations which prevented the meaningful transmission of lore, culture and ceremony as it had evolved pre-contact. William Cooper has provided a moving insight into the impact of forced separations of family members,⁴⁹ when indigenous communities were split along racial lines. In the immediate history of Graham’s family, the tribal (“full-blood”) people were forced (or allowed⁵⁰) to live on the mission, while their mixed

⁴⁹ William Cooper, cited in Attwood & Markus. (2004) *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines’ League*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, ACT.

⁵⁰ So called “full blooded” Aborigines on the mission were given Government rations, which, though meager, were preferable to the starvation experienced by their light-skinned relatives who had to somehow

heritage relatives were barred from it. In some cases, this meant the separation of parents and children. Graham:

The families that were living on the mission, if you were sort of seen as a half-caste you had to go and live outside, they kept people there who were dark, so only the more or less traditional full-blood was left on the mission ... I remember stories about this family on the mission, where the father had to sneak in at night to visit them.

Cooper, writing in the 1930s, could have been referring to Graham's grandparents, or to Uncle's parents.

Because of this breach, many so called urban Aborigines in the Southeastern states have tended to intermarry with whites to a much greater extent than has been the case in other parts of Australia with larger indigenous populations, with the result that southern Kooris tend to be lighter skinned and have less markedly Aboriginal physical features than elsewhere (although this is not always the case). According to Uncle, most contemporary Kooris who live within one geographical area are related through their blood-line, so they can't marry another Koori without leaving the area where they grew up. Selecting a partner from the white community solved this dilemma, but added to the sense of cultural dislocation of Victorian Aborigines. Chrissy stated this reality in plain terms: "The Kooris are getting whiter and whiter."

make their own way outside the mission. Mission rations were augmented by fruits and vegetables grown on the mission, as well as fishing and hunting of game, such as kangaroo. With little or no mainstream education and no access to social welfare, Kooris off the missions survived precariously on seasonal work or unskilled laboring jobs. Many had large families (eight to ten children were not uncommon). Graham and Chrissy said that many of the children of their parents' generation were placed in State care simply because they were starving. Chrissy said that this had been the case for her own mother.

Non-indigenous Australians, including Pauline Hanson, have questioned the authenticity of Aboriginal people with, in Hanson's terms, only a "minute" amount of "Indigenous blood flowing through their veins" (Hanson, 1996, cited in Chamarette, 2000, p. 171). This perception persists despite the efforts of Aboriginal people to educate whites that Aboriginality is not dependent on the colour of one's skin. In a letter to John McEwen, Minister for the Interior, dated December 17, 1938, William Cooper decried the official policies discriminating between "classes" of indigenous people. He described the "discrimination between those of more than half aboriginal blood from those of half white or whiter colour" as "our chief bone of contention over the years." Cooper stated the case as follows:

Do not suppose that the colored folk have, generally, aspirations to be white or possess any regret as being colored. Do not therefore suppose that we feel any different toward any member of our race who is full blood as against one with some white blood. It may shock you to know that, very generally, even octoroons look with more sympathy on the aboriginal side of their ancestry than on the white side. There are exceptions, of course, but these prove the rule. The white man cannot "think black" but I submit that our chieftain, which is your particular position, and the Government, which is our guardian, should set themselves to learn to "think black" (Attwood & Markus, 2004, p. 109).

Cooper's assertion, made so long ago, is in keeping with current conceptualizations of race as a cultural, rather than a biological distinction. As in Cooper's day, Aboriginal identity continues to be constituted through the psychological quality of "thinking black", rather than any physical characteristic. Light-skinned Aborigines are sometimes accused

of “pretending” to be black, ostensibly to gain benefits available to indigenous people. The interview data confirmed that it would be a mistake to equate cultural identity with external characteristics like skin colour. Chrissy explained why the fact that her father was a white man did not figure in the way she identified herself:

... ‘cause to me now, I don’t even feel like I’ve got a white family, ‘cause I just grew up with all my Koori family see ... I can’t act white, ‘cause I’ve only acted Koori all my life, all my white family, they’re from England, so I’ve got to learn up on that. I never met my dad, I just seen him at the funeral, I never even spoke to him ... so I didn’t worry about him ... it’s different, eh, it’s funny ... when you’re going to meet people that’s your own blood, but they’re white.

8.1.2 Hybrid Aborigines

In 1938, William Cooper referred to the sense of alienation that has grown out of past assimilation policies advocating the separation of mixed-blood children from kin as one of the most salient factors in explaining the high level of dysfunctional behaviour among the indigenous population. The evident pride in an Aboriginal heritage expressed by all of the indigenous participants contrasted strongly with Uncle’s assertion that, in the 1950s and 60s, Aboriginal people with mixed ancestry would try to pass off as anything but an Aborigine. Uncle: “They were ashamed of who they were, so they used to say they were from any other nationality, Greek, or Maori, anything but Aboriginal.”

For many, the racism Aborigines experienced in the white community began to be matched by an internal racism, a process that has been described by Franz Fanon (1963) as identification with the aggressor. Over time, many were wholeheartedly converted to

Christianity, which taught them to regard their cultural traditions as “primitive” and thereby initiated the schism between a traditional Aboriginal identity and a Christian identity. Nan described this as the “Missionisation” of indigenous communities.

Becky described how her grandmother “used to put powder on her skin and on her face, because she wanted to be white ... and she ran away at sixteen and married a white man, still pretending to be white.” The conflation of specific cultural markers, including skin colour, with perceptions of “real” Aboriginality emerged as a subject which continued to resonate for the indigenous participants into the present.

In a form of inverted racism, Chrissy described being called a “gubbariginal” by her mother’s cousins, who teased her because of her light coloured skin: “I didn’t like it, because I didn’t know who my father was, and I was calling me Grandfather “dad” ... I used to say, I wish I was black, you know, my skin wasn’t light, half-caste.” Uncle introduced himself with the statement ... “You probably don’t think I look like an Aboriginal person, more like a Greek or Italian.” Stuart has dark skin, and his Aboriginal heritage is more obvious than his fair-haired partner, Trish. His Aboriginal identity was not always recognized, however ...

... sometimes I get mistaken for Mauritius or African American ... Like, I get some Somali fellas walking up to me and that, and ah, ‘How you going bro’, and all this, and I have to let em know, you know, I’m Aboriginal ... Like, when I go into the DEET offices and all that, and they said ‘have you got your Australian citizenship?’ and I say, yeah, I’m Aboriginal.

Ian Anderson (1997) has argued that, on the imagined continuum between black and white, the Aboriginal person of mixed parentage has been represented (by whites) as being without any claim to cultural identity, and that the members of this group were particularly vulnerable to feelings of alienation and worthlessness. This is the group that Franz Fanon (1963) described as “individuals without an anchor”.

Writing from the Tasmanian perspective, Anderson described his subjective response to representations of people like himself (with one Aboriginal and one white parent) as “hybrids”. In his paper, Anderson quoted from a monograph on Tasmanian Aboriginal history published in 1977 by N.J.B. Plomley, “one of the most prolific writers and compilers of Tasmanian Aboriginal history” (p. 7), as follows:

... structurally, physiologically and psychologically hybrids are some mixture of their parents. In social terms [these people] belong to neither race (and are shunned by both), and lacking a racial background they have no history (Plomley, 1977, cited in Anderson, 1997, p. 6).

Anderson, one of the very few indigenous doctors in Australia, described his vivid recollection of reading Plomley as a teenager ... “It made me feel as if I was indeed without tradition and culture”. According to Anderson (1997, p. 7), the “hybrid” is “a potent symbol within the array of colonial constructs of Aboriginality” and, as such, is positioned in a “no-place”:

... the ‘hybrid’ Aborigine inhabits the ambiguous social realm between the world of the coloniser and the colonised. They are between tradition and history, bush

camp and town, black and white skins. But most emphatically they are neither. Sentenced to a liminal zone, the 'hybrid' inhabited what A.P. Elkin (1974, p.379) called a 'cultural hiatus'.

The liminal place occupied by the hybrid Aborigine in white Australia has made this group especially vulnerable to the process of identifying with the negative attributions that have been ascribed to them. Unlike Uncle, Graham, Chrissy, Stewart and Nan, who grew up surrounded by family and extended family, many Aboriginal children with mixed heritage have not had access to the Aboriginal communities to which their mother or father belonged. Becky did not discover that her father was Aboriginal until the age of 21. Prior to this she had no knowledge of Aboriginal culture or the difficulties encountered by Aboriginal people ...

I was really naïve, I remember not long after I'd found out I was Aboriginal, and I was listening to the radio, and it was like the first time I'd ever paid attention to Aboriginal issues, and I listened and I'd think 'God, it's affected me', and I thought, I just didn't know the real story of Aboriginal history in this country.

Asked how this new awareness of her Aboriginal identity and Aboriginal issues had affected her, Becky said:

I was much happier, in a way, when I was the [white] person who was young and silly and used to party ... and I was ... I was light, I was carefree, and then I started to be educated and to see how society really structures people and culture, you know, sociology was daunting to me, and I sat there and I thought ... fuck ... this is a great lie ... and things became more intense, I wasn't as light, I'd lost that

care-freeness ... if you're in the Aboriginal community, like a child in the Aboriginal community is just stacked, the day they're born, it's so political, and they grow up in it, so they don't know the difference.

Becky described her entry into the Aboriginal community as a life changing time, when she was immersed into a different set of values and way of seeing things ...

... and then, once you're in it, you're in it, it's like a big current of a waterfall, or a rapid [laughs] ... and the two worlds are so different, the Aboriginal community is very different, it's very heavy, but ... it's also really nice, it's really warming, and it's nice to belong somewhere.

The impact of the sense that she belonged somewhere was directly related to the fact that Becky had been adopted into a white family:

I had this sense of community and belonging which I'd been looking for as an adopted person, ever since I can remember ... 'Who do I belong to? Where do I belong?' This belonging thing has been huge in my life, so as soon as it was on offer ... it's like 'grab', and if I didn't have that, I would probably be lost.

Becky, who had been criticized by her adoptive parents for "not taking care of things properly", was relieved to find that the Aboriginal community valued her capacity to share and to be flexible about time. Becky recalled the answer she gave to a close friend who had asked her: "Why are you expending all this energy on your Aboriginal side? Why are you doing it?" Becky told her ...

... it just felt right, it doesn't feel wrong, it just felt like ... home ... in a funny way ... a really accepting way ... I love it, you know, even though it's hard sometimes ... and I want to run away from it sometimes ... and I burn out ... but I like sharing things, I used to always get in trouble with my [adoptive] father, and they [Becky's adoptive parents] still freak out sometimes, because I lend my car to people, and I'm always lending my clothes and my possessions to people.

8.1.3 Stolen identities: Aboriginality as a bureaucratic category

William Cooper has outlined how Aboriginal identity for mixed race indigenous people has historically been controlled, monitored and regulated from outside the individual. At Cummeragunga mission in the 1930s and 40s, Aboriginal people of mixed parentage were allocated or denied assistance depending on the "ratio" of Aboriginal to white genetic inheritance. Cooper used the following story to show "...how the gun is loaded against the person of mixed parentage and how many times this circumstance has applied nobody can say":

One of our finest women, very dark complexioned, splendidly educated and who taught bible class in one of our white Sunday schools for many years, became ill ... She applied for an invalid pension, it was refused on the grounds that her illness was not necessarily chronic. Later, she qualified in age for the old age pension and applied for it. She was refused as being obviously more than half native. She [then] appealed to the Prime Minister, who regretted that the law did not permit granting a pension. She then applied for state aid (she should be entitled to one or the other) but was told that as she was more than half white she was not entitled to state aid. When told this, she remarked ... 'I am too black for a pension and too white for relief as a necessitous aboriginal.' She got nothing and her death closed a case which, if presented publicly would have brought matters to a head (William Cooper, 1938, cited in Attwood & Markus, 2004, p. 111).

In his day, Cooper was a strong campaigner against the laws that differentiated between “degrees” of Aboriginality. While strict genetic criteria no longer apply, the definition of who is a “real Aborigine” has remained problematic. Whereas in the past white administrators decided who was an Aborigine, confirmation of Aboriginality is currently approved with the common seal of a Koori organization. Becky and Trish both spoke about the difficulty of establishing a formal Aboriginal identity for members of the Stolen Generations. According to Trish: “Proving your Aboriginality, that’s a really big thing for people, like, I know, to get a loan through ATSIC, or to get this or that, you’ve gotta prove your Aboriginality.” However, if no-one on the board of directors knows an applicant directly, their Aboriginal status can’t be confirmed:

So it’s like ... ‘No, sorry, we don’t know you, we don’t know your family, sorry’. ... and I mean, you know, imagine that, you’ve been lost for forty years, and you find this out, and you come back, and you get this slap in the face ... you know, no wonder people would think it’s all too much ... I can’t deal with this.

Trish reiterated the Aboriginal criteria for inclusion in the indigenous community: “Well, the first thing that you say when you see another Aboriginal person is ‘Where are you from? Who’s your mob?’ ... If you don’t know that, you’re not an Aboriginal ... if you can’t answer that, you don’t fit in anywhere.” This was not a major issue for Trish, since her family connections were well known in Victoria, but ... “for people whose family aren’t well known, it does become an issue ... there are a lot of people out there who can’t get confirmation of Aboriginality.”

If your mother is Aboriginal ... and is still living within the community, that's clear ... whereas other people that were removed, say, their mothers were non-Aboriginal, and they had Aboriginal fathers who passed through a town once, and they wouldn't have a clue. For a lot of members of the Stolen Generations, they're removed because they're, you know, half-caste, they can find out who their white family are, they're told they're Aboriginal, but ... where this mysterious blackfella walked from is unbeknown to me, and where he went ... you know, he's probably dead, that's what a lot of people get ... I can remember my dad talking about that ... something came up at some stage, but because it was his mother that was Aboriginal, and not his father, there was no way that anybody could doubt anything ... you may always wonder who your father is, whereas you'll always know who your mother is, so there wouldn't be that doubt.

Asked whether the "doubt" she referred to was personal or official, Trish explained that it had more to do with official recognition, a concept which is relevant to Native Title legislation:

I just find it amazing that there is a definition of an Aboriginal person, like, is there a definition of any other race based on genetic percentages? The current definition is that you have Aboriginal ancestry, that you identify as an Aboriginal person, and that you're accepted by the Aboriginal community in which you live ... which brings up all sorts of issues for the Stolen Generations, like, just because you're not accepted by the community, does it mean you're not Aboriginal? Because, if you've been removed from that community ... it's a huge issue, with people that were removed coming back in, the racism that goes on ...

The repercussions of not being able to confirm one's Aboriginality had profound effects in terms of both social exclusion and economic disadvantage. The potential impact of these factors on an individual's sense of identity was similarly profound, so that conflicts around the issue of authenticity often led to conflict within and between indigenous communities. Despite the contentious debate around how to deal with individuals who claim to be Aboriginal without the imprimatur of an Aboriginal organization, Nan said that the Aboriginal staff she worked with had been ...

... having a good old time for many years, we've never asked for any identification, and I wanted to introduce some kind of a process where we could get some kind of identification, I didn't want letters from organizations, because anyone can get that ... we finally came up with a statutory declaration ... people just had to put down where they were born, which mob they belonged to ... if they were stolen they could just put down that and at least we'd have it on record.

To Nan's surprise, the response to the idea of providing a statutory declaration of Aboriginal status was profoundly negative:

We had these workshops, and everyone went ballistic, there was so much fear and resistance, and I was amazed ... I mean, these are Aboriginal academics, and they were really fearful, and it sort of spun me out a bit because I thought, here we are teaching Aboriginal issues, but we as individuals are scared when the light shines on us ... that's wrong, something's wrong there, we had an Aboriginal counselor come in and work with individuals who felt threatened, so it was supportive and all that ... but it was quite amazing that we're so strong in preaching and talking about Aboriginality, but when the light was on us, as individuals, we bloody ran for cover mate.

Graham provided an example of the high stakes that are involved in issues concerning Aboriginal identity, from both an external [mainstream] bureaucratic perspective and an internal community perspective. Unlike most Victorian Kooris, who are more likely to have one Aboriginal and one European parent⁵¹, Graham had access to both his mothers' and his fathers' clan groups. Graham had to decide whether to register his name on the Native Title claim of his mother's clan or his father's clan. Graham: "You've gotta be in your own boundary, like that, to claim, and you've gotta be in your own clan to claim." Chrissy added ... "but see, his big worry is that he's got links to that country [names clan group], from his grandmother [father's mother], but he's also from here [names clan group] because of his mother, but he can only go one way." As the law stands, Graham is required to "choose" between his two hereditary clans in order to claim Native Title rights. He can register as belonging to only one of them.

8.1.4 Stuart's story

Because both his parents were from Victorian clans, Graham did not have the opportunity to "go through the law", as did Stuart. Despite the years of preparation, Stuart was ambivalent about the prospect of initiation: "Oh, I guess if I went up there, it'd be a big culture shock on me, because I haven't really been up there, I haven't seen how it really is." Stuart indicated that initiation was not an event, but a extended process of learning

⁵¹ The phrase "just one Aboriginal mother" was interesting in that, later in the interview, Stuart and Trish spoke about a friend who had several women that he called "mum", and that he did not know which of them was his biological mother. Even though it is often stated that so called "urban" Aborigines have lost touch with traditional culture, this example appears to follow the practice of calling all those women who could potentially have married their father "mother".

and experience, enacted through ceremony, which can only take place in one's traditional country (in Stuart's case, his Grandfather's country, in Northern Australia):

We go out bush for months ... there's a certain part, straight up the middle of Australia, where no-one's allowed to go, at all, or if they do go in there they get speared and stuff like that, without doing all the sacred ceremonies and stuff like that ... only the men [the initiated males] can take that track, and if they don't get permission to come on, then they get killed, or at least they get hurt.

For Stuart, initiation would require him to leave behind the life he had built for himself in the city, including his partner and his job, for an extended period of time. "Going through the law" was no simple matter ... "If I went up there I'd probably have to stay up there for a year or so, just to really understand it properly." Stuart laughed, and said ... "I'd probably miss the Golden Arches [the McDonald's symbol], up there in the desert." Once again, the avuncular system was invoked: "Someone would be there to help me out, like a couple of my Uncles from up there come down here and stayed with us for a couple of months, and so, you know, if I went up there, they'd look after me."

8.1.5 "Am I a man or a boy?"

When Stuart was asked about what position he occupied in his family: "Are you the oldest boy?" Stuart replied unexpectedly, "I wouldn't have a clue ... but that's what I mean, I mean I'm not even initiated yet, so I wouldn't know what kind of boy I am, or if I am a boy." For Stuart, the question about his place in the family raised questions about whether he could consider himself as a man or was still a boy in terms of initiatory status, because: "Between up there (Northern Australia) and down here (Victoria), there are

different definitions about what being a man or being a boy means.” When asked if there was a time limit to his decision, Stuart once again referred to his own ignorance:

Oh, I wouldn't have a clue. You know, it's really funny, 'cause if you don't know your own culture, or stuff like that, it's really hard to get a grasp on Aboriginal people, I reckon, in general, that's from my own experience anyway. I feel that, that's what I feel ... just like if, I reckon once I get the gist of my own culture ... I reckon I'd feel more ... like I'd know more ... I'd got ... my identity.

Stuart clearly identified the relationship between cultural knowledge and a sense of Aboriginal identity. For Stuart, this also related to his distinction between being a boy and being a man – there were many aspects of Aboriginal culture that he remained naive about, and there was an inherent sense of emasculation about this ignorance. In traditional (tribal) Aboriginal terms, a boy becomes a man by going through initiation. An initiate may begin the process and not finish it, while others are not invited to take up the challenge at all. According to Uncle, certain individuals in the clan are selected to “carry the law”. In his particular case, his mother chose him from amongst his siblings because he was clearly interested in his indigenous heritage from an early age.

Being “chosen” meant that he was sent around the State to visit the “old people”, where the practice of learning involved sitting around the campfire and listening to the old men talk, often in humpies along the riverbank, or in bush camps. Occasionally, one of the men would convey something of significance, and he would remember it and add it to his store of knowledge. These old men were referred to as “our professors” and the learning context as “our universities”.

8.1.6 Knowing the culture, learning the culture

Stuart described “knowing the culture, learning the culture” as the thing that would enable him to understand himself as an Aboriginal person. His struggle to articulate the depth of feeling and longing associated with these issues was apparent. He would not be fully “a man” until he had gone through the men’s ceremony. Once he had made this transition, he would be able to walk where the men have walked before him (his father and grandfather and so on through the generations). He would quite literally be allowed access to secret places where only the initiated can go. Stuart’s partner, Trish, was jealous of his opportunity ... “I know if it was me, I’d be out of here, I would have been there and back again!” Stuart’s response was more measured. While he affirmed that he was frightened that he might be changed in some fundamental way, such change was expected to be “for the better”. Trish described the response of their friends:

It was interesting to hear some of the other Koori boys saying that they only wish they could be given that opportunity, like that Stuart’s so lucky that he has ... such a rich ancestry and a family in such a beautiful area of the country and that he has the opportunity to go and learn from people, like there are some people in Victoria for whom that opportunity is long gone.

Ritual knowledge held by Aboriginals from remote communities appeared to be regarded with some awe by Kooris who lacked access to such knowledge. Just as his Koori friends were jealous of Stuart’s access to traditional culture, Chrissy spoke with great respect about the attributes of two tribal Aborigines who had come down to Victoria from the Northern Territory to consult with the convener of a local CDP scheme ...

These two blackfellas come down eh, they were real black and they don't wear shoes, just sleep on the ground ... me uncle gave 'em a mattress and a blanket and they just sleep on the ground, and they look at ya, but you're not allowed to look in their eyes, and when they look at ya, you know, it's like they can see right through ya, I just couldn't look at 'em, look into their eyes, like ... it made me feel funny ... if you're Koori, you have to do what they say, and if they want to track you down, they'll grab a piece of hair and they'll find ya.

Some indigenous people have advocated a return to specific aspects of traditional culture. For example, there was a debate about the appropriateness of customary lore in some Aboriginal communities (in the media, this debate was centered on issues of “payback” for crimes committed by Aborigines against other Aborigines in remote communities). Graham mentioned that some of the younger men in his Victorian clan had “gone up North” and come back with ideas about using customary lore (in this case, spearing an offender). This kind of “warrior” stance appealed to Graham ... “people need to understand what they're trying to do and support them, but a lot of people won't because they know a lot, they know a lot of things that a lot of other people don't.” Nevertheless, Chrissy, disagreed that Victorian Kooris should emulate the cultural practices of people from other states:

The thing is, these guys go away [to remote communities], and then come back and try to teach other culture here ... but you can't do that either, eh ... what they learn from other old people [Elders] in another part of the country, well you can't bring it back here and teach it here.

This comment highlighted that social order in Aboriginal communities continued to rely on regionally specific authority structures. As with Stuart's comment that he would "miss the Golden Arches" in the desert, Graham also wondered how he might cope with the realities of traditional culture in a remote community:

If you ask me, I wouldn't know how to live if I went up there, because I'm not used to the heat, and they walk around with bare feet and stuff, like if you're used to shoes and clothes on your back ... [laughs] ... but they all still talk in language and stuff, and that's good.

This last comment from Graham was indicative of the general consensus among the indigenous participants that a return to the "traditional" life was a seductive but impossible dream. For Victorian Kooris, one of the difficulties was that traditional, or tribal culture, would have to be "borrowed" from elsewhere. Chrissy pointed out the fact that such borrowings would hold the danger of creating a pastiche of indigenous culture, which would undermine the importance of local knowledge. The same was true for Nan, in her State:

We can never go back, because, you know, things have changed. I think some people erroneously think they can get a pure traditional way of operating, but that's not realistic, what you have to do is look at some of the cultural aspects, there's a lot of bastardization that happens too, which sort of distresses me, and I think we have to be realistic about how we move into the future.

Nevertheless, the idea that important aspects of indigenous culture could be reclaimed was appealing. More than this, the loss of cultural knowledge was linked to a sense of

personal inadequacy, or shame, for some indigenous groups in Southeastern Australia.

Penny, in her work with members of Melbourne's Aboriginal community (Kulin nation), noted that this group appeared to be more fragmented than groups outside Melbourne:

The Wurundjeri are the most fragmented out of all the tribes, because they were the ones that were in Melbourne, and they were the ones that were decimated, everybody else outside Melbourne, even though there were massacres and stuff, to some extent they have some sense of ... well in a lot of cases they have stayed connected with country and have a sense of who they are. Like, the Yorta Yorta, from up around Echuca on the Murray, they have a lot of artists and are culturally relatively strong. As a result ... the Wurundjeri are just so fragmented in themselves, and socially and culturally. It's like ... we haven't got all the information, everything's in fragments, they're broken up ... they've lost those links ... it's like something's broken.

Stuart's story illustrated the reality that Aboriginal people who live in remote communities tend to have retained access to language and culture in ways precluded from the majority of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Chrissy could not speak more than a few words of her ancestors' native tongue. The problem for Chrissy was that there was no one in her clan who was fluent enough in the local language to teach it:

... I can talk about it [language] with some of me family, but they're not interested either, only me sister, and me grandfather, and one of me uncles, we're the only three culture people out of my whole family, and that's it ... I've got about eighty in my family, but there's only four that's interested ... and out of Graham's family, out of his brothers and sisters and mother and father, there's only him ... and so now it's more or less us teaching our family, and we've got to

learn for ourselves, see, 'cause our parents, they taught us some things, like fishing and walking tracks and that, but that's about it.

In terms of the losses which have resulted from past practices, Stuart empathized with Kooris whose cultural heritage was less accessible than his own, but argued against the assertion that it was lost altogether ...

... I don't think our [Aboriginal] culture has got lost, because it seems to me that, they know where it is, it's probably just harder, too hard for them to find it, 'cause they didn't really have their ancestors there to help them out as much as they do up North in Broome and places like that.

8.2 Reconstructing culture

Since the early 1990s, the emphasis on cultural renewal (Wettenhall, 1999; and Moreton-Robinson, 2003) has included the desire to redefine regional differences between clans. Some groups were beginning to reconstruct their cultural heritage from remnants. In some cases, dances and songs have been re-created as they "might have been", through close observation of the movements of native animals and birds that are specific to particular regions. Stuart spoke about an indigenous man he knew who had started a dance troupe in Victoria ...

Yeah, 'cause see, like he's sort of like, trying to find his culture, but probably trying to find it for himself, and um, doing all this dancing and stuff that you might think, um, you know, this might be some kind of cultural experience that I'm having and, I don't know ... not trying to start a whole new one, just reconstructing the culture that was always there.

Penny had seen the dance troupe perform and made the following comments from a white perspective:

Actually, this is all males, and they keep bringing the younger ones in, so there's little boys, younger brothers, and they're bringing everyone in all the time, and they're into it, so it's [from the audience perspective] a matter of wondering what's going on ... there's all these little boys wandering around in loin cloths, with their white paint on their bodies, and they're not black, which is how most [white] people perceive them ... 'What the hell are they doing?' But when you know who they are, you think, yes, they're trying to work this out [their Aboriginal identity], and in a way it's really good, because they're taking all the boys who might otherwise go out and take drugs, or commit suicide, or commit crime, or whatever the potential is for these boys, and try to bring them into a situation where they're learning something ... so now their question is, 'What are we learning? What do we know?' So when dancers come down from Queensland, and they've got, you know, their kangaroo and their emu and their everything, so these boys are now beginning to differentiate between, ... 'Oh, that's them, but this is us', and how do we do something, if that isn't what we can do ... can we come up with something else?' ... so that's where they're at.

Nan described something similar in her State:

I think that there's a renaissance happening, that's very marked ... there's a move back to reclaiming culture, in a big way. I think it was spoken about previously, but it wasn't done to the magnitude that I'm seeing now ... people are right into relearning their languages, rediscovering the protocols, or trying to come up with adopted, ah, adapted protocols for a new way of going about business, you know, there's a lot more talking happening ... here in my State we have had a particular

movement, which was about reestablishing the local nation, but also looking at cases from other clans, you know, the protocols ... who speaks to who, who has the right to discipline or caution or encourage or support, whoever ... they were trying to get some shared protocols on ways of doing things and bring the community together.

Nan used the example of one of her colleagues, a man who belonged to the clan group from the area where she lived and worked, to illustrate the process of renewal:

He's re-learning his language, and for him to follow his path as an Aboriginal, an indigenous man, he needs to be able to speak his language, and to observe some of the cultural protocols, so he's actually relearning something, believe it or not, he's learning from a non-Aboriginal person, because an old [clan name] man, who had all the language, when he was getting really old and starting to die, none of the younger men wanted to listen to him and to take his language and stories, but there was a white anthropologist who was prepared to do that, he's a very good bloke, we actually hired him to transcribe all the tapes that he did, and so, he became the link, and the old man passed on, we're trying to get money to have all his stuff written down, recorded and archived and used, so in a generation or two, no one will know that there was a glitch in the linking there.

Trish and Stuart described how inadequate they felt when they went to New Zealand as part of a cultural exchange program and discovered that, as indigenous people from Southeastern Australia, they had very little to actually exchange. Their poverty of cultural knowledge was all the more embarrassing in the face of the abundance of riches on offer from other indigenous Australians as well as their New Zealand (Maori) hosts: Stuart ...

... when the other Koori people went over there, they could talk some of their lingo and stuff like that, and, as with us, we were just like ... couldn't do it, and even over there, with the Maori people and all that, they could talk full on in another different language, and um, you know ... have their own language there and talk English as well, you get little two or three year olds, little kids talking their language and all that, but over here you don't see that at all.

Trish picked up the narrative ...

... and then there was this cultural ceremony where each different group would get up and sing a song or do a dance, or um, you know, something that was significant to their people ... and I mean, there were people from Western Australia and from South Australia there, and the Northern Territory, who all still have their language, and Queensland as well, and yeah ... there was kind of like ... Victoria and New South Wales ... yeah, and we didn't really feel that we had all that to contribute in that specific part of the conference ... that [cultural exchange] was very much the highlight and focus of the conference, which also made it ... um, I guess, a lot more apparent to us as well, like the conference started with a huge cultural ceremony and finished with a huge cultural ceremony ... I mean, we don't even know any Victorian song, or dance.

Stuart and Trish described the absence of cultural knowledge as a form of missing “capital”, the deficiency of which was only evident to them when they were placed in the position of comparing themselves with other indigenous groups. This underscored Stuart's earlier reference to the idea that he would not fully understand what it meant to be Aboriginal until he learned more about his own culture. These reflections indicated that Kooris in Victoria suffered from a lack of which they themselves had been unaware

until it was reflected back to them through exchange with others. For Stuart, this lack needed to be addressed through education, as it was in New Zealand:

... it all starts from pre-school, their (Maori) cultural identity, 'cause like, over here, we only hear about when James Cook come, like over here you start reading about James Cook and stuff like that, that's the only time you get to hear about the culture over here, like you don't get it from pre-school all the way up to university.

Recognition of how much had been lost was associated with a tendency to regard traditional Aboriginal culture with a positive bias, while the accompanying awareness of the current gaps in or absence of cultural knowledge was described as “embarrassing”. In rural Victoria, Chrissy and Graham had grown up in their respective Aboriginal communities, but had only begun to seriously and actively research their indigenous cultural history in the last ten years. They expressed a sense of urgency about the need to learn from a diminishing group of Elders who still had access to cultural knowledge.

8.3 The transmission of knowledge

Just because a person wanted knowledge, however, didn't mean that they would be given it automatically. Becky, who had grown up outside the Aboriginal community and had now decided to wholeheartedly “go with my Aboriginal side”, described how she was still coming to terms with the differences between mainstream and indigenous concepts of knowledge, learning, and teaching:

The way knowledge is handed down in the Aboriginal community is very, very different [from the way knowledge is transmitted in mainstream society] ... knowledge is respected very differently ... and you have to bide your time, you can't just go in like a bull at a gate and expect people to teach you the things you might want to know.

After nine years of involvement with the Aboriginal community, Becky felt that she was only beginning to understand something of these differences and to learn something of her Aboriginal culture. One major difference noted by Becky was that Aboriginal people were less likely to recognize status according to a person's professional qualifications. In mainstream culture, such credentials lend status and may act to open doors, whereas Aboriginal people tended to regard individuals with professional qualifications, whether black or white, with suspicion. Another obstacle that Graham and Chrissy had encountered in their community was the extensive integration of Kooris into the mainstream culture and the adoption of mainstream values at the expense of traditional knowledge. Chrissy:

See, the thing with the Kooris that marry whitefellas, whether it's a man or a woman, there's only, like in my family, there's about six of my Aunties and Uncles with white partners, but there's only one that understands the Koori ways. The others do but they don't, they don't care about culture when you go into their house, or anything ... there's a lot of Kooris around here that don't even worry about culture, there's only so many of us that's interested in it ... and it's up to us to keep it going, to teach our kids so they can learn, and then teach their kids.

According to Chrissy, the majority of the people who have retained cultural knowledge have kept it to themselves, but ... “Now they’re starting to come out into the open and other people are starting to learn.” Asked why these people had been reluctant to share their knowledge, Chrissy said ... “There are a lot of old fellas who don’t even like talking about the past, eh, because it’s a bit painful for them.” Uncle said that many of the old people “keep their knowledge to themselves” out of fear that it could be misused by the recipient. Knowledge within Aboriginal communities is only offered to certain people who can be trusted with it. In the absence of a suitable indigenous recipient, Aboriginal people have been known to share their knowledge with a white person who has gained their trust⁵². Paradoxically, Aboriginal communities are sometimes reliant on information about cultural practices that was gathered and recorded by social scientists in the past.

For example, sound archives which contain recordings of native speakers of Aboriginal languages lost to current generations have been particularly helpful for the reclamation of those languages, and the same is true for archival film footage of ceremonial practices. Nevertheless, many questions remain about some of the anthropological data generated by white researchers and historians. Uncle was particularly scathing of white researchers who purported to be experts in indigenous culture ...

I was at a conference once, and this whitefella gets up and starts talking about Aboriginal culture this and Aboriginal culture that ... and I stood up in the audience and I challenged him, I said ‘Well, Mr. so and so ... you’re standing up there claiming to know all about my Aboriginal culture, might I ask what right you have to go about saying that you’re an expert?’ ... and he said, ‘Well, I’ve

⁵² Ted Strehlow and Bill Stanner, as respected “friends to the Aborigine”, were entrusted in this way.

studied indigenous culture for twenty years', and I said 'Oh, yes, well, in all that twenty years, the only things you would have learnt are the things that we were willing to tell you' ... that put him in his place.

Uncle pointed out that white experts only knew ... "as much as we want them to know ... I'm an Aboriginal person, and if you're asking me, I'll tell you what I want to tell you, whether you believe it or not, whether it's true or not."

8.3.1 Gendered knowledge: Men's business and women's business

The transmission of knowledge also emerged as a being highly related to the gender of the receiver. The indigenous participants appeared to understand gender in terms of the specific roles played by men and women. Chrissy: "When we're all having a drink, or at a family birthday or just at a party, all the boys are this side and all the girls are this side, then later on we all mix in together." The researcher commented that this occurred at parties in white mainstream culture as well, but something seemed a little different in what Chrissy was saying. She elaborated:

All us girls will just talk about the kids, but the boys will talk about work or culture side ... so, if I walk over to my partner they'll say 'Get away, it's men's business' and I'll just walk away ... they're talking about things they don't want you to know, see.

When her partner, Graham, was asked whether the men really were talking about things the women shouldn't know, or just using "men's business" as an excuse to have some privacy from their wives and girlfriends, he said:

Ah, no ... a lot of the times we're just talking about things that it's not appropriate for them to know, you know, we've been working towards something or working on something, yeah, just time together to talk about different men's things ... we'll probably talk for a little while, then afterwards discuss what we've talked about, then sort of mix in and we can talk about anything then.

Later in the interview, when juvenile justice was being discussed, Graham returned to the issue of men's business ...

We had a men's meeting last year, and these were the sorts of issues that came up, how do we deal with young people, or any of our Koori people in the community that's muckin' up with their wives, you know ... how do we deal with them as responsible Koori men ... so, we sort of wanted to get together all the Koori men and the older ones together and go and have a camp somewhere and talk about how we can deal with these sorts of issues.

The separation of men's business and women's business within indigenous communities bore little relationship to the tendency in mainstream culture for men to go off to talk about women and sport (although no doubt indigenous men, like their white counterparts, also partake of this type of social interaction). Uncle:

It's not my place to teach the young women, that's the women's role to do that. If they're not doing that, all I can do is remind them, now and again, you know ... you're not being responsible. I want to take more young blokes out in the bush, that's something that's very important that I want to do more of ... they get caught up in drugs and they get lost ... the young people, the young men

especially, it's really important for the men, to do their culture ... and they need to take more responsibility.

Uncle emphasized that culture is something that you do, as opposed to something that you have. Doing men's culture involved spending time in country with other men ... "I want to spend days with them, you know ... say to them, this is where your ancestors lived for thousands of years and looked after it faithfully, so, are you going to be like the whitefella and abuse it, or are you going to be responsible for it?" Asked why the young men in particular were vulnerable to becoming "lost", Uncle said it was because ...

... they've got no guidance by their Elders, there's been a breakdown for a long, long time." [He added] ... a lot of the older men have got lost too, they've got caught up in the scenario of what's out there today, drugs, or gambling. They haven't got the knowledge, you know, it's about you being responsible.

Chrissy described the difficulties for young Aboriginal people who were trying to gain access to cultural knowledge through the Elders' system. One problem was that there were many gaps in the transmission of knowledge, so that often the Elders themselves had nothing to guide them about important decisions. Chrissy said that the Elders were sometimes ... "making rules up as they go along, and they've gotta cut that out ... 'cause they're confusing us while we're still trying to learn."

8.3.2 Cultural artifacts or cultural fictions

For Trish, the longing for cultural knowledge was partly assuaged by learning from books. Both Trish and Stuart were inspired by the historical and cultural information

presented in Wettenhall's (1999) book *The People of Gariwerd: The Grampian's Aboriginal Heritage*, with an introduction written by Tim Chatfield, one of the indigenous custodians from that area. Stuart commented with pride on the timeline presented in the book ... "from 200,000 years before present, and, yeah, 100,000 years before present, this is what happened in that time, and then it would say something about what happened then." Trish: "Yeah, it's just amazing ... [laughs] ... think about how they made things work for 50,000 years and think about how things work now".

Similarly, Chrissy and Graham referred to published texts when explaining aspects of their heritage. One book contained archival material gathered by a white anthropologist who had worked extensively with Victorian Aborigines early in the twentieth century, and contained individual portraits of Chrissy's tribal forebears, including her great-grandmother and great-grandfather, as well as photographs of ceremonial sites and corroboree. There were also detailed scale maps showing tribal boundaries and detailing how the five clans of the tribe were placed within those boundaries. Chrissy valued this book so highly that she would not let it out of her sight.

Both Chrissy and Graham had the relative advantage of growing up in their traditional country and knowing their clan affiliations. Graham: "Yeah, we know where all the families are and stuff, and know everyone that's pretty much interested in having input in that sort of stuff." Local knowledge had been maintained, largely through the continued isolation of Aboriginal people on mission stations, such as the one where Graham was raised by his parents. Chrissy: "The people that live on the missions, they don't live

around whitefellas, there's just all Kooris out there, that's where a lot of the old fellas are based, it was the old fellas that kept it [cultural knowledge] going." As Chrissy pointed out, however, not everyone was interested in learning about cultural heritage. She was one of very few in her family who took an active interest in learning about the past.

This was one reason why Chrissy relied heavily on published material. Learning from books was, however, partial and piecemeal, and fraught with many traps for the unwary. This was particularly evident where historical knowledge has been based on observations and written reports from non-indigenous "experts". As has been discussed above, Aboriginal cultural knowledge was highly gendered and segmented according to status. Initiated men and women were allowed to access information that was forbidden to the uninitiated, men could not know women's business and visa versa. Trish spoke about Bunjil, the creator of Victoria (although even to say that he was the creator of Victoria is misleading, since State boundaries are not the same as clan boundaries) ...

I mean, these days, everybody calls him Bunjil, but back then it was Bunjil only to initiated men, and everybody else had to refer to him as something else, so, you know, there are a lot of things like that, it constantly comes up.

The European academic tradition, which holds knowledge as a universal right, has led to the assumption that knowledge should be equally available to all. In Aboriginal society, by contrast, the fact that someone knows something does not necessarily mean that this knowledge can or should be shared with others. Certain kinds of cultural knowledge have been restricted to particular individuals and groups, so that such a universal approach is

problematic. Initiation was also highly localized, certain places were reserved for ceremony, and these were also gendered as men's places and women's places. An example of the importance of these factors to protocols surrounding the transmission of knowledge is given below.

Aboriginal people are renowned for their beliefs in spirit worlds and supernatural phenomena, and, traditionally, these beliefs were often related to areas of knowledge that can be roughly defined as secret and sacred (see, for example, Berndt & Berndt, 1999, pp. 259-287). In the current study, participants were not asked to divulge anything of a secret or sacred nature, but occasionally the interview data touched on topics of this nature. On one such occasion, Chrissy described the following incident:

My sister's boyfriend, he went in the bush ... he saw these arrows, or he thought it was arrows, the way the sticks was laid, and then he showed me some pictures in a book, the same place he went, and there in the bushes was an old blackfella's face with paint all over it, I spotted it and I got scared ... and I was still scared ... over this picture in the book, and I showed my sister and I said 'there' and she couldn't see it, she said 'Where?' and I said 'There, he's looking at ya', and when she seen it she got scared, the scaredness came out of me, then she was scared until someone else seen it, so she showed Graham, and when he seen it she felt alright, but she still won't look at that book today, and she won't show me books when I go over there, because I might see something, every time I look in a book I see a face or something ... I was really scared and I nearly had a cry, I said to Graham ... 'Whoever took this photo shouldn't have been there, or, they've taken it and he was there, watching 'em' ... it could have been men's business, see. Graham said: 'That's the feeling I got, that females shouldn't have looked at it'.

Uncle placed great importance on respect for cultural artifacts, like stone axes and grinding stones, which he believed contained spiritual power. Such items needed to be placed in a safe environment, where they could be preserved and where their spiritual value was appreciated. In the wrong hands, these objects were thought to be dangerous.

Chrissy: “If you find a stone artifact, like someone we know, he found some rocks somewhere, and he was getting sick, eh ... and we had the rocks at our house for a while, and things started happening, so we took ‘em to the museum.” Graham:

You get a sense, a feeling from touching objects or things, if you’re strong about your culture, you will feel funny if you pick something up, you know that you’ve got something very strong, and very sacred, and it’s obviously been used by the old timers, we’ve got to take it somewhere where it will be properly looked after ... you know that you can’t keep them in your house.

According to Graham, these objects did not need to be sacred as such [ritual objects], but could be “objects that were used on an everyday basis, in the times when they were used.” The same was true for certain locations. In the area that Graham and Chrissy lived, there were “still a lot of sites that we don’t know of.” This created the danger of inadvertently wandering into a forbidden place. Chrissy described how she felt on such occasions: “... even if we go to a cultural site, we get spooked, and get the feeling that we’ve gotta go, ‘cause someone there don’t want us there, some old blackfella eh? Or, something’s happened there.”

The phrase ... something’s happened there ... is an oblique reference to the way Aboriginal people feel when they come across a burial site, or, perhaps, a massacre site.

Uncle, the oldest indigenous participant, held a lot of knowledge about such places, most of which remained unmarked⁵³. Previously, Uncle made the point that many ceremonial and burial sites were not marked so that they would not be vandalized. Occasionally, a massacre site betrayed its dark history by place names like “Butcher’s Ridge”.

Archeological surveys in the rural area where Graham and Chrissy lived had found several important sites on privately owned farmland. Often, artifacts were revealed when major works programs were implemented, such as the laying of gas and water pipes through freehold and publicly owned property. As a relatively recent development in their region, an indigenous cultural officer was supposed to be alerted whenever anything of significance was found during survey work or in the actual digging. Graham:

There’s a lot of farmers with Koori artifacts on their land, like, there’s a lot of grinding stones down by the river flats, but they won’t tell anybody because they think we’re going to claim their land, we don’t want their land, we just want to know that the artifacts are protected.

Some farmers, by contrast, were open to idea of protecting the cultural heritage of the area. Graham:

There’s one farmer, he’s got some grinding stones, where they used to sharpen stone tools, he’s still got them in the ground on his property, he wants to work with us to get a grant so he can build a fence around ‘em, so his cattle don’t go trampling all over ‘em ... so that’s a good example ... but there’s this other

⁵³ See Clark (1998) and Gardner (1983), for archival evidence concerning massacre sites in Victoria.

farmer, he won't talk about what's on his land, 'cause he thinks we're going to claim it.

This was a reference to a Native Title claim currently being negotiated by the area's traditional owners. Sites which show Aboriginal presence are important for the claim process, because they prove prior Aboriginal occupation. The fear that local indigenous groups may make a claim on privately owned land has made some farmers wary of disclosure. Chrissy said of one local farmer: "He knows what he's got there ... but he's not saying anything." Graham, "We've got the local shires and the land managers, and farmers and people like that, we've got an awareness program going, so they become aware of Koori places, our sites ... and our culture ... and our cultural history."

8.3.3 Burn out: Struggling with the cause

Because of his position as a community Elder, Uncle believed that the transmission of cultural knowledge to young indigenous people was a critical part of his Aboriginal identity ...

You have a duty, 'cause if you don't teach them, who is going to teach them?
Like I say, I don't know how long I've got. I've done so much ... I've done more than enough. My family members are saying to me, when are you going to stop, when are you going to do the things that you need to do? ... I say, you're missing the point ... if I don't go out there and do it, there's no-one out there doing it, so we're gonna set up another cycle of generations, with nothing being passed on.

Uncle spoke about the high level of commitment required to educate young Kooris about their cultural heritage: "It's about putting the effort in ... I gave the commitment, one

hundred and twenty percent ... as well as meeting my dues and paying my taxes and meeting my responsibility to my family.” Clearly, this commitment did not come without some cost. Nan spoke about the dangers for Aboriginal people who get caught up in working for the cause ...

Whenever you get involved in any social justice issue, especially if you facilitate the development of a program or initiative, you tend to get bound into it, which is good, for a short term, but it can be bad for both you and your initiative if you continue that, you can get burn out ... it sucks you dry.

Uncle’s years of commitment to the cause had placed demands on his health, so that his family had begun to urge him to retire from community politics. However, for Uncle, the struggle was a duty that he had inherited (from his mother and grandmother), and he therefore felt that he had little choice about being involved. One of the difficulties Uncle encountered was the apathy and indifference within his own indigenous community:

I could see the need to do it because the rest of our mob are sitting back and not being proactive ... people are assuming they can leave it up to the Government to look after Aboriginal people in terms that they relate to ... whether it be in health, education, land rights issues, the arts or social justice for indigenous people, but the mob, they’re not prepared to get up and make a public statement, to confront the issue head on, whereas I’ve always done that, and I will do it till the day I die, I will stand up and will not let people put us down, because our struggle is ongoing ... it’s a struggle that has gone on for more than two hundred years ... and for some families, within those families, the struggle has meant speaking out.

As a senior man, Uncle had devoted a great deal of his time and energy to his “nephews”, of whom there were ... “twenty or more in Victoria, plus some more in New South Wales ... I’ve been taking them through and talking to them.” Not all of the young people were receptive, however ... “Some that just come and listen, they don’t want to hear it ... it’s not for them ... they get caught up everyday in what they’re doing, every night the other culture, the drug culture meets their needs more.”

8.4 Horizontal violence

For those working within Aboriginal communities, the struggle to maintain a sense of self was often impeded by the level of dysfunction that needed to be addressed day to day.

Becky, who had been involved with an Aboriginal organization set up to help members of the Stolen Generations to locate their Aboriginal families, saw part of the problem for Aboriginal people working in positions of responsibility in terms of the unconscious processes of projection and projective identification ... “you take stuff on ... like, if it’s your issues, you recognize it, and you pick up the projection of what might be underlying in the person you might be working with.” Becky thought that indigenous people who worked in professional roles within the community were especially vulnerable to projective identification because ...

... in all the areas of Aboriginal issues that you can look at and you can research, because you’re an Aboriginal person and living in an Aboriginal community, it’s going to affect you no matter what, whether it’s Stolen Generations, it affects you in all sorts of roundabout ways ... it affected me quite directly, because I was adopted, but if you were working with substance abuse, that’s affected you, if you were working in family support, that’s affected you, you’ve been in a family

within the community, if you were working in the legal field, you know ... because it's not the subject content, it's the family issues, it's the people that you know, it's the whole framework, you can't work from nine to five and turn off.

For Becky, the need for debriefing was largely unrecognized within indigenous organizations, despite the fact that Aboriginal workers were prone to have had personal experience of many of the issues confronted by their clients. Becky thought that debriefing was essential to prevent burn out, because it would help indigenous workers to ... "recognize that [the client's issue] as a foreign thing ... if you weren't so personally affected, it's quite easy to work out which is your stuff and which is your client's stuff."

The difficulties of working with clients with complex needs were not limited to indigenous workers. John had experienced the phenomenon of horizontal violence first hand. On one occasion, he had been "shirt-fronted" at an indigenous community meeting. Issues of power had also emerged at his workplace, where he was the organization's only non-indigenous employee. John, being white, said that it was easy for his Aboriginal co-workers to put him in the place of "the oppressor" and that he sometimes felt ostracized. Becky spoke about how one non-indigenous worker was treated by her Aboriginal clients ... "she's getting pretty burnt out, she's doing the youth work, she's getting the run around with the community and they're trying her out, like some of them are abusing her." Becky attributed the "trying out" of white workers to systemic "underlying stuff", of which both parties may not be consciously aware.

The tendency to give workers a difficult time also applied to non-indigenous people working for Aboriginal organizations, despite the fact that many of them were as deeply committed to social justice as indigenous people themselves. Penny, the community artist, outlined the thinking that had led her to work with Aboriginal people:

I've really always wanted to work with Aboriginal people because I think that, in Australia culturally, that we have to ... that I as an artist have to, because it's an element of how I perceive things should be ... It's a cultural identity thing, you know, it connects to what Keating's thing about creative nation was about, like 'Who are we as a nation and where are we going?', and I think that, down where I am, if we aren't able to get along, we're going to go nowhere.

Penny expressed the view that the ruptures between Aboriginal people and their cultural base in Victoria had led some groups to be very aggressive about reclaiming their culture. Fred had been surprised by the level of animosity that existed between clan groups, with one group vying for power to make decisions over another. Like Penny, he had found that the rivalry between clan groups had made negotiation difficult at the community level ... "they hate each other, they hate each other's guts." At one point, this hatred had been directed toward Penny by one of the indigenous coordinators of a community arts project she had been commissioned to undertake ... "She was hostile, her attitude was hostile, just generally", Penny said.

Like John, Penny felt that she was being tested, and very nearly gave the project up. She thought this was a common problem for whites trying to work in partnership with Aboriginal people. Penny commented: "All this is so detrimental to Aboriginal people,

because it's so divisive ... everyone just puts their hands up and says 'There's no way. I'm not going to get involved in this', and they walk away." The community arts project was finally able to go ahead only when a *détente* was achieved between Penny and the "hostile" coordinator. Two factors enabled Penny and the coordinator to reach an agreement. Firstly, in relation to the anger projected onto her by the Koori woman, Penny said that she had only managed to stay with the project by "taking my ego out of it." Secondly, the coordinator had made an attempt to explain her feelings of hostility:

She [the Koori coordinator] said to me, by way of explanation I suppose ... 'Look, we are culturally imposed upon by European society (or white people or whatever), ... other Aboriginal tribes, they're imposing on us too, the Yorta Yorta are imposing on us, the Queensland and Northern Territory Aborigines that come down to Melbourne, they're imposing on us, everybody's imposing on us' ... That was what she said to me ... so I thought, oh, ok ... and after that, you know, she was ok. We might even become friends eventually.

Becky attributed the hostility directed toward whites by the people they were trying to work with to the processes of projection and projective identification ... "it depends why they're coming in, maybe if they're more of a victim type, they might become a victim, and they want that [to be abused] ... if they've got a thick skin, then they might be able to carry a bigger load." For this reason, Becky thought that non-indigenous people could contribute productively to indigenous organizations. This view, however, was not shared by all indigenous people, some of whom were openly antagonistic to employing whites in Aboriginal organizations.

Freire (1970, pp. 30-31) warned about the danger of oppressed peoples becoming “sub-oppressors” by forming identifications with those who hold power and adopting the oppressor’s “model of human-hood”. Without regular access to professional supervision or peer debriefing, the worker’s unresolved psychological issues make them vulnerable to unconsciously identifying with split off part objects which their clients have projected onto them. Workers who engage with severely damaged clients before they have adequately addressed their own psychological issues, were said to be in danger of enacting their victim status (by unconsciously inviting attack), or alternatively, of themselves becoming an abuser.

John said that he had managed to calm a couple of “tricky situations” down by being quietly assertive. John’s adaptive response to being “tested” in this way can be positively contrasted with workers who may, in Becky’s terms, be “more of a victim type” (sometimes called the “wounded healer”). Becky’s insight, that the worker with a “thick skin” does not identify with the projected material and can therefore recognize the issues that the client is unconsciously exposing and work with them appropriately, can be illustrated by Penny’s observation that “at best you need to be sensitive to it [the aggression], but not sensitive in yourself, because otherwise you can’t handle it.”

8.5 Unresolved grief

Becky thought that the main underlying issue within Aboriginal communities was one of unresolved grief ... “It goes back deep, in my personal opinion ... I can see that the whole community nationally is grieving, grieving from land, from mother, the whole

connection, it's never been addressed, so that grief is never spoke [sic] of in that kind of terminology." The grief for loss of land, which was synonymous with "mother" in Aboriginal culture, had never been symbolized. Becky went on to describe the intergeneration effect of this unexpressed grief:

... you bore a child into that grieving environment, it looks for ... it has that energy and it looks for what it's grieving for, doesn't know it, it's disconnected, and then it causes havoc, to find that grief spot, and then you've brought another child into that, and it's never been addressed and it's the land and the removal and the thing is that the Elders in this community are the Aboriginal community, they've [whites] gotta listen to the secrets that the community have and know, the knowledge, it's not even secrets.

In this passionate speech, Becky attempted to express something about a common indigenous experience that she felt had not been articulated adequately, and therefore could not be symbolized. Her speech, usually articulate and fluid, has become fragmented and disjointed, with several ideas thrown together in her hurry to include all the associations. Becky nominated the lack of recognition that white Australia gave to the knowledge held by the Aboriginal community as a whole as being closely linked to the trans-generational transmission of grief. In turn, the frustrated attempt by individual indigenous people to search for the cause of their grief, from which they were "disconnected" created turmoil ("havoc"), which was then expressed as maladaptive behaviour. Depending on whether the individual concerned was prone to externalizing or internalizing their emotions, the behaviour would be characterized by either explosive anger or depression, or cycles of both.

At the policy level, however, politicians and their representatives often remained emotionally distant from the material circumstances of the indigenous people they purported to represent. Trish, who had been present at a meeting of State representatives to address issues raised by Wilson and Dodson's (1997) *Bringing them Home Report*, was prompted to reflect on her own experience:

Well, it was interesting, when everybody had left ... there were people from the Commonwealth there too, who weren't Koori, who had no idea, saying some of the most inappropriate things like ... basically that it was years ago, get over it, you know... 'How many implementation reports do we have to do? Do we have to report on this every year for the next thirty years?' Like, 'When is it going to be over?'

When pressed, Trish elaborated on the feelings that such statements provoked in her ...

It makes me feel angry, to think that they can say that, like, there's not an Aboriginal family in this country that hasn't been affected by those policies. Like ... my dad was put in a boy's home at the age of eight, until he was eighteen, for stealing a pram, because he wanted the wheels to make a billy-cart ... like ten, you know, **ten** years ... and I mean, he doesn't have good relationships, with his family ... his parents had passed away by the time he'd got out, you know, all sorts of things had happened with the family, which highlights the difficulties ... and then he goes out and starts his own life and they don't ... you know, terribly accept his partner, which is my mum, which ultimately affects me, because I wasn't able to get in touch with my Koori relatives ... as a young person I had more of an attachment with my mother's family, and it wasn't until I was old enough to go out and make that decision for myself, when I was about fifteen, to

go out and start hanging around the Koori community ...so, from eight to eighteen in a boys home, and there were some other Koori boys there too, but it's not the same as being brought up in the community ... and I think about those things when people say 'What are people carrying on about? ... and I think 'Look, that's affected me.'

The failure of white Australia to recognize and respect Aboriginal knowledge was suggested as a contributing factor to the difficulties that generations of Aboriginal people have had in identifying what has been lost. Trish and Becky, both members of the Stolen Generations, have argued that, because the loss has not been properly symbolized, Aboriginal people (as a whole community) have not been able to process their grief. It was suggested that this may explain, at a fundamental level, the relatively high levels of dysfunction within the indigenous community. This is why an apology to the Stolen Generations is so significant to Aboriginal people and why its denial is akin to adding insult to injury.

8.6 The “Tall Poppy Syndrome” within Aboriginal Australia

In the early chapters of the thesis, the concept that Aboriginal people “naturally” sat at the bottom of society was presented as a phenomenon of whiteness. The indigenous interview data highlighted the specific difficulties that Aboriginal people have encountered in their attempts to be both successful and to belong. Belonging, according to the participants, is predicated on how the term Aboriginal Australian is construed, not just by the white mainstream, but by Aboriginal people as well. A major source of conflict within Aboriginal communities had to do with the perception that “real”

Aborigines should not be seen to put themselves above others. Nan questioned the logic behind this way of thinking:

I think there's a lot of confusion in what is an Aboriginal way, so we say, you know ... 'So-and-so doesn't do this in an Aboriginal way', but what is an Aboriginal way? We might, say, mix up working class white ways with Aboriginal ways, so that culture of poverty etc might be perceived as an Aboriginal way, but it isn't, I mean, just being poor doesn't make you any blacker than any one else, just means you're poor and black ... that's why this renaissance is really important, so we start looking for good and positive ways of expressing our Aboriginality.

The sense of inclusion that Becky felt when she discovered that her father was Aboriginal was linked with the concept of caring and sharing, but, for the indigenous contributors, the expectation that resources should be shared also created severe limits around any aspirations they may have to achieve on an individual level. Stuart reflected on the fact that he was sometimes mistaken for a Mauritian or an African American in terms of a general perception that Aboriginal people are associated with a certain class:

I cop that a lot, like it's funny, 'cause they [whites] probably don't expect an Aboriginal person looking like me to dress up and look as nice as I do and ... most Aboriginal kids my age are either not in a job or they're looking a bit scruffy round the edges.

This exchange initiated a conversation about the ways that Aboriginal people have internalized the identification as “underdogs”, with the result that successful Aborigines are often denigrated by their peers. Trish reminded Stuart of the reactions of their

(indigenous) friends when visiting the couple at their new house ... “Remember the reactions we had when we moved in here ... every person that’s walked in that door, the first thing Kooris say ... ‘Flash Blacks’.”

8.6.1 “Flash Blacks”

The term “Flash Blacks” provides an example of the way Aboriginal people are prone to be critical of other Aboriginal people who are doing well because they are perceived to have adopted the values of the white mainstream. It refers to upwardly mobile Aborigines who show signs of doing well economically, usually through having access to stable employment and/or positions of relative power in the mainstream community. In Stuart and Trish’s case, the term is indicative of the fact that they live in a new house, dress well and work in areas of employment that offer reasonable salaries.

In mainstream terms, Stuart and Trish represent a fairly standard demographic – the young couple without children who are both working to pay off a mortgage (often referred to in mainstream society as Double Income No Kids, or DINKs). In Aboriginal terms, however, they are unusual, hence the term Flash Blacks. The term can be both affectionately self-deprecating and insulting, depending on who is using it. Upwardly mobile and educated Aborigines appear to be tolerated as long as they place their Aboriginality above all else. To be called “flash” is to be charged with deliberately diminishing others by making them feel envious and of low standing (Williams, 2006, personal communication).

8.6.2 “Tall Poppies”

Nan was especially incensed about the tendency of Aboriginal people to judge others.

Nan linked this to the “Tall Poppy syndrome” which she thought reflected a more general attitude within the broader Australian community:

I know my family are proud of me, and that includes my extended family, that I've become someone of consequence, but actually, having a university qualification ... ah ... I've only recently come to my own thoughts on being qualified and my statement now is, I'm sick of apologizing for my good luck that I've had in life ... 'cause there's always in the community, the more amorphous community now, there's always a resentment and a mistrust from so-called grass-roots, towards Aboriginal people who are well qualified, or are seen to have 'made it' ... there's always a demand like, well you must be a coconut to get there, and what are you doing for your people? ... which I think is really unfair and unacceptable ... I used to go around feeling guilty for having a decent job and stuff like that, and that's not only for me, that's for all Aboriginal leaders, they're always being run down ... I think it's an Australian thing that us Aboriginal people have picked up on ... I mean, has there ever been one prime minister that we've liked a little bit? We liked Gough [Whitlam] but only after he was kicked out ... there's this colonial mentality that blacks and whites have against figures of authority, we basically hate them, and we're trained to hate them. We run down every single prime minister and politician we've had ... there's never ever going to be a John F. Kennedy for us, 'cause we just don't have it in our psyche to allow that to happen ... Aboriginal people seem to have picked up on that, and we seem to really want to cut down our tall poppies with a vengeance.

8.6.3 “Nine-to-five blacks”

According to Nan, *nine-to-five blacks* is a term used to describe ...

... those who work in an Aboriginally marked job, but you're only black from nine to five and after that you're white ... it's all about challenging someone's identity and saying that they don't act in an Aboriginal way, but, if we reflect and look at the way we behave, maybe we don't act in an Aboriginal way either.

Asked for an example, Nan said:

This is largely community politics ... for example, an old lady that I know well said it, which is a bit distressing, she said “people are only nine-to-fivers” ... when people aren't doing what you expect them to, and you get disappointed with them, so you have a go at their identity, and it's about their commitment to the cause too, I think, ... but then again, that's your own disappointment, it isn't about their identity, but people do get pressurized, I know that when we came to live here, there was a suburb that was very much an Aboriginal suburb, a bit like Fitzroy in Melbourne and Redfern in Sydney ... there was no way that I was going to live there, I'd live close to work or whatever's convenient for me, it wouldn't really matter where I lived, but a friend of mine who's Aboriginal deliberately chose to live in the equivalent of Redfern, so that people wouldn't say things about her, and I think that's wrong.

8.6.4 “Coconuts”

Coconut, along with Flash Blacks and Nine-to-Five-blacks, is a derogatory term given to Aboriginal people by other Aboriginal people. According to Nan, such terms are insulting in the extreme and are used to cut down the tall poppy: “It's a way of saying that they

might have Aboriginal blood but they don't act in Aboriginal ways." Coconut refers to being black on the outside and white on the inside, and is similar to Thomas King's⁵⁴ reference to "apple" as applied to Native Americans (red on the outside and white on the inside). According to King, the term apple, like the term "Uncle Tom" applied to African Americans, is the worst possible insult one could level at a Canadian Indian. To call an Aboriginal person a coconut is a method of exclusion. Like Nan, Uncle was frustrated by such negative attributions:

I'm very strong about our rights and what the things are that need to be put right for us ... and if I have to use the media for that I will ... and a lot of people out there think that I'm putting myself up on a pedestal, it's the tall poppy syndrome ... and I get that from a few people in my immediate family and also from my extended family... you know, they say 'Oh, he's doing it again' ... but, the only way to be heard is to speak, you know.

Nan attributed the hostility directed toward successful Aboriginal people to fear:

There is a fear that some people will get too big and they'll be representing us, and they'll move away from us. Like, you know, I accept that Pat Dodson and Mick Dodson and Aden Ridgeway and all those people speak for me, because they do, they're speaking about the Aboriginal issues. But I trust them and I think, well, good on them ... and I accept that they do speak for me ... maybe they will reflect some diversity, but the core issues will be there and we've just got to trust and have faith. I think why people get resentful ... there are probably a number of issues ... one is a genuine concern about what others are saying on my behalf ... whether you like it or not, when you get to that level you're representing the

⁵⁴ Thomas King presented a series of lectures on the experience of Canadian Indians on ABC Radio National's *Away!* indigenous arts and culture program, in 2004.

whole of the Aboriginal people of Australia, personally I think it's fine, but most Aboriginal people don't like it.

A second major concern was ... "what if they get too big and they're just using Aboriginality to feather their own nest and not really caring about the people, and that's a valid concern." The notion that some Aborigines "feathered their own nest" was critical to the distinction between "working for the cause", being a Nine-to-Five black or being a Coconut. When Becky was asked why she thought Cathy Freeman was never described in a derogatory way, while other prominent Aborigines were, she replied that she thought it was because Freeman had never taken advantage of her Aboriginality:

She's not a Flash Black, she's not swankin' it ... um, she's never used her Aboriginality to get where she is ... like maybe Flash Blacks and coconuts do. Flash Blacks have ridden the backs of ... have used and manipulated ... and taken on white values ... yeah, that's it, isn't it? It's the tall poppy syndrome, Flash Black's more about arrogance, and self love over community love ... whereas Coconut is taking on white values, I reckon that's far more of an insult ... and you also work in a white man's way, you think in a white man's way ... you really are white. Coconuts are people that have sold out.

Uncle said that he was taught by his mother and some of his uncles, that ... "to speak the whitefella language, you've gotta be smarter than what he is." This was sometimes interpreted as being a Coconut. Uncle stressed that this placed his people at an impasse, because if no-one spoke up, Aboriginal interests were not properly represented ... "Someone has to speak up. If the rest of the mob are going to sit back on their mooms [backsides], and say nothing, people are not going to listen because they're hearing no-

one.” In the face of criticism from other indigenous people, Uncle drew strength from his grandmother, who was:

A great spokesperson ... she wrote many letters to Government about Aboriginal people’s rights, in the late 19th century ... she had a very strong mind in terms of being outspoken about the rights of her people ... and, I’m the only one in my family, in that bloodline, that’s been very strong in that as well, in speaking out.

Nan also wanted to make it clear that Aboriginal people were no different to any other group when it came to petty minded jealousies:

... being honest now, I think there’s a lot of jealousy and small minded pettiness and ignorance, I mean, do you ever read the local paper and read the letters to the editor? ... We’ve got lots of that kind of small minded shit thinking in the Aboriginal community, you know, as much as the white population, just ‘cause they’re Aboriginal doesn’t mean they’re wise and spiritual and all the rest of it, they’re just as ignorant and dumb and everything else as any other given population ... there is a tendency that as soon as people become pro-Aboriginal, white people and Aboriginal people, we think that all Aboriginal people are sort of saints in disguise, if only we could get them to stop drinking or get them to do this, they’d be just bursting out with this spiritual bloody shit and, you know, the world would be transformed. It’s a lie, we’re just normal human beings, what I’m proposing is just a natural humanity.

When she was asked what purpose such canonizing might serve, Nan replied:

I think that we tend to over-gloss the victims of social injustice, whether it’s ourselves or another group of people, and in our earnestness to try and change

things and recognizing inequity, we tend to explain everything in terms of inequity ... when you become pro Aboriginal issues, you see them [Aborigines] through different coloured lenses than if you look at any other person, which, on the one hand, you need to do, but I'm saying that you also need to appreciate and respect their deep cultural diversity.

8.6.5 The “New Assimilationists”

When Nan was asked about the tendency within parts of the white community to polarize Aboriginal people as either welfare recipient no-hopers, or, alternatively, to represent them as deeply spiritual beings, she replied as follows:

I think it's about positioning, I think it's a white issue, I call people like that the New Assimilationists, because they actually come and work with us, or study with us, and they've got their own ideas, and they're very positive on what Aboriginality is, and when we don't talk in ways or meet what they expect Aboriginals to be, they don't really want to listen to you and they have already preconceived and romantic notions and they want you to fit into that.

I've experienced it, they then invalidate you in different ways ... they say, that might be you, but other people, I've spoken to this blackfella here and that blackfella there and they feel blah, blah, blah. They put your opinions or position against a lot of other ... you know, mythical or anonymous Aboriginal opinions which um, may or may not be true, but because you're not being spiritual or collective, or suiting their images or imaginings of what real Aboriginal people are like ... I think that white people want something from Aboriginal people, they want certain images or imaginings ... like ... white film-makers, when they do a story about Aboriginal people and whites, they want the whites to be really oppressive and bastards ... and that sort of ignores the very good relationships that Aboriginal people and whites have had.

8.6.6 The underdog has to remain an underdog

For Nan, one of the problems with identifying so strongly with Aboriginal disadvantage was that it precluded Aboriginal people from expressing ordinary needs ... “if we aren’t in a terrible situation then we’re invisible” ...

We do this artificial dichotomy where we get the worst of the white and we create an image of whiteness which is really individualistic, capitalistic, a sort of caricature, and then we get, at the other end of the dichotomy, the caricature of the Aboriginal person who is very caring and sharing, in touch with the earth and so on ... and they’re good tools to use to make sense of things, but most people believe that they’re realities, and they’re not, they’re constructs.

Marcia Langton wrote that about film-making, but I think that’s true even in the academy, because I notice that when I’ve done some work, everyone wants to share the hard luck stories, even when you go to a conference, I don’t want to hear your, you know ‘Oh yeah, I had a good life and got on well with my neighbors and that’ ... if you do that, the audience all sort of look at you blankly, but if you say ‘Yeah, they said I’d never succeed’, they all go, ‘Yeah!’ they love it. It’s all done very, very subtly, but even when you interact with audiences as a black person, they want to hear a black narrative, they want to hear a story of suffering and oppression and shit, and then triumph, that’s what they want to hear so that they know that they’ve invested philosophical things in you that can then be realized ... they are really rooting for the underdog here, you know, they’re right.

Uncle provided another view of “upwardly mobile” indigenous people. As discussed above, Uncle had devoted a great deal of time to supporting young Aboriginal people, especially young men, to gain a good education to enable them to meet white bureaucrats

on equal terms. The very success of these endeavours, with more young indigenous people gaining professional qualifications, had led to unexpected intergenerational fractures within Aboriginal communities. Uncle explained:

You get someone going through, the younger ones, and because they've got some piece of paper or something that says they're highly intelligent, that they're 'smart blackfellas' ... they're [government bureaucrats] more inclined to take notice of them than some of the Kooris that never had that opportunity, or privilege, to get an education ... you can only speak from the wisdom and knowledge and experience that you have ... therefore they're more inclined to take notice of the person with the papers, because you have to be pretty smart to go to university for four years ... but, there are people who haven't had that, but have lived life experience in their education ... and the wisdom that they've seen through their eyes in the changes in what's happened to their people ... surely that means something?

Uncle thought that there was a danger of some young people abandoning the cause once they had entered the "white system":

When they get into the white system, and they see what the system in time can give them ... security, benefits, superannuation ... it leads to a situation where they say, 'Well, I'm pretty comfy here, so ... I'll just write a few things with paper, and hand them to my superiors, and hope they take notice of them, but I'm not going to challenge the decisions that they make' ... some will and some won't ... some will ride the gravy train, and that's what it is, when they get in there, they've got the security of a job, and I suppose they think 'I'm alright Jack' ... maybe I'm wrong in saying that, but that's the way I see it, I don't know.

Nan saw things more moderately, perhaps reflecting her own position:

I think anyone who's got a job and attempts social change, whether that's radical or tame, or whatever, that's still part of the cause, I don't think you need to be wearing your Aboriginal land rights tee-shirt and flying a flag down the main street to be part of the cause, I think you can be wearing a suit and tie and chipping away quietly in some Government bureaucracy, in fact, just the fact that you're there as an Aboriginal person is a change.

8.7 Internalized racism: Denial of denial

Nan described the process whereby successful Aboriginal people were denigrated by others within the Aboriginal community as “denial of denial”:

My big beef is the denial of denial, see, what's happening for us is that, in our generation, there's been times when people have been very ashamed of being Aboriginal, my mother and my grandmother grew up on missions, and they wouldn't have come out of there thinking, 'Wow, I'm so proud to be Aboriginal', or, you know, 'I'm an oppressed indigenous woman', because of those influences, they would have carried some internalized racism and some self-hate about who they were, even though they were embedded in their culture, and I think most people [now] in their forties, probably during their growing up days, there's been some times of embarrassment or shame when they actually wish they were white, and we've gotta talk about that, but no-one ever talks about that, 'cause we're scared that if we do, someone's going to say 'See, I knew they were a Coconut', so there's a lot of dishonesty about disclosing too much of our identity because if we say certain things we'll be seen as less Aboriginal.

In Chapter Four (Section 4.1.1), Lacan's distinction between imaginary and symbolic identifications was discussed with reference to the relation between the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal. As Butler (2005, p.53) has pointed out, our first, "instinctive" conception of identification, takes place on the level of the Imaginary. At this level, we "identify with the *image* of the other as an ideal-ego. It is an image in which we appear 'likeable to ourselves', with the image repeating 'what we would like to be', and that we feel potentially reflects us." These are the imaginary identifications that are so often formed with powerful and attractive figures, such as movie stars, popular heroes, great artists and intellectuals.

The process of identification, however, is not that simple – not only because we often identify with negative stereotypes – but also because the complex relation between the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal means that this imaginary identification cannot be grasped outside of symbolic identification (Zizek, 1989). As Lacan (1953) has explained, the "I" that we use to describe ourselves is constituted during the Mirror stage through the look of those others who were internalized as an ego-ideal. In symbolic identification, we identify not with the specular image, but with the *gaze* of the Other, not with how we see ourselves *in them*, but how we are seen *by them*.

According to Zizek, the fundamental dimension of ideological representations is not that ideological constructions are illusory representations of reality, but rather that it is "reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological'." This means that our most sincere and intimate beliefs are "decided and staged in advance," we already believe

without our knowing it, and our belief is only subsequently materialized in the external world. In other words, we believe unconsciously (Zizek, 1989, p.12).

In *The sublime object of ideology*, Zizek (1989, p.24) explained the mechanisms through which identifications with less-than-appealing characters are formed in terms of “a certain ‘fetishistic misrecognition’ which concerns the relation between a structured network and one of its elements.” Zizek argued that, what appears to be an immediate property of one of the elements, in this case, Aboriginality, is really a structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements. Aboriginality, therefore, cannot be considered outside the structural relation between indigenous and mainstream Australia.

Because we do not identify “directly through ourselves, but only through another” (Butler, 2005, p.53), the ‘ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence. An individual’s identification with one or other particular “brand” of Aboriginality will therefore depend on the various ways that the concept “Aboriginal identity” has been externally constructed and later internalized as constitutive of the subject. For Zizek (1989, p. 12), the subject is therefore ‘anchored’ by all the possible ideological representations of him/herself that were present in the symbolic order before he/she was born. This explains why conceptions about ‘Aboriginality’ seem to depend on who is speaking, and why they can alter over time. It also goes some way toward helping us to understand why some Aboriginal people feel a great deal of pressure to conform to someone else’s idea of Aboriginality.

8.8 Manufacturing Aboriginality

Mark said that, because of the fear of not being “black enough”, some Aborigines have reinvented their past so that they were “More impoverished or more cultural [than they actually were], they talk about how they were brought up learning language and tradition, and that’s bullshit.” Mark described people known to him personally who had “blatantly reinvented” themselves:

They say they were born under a tree and grew up in a tent, and I know they haven’t, but that’s fascinating though, the urge that people have to reinvent themselves, now that it’s cool to be Aboriginal.

Nan gave an example of the extent to which some people that she knew had gone in order to “reinvent” themselves in ways that reflect Zizek’s (1989) “fetishistic misrecognition”:

There was a girl I knew who became a well known performer, and I’ve known her for a while ... she actually grew up thinking she was white, because she looks white, and she found out she was Aboriginal later, and she had to deal with that ... but in her story, she writes that she grew up with her Aboriginal grandmother who taught her [Aboriginal] culture, I was amazed.

Nan, however, was defiant about not reinventing herself ...”when I was young and growing up, I was **too** black, and I wasn’t good enough, and now that I’m an adult, I’m not going to go and change myself” [to fit in with someone else’s ideas of being

Aboriginal]. On the other hand, Uncle described how many Aboriginal people are prone to thinking that they should put themselves into the hands of whites, thinking that ...

... he knows best, and he'll tell us what we need to do, and he must be right, 'cause look what he's got ... he owns land, he owns property ... he has a new car every second year or whatever ... so he must be an intelligent man, to have all those things.

As early as the 1930s, William Cooper had described the internalized a sense of inferiority as a "complex" (Attwood & Markus, 2004). Nan spoke at length about how Aboriginality was constructed: "There's a lot of distressing things that happen that I don't agree with, and they're done in the name of Aboriginality, and they're not really, it's just some people having a go." Nan thought that the fear of exclusion had contributed to a sense of not wanting to stand out too much from the crowd for many indigenous Australians:

So, you hold back and you don't act too flash ... there's a lot of negative things about conforming, which I don't like ... I think they're very stifling and suffocating of us, you know, claiming our own empowerment, personally, and I've noticed that ... I've read interviews of young Aboriginal actors or whatever, in magazines ... and they're always going on about the community and the cause and this or that, but it's almost like an apologetic rant, you know, like if they don't do it, people are going to think that they're bigger than themselves, and there's an apologetic manner that is manifest in many of our leaders and our actors and singers etc, etc, that shouldn't be there, and they know, because our people know that, our people are jealous.

The tendency to conform to an Aboriginal ideal may also lead to greater acceptance of certain individual Aborigines by the whites with whom they interact. Nan: “There’s some people I know, who are Aboriginal, who all the white people love, for some reason ...” When Nan was asked what it was about these people that made them attractive to non-indigenous people, she said ... “White people like Aboriginal people who speak their language, or they like Aboriginal people who fit the very Aboriginal picture of Aboriginality.” The stereotyping of certain kinds of behaviours and mannerisms as helping to define the “real Aborigines” for white Australians was highlighted by Mark’s description of an Aboriginal performer with whom he had worked closely:

Probably, I think his troubles are all about identity, identity ... because he looks the way he does, it’s easy for him to fool people into thinking that he’s something that he’s not, very easy, especially white people, and that can get you into a lot of trouble, ‘cause then you can start to live a delusional life, you know, it’s easy when you’ve been playing this other person on the screen ... you know, when I first met [name’s indigenous actor], he spoke like me, but now when you speak to him he’s got [mimics] ‘dis real blackfella accent like dat’ ... ‘cause that’s a character that he’s developed, and now he’s playing that character all the time, a lot of actors do it, not just black actors, but ...he’s got that terrible thing of being stuck between the cultures, you know, you see it happen to a lot of people. A lot of the people that you meet, especially the men, are really fucked up people ... because they’re stolen, they’ve been abused as children, every one of them, you know, so when you meet a group of people that have all had the same experience, and some of them deal with it better than others.

Penny described observing a similar phenomenon among Kooris who try to “invent who they are ... you can have a miserable life and you can have no money, but you can

bullshit your way ... it's like being adopted, you can kid yourself about who your parents might have been, if you don't like the reality, or you don't know, you can make yourself up." According to Nan, Aboriginal people often contribute to stereotyping, because ...

Overall, as Aboriginal people, we do have an identity problem, I think all of us are scared of being found ... ah ... missing, or inadequate in our identity, so I think by running other people's identity down, we can take positions and make ourselves feel better, yeah, there's a lot of negativity.

Nan was outraged that "traditional Aboriginal" values were invoked to chastise certain behaviours (for example, a female Aboriginal Olympic athlete posing nude) as "un-Aboriginal", when the origin of the notion that nakedness was shameful in fact came from missionaries, thus the term "Missionisation" ... "That's a good example of people bastardizing our culture and speaking without any information or knowledge, but just because they're Aboriginal they think they can say it ... and that's not good enough."

For Nan, however, there was no place for whites in questions around what constitutes "authentic" Aboriginal culture: "That's a debate us blackfellas have to have. I would tell all white people to just stay out of it and watch." When it was suggested to Nan that white people had no real options but to accept anything that an Aboriginal person says about Aboriginality, she agreed ... "Well, that's got to be a part of it, I mean, we don't know what the truth is." Barry, in answer to the question "Do you think there is an indigenous way of doing things?" said:

No, I don't think there is, it's an interesting term, because what we've found is ... the whole notion of pigeon-holing indigenous is one of the fatal flaws that I think everyone falls into, you read, you listen to the news, you know, Kooris do this, indigenous do that ... what is common to indigenous people is that they're indigenous, there is nothing else that's common to them, their politics, the way they think, the way they've been brought up ... I mean, by the way they've been brought up in history ... there's commonalities there, don't get me wrong, but the way the group thinks is completely varied.

Mark made a similar statement:

We [whites] need to get the idea that all black people are the same thing out of our heads, you know ... there's five hundred nations. It's like saying a Hungarian person and a person from Norway are going to have the same culture, 'cause they aren't ... and a person from Melbourne is not going to be the same as someone from East-Arnhem Land ... not even close ...

Mark hoped that, in the future, white Australians would come to value Aboriginal culture along with the people who are the traditional custodians of that culture:

I hope that we whites will identify Aboriginality as belonging to Australia and as a precious heritage and will not want it to die out. [I would like to see] the people become part of our own ability to identify as Australians in a way which allows pride and not shame.

Mark's hope was tempered, however, by his experience with members of the Stolen Generations who continued to "exist at the very bottom of the society." On the other

hand, Nan's optimism was based on the generational changes she had observed in her lifetime:

I've been reflecting about how things were even in my mum's and my grandmother's time, and I'm really grateful to be at this point where I am now, and even fighting the cause I think this is the most exciting time too, I think it'll be boring in the future ... who says it ... bell hooks⁵⁵ ... 'There's joy in the struggle', and there's still joy in unity in the struggle, so there's still a bit of that, but I think it'll be over in due course.

In answer to the question of what might happen if Aboriginal people were no longer the cause, Nan replied: "I think that we as a society will find another minority group to oppress, and they'll have to fight for their rights." Nan's vision of the future was positive:

I envisage in the future, like in a hundred years time, Aboriginal people being part of society but being really ... I dunno ... respected ... you'll have had the odd politician, you might have even had an Aboriginal Prime Minister by then, but I think we'll be more clear on what these people represent, so like, we'll have Aboriginal politicians, but they'll represent everyone, so, you know, they won't be like ... you see Aden Ridgeway and you think of him as the Aboriginal representative, we'll see him as representative of Australian society, but he happens to be Aboriginal ... and Native Title will have been and gone by then, so people will be locked into local areas and there'll be positions, you know, they'll be powerful in their own right, and maybe we'll be more fragmented too, there'll be a greater concern with local issues, which as I said we're already seeing, now people talk about themselves as not being indigenous, but belonging to a particular tribal group, so you can sense that already.

⁵⁵ bell hooks is an African American cultural theorist.

CHAPTER NINE: SYMBOLIC SOLUTIONS

9.1 The unconscious structured like a language

In chapter one, the concept of language as a social institution was discussed in terms of Wittgenstein's (1953/1968) notion that the narrative realities of individual actors are inevitably played out on the social stage, through the social institutions circumscribed by language games. Buhler's (1934/1990) explanation of the way language functions to position us within the deictic and symbolic fields elaborated on this idea to argue that inclusion in both fields through language is critical to identity because, without the semblance of a meaningful communication that can be shared with others, we risk alienation and insanity.

Silverman (1996, p. 80) has stressed the normative nature of unconscious idealization, and suggested that ... "it is unfortunately the case that the subject more often than not libidinally affirms what is culturally valorized" and that "The objects which are repeatedly represented by a particular society as 'the ideal' can exercise an almost irresistible attraction."

9.2 Symbolic inclusion

The poor self image of many contemporary indigenous people was linked to the fact that positive representations of Aboriginality were rarely available in the past. All of the indigenous contributors to this research strongly endorsed the need for the Aboriginal presence in Australia to be represented in positive and constructive ways. Even without

the granting of Native Title, formal recognition that Aboriginal people had custodianship of the land prior to white settlement was regarded as very important, as was the acknowledgement of a continued Aboriginal presence.

The sense of inferiority that many Aboriginal people have internalized through what Nan described as the Missionisation process was beginning to be transformed into a pride in an Aboriginal heritage. Much of this pride emerged during the period that has been described as the Reconciliation Decade (1990-2000), a period marked by significant attempts by both indigenous and white leaders to provide an accurate survey of the failures of past practices and to make recompense through symbolic measures, best encapsulated by the sentiments expressed by Paul Keating at Redfern Park in 1992.

Nan, Chrissy, Graham, Trish, Stuart and Uncle all said that younger Aboriginal people were growing up in a different Australia, in a generation where many more opportunities to develop a sense of pride in their indigenous heritage were being offered. Graham reflected on how the inclusion of Koori programs in schools had a positive effect not only on the self-esteem of Koori children, but on their relationships with their white peers ...

I think that, just with the attitude now, with a lot of the younger kids, you know, that might empower Koori families and probably the same with the Koori kids that have gubba friends and stuff ... it's good for the young kids that they've got the opportunity to have friends ... that they can bring, you know, white kids home to their place and that's no drama.

This resonated with Mark's (somewhat ironic) comment that it was now "Cool to be Aboriginal" and presented a stark contrast to the stories told by the participants about their own school days, when they were called "dirty abos" and worse. Graham and Chrissy emphasized the need for Koori children to get a good education, but one that would enable them to be fully functional in both worlds. Chrissy: "That they could get a good education **as** Kooris, and know their rights." Graham and Chrissy's parents and grandparents had a difficult life. Chrissy:

Now that we've grown up, we can get around to see our Aunties and Uncles, Elders, then we ask them questions ... "What was it like for you growing up?" ... and then they tell us, that's how we know they all had hard lives, our life is easy in comparison ... we had a house to live in ... we never lived in tin sheds and that.

The racism that Uncle had encountered at primary school deterred him from attending, so that he received no formal education beyond grade three. By contrast, Chrissy spoke about her daughter's enthusiasm about school: "I think ... just to talk about our kids, just the way they're ... looking at their reaction and the way they mix in with white kids and stuff." The current generation of primary school aged Koori children mixed with white children to an unprecedented degree. Graham, who was raised on the mission surrounded by Koori families, described his initial response to facilitating his children's friendships by interacting with their parents: "It was a bit scary the first time though, taking them to a gubba's house." Things were different for the community Elders in Graham and Chrissy's area as well. Chrissy:

They're just glad that, now we've got a Koori Co-op, and, you know, they've got different programs, like now there's a medical center, an Elder's hostel, they started building through the mid-seventies and the eighties ... and they're run by particular families, things are just made up of different family members.

The "families" corresponded to particular clan groups, based around regional centers which were able to determine priorities and decisions about programs funded through local Aboriginal Co-operatives, based on the needs of local groups as determined by community Elders. Programs such as these, which had been initiated in the 1970s and 1980s and further developed through the 1990s, had contributed to both a new sense of pride in Aboriginal identity and a greater awareness of indigenous issues in the mainstream community. The awareness that many white Australians shared a desire to include Aboriginal people in the narrative of nation was heartening for all of the indigenous participants. Nan saw the mainstream rejection of the anti-Aboriginal policies of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party as indicative of positive change:

The Pauline Hanson incident ... I thought that was absolutely riveting ... the way the media and the people reacted to Pauline Hanson ... it really united us against the enemy, and the media gave her a bit of stick, I mean, no-one was sympathetic to her ... all the (protest) rallies everywhere she went ... I thought that was quite amazing ... maybe ten years ago or twenty years ago, she wouldn't have got that [criticism] ... I do these checks where I look back on how it was ten or twenty years ago, and if you ask me we've moved ahead a million miles ... I mean, people get fearful and say she represented all the closet racists and that, and yeah, she did, but at the same time, what I noticed, was the other side of it, how the whole world, pretty well, there was no-one I spoke to who endorsed her, you know, everyone, black, white, the whole lot, so I think that she did a lot of good,

because people came out publicly and disagreed with her opinions, a lot of [Aboriginal] people see a lurking sort of racist population there, and that may well be, but what I noted was how white people came out against her, I think she represented a silent minority, not a silent majority.

9.2.1 The metaphors we live by

In contemporary Australia, cultural “brands” for white Australians include landmarks, such as Uluru and the Sydney Opera House; native fauna, including the emu and kangaroo as represented on the Australian Coat of Arms; the bushman’s Akubra hat and oilskin coat; the Eureka Stockade flag; the iconography surrounding the Kelly legend, especially as represented by Sidney Nolan’s series of *Ned Kelly* paintings; and the slouch hat worn by Australian Imperial Forces at Gallipoli and elsewhere. In a very literal sense, cultural markers act to *brand* us, while at the same time providing the illusion that the choice of brand is our own.

Nan referred to the paucity of positive representations of Aboriginal people as she was growing up, and reflected on the impact that negative representations had had on people of her generation and her mother’s generation, even to the extent that their Aboriginality was so fractured that they “wished they were white”. For Nan, the recent proliferation of Aboriginal “things” in public spaces, including the Aboriginal flag, represented an important shift in the national consciousness toward an inclusion of Aboriginality itself.

Aboriginal artifacts, like the boomerang and didgeridoo, have also been incorporated into the Australian psyche, but, stripped of their functional and ceremonial value, these

objects have often been reduced to relics of anthropological curiosity by the white mainstream. In the absence of the true inclusion associated with respect, Aboriginal people have sometimes used irony and “black” humour to turn the tables on whites. Uncle told the story of how Melbourne’s annual Moomba Festival (held on what used to be called Labor Day each year) was subverted by Aboriginal people:

Years ago, when they were looking for a name for a festival, they talked to my old Uncle in Melbourne and said ‘Listen, Mr Onus’, they said, ‘could you give us an Aboriginal word meaning festival?’ ... and he was a pretty smart old blackfella see, and he said, ‘I’ll fix these white people up, they don’t know our language’, so he said “Moomba”, which means your backside, your bum, so we call it the Moom Festival – the festival of sitting on your backside [laughs] ... every year, when Moomba comes around, the Aboriginals think, you silly gubba, if only you knew what it really meant.

Richard Frankland (2004⁵⁶), made it clear that indigenous people continued to gain great enjoyment from the joke against “them silly whitefellas” perpetrated so many years ago. Satire, as the only tool available to marginalized minorities, can be a very effective means of enabling the members of minority groups to cohere around a shared identification and to maintain some semblance of self respect through shared subversion born out of resistance.

⁵⁶ In a panel discussion about indigenous humour on ABC Radio National’s indigenous arts and culture program, *Away!*

9.2.2 Renaming country

Along with support from the grass-roots level of the political sphere, a new sense of pride accompanied the recognition of the traditional relationship between clan and country. The use of Aboriginal words, including the replacement of colonial names with Aboriginal names: Ayer's Rock/Uluru (handed back to the traditional owners in 1995); Gariwerd/Grampians, was seen as very important. Uncle, in the field trip interview, had reflected positively on such initiatives: "We would like to have renamed a lot of our places through here too, traditional names for country." Uncle had factored renaming into his agenda for future action ... "first we want to get (place name) off the table, and then concentrate on the other [Native Title] claim that encompasses all crown land that comes under Native Title, we want to be able to negotiate a deal with the [State] Government for that."

It has now become relatively common to invite traditional custodians to give a welcome address at openings of community centres and launches of projects of various kinds. Nan said that this kind of recognition of prior ownership of country had only begun to occur from the 1990s in her State. The greater acceptance of Aboriginal culture and identity by white Australians had been accompanied by a renewal of interest in relearning languages and cultural protocols. Not coincidentally, this corresponds with the period where the focus of Government policy was on reconciliation and self-determination.

9.2.3 The Aboriginal flag

Harold Thomas, an Arrente man, designed the Aboriginal flag because he felt that Aboriginal people needed a unifying symbol that they could claim as their own ... "We

needed a common symbol to march with, as blacks together in unity, and something we could be proud of.” For indigenous Australians ... “the red panel represents the land, the black represents the people, and the gold represents the sun, the giver of life” (Thomas, cited in Hocking, 2002, p. 106). For more than three decades, the Aboriginal flag has been symbolic of Aboriginal identity and has been a rallying point for both black and white political activists wherever indigenous issues are raised.

The flag was first flown on July 12, 1971 on National Aboriginal and Islander Day in Adelaide, but was not proclaimed as an official Australian flag for Australia’s indigenous people until more than twenty years later, on July 14, 1995 (Hocking, 2002). Patrick Dodson⁵⁷, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1995, July 6, p. 13), described the proclamation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags as a “unifying and inclusive” act, and expressed the view that: “Official recognition provides a powerful symbol of reconciliation” ... because it signified to indigenous people ... “You are a valued and unique part of the fabric of our nation.” As an indication of the functional importance of symbolic inclusion, Uncle described the change that occurred when the local hospital in his region put up an Aboriginal flag in the lobby:

They [Kooris] won’t go to the hospital, ‘cause it’s a foreign place, you know, there’s nothing there for indigenous people to identify with, so when they put the Aboriginal flag up in the hospital lobby, you know, that really made a difference, ‘cause it shows that respect, you know, and Kooris will go there, the flag is like a

⁵⁷ Patrick Dodson, brother of Michael, was the chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation at the time.

statement, 'Kooris are welcome here' and so they go to that place now, for treatment, where before they wouldn't feel comfortable.

Nan expressed surprise at my suggestion that the presence of an Aboriginal flag created an unusual feeling for white people, insofar as it made them aware of their whiteness in an Aboriginal friendly place: "I'd hope it wouldn't say 'This is not your territory' ... I'd hope it would just indicate an Aboriginal presence." Nan reflected further about the difficulty whites have had with Aboriginal symbols. "Now people say, 'Oh, the Centre's so lovely' ... but none of it was given on a silver platter ... I can remember having a big fight just to get the Aboriginal colours on letterhead":

... that's interesting, your response, because I was just thinking of a colleague of mine, a white friend, who had to visit me at the Centre, and we had a huge Aboriginal flag hanging up there, or the fact that there's a lot of Aboriginal faces around, and she actually freaked out and she had to leave ... and yeah, well, I wanted to say to her, 'How do you think it felt for me all those years in the university, because I had to hang in there, I couldn't run away?' ... but, when I see the colours, you know it's your turf, so it attracts us ... that says it's an indigenous place ... or if its an Aboriginal thing, you usually feel attracted to it ... and not necessarily the colours too, it's ... the Aboriginal art ... I think now there's more expressions or indications of Aboriginality and images other than the colours, to me the colours are still more political.

Like Uncle, Nan clearly identified the role of Aboriginal artifacts and the Aboriginal flag as signifying an Aboriginal presence. The flag, which was designed to symbolize the unity of indigenous people throughout the whole of Australia, was regarded by Nan as having political connotations that could be distinguished from items with more specific

cultural resonance, like paintings and artifacts. Chrissy also thought that the flag was an important symbol of Aboriginal presence: “Well, the Aboriginal flag ... it’s about symbols ... well it’s **our** flag.” Graham agreed: “It gives us a sense of identity, you know, as Aboriginal people ... you know how they want to change the Australian flag ... there should be something Koori on it, anyway.”

In terms of the communication between black and white Australians, Nan was surprised that a white person (the researcher) may find that the very things that attracted her, because they signified an Aboriginal presence, may act as a block to a sense of inclusion. As noted in the discussion of Legend Rock, Whiteness becomes marked only when Aboriginality is signified, and this signification evokes the awareness for whites that they/we are entering Aboriginal territory (“you know it’s your turf”). This may explain the response of Nan’s white friend at the Aboriginal centre (“she actually freaked out and she had to leave”), which reminded Nan of the difficulties she had had in “hanging in there” while studying in a mainstream university at a time when Aboriginality was not recognized or acknowledged through symbolic inclusion.

The response of Nan’s friend may therefore be contextualized within the earlier discussion concerning the unmarked nature of whiteness and its subliminal associations with the “Good Australia”. When whiteness becomes marked through the recognition of difference, an uncanny sense of finding the unfamiliar in the familiar (Freud, 1919) is evoked. The importance of this factor in the discussion of the interface between white and black Australians should not be underestimated.

9.2.4 Indigenous role models

The Aboriginal contributors were universal in acknowledging the important place of indigenous high achievers as role models for young Aborigines, because they brought much needed exposure to white Australia of the fact that Aboriginal people are “out there”. The indigenous participants all described a feeling of pride with respect to Cathy Freeman’s use of both the Aboriginal and the Australian flags for her victory lap around the Olympic Stadium, which followed her win in the 400 metres in the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. Linda Burney (2006) described Freeman’s win as “One of our greatest moments”, not just for Aboriginal people, but for Australia as a whole:

The wall of sound coming from the stadium was like nothing ever heard. And no matter where you were that night - as a nation we were focused absolutely on that race, and all Australians united with one voice to cheer Cathy on, to will her to win. We stood together, and that, my friends, is what Australia can be.

9.2.5 The Freeman factor

Cathy Freeman was a central figure throughout the interview period (1999-2000). Chrissy said: “It makes you feel proud of yourself eh ... Kooris winning gold at the Olympics, ‘cause we got no-one else in there for the Kooris.” Graham distinguished between white and Aboriginal responses to Freeman’s triumph ... “for Aboriginal people it’s a bit different, it makes us all feel proud to know that there’s an Aboriginal person up there.” Chrissy: “Yeah, but they only put Cathy Freeman there [lighting the torch at Sydney’s 2000 Olympic opening ceremony] to make Australia look good, because of all this

reconciliation and stuff.” Graham agreed: “We know what they’re trying to do, using that aspect.” Chrissy and Graham’s cynicism about the motivations of white promoters was tempered by their admiration for Freeman’s talents ... “it made us feel proud anyway, because, you know, we was here first.”

9.2.6 Winmar’s jumper – a modern icon

Uncle referred to an incident that occurred in 1995, when AFL footballer Nicky Winmar answered racist taunts from the crowd by lifting up his jumper to point to his black skin, as a seminal moment for Aboriginal pride. In this proud display of Aboriginality, the body of Winmar the athlete was rendered as black by his defiant gesture of pointing to himself. In the act of pointing, Winmar effectively made the statement: Yes, I am black, and I am proud to be black. Winmar’s action in refusing the projections of the crowd had a dual effect: In that moment, he created a symbolic position with which other Aboriginals could identify with pride (rather than shame). At the same time, he named the crowd’s actions as racist. Through this symbolic gesture, Winmar made it very clear that he knew he was not being “sledged” because he played for the Saints, but because he is Aboriginal. For Uncle, the day that Winmar lifted his jumper to point at himself “turned a corner for racism in sport, and in AFL football ... which is a good thing ... because we invented that game, you know.”

The jumper that Winmar wore that day was framed and hung in a place of honour in the ATSIC offices in Melbourne. When ATSIC was in the process of being (literally) dismembered, former ATSIC chairman Geoff Clark caused a furor by taking the framed

jumper home “for safekeeping”. Clark’s argument was that the jumper was an important symbol of Aboriginal defiance and pride, and that it should be allowed to continue to occupy that symbolic position. His stated fear was that, for the Government, the jumper was just another one of ATSIC’s “assets”, which was in danger of being sold off for its dollar value, along with the rest of ATSIC’s material assets. In this case, the militancy of Winmar’s act would be subverted by its appropriation by the state (Shaw, 2005, March 10, *The Age*, p. 1).

9.3 The rise and fall of ATSIC

The election of ATSIC commissioners to represent indigenous interests across Australia was a profoundly symbolic event with equally profound practical implications. ATSIC began operations in 1990, with a structure consisting of an elected arm of indigenous representatives with direct links to 35 Regional Councils throughout Australia, a national board of commissioners led by an elected chairperson, and an administrative arm headed by a CEO. The elected arm was responsible for driving policy in consultation with the Regional Councils, and service delivery at the grass-roots level, while the administrative arm was responsible for funding approvals.

One of the facts often overlooked in the public discussion about public moneys spent under the auspices of ATSIC on programs for indigenous people is that the administrative arm, made up of predominantly non-indigenous public servants, always had control of the ATSIC budget, the bulk of which was taken up by administrative costs, including the salaries paid to non-indigenous employees. This means that, in contrast to public

perceptions, the peak organization set up for the implementation of indigenous programs employed more white bureaucrats than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For example, of \$1.3 million allocated to a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial in the Far-East Kimberly region of Western Australia, only \$327,000 was spent on Aboriginal people and programs over two and a half years. The rest of the money was spent on salaries, travel, and other related expenses of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, which administered the program (Murdoch, 2005a, September 15, *The Age*, p. 11).

9.3.1 Did ATSIC really fail?

When the first interviews with indigenous participants were conducted, Aboriginal people were beginning to look beyond national measures to more local concerns. By this time, cracks had begun to appear in ATSIC, which had then been scrutinized and criticized by successive Governments over almost a decade of operation to an extraordinary degree⁵⁸. The fact that the regional mapping made up of family clan groupings meant that affiliates were inevitably prioritized over groups who were outside of the area may explain why some regional ATSIC councils were extremely effective, while others have been surrounded by controversy, including the much publicized issues around the activities of ATSIC chairman Geoff Clark and his deputy, “Sugar” Ray Robinson.

⁵⁸ ATSIC was finally “killed off by statute” by John Howard’s conservative Government in 2004. The final disbanding of ATSIC’s regional councils took place in July, 2005, to be replaced by a non-elected body of indigenous advisors, the NIC (National Indigenous Council).

Although the participants expressed various views about how successful ATSIC had been in meeting its charter, they were unified in their response to a question about the overwhelmingly negative perceptions of white Australians concerning its role. Trish was particularly angry about the “misinformation” that had been promulgated through the mainstream media about this aspect of ATSIC:

Nothing gripes me more than people talking about ATSIC, saying ‘They [Aboriginal people] get all this money’ and I’m thinking ... it’s not us in ATSIC, it’s bloody white people, it’s not even Kooris, they don’t even have Koori people as receptionists ... like, sure, all the ATSIC councilors, and chair-people, and all that [are indigenous], but in terms of all the people that actually work there and make the decisions about where the money goes and where it’s allocated and all of this stuff ... seventy percent of ATSIC workers are non-indigenous.

Newspaper reports around the time that ATSIC was being decommissioned were also critical of the way that the organization had been represented. For example, Murdoch (2005, September 15) wrote in *The Age*:

While well paid public servants from federal and NT departments worked on indigenous matters in air conditioned offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, administrators in remote communities have complained that their pleas for help mostly went unanswered. Ngukurr, a community at the edge of Arnhem Land, asked for eight months for help on chronic petrol sniffing among teenagers. One social worker with expertise in the problem arrived for one day (Murdoch, *The Age*, p. 11).

Barry was employed by a company which had won a major tender to provide infrastructure within Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Speaking before ATSIC was dismantled, Barry explained that, just as he was indirectly employed by ATSIC, the peak indigenous organization was also, indirectly, a client. ATSIC functioned through the separate mechanisms of the elected arm and the administrative arm. While the indigenous communities were the primary client, whose needs were addressed by the work that Barry did, those communities were coordinated by regional councils, whose elected leaders were effectively funded by and answerable to the administrative arm.

At the end of the day in Victoria, that's all I can speak of, ATSIC is run effectively by public servants, they have an elected arm and an administrative arm, and we deal through the administrative arm, who theoretically do what the elected arm says, but ... at the end of the day, a lot of them [the administrators] will do what they think will suit their own ends, rather than carry out what the elected arm decides.

Barry spoke at length about his observations about the nature of ATSIC's operations on the ground, especially in terms of how funding decisions were made. Barry explained that the elected arm was made up indigenous people, while the administrative arm was comprised of public servants, some of whom may also be indigenous, but he stressed that most public servants working for ATSIC were non-indigenous. Based on his six years of close liaison with elected representatives in indigenous communities, Barry said that, within the administrative arm, there were essentially two basic approaches to decision making. Barry conceptualized the first approach as "self-determination", which he said

was “all the rage”, and he defined the second approach as the “this is how it’s going to be” model:

The administrative arm, what they tend to do is, depending on which decision comes up, they will get out of making decisions by saying ‘Ah, self-determination, we’ll go to the regional council and get them to make a decision’ ... and when it suits them the other way, they’ll say ‘We’ll just do it this way.’

Reports concerning ATSIC’s operations in the two years prior to its formal dissolution were predominantly focused on the legal proceedings against Clark and Robinson, rather than on evident failures within its administrative arm. Extensive media coverage about the alleged criminal behaviours of these two men came to be associated in the public imagination with the concept that nothing good could come from ATSIC as a whole. The then ATSIC Commissioner, Alison Anderson, who had been strongly critical of Clark as chair, said that: “ATSIC’s name has been muddied so much by this Government that it’s like a dog with fleas” (Anderson, 2004, April 16, ABC Radio National: *PM*).

By the time ATSIC was decommissioned, this notion had become so entrenched in the public imagination that the formal axing barely raised a murmur. Not so well publicized was the fact that Aboriginal affairs was one of the first areas targeted for significant funding cuts when the current Commonwealth Government came to power in 1996, and that the extent of these cuts undermined many of the initiatives that ATSIC had successfully developed and implemented at the grass roots community level. While the health budget was supposedly protected from those cuts, by the end of March, 1997

funding for ATSIC had been earmarked to be cut by Aus \$440m over three years, amounting to 11% of its operating budget.

According to Ernest Hunter (2000), these cuts functionally eliminated, among many others, ATSIC's community and youth support programs. Hunter (2000) has argued that this shift further consolidated the problem focus in indigenous mental health promotion and prevention activities, and erased almost all of what could have been seen as investments in indigenous social and emotional wellbeing. At the community level, Penny, reflected on the impact of these cuts to the programs she had been involved with that were aimed at educating at-risk indigenous youth in Victoria:

I feel frustrated that all the training programs and all the ways that you're able to work with people now don't exist, because when the Government changed, when the Liberal party came in federally, they cut everything, so, in 93, 94, 95 we had funding, but since 96 there hasn't been any money for training programs, there's no money to pay anybody ... and these programs that we had were really successful. We had one guy, he'd come from a foster home, and he turned out to be apprentice of the year and he's brilliant, but, the problem is, these kids need you pay a bit of attention to them, like, the training programs also included literacy programs, like, they're apprentices, but part of the training was a literacy program, and they had a woman who came in and worked with them individually, 'cause they had to go to TAFE and study, you know, and they needed help. Most of them have got through their apprenticeships, which is over a period of five years, and we incorporated cultural stuff along with the technical training, so that really helped these guys, because they didn't really know who they were before that, you know, they didn't know that much about their Aboriginal heritage, so we had Aboriginal mentors working with them too ... and eventually they got

through, which was a real achievement and I'm proud of that. The frustration though, for me, was that I didn't think that the CES or the Government was really serious enough about it, which was disappointing, for me, I had to deal with that, because I was a bit idealistic.

9.4 Symbolic representation or “practical reconciliation”? The public debate about the loss of ATSIC as a national Indigenous voice

In April, 2004, when the Howard Government announced that legislation would be introduced to abolish ATSIC, Howard presented this as a fixed decision without inviting any debate: “ATSIC itself will be abolished with immediate effect from the passage of the legislation. The Regional Councils will be abolished by June 30, 2005.” The rationale for dismantling ATSIC, along with the Government's proposed alternative, was presented as follows:

We believe very strongly that the experiment in separate representation, elected representation for indigenous people has been a failure. We will not replace ATSIC with an alternative body. We will appoint a group of distinguished indigenous people to advise the Government on a purely advisory basis in relation to Aboriginal affairs (John Howard, 2004, April 15, ABC Radio National: *PM*).

In April and May, 2005, the Prime Minister and the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Amanda Vanstone, in public statements about the events which led up to the demise of ATSIC, continued to argue that positive discrimination and self-determination had “failed”, and that Aboriginal services needed to return to mainstream service providers. In answer to interview questions about the reasons behind ATSIC's “failure”, the Prime

Minister suggested that ATSIC had “become a little too preoccupied with what might loosely be called symbolic issues and too little concerned with delivering real outcomes for indigenous people” (John Howard, 2004, April 15, ABC Radio National: *PM*).

Fred Chaney, a former minister for Aboriginal affairs from 1978-1980 in the Fraser government, previous co-chairman of Reconciliation Australia and deputy president of the National Native Title Tribunal, spoke on ABC Radio National’s *The World Today* (2004, April 16) in response to the Government’s claims that ATSIC had failed. Chaney said that it was unfair to judge the success or failure of ATSIC on the basis of its last two years. While he acknowledged that the organization had been damaged by leadership issues during that time, Chaney argued that it was not true to say ATSIC had not performed at the regional level:

I think in many parts of Australia, the ATSIC Regional Councils have done a fine job, and I think there’s a lot of evidence that they’ve been very effective. Like all major organizations, there are good bits and bad bits. If you held up BHP, Westpac, a whole series of major Australian corporations over the last 10 years, you’d say they’ve had their very good years and they’ve had they’re appalling years. An Aboriginal organization is going to be no different from those institutions. They’ll be areas of failure, areas of success.

Chaney’s statements contrast markedly with the position taken by Minister Vanstone. On ABC TV’s *Lateline* program, Vanstone (2004, April 16) challenged the television interviewer, Maxine McKew, as follows: “Do you really think the elected body ATSIC has over the last 10 or so years been an example of self-determination? Can you nominate

something that they've done that fits into that category?" Taken aback, the interviewer paused to reflect on an answer clearly outside her area of expertise. Without waiting for a reply, Vanstone provided her own response: "Let me help you with your answer – No!" On a similar theme, when asked (by ABC reporter Alexandra Kirk) how she justified "depriving indigenous Australians of elected representation and of their national voice?" Vanstone (2004, April 16, Radio National, *AM*) defensively compared the election of ATSIC representatives with the now defunct apartheid regime in South Africa.

9.4.1 Apartheid or positive discrimination?

Vanstone argued that: "Indigenous Australians vote in elections and they do have elected representation, that's their local member. And I make an additional point that there was once a country we wouldn't play cricket with because they had separate systems." Alison Anderson responded to this emotive argument with the comment: "Let's not forget that apartheid was invented in Australia" (Anderson, 2004, April 16, ABC Radio National: *The World Today*). Anderson argued that the very existence of ATSIC, as the "national voice" of indigenous Australians, had enabled a contextual position within which Aboriginal people could address the need to develop skills:

We have to understand that ATSIC was a very unique structure, unique in the sense that it built a capacity of indigenous people. If you talk to former commissioners, former chairs, former regional councilors, ATSIC has given them the capacity to question state governments on service delivery to Indigenous people (Anderson, 2004, April 16, ABC Radio National: *The World Today*).

Aden Ridgeway, the only Aboriginal MP in Federal Parliament at the time ATSIC was decommissioned, argued that ATSIC's existence was the very opposite of apartheid: "The idea of having separate systems isn't so much about creating this dividing line between black and white Australians, it's about building bridges to make sure the services can be provided and provided effectively" (Ridgeway, 2004, April 16, ABC TV: *Lateline*). Noel Pearson (2004) addressed the criticism that ATSIC had "failed" by noting that the two biggest problems affecting the livelihood of indigenous people were health and education, both areas over which ATSIC had no control.

Like Hunter (2000), Pearson pointed out that education had always been a mainstream Government responsibility, while the responsibility for indigenous health had been removed from ATSIC by the Keating government in 1995. This fact poses the question as to what the actual motivating force behind the Government's long-standing antagonism toward ATSIC may have been. If the public assertions that the Government's only interest in abolishing ATSIC was to improve the lives of indigenous people by helping to relieve indigenous disadvantage were true, why then would John Howard and his Ministers show such manifest disregard for the opinions of indigenous leaders about how their interests would be best represented?

On numerous occasions over the ten years of the Howard Government, the Prime Minister has placed emphasis on the view that Aborigines should not be treated any differently than other Australians, and has been particularly critical about any discussion of symbolic gestures which may act as markers of indigenous autonomy – including a

Preamble to the Constitution, a Treaty, or an apology to the Stolen Generations. At the 2002 Geneva Convention, Australia was “the sole remaining country opposing the right of indigenous people to ‘self determination’ in United Nations negotiations towards an international statement of indigenous rights” (Crabb, 2002, December 26, *The Age*, p. 1). Phillip Ruddock, the then Indigenous Affairs Minister representing the Government’s position, insisted on the alternative term “self-management”.

A spokesman for Ruddock was reported to have said at the time: “Our position is that we’re not comfortable with the word [self-determination] because it implies separateness and a separate sovereignty.” Some commentators have argued that John Howard has always been ideologically opposed to the concept of separate representation of indigenous people. Aboriginal activist, Michael Mansell (2004, April 16), speaking on ABC Radio National’s *PM*, said that along with its opposition to Native Title, the Government “had ATSIC in its gun from the time it came to power.”

Similarly, Democrats leader Andrew Bartlett (2004, April 15) stated that Howard had ... “been looking for an opportunity to get rid of ATSIC pretty much from the day it was established”. Noel Pearson, in response to the Government’s proposal to set up an advisory body of eminent Aboriginals to replace ATSIC’s elected Regional Councils, pointed to a reactive component in the Government’s position when he stated that: “There’s no positive program that’s been articulated other than this vague prejudice against special indigenous structures” (Pearson, 2004, April 15, *ABC TV 7.30 Report*).

Pearson was skeptical about the concept of ATSIC being replaced with an “advisory body” of eminent indigenous people appointed by government:

What we need is indigenous leaders, competent, talented people, to take up responsibility for these problems. Not to be shunted sideways and made into token advisors to the government. When I talked about passive welfare four years ago, I did not just mean that money for nothing was the passive welfare problem, I also identified that government services were part of the problem. That is, where government took complete responsibility for trying to uplift Indigenous people, government was going to get nowhere. What is needed is for Aboriginal people to take charge of their own problems (Pearson, 2004, April 15, ABC TV 7.30 *Report*).

Chaney (2004, April 16) made a clear distinction between “practical reconciliation” programs assisted by nominated advisors, and the symbolic and strategic role of an elected representative body. While an advisory body may be useful in helping governments to deal with “immediate issues” at the local level, the function and role of an elected body is to address broader issues, so that:

... If it’s operating properly, that body will tell you where you’re trying to get to. What are the ambitions? What is the agenda that you should be trying to meet? What is the future? What would Australia really be like if it was a satisfactory country for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike? And you’ll get much more guidance in that area from an elected body than you will get from a group of nominees.

Like Anderson and Pearson, Chaney (2004) has argued in defence of the need for a separate system which positively discriminates in favour of Aboriginal communities, but suggested that there was a “natural tendency” on both sides of politics to revert to assimilationist attitudes when dealing with indigenous issues and policy.

9.5 The eternal return of the Aboriginal Question

Although much of the focus here has been on the current Government’s new policies in Aboriginal affairs, it was hypothesized that the Aboriginal Question itself reflects a deep-seated investment in the continued marginalization of indigenous Australians. This investment has been played out in various ways throughout the history of white Australia, and is not limited to our time. Current attitudes toward Aboriginal people are, in many ways, very similar to the prevailing views of the white majority in earlier times. The unconscious nature of these attitudes has been emphasized by [added] italics in the following quote from Fred Chaney:

I think that’s actually the *natural policy position* that most Australians adopt without thinking. But it fails the really important test, I think, which is acknowledged by the present Government, that if you don’t get the Aboriginal community on board, things won’t happen. So ... there are really two tests to apply to what’s going on. Can you get the Aboriginal community on board? And how do you drive the agencies to actually deliver to Aboriginal people, because in the past they haven’t? ... There’s the risk that all agencies will simply not accept the responsibility of delivering services as effectively to Aboriginal Australians, to indigenous Australians, as they do to the rest of us. That has been the historic fact in Australia, that’s been the sub-standard performance that’s occurred, and it takes a huge effort of will by governments – whether they’re Labor or Liberal – to

change that *natural tendency* to neglect this most significant minority in Australia (Chaney, 2004, April 16, ABC Radio National: *The World Today*).

9.5.1 The more things change the more things stay the same

Chaney's comments are pertinent to my earlier argument that the unconscious motivations beneath hegemonic discourses are revealed through the unmasking of that which appears most natural. Of the many hundreds of newspaper articles surveyed over the course of the current research, very few have focused on positive change. The place names may change, but the content is depressingly repetitive across Aboriginal Australia. In the 1930s, William Cooper (cited in Attwood & Markus, 2004) was begging for a water pump at Cumberagunga Mission, or for the one that existed to be repaired. To support his request, he argued that the pump would enable his community (360 people) to grow their own food and be self-sustaining to that extent at least. This was to augment the starvation rations doled out by the mission manager, who often used his discretionary powers to limit rations to Aboriginals who were deemed to be "troublemakers".

In 2005, the remote West Australian community at Mulan entered into a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) with the Federal Government in an attempt to reduce the high rate of the eye disease, trachoma, in that community. The Government agreed to provide the community with a petrol pump, in exchange for ensuring that their children's faces would be washed and that they would attend school (Murdoch, 2006, May 25, *The Age*, p.1).

Civil libertarians have found the apparent paternalistic aspect of the mutual obligation enterprise offensive. Nevertheless, Howard's model has been endorsed by some Aboriginal people, including Noel Pearson (2000), who introduced the "mutual obligation" model in his own Cape York community some years ago. Many communities have initiated and continued to support their own "paternalistic" measures, including the banning of alcohol in communities where alcohol abuse has been associated with extremes of both poverty and violence.

In some communities, these measures have been reported to have produced good outcomes. For example, the installation of a swimming pool at Wadeye has been associated with a reduction in the number of skin disorders in children (Murdoch, 2005b). The critical factor here seems to be whether the stipulated system of "rewards and punishments" have been decided by the community and supported by Government, or whether the Government makes directives that communities are then forced to comply with (Calma, 2006, March 12). According to Calma, the latter carries all the time-worn dangers of the old paternalism (state-as-parent), while the former is a marker of self-determination and local autonomy.

9.5.2 What's wrong with Practical reconciliation?

As the major plank in the current Government's "practical reconciliation" policy, the COAG trials set out to provide Aboriginal communities with services in exchange for negotiated outcomes, known as Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). Like the agreement at Mulan, many of the 120 SRAs signed so far have stipulated that funding for

basic services within specific indigenous communities will be offered on the proviso that members of those communities will commit to positive behavioural change.

In Bourke, SRAs were signed off that linked a reduction in domestic violence to the provision of funding for the repair and maintenance of existing housing and the provision of new houses (McCausland, 2006). This example raises the fundamental question touched on earlier: Who is “the community”? And who is authorized to make decisions on behalf of that community? For example, if a community representative signs an SRA tied to funding to build ten houses within a specific community, who decides which families will live in them, and what incentive can there be for all the other families who have not received housing support? (Calma, 2006).

In the case of Wadeye, “no pool no school” was the agreed basis for funding. The new swimming pool at Wadeye was installed in 2003, with “much fanfare”, on the basis that children would attend school before they could gain entry to the pool. In 2006, however, Wadeye was again in the headlines (Murdoch, 2006, May 23, *The Age*, p. 1), this time because rival gangs had turned the town into a “war zone”. Only about 100 of the town’s 880 school aged children attended school, substance abuse and family violence was endemic, and children as young as six years old were victims of systemic sexual abuse. Wadeye’s chief executive, Terry Bullemor, said that gang violence was a symptom of much deeper issues that community Elders had been trying to get governments to address for many years. He blamed the violence being perpetrated by the town’s youth on the

continued failure of governments to deliver basic services in housing, health, education, child protection and policing (Murdoch, 2006).

Shaw (2004) has argued that it is salient that funding for basic services has been described as “discretionary” in each of these agreements, and noted that SRAs between the federal Government and Aboriginal communities have been based on an interpretation of mutual obligation that has not been applied to any other group, with the possible exception of illegal immigrants.

9.5.3 Basic rights

Taylor (2006, March 12, ABC Radio National, *Background Briefing*) has argued that it was disingenuous for the Government to suggest that the provision of basic infrastructure for healthy living in Aboriginal communities should have to be negotiated in the first place: “They don’t have the hardware they need for healthy living, and in some ways these mutual obligations have some merit, but they need to be around issues that are not basic rights.” Further to the argument about basic rights, Aboriginal leaders have expressed the view that the current focus on practical over symbolic measures will be unlikely to produce lasting change, because they do nothing to address issues around capacity building and self-determination. The participants in the current research raised these issues as critical to indigenous health, a position that has been supported by recent research, both in Australia and internationally.

9.5.4 Recent research in indigenous health

In an extensive review of indigenous health research, Hunter (2000) argued that symbolic measures, where implemented at a national level, were related to better outcomes for indigenous peoples. Hunter made reference to international research findings which showed that the highest levels of poor indigenous health occurred in countries where no formal treaty had been concluded between the colonizing and indigenous populations, and when states and provinces retained responsibility for indigenous health as compared to national or federal governments. As an example, Hunter cited a 1994 paper by Steven Kunitz (cited in Hunter, 2000), which compared the rates of morbidity and mortality for indigenous populations in “Anglo-settler colonial” countries (Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia).

Despite common negative health patterns among these groups, Australian Aborigines had the dubious distinction of having the worst health status across almost every measure. Ironically, indigenous health was comparatively best in the USA, the nation with the least equitable system of health care for the population as a whole. By contrast, indigenous health was worst in Australia, where health care is universally available through Medicare. Kunitz’s study revealed clear links between structural disadvantage and poor indigenous health in Australia where, unlike the Maori and Inuit peoples in New Zealand and Canada, no formal treaty has ever been concluded with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Kunitz pointed to the disadvantage of the underprivileged in accessing resources, even on a “level playing field”, and concluded that comprehensive

programs needed to be directly targeted at indigenous communities, suggesting positive discrimination as a possible solution.

More recently, Altman and Hunter (2003), from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, used Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data to examine the status of indigenous Australians between the years 1991-2001, the period described as the Reconciliation Decade. The study compared the relative wellbeing of black and white Australia in the areas of employment, education, income, housing and health for the whole decade. According to Altman and Hunter's report, there was a marked difference when looking at the gains made by black Australia relative to the rest of the population during this period. The data was then separated to enable a comparative analysis of the two periods 1991-1996 and 1996-2001, when, fortuitously, ABS census dates corresponded roughly with a change of government and the implementation of new policy. This comparison revealed that many of the relative gains made between the years 1991 and 1996, when the focus of the Keating government had been on addressing symbolic measures, were lost during the first five years of the Howard Government, which has focused on practical outcomes ahead of structural change.

Despite the rhetoric around the current Government's practical reconciliation policies, Altman and Hunter's (2003) research supported the argument that symbolic measures were important to practical outcomes. According to Professor Altman, black Australia in 2001 was worse off in terms of full-time jobs, labor force participation, attending tertiary institutions, adult median income, male life expectancy and population over 55 than on

these same measures in 1996. Altman concluded that: “While practical reconciliation forms the rhetorical basis for indigenous policy development since 1996, there is no evidence that the Howard Governments have delivered better outcomes for indigenous Australians than their predecessors” (cited in Shaw, 2003, October 16, *The Age*, p. 4).

9.6 Moving on from identity politics?

In his Bennelong lecture, the Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott (2004, September 9, *The Age*, p. 9) stated that Australians needed to move on from the “identity politics” of the Keating era, which Abbott equated with “doom-saying” and embrace Noel Pearson’s call to restore purpose and self respect to indigenous peoples through “practical reconciliation”:

For 200 years, nearly every speaker on Aboriginal policy has dwelt on problems: the difficulties of preventing conflict, building relationships, generating resources, and dealing with dispossession ... [These] are among the most serious and intractable problems our society faces. But fixating on problems, however natural the temptation, won’t make them any better. The facts of history can’t be changed. The challenge is to learn from them, not dwell on them. *The task that matters most is enabling Aboriginal people to create for themselves what other Australians create – namely, safe communities, good schools, reasonable health and normal prospects of a better life for their children.* The big difference between the old [Labor] policy paradigm and the new [Liberal/National Coalition] is that it is no longer as preoccupied with race and guilt. Racism used to be offered as the complete explanation for Aboriginal poverty, alienation and early death. Racism hasn’t disappeared. Still, if racism causes poverty, why hasn’t poverty declined as racism diminished? Pearson’s great insight has been to understand that people living in welfare-dependent communities are poor and

alienated regardless of their colour or their location. *The Aboriginal communities of Cape York aren't poor because they're black, but because there's no economic base and almost no-one has a real job* [italics added].

Abbott cushioned his argument that Australians should forget the past and the “preoccupation with race and guilt” by referencing Noel Pearson’s “great insight” that welfare dependency was not helping indigenous people. Abbott’s argument, however, contains two fundamental flaws: firstly, the assumption that most Australians “create for themselves” the conditions which will produce satisfactory economic, infrastructure and educational outcomes grossly overestimates the capacity of individuals, or even of discrete communities – whether they are black or white - to build, maintain and support social institutions. With respect to mutual obligation, Hugh Taylor (2006) has stated:

I believe that health, housing, education are seen by all Australians as basic rights of all citizens ... There’s not going to be anybody who lives in Toowoomba or Toorak or Taronga who doesn’t expect to have water and sewerage and roads and rubbish collection and electricity as a basic right. And people in Aboriginal communities just don’t have those facilities (2006, March 12, ABC Radio National, *Background Briefing*).

Secondly, Abbott’s question “Why hasn’t poverty declined as racism diminished?” assumes that Aboriginal people have equal access to employment in Australia, a claim which has been strongly debated by researchers from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Altman, 2000; 2003; Sanders, 2001; Schwab, 1999). Abbott’s (2004) assertion, that Aboriginal people ... “aren’t poor because they’re black”, but because they lack employment and an economic base, does not acknowledge the reality that Aboriginal

people continue to be denied these things because they are black. Sir Gustav Nossal (2000) described an experience related to him by a social researcher who had conducted a focus group in a town in rural Victoria where there was high levels of contact between blacks and whites:

One Aboriginal person in this focus group told about an interesting experience that he'd had recently. One day he walked up to a white employer ... who ran a small business – and said: 'I want to put a hypothetical case to you: it's the end of the school year, the results of the VCE are out, and two kids walk up to you, one black and one white, with an identical VCE score and an identical highly laudatory recommendation from the headmaster. Which kid would you take?'

Without a second's hesitation, she replied: 'Well of course, the white kid. But it's not me, I'm not racist, it's because of my customers.' And that Aboriginal person posed that same question over the next few days to three other employers, and got exactly the same response. I regret to say that, with respect to our attitudes towards Australian indigenous peoples, racism is alive and well in Australia (Nossal, 2000, September 4, *The Age*, p. 13).

Chaney (2004, February 19, *The Age*, p. 13) has questioned the Government's rhetoric on practical reconciliation and has argued that Aboriginal rights and the maintenance of an Aboriginal cultural identity need to occur in the context of positive discrimination to create opportunity and employment. It is salient to note that, as a direct result of ATSIC being dismantled, 400 Aboriginal people employed by the Regional Councils found themselves without a job. Since June, 2005, Aboriginal people have been reported to have left the public service "in droves", with the ironic result that the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) currently suffers from a lack of indigenous

expertise (Pat Turner, 2006, March 12, ABC Radio National *Background Briefing*).

According to Turner, positions previously held by indigenous public servants in Government departments which provide services to Aboriginal communities have been filled by non-indigenous public servants, often with no experience of life in those communities and little understanding of the issues faced by community members.

These issues are more than academic. As Money-Kyrle (1951) has stated, an environment that is passively frustrating is different from one that is openly persecutory, but it has certain parallel effects. Money-Kyrle argued that reparative and creative sublimations are critical to the mental health of adults as well as children, and that many people owe their mental health to their success in some occupation which they have found and chosen for themselves. To frustrate them in it is to invite depression, or a depressive apathy which may be concealed by the pursuit of time-killing amusements. In the absence of opportunity, the young people growing up in Aboriginal communities today represent, in Burney's (2006) words, "a ticking time bomb" for Australia⁵⁹.

9.7 Practical reconciliation or symbolic inclusion?

The recent focus on practical measures to address Aboriginal disadvantage has been accompanied by a denigration of the place of symbolic gestures which may act to emphasize and celebrate difference. Tony Abbott's 2004 Bennelong⁶⁰ Lecture drew

⁵⁹ According to Linda Burney, the indigenous birth rate is almost double the mainstream – 2.3% compared to 1.2%. The average median age of indigenous people is 21 years compared to 36 for other Australians. 39% of indigenous people are under the age of 15 years, compared to 20% of the mainstream. 57% of the indigenous population is under 25.

⁶⁰ Bennelong was the name of an Aborigine who was captured by Governor Phillip in 1789. He was taken to England by Phillip and on his return was unable to fit back into Aboriginal society (The Macquarie Concise Dictionary, 1998).

inspiration from Noel Pearson's support for the concept of mutual obligation in his Cape York community. Abbott paraphrased Pearson to endorse his Government's argument against symbolic measures:

By all means, says Pearson, pursue apologies and treaties, but the right response to poverty in Aboriginal communities is to prevent substance abuse, promote good education (mainly in English, rather than community languages), foster personal responsibility and encourage people to take whatever economic opportunities are present. However real the injustice and whatever the case for extra government help, to Pearson the big task is not to lament historical injustice or to demand more funding, but to restore purpose and self-respect to people's lives

Along with mutual obligation, the current Government was reported to be considering "sweeping changes" to the historic federal land rights legislation. Prime Minister Howard has argued for a switch to individual title to "enable land to be used to more economic advantage", primarily to "speed up mining negotiations." Howard expressed the view that all Australians should aspire to owning their own home and business, and that "having title to something ... is a key to your sense of individuality, it's a key to your capacity to achieve and it's a key to your family ... I don't believe indigenous Australians should be treated any differently" (Grattan & Murdoch, 2005, April 7, *The Age*, p.1).

This proposition directly challenges the principle of collective ownership of land which indigenous people have repeatedly described as integral to their psychological and social wellbeing. When Vincent Lingiari walked his people off Wave Hill Station, he made it

clear that the eight years of waiting was not about equal wages, but about land rights. Indigenous people have always insisted that spiritual, cultural and economic interests are integrated, and that “everything about Aboriginal society is inextricably interwoven with and connected to the land” (Dodson, 1997, pp. 41-43). This concept was explored in Section 1.9, under the title *Country and kinship*, where it was argued that many of the current problems in indigenous Australia are the result of ruptures in the social fabric brought about by the separation of clan and country.

While Abbott has presented symbolic and practical measures as oppositions, the data from the indigenous participants in the current study indicated that this is a false dichotomy. For example, Uncle’s evidence that Aboriginal people would not attend the local hospital before an Aboriginal flag was displayed suggests that symbolic measures have direct implications for indigenous health. Similarly, Nan spoke about the importance of symbolic inclusion for Aboriginal people attending mainstream educational institutions, and the difficulties they encountered when markers of Aboriginality were absent. Chrissy spoke about the importance of re-learning her mother tongue, and how the teaching of indigenous culture in schools had helped her children to feel proud to be Koori.

How also, can appropriate measures to address indigenous disadvantage be maintained without extra funding support? Penny described the impact of funding cuts on programs for at-risk indigenous youth that were operating successfully before they were cut, and

Graham emphasized the relationship between community support programs and the prevention of deaths in custody.

9.8 The symbolic struggle – Aboriginal activism from 1967 to 2005

We should not forget the power of symbolic representation to change worlds. The 1967 referendum, which is often held up as the moment which fundamentally shifted black-white relations, was preceded by the first Day of Mourning in 1938, Charles Perkins' Freedom Ride in 1965 and the Gurindji people's walk off Wave Hill Station in 1966. Like Rosa Parks' famous refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Alabama in 1955, which sparked the civil rights movement that changed the course of American history, these political actions raised the awareness of Aboriginal issues in the public imagination and greatly influenced the Yes vote in 1967. In 1971, the Aboriginal flag was first flown. In 1972, the flag was employed to identify the Aboriginal Tent Embassy as Aboriginal land, symbolically representing the concept that indigenous Australians were alienated from mainstream Australia and wanted their own representative voice in Canberra.

In 1975, the then prime minister, Gough Whitlam, poured a handful of sand into Vincent Lingiari's hand and the struggle for land rights took another turn. That sand cannot be poured back. Just as Aboriginal Australia can't return to an imagined and longed for pre-contact era, white Australia cannot go back to the days before Mabo, when the lie of *terra nullius* was finally, because symbolically overturned. In 1988, on the Australia Day/Sorry Day that marked Australia's bicentenary, thousands of people marched for land rights

and self-determination. In 1990 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was set up. For the first time in Australia's history, Aboriginal people had a direct voice in the management of their own affairs, something that Aboriginal activists had been demanding from the beginning. In 1992, after Mabo, reconciliation and self-determination were the major rallying points, and Paul Keating made his famous speech at Redfern Park.

In 1995 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were officially proclaimed, and Nicky Winmar confronted the racism that was endemic in sport by proudly pointing to his black skin. In 2000, at the closing ceremony of the Sydney Olympics, Cathy Freeman provided a powerful symbol of reconciliation when she wrapped herself up in both the Aboriginal and the Australian flags. In that moment, Freeman forced the recognition of the politicized black body in contemporary Australia. In 2005, inspired by Rosa Parks' actions 50 years earlier, Michael Long began his "Long Walk" to Canberra, in an effort to re-engage politicians with issues around indigenous rights.

9.9 The symbolic act

Each of these historical acts shared one thing in common: they all broke with the existing conventions and actively sought to expand the range of commonly expected possibilities within the symbolic field to create new "positions of enunciation" (Hall, 1990, p.222). According to Butler (2005, p. 67) "There is always an element of the unexpected and unpredictable associated with the symbolic act, of something not foreseeable within the current conceptual horizons." As Zizek (1989, p. 121) has written:

An act does not occur *within* the given horizon of what appears to be ‘possible’ – it redefines the very contours of what is possible (an act accomplishes what, within the given symbolic universe, appears to be ‘impossible’, yet it changes its conditions so that it creates retroactively the conditions of its own possibility.

In his analysis of Žižek’s thesis, Butler (2005, p. 68) has argued that the symbolic act creates an opening in the field of what was previously decided ... “It is only *after* the symbolic act that we can see those alternatives that were excluded before the act. By revealing a possibility that could not be seen before, the revolutionary act introduces a split into history, and allows the ‘continuum’ of history to be constructed retroactively”. In Lacan’s (1953) terms, the synchronic movement of the chain of signification halts at the moment of the act to produce a new ‘anchoring point’ on the diachronic axis, the historical dimension. To illustrate this point, it was only *after* Winmar lifted up his jumper and pointed to his black skin that the racism in Australian Rules football was able to be ‘written in’ to the historical record.

Prior to Winmar’s “act” the commonplace acceptance of sledging was the grounds for accepting racial slurs against Aboriginal players, so that racial slurs also became accepted as commonplace, while disguised as harmless sledging. This prior set of conditions, which constituted the ‘ground’ for Winmar’s action, only became relevant when they were ‘taken on’ by Winmar. That is, through his act, Winmar both made the racist grounds for the sledging he had received from the crowd visible and, at the same time (by exposing the sledging as racism), opened up the possibility that all such future ‘sledging’ would instead be revealed as ‘racism’.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

If ever-growing social complexity, cultural diversity and a proliferation of identities are indeed a hallmark of the postmodern world, then all the appeals to our common interest as humans will be as naught unless at the same time we can learn to live with difference (Weeks, 1990, p. 92).

10.1 The propositions that were tested in the current study

The first proposition, illustrated by the *Lake Mungo* case, was informed by Margaret Bain's (1992) research, discussed in Chapter One under the heading *The Aboriginal-White Encounter*. The data pertaining to Bain's hypothesized *indices of difference* was presented and discussed in Chapter Seven.

The second proposition, illustrated by the *Legend Rock* case, was that cultural differences have been obscured to enable white Australians to repress feelings of guilt engendered by both the past treatment of indigenous Australians and the continued difficulties experienced by Aboriginal communities in the present. The impact of national discourses around the Aboriginal Question on the experiences of contemporary Aboriginal people and the whites with whom they interact was explored through the analysis of both primary interview data and secondary sources. The data presented in Chapter Eight illustrated the ways that culture and language are integral to the individual's sense of identity, and indicated that many Aboriginal people have developed fractured and impoverished identities as a direct result of the high levels of misogyny that continue to manifest in mainstream Australia.

10.2 A comparison between Bain's sample and the current study

In her study of a semi-remote Aboriginal community, Bain (1992) found that the interactions between Aborigines and whites were confounded by the adherence of members of each group to different ontological assumptions. Bain defined these different views of the world categorically, and posited an Aboriginal *interactional* model that was distinct from a white *transactional* model. Bain defined interactional processes as: "social action undertaken by individuals or groups when its occurrence and content is determined by the kin relatedness of those taking part" (Bain, 1992, p. 142). According to Bain, the predominance of transaction over interaction enabled whites to separate economic and social interests in ways that were precluded for Aboriginal people.

When tested against the interview data, the external validity of Bain's distinction between white transaction and Aboriginal interaction was partially replicated. The data from the indigenous interviews indicated that indigenous community structures in urban and rural communities attempted to follow traditional lines of social organization, but that social cohesion had been damaged by the absence of access to ancestral land and the breakdown of the Elders' system in some communities. As with Bain's (1992) study, community was valued over the individual, and mentoring programs designed to assist the education of the young were built on the concept that those individuals would contribute to the community in the future.

10.3 Partial support for the guiding hypothesis

Of Bain's six hypothesized indices, five were highly pertinent to the indigenous contributors: Aboriginal ontology; Relationship to land (inheritance); Kinship systems and associated obligation; Traditional law and authority; and Interpretation of time. Bain's remaining index, Interpretation of space, has not been included in the emergent themes, although several of the participants did refer to incidents which could be interpreted in terms of an unusual perceptual relation with both space and time. For example, Chrissy's description of her experience of seeing an Aboriginal "spirit" figure in a photograph may fit this category. As the indigenous participants had been told that the focus would not be on secret or sacred knowledge, this aspect of their experience was not pursued.

In summary, interaction had priority over transaction in Aboriginal communities in the current study, but the protocols around obligations and reciprocity were not strictly based on a traditional kinship structure, since much of the traditional structure has been disrupted. The interview data showed that indigenous society continued to be based on the concept of "caring and sharing", but that this did not preclude competition between different groups. Blacks in positions of power, who place personal aspirations above community welfare, are denigrated as "Tall Poppies" or "9 to 5 Blacks". Aboriginals who are seen to aspire to be white, or to "think like the white man" are given the title "coconut", said to be the worst insult one Aboriginal person can use to label another Aborigine. These terms can be contrasted with the positive connotations associated with

working for “the cause” or “the struggle” (that is, working for the general betterment of indigenous people).

Sharing was regarded as a necessary antidote to hardship in Aboriginal communities in general, with a special focus on support of family members (also bearing in mind that “family” includes extended family and non-kin). People who were not managing well were regarded with compassion, rather than with the kinds of negative judgments that tend to prevail in mainstream society. As well, there was an evident “us and them” response, where community cohesion appeared to be partly motivated by antagonism toward whites, especially those in positions of power.

As a direct result of their awareness of how past policies (such as child removal) had contributed to Aboriginal disadvantage, indigenous people were reluctant to engage with government agencies. As well, poor education and low levels of literacy made it difficult for indigenous people to navigate within mainstream bureaucracies, so that many did not access the services to which they were entitled.

The findings also supported Bain’s conclusion that cultural differences have led to communicative problems and misunderstandings between Aborigines and whites. As with Bain’s study, the non-indigenous contributors reported that social obligations created difficulties in the workplace, when family was given priority over work.

10.3.1 Relationship to land: An Aboriginal ontology

Unexpectedly, the relationship between family, clan and country was still very strong for indigenous communities within Victoria. Uncle referred to the “whole of Australia” as a sacred site. In terms of an Aboriginal ontology, each of the indigenous participants spoke about the way that clan and kinship remained at the core of Aboriginal identity, even in urban areas. As Uncle has stated: “[It’s] still out there, and you’ll see in the city, in the urban areas, that a lot of Kooris still live that sort of tribal, uh, clan structure system of family, immediate and extended family living in certain suburbs, so that part of the culture is still very strong.”

10.3.2 Kinship as an organizing structure

While the relationship to country as part of their Aboriginal identity varied between the indigenous participants, there was remarkable consistency when it came to the analysis of Bain’s (1992) description of social relatedness as an expression of a distinct Aboriginal subjectivity. Bain’s finding that interaction permeated every aspect of life and had priority over transactional processes in Aboriginal communities was not always true for the indigenous cohort in the current study. The interview data, however, showed that Kinship obligation was an important factor in the everyday lives of the indigenous participants.

There were observable tensions between the need to share resources and the individual’s desire for financial autonomy and personal space. Not surprisingly, the greatest tension within indigenous communities was in cases where reciprocal obligation was not, in fact,

reciprocated, for example, when an unemployed relative expected continued handouts from someone with a job, or when visitors overstayed their welcome without contributing to household resources. The requirement to share with kin meant that Aboriginal people in employment were more likely to take on additional responsibility for less functional members of their extended family.

Uncle maintained that the tendency of some family members to freeload on the enterprise of others got in the way of running businesses along professional lines: “With the Kooris, the big family job, they come on board and say ‘You’ve got to share it with me’ ... so, there goes your profit.” Uncle articulated the impasse very clearly:

With some blackfellas, they say: ‘That’s my money, you don’t touch it’, and they’re not going to share it with you ... for the professional business person, you’ve got to be hard and tough and make a commitment ... and yet, Aboriginal culture has survived through supporting family ... so, where’s the middle ground?

As with Bain’s (1992) sample, the indigenous participants reported that, for certain relationships, kinship obligation was not open to choice, and the requirement to comply with requests from particular individuals was sometimes experienced as a “pressure”. This was most likely to occur where traditional authority structures were more intact. In order to limit this pressure, some participants had taken practical steps to reduce the level of support they would be expected to provide.

Individuals who had made practical boundaries around kinship obligations suggested that the absence of such boundaries would have made it difficult for them to function in the kinds of transactional relationships demanded by continued employment and to make the kinds of associated material gains (owning a car and having a mortgage, for example), that are taken for granted by most contemporary Australians.

10.3.3 Traditional law and authority

The three tier structure of authority was described as hierarchical: with family at the base, spokespeople in the middle, and Elders at the apex. This hierarchy of authority functioned more or less successfully, depending on the degree of disruption to family structure in different regions over time. Breakdowns in the Elders' system had led to some common misunderstandings about the criteria for the title of Elder, as well as confusion about the roles and responsibilities of Elders.

The Elders' system was said to be particularly fragile where the indigenous population had been relocated from their traditional country to areas belonging to another clan, or where none of the traditional owners of a particular region had survived. The importance of bloodlines as a link with country to the maintenance of an effective authority structure within indigenous communities could not be overstated. The participants emphasized that it was important that organizations and agencies which interact with Koori communities take into account the ways in which those communities are structured and respect the levels of authority as set out above.

Participants who were members of the Stolen Generations reported that they had particular difficulties fitting into the social hierarchy because they did not have ancestral links with the country that their parents and grandparents had been forcibly removed to. Uncle described Aboriginal people born and raised outside their traditional country as “historical blacks”. Redfern’s “Block” was presented as an example of the difficulties encountered by historical blacks attempting to apply the social aspects of Aboriginal culture in communities where a lacuna existed in the place normally occupied by Elders who have hereditary authority over that country.

A major problem at the interface was that whites had no way of determining who the real authorities were, and that authority to make decisions about the interests of a particular clan may be falsely attributed to non-Elders. Aboriginal leaders and spokespersons were beholden to Elders, but where the Elders’ system had broken down unscrupulous individuals were able to manipulate the system for personal gain, while ostensibly acting on behalf of their community. The white mainstream was likely to give more credibility to educated blacks than to Elders less well educated in the white system, although it is this group who ultimately were of higher standing.

As well as being more open to manipulation by self-interested individuals and more powerful family groups, the lack of education within many Aboriginal communities was reported to have led to poor decision-making, which in turn, sometimes led to a poorer use of resources than would otherwise be the case.

10.3.4 Relationship to time

Bain (1992) noted that, in Aboriginal culture, time is measured along both diachronic and synchronic axes, so that the past and the present are not distinguished in the way that they usually are for European Australians. “Koori time” or “Thursday Island” time was a topic area that was spontaneously introduced by several of the indigenous participants. “TI” time was used to describe the tendency among Aboriginal people to place less importance on chronological time than was usually the case in the white mainstream. “Being on Koori time” was related to the primacy placed on interactional processes over transactional processes.

10.4 The second proposition: Perceptions of Aboriginal identity

The indigenous participants’ self concept as Aboriginal people was based upon a number of factors. Primarily, identification with Aboriginality derived from social inclusion in the Aboriginal community. Once a person “fitted in” to the kinship system they were accepted into the community and had a strong sense of social belonging. Becky described this sense of belonging as like being in “one big family, and that’s what’s really beautiful about it”, although she also “wanted to run away sometimes.”

With inclusion came a “heavy” sense of responsibility, manifested in the expectation that individuals would contribute to the community through sharing of resources and meeting obligations to relatives. The participants’ identification as Aboriginal did not appear to be weakened by their European parentage, and all the mixed-heritage contributors gave precedence to their indigenous identity over and above any identification with a European

cultural inheritance. This was despite the fact that two participants, Becky and Trish, had (literally) European mothers and had “grown up white”, having had very little contact with their Aboriginal fathers or the Aboriginal community until the ages of fifteen and twenty-one, respectively.

Cultural heritage was a secondary, but related factor, where an individual’s sense of inclusion was strongly mediated by their level of access to cultural knowledge. In turn, access to knowledge was associated with relationship to land and access to Elders who were both willing and able to share their knowledge. These factors were contingent upon the historical circumstances of the particular community to which individuals belonged. In some circumstances, individuals depended on written (historical and anthropological) information to further their understanding of their indigenous cultural heritage. This raised questions, however, about the authenticity of published material.

It was noted that the teaching of Aboriginal knowledge did not follow the same lines as western models of education, being more to do with listening than questioning. Cultural knowledge was revealed slowly, and only at such times that the giver was ready to divulge something of importance. The recipient of knowledge was required to be patient and to show respect. In fact, excessive questioning was regarded as impertinent, and was likely to lead to being stonewalled.

Assumptions about gender were implicit, rather than explicit. The segregation of men’s and women’s “business” was subtle but noticeable. In the interviews with men present,

topics which were primarily of concern to women were simply ignored by them. This reticence could easily be mistaken for disinterest or hostility, an impression that was at odds with the men's evident engagement with the interview process. A similar phenomenon emerged in the interviews with Uncle, where no-one else was present. It seemed that Aboriginal men simply don't engage in issues pertaining mainly to women or answer questions best addressed by females. Had the researcher been male, perhaps a similar phenomenon would have emerged with respect to the women being interviewed.

10.5 Broader implications of the findings of the current study

Each of the indigenous contributors told about the long journey of “struggle” they have had to undertake to achieve those things that most Australians take for granted (psychological health and material comfort). Even success brings distress, however, because of the guilt evoked by an Aboriginal imaginary which states that, to do well in the white man's world is to “stand in the shoes of the oppressor” and to “walk over the bodies of the dead” (Tovey, 2006). In the course of this research, I have come to understand something that every Koori understood from the beginning: The bodies of the dead are not Ancestors, but the mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters and children of the current generation of Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal people, “to be born black is to be born political.”⁶¹

For the indigenous participants, “the cause” was defined as both a struggle for social justice for Aboriginal people and a way of being in the world. To be part of the cause

⁶¹ The phrase, “To be born black is to be born political”, was recently repeated by Noel Tovey, in the reading of his autobiography, *Little Black Bastard* on Radio National (*Life Matters, Radio National*, broadcast on January, 9th, 2006).

implied a political position, with an underlying awareness of historical contingencies. Because of this awareness, which incorporated what several participants referred to as “the big lie” of *terra nullius*, many people involved in the cause were motivated partly by anger about past injustices, and sometimes their anger was directed against white Australians, including those who worked within indigenous communities as doctors, researchers, teachers, counselors and allied health professionals.

An understanding of the psychological processes of projection and projective identification was posited as necessary for the understanding of the difficulties encountered by workers in indigenous communities, or in organizations catering to indigenous clients. The indigenous data revealed that generational change in Aboriginal communities away from national issues affecting indigenous people as a whole, towards more of a focus on regional and clan affiliations, has led to frictions within some communities. Unprocessed grief, which was said to be endemic across whole indigenous communities, was nominated as the root cause of the potential for unprocessed (unconscious) material to be projected onto other indigenous individuals or groups in the form of horizontal violence.

In turn, horizontal violence was likely to lead to higher rates of burn out among both indigenous and non-indigenous people. Several of the indigenous contributors were involved in community politics, and each of them spontaneously nominated “burn out” as a primary issue. It was suggested that, through the process of psychological displacement, identification with the oppressor may lead oppressed people to punish others like

themselves by re-enacting the same kind of oppressive actions that they have suffered under themselves.

10.6 On reconciliation

Judging from the comments made by the indigenous participants, the concept of reconciliation was more of an issue for non-indigenous people than it was for Aborigines. Many non-indigenous people are quick to feel warmly about the idea that white and black Australians can be reconciled, but if the term is considered more closely, something more than goodwill is required. Becky thought that reconciliation was about “relieving white guilt”:

It’s a little tokenistic thing that we that need to reconcile can do ... see, Aboriginal people don’t need to reconcile. Most people in my community reckon that the white bastards can get stuffed, really, that’s quoting some people that I know ... like, we, the reconcilers. I don’t even know ... did it even come from the [indigenous] community, did the community want reconciliation, or was it a white person’s main idea, they said let’s go and have this reconciliation committee to try and connect people that felt like they needed to get rid of some guilt.

While indigenous people continue to endure racism in Australian society, much of the data also indicated that many aspects of the relationship between black and white Australians were changing for the better. Chrissy and Graham compared how things were for their children to how life had been for them while growing up. One of the most significant changes had occurred in education. Chrissy’s statement: “It’s different now, there’s Koori educators in each school”, reflected a major change in attitudes toward indigenous history and culture. Koori culture was presented as part of the curriculum and

indigenous people were placed in the present tense, rather than as historical relics of a time long past. Nan was very positive about the future:

I think the renaissance is going to carry on forward, especially with Native Title which I think is really significant, and people are going to be more grounded in a local community and know where they're from, you've probably noticed that Aboriginal people will say which tribe they're from, so that's going to become important, that we know exactly which tribal group we belong to, and that'll be part of us identifying as indigenous people, and I think you'll see a great resurgence of learning language, and there'll be a more profound, strong sense of one's own identity, I think our identity is still very ... weak ... at the moment ... I think it'll be a generation or so before we settle down and accept ourselves as being Aboriginal people in all our diversity, that's where I think it'll be going, and I think Australia will treasure and hold in great respect all indigenous people and indigenous images ... maybe I'm being a bit of a Pollyanna.

Uncle stressed the need for Aboriginal people to be able to “talk the white man’s language, at his level, around the table.” The concept of taking one’s place at the table is important to the notion of reconciliation. Reconciliation cannot occur prior to conciliation, which means ... “to come to an understanding”, with “a shaking of hands”, literally, a coming to the table to resolve differences (Roget, 1972, p.33). An assumption that an equivalent status exists between the conciliating parties is implicit in this notion. Re-conciliation, then, cannot be conferred by one upon the other as an act of generosity, but can only occur between two equivalent parties. Aboriginal leaders have argued that constitutional reform which recognizes the First Nations status of Australia’s indigenous peoples in the form of a Treaty is required before such equivalence can be achieved.

10.7 Healing the damaged Aboriginal object

The data clearly showed that symbolic measures were an essential component to the successful implementation of policies that focused mainly on practical outcomes. Of all the symbolic measures that the participants put forward as necessary to help Aboriginal people to feel included and valued by the white mainstream, none were expressed with more urgency than the need for a formal apology to the Stolen Generations. The indigenous contributors to this research emphasized that Wilson and Dodson's (1997) *Bringing them Home Report* had a profound effect on Aboriginal people.

The loss of the generations of Aboriginal children through assimilationist policies had not begun to be symbolized until Peter Read (1999) gave a name – Stolen Generations - to the combined effect of all the discrete incidents of the removal of children from their families. Where before, each family and each community carried their personal losses in relative privacy, the Report uncovered the enormity of the loss to Aboriginal Australia as a whole. Memorializing loss through symbolic representation and formal ceremony are fundamental to the process of grieving and adjustment following a personal loss, such as the death of a loved one. Funerals, eulogies, the celebration of anniversaries and keepsakes to remind us of the person who has died all provide an outlet for the public expression of grief and allow a space for personal remembrance. In the psychological literature, the process of grieving is described as “working through”.

10.8 Working through

The process of working through does not only apply to grief, but to all those painful, shameful and embarrassing memories and jealous hatreds that we have repressed but which remain active in our psychic life. Laplanche and Pontalis (1985, p. 489) have defined working through as, "... that process which is liable to halt the repetitive insistence characteristic of unconscious formations by bringing these into relation with the subject's personality as a whole."

Freud emphasized that the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis was effected by bringing what has been repressed to conscious awareness. Lacan, with his focus on the relationship between language and subjectivity, went further to suggest that the process of remembering repeating and working through, while necessary, is not sufficient. The fundamental change offered by analysis can only occur when a shift in the old metaphors which have constructed our perceptions of reality is achieved, and new ones are created.

In Australia, the process of working through the loss of generations of young men in two World Wars, Korea and Vietnam has been helped greatly through the shared public ceremonies that are annually enacted to memorialize ANZAC Day. White Australia now needs to help indigenous people to lay their ghosts to rest through providing symbolic recognition for past wrongs. Because these wrongs were committed in the name of nation, they must be addressed from the highest level of Government and embedded in the Constitution if they are to have a symbolic effect.

10.9 The significance of a formal apology

Many Aboriginal leaders have not forgiven Prime Minister Howard for his unemotional and skeptical response to Wilson and Dodson's (1997) *Bringing them Home Report*. The publication of the report transformed the personal experiences of loss for individual Aboriginal people into a nation-wide awareness of the profound loss represented by the Stolen Generations. As Trish has stated, the Government's response to the issues raised in the report was not only delayed, but was the opposite of what indigenous people had hoped for at the conclusion of the Reconciliation Decade. The formal response to the issues raised in the report came in the form of a submission to the Senate's Constitutional Legal Affairs Committee, in which the Government "explicitly denied the existence" of the Stolen Generations (Morton, 2000, July 2, Radio National: *Background Briefing*). Becky described the Government's response to the report as a "slap in the face":

It was like the Government had gone around and extracted these emotional personal stories, out of people who'd experienced it ... [they] rose the knowledge up and the awareness within, not only the non-Aboriginal community, but the Aboriginal community as well ... the Aboriginal community always knew, but nationally, they didn't know to what extent it had happened here there and everywhere⁶², that's been my experience, so it wore open those scars ... and then they sort of 'in-tray-ed' the report, nothing was done for ages, it was like they'd just put it in the 'in-tray', as if it wasn't really all that important, dismissive again, at that level, and the community members, that's what they knew and that's what they saw and that's what they heard, and that again was like a real slap in the face,

⁶² A national survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1994 revealed that one in every ten indigenous people aged over 25 had been removed from their families during childhood (Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner, 1997). This figure was interpreted by the Federal Government as "ten percent", which effectively implied that a relatively small proportion of indigenous Australians had been impacted on by assimilation policies.

a real insult ... [adding insult to injury] ... people offered up their stories, because they were told something was going to come from it, but nothing did.

The Senate Committee's main concern was to consider the question of compensation to the Stolen Generations, and the submission presented by Senator John Herron was prepared in the context of a claim for compensation brought against the Commonwealth by two members of the Stolen Generations, which was at that time being vigorously contested in the High Court⁶³. The Government had already invested millions of dollars fighting the Lorna Cabillo and Peter Gunner case, and claimed it could be faced with compensation payments of up to \$4-billion if the recommendations of the *Bringing them Home Report* were implemented (Morton, 2000). The Co-Chair of the National Sorry Day Committee, Audrey Kinnear, described her feelings on hearing about Senator Herron's submission:

Oh, I was absolutely devastated, and I think what added to the pain is the fact that this was information that was coming from the Minister, who has the parliamentary portfolio of Indigenous Affairs, so it's the Minister that we expect to work with us, not against us, and certainly not to trivialize the era of the Stolen Generations (Kinnear, interviewed by Morton, 2000, July 2, Radio National *Background Briefing*).

Although talking about a traumatic experience is considered a necessary first step in the treatment of symptoms, a lack of empathy or a dismissal of the import or veracity of the story at the point of disclosure is often experienced as traumatic in itself (Gardner, 1999).

⁶³ Cabillo and Gunner's claim for compensation was ultimately rejected on the grounds that they were "not stolen" (Manne, 2001).

Aboriginal people, made vulnerable by the public exposure of the pain and grief associated with child removal, were “dismayed” by the statement that “there never was a stolen generation.” Senator Aden Ridgeway said at the time that it was “comparable to denying the holocaust” (as cited by Morton, 2000).

In his Senate submission, John Herron criticized Wilson and Dodson’s report on the basis that the evidence it presented that large numbers of indigenous children were forcibly removed from their parents was “only anecdotal”, because none of the 500 plus witnesses who came forward to tell their personal stories had been cross-examined. Herron argued that the treatment of separated children was essentially “lawful and benign”, and reflective of public attitudes at the time. Sir Ronald Wilson, who co-authored the report with Michael Dodson, responded to this criticism as follows:

It was impossible to cross-examine in the ordinary understanding of the word when a person was speaking in words [from the] heart with tears running down their face ... We listened, and I don’t deny that we listened sympathetically because we were there to hear their stories. They had sought this enquiry for the best part of twenty years in order that they could tell their stories. But when it comes to the credibility of those stories, there is ample credibility, not from the cross-examination of the children themselves, but from the governments whose laws, practices and policies enabled these forced removals to take place. We had the support of every State government, they came to the enquiry, came with lever-arch files setting out the laws from the earliest days, right up to the end of the assimilation policy, that is up to the 1970s ... these senior government officers acknowledged that there was a lot of cruelty in the application of those laws and practices (Wilson, interviewed by Morton, 2000, July 2, speaking on Radio National *Background Briefing*).

Michael Dodson, in his speech at the Corroboree 2000⁶⁴ celebrations, used the point that he, John Howard and John Herron were part of the same generation to directly confront John Howard about the contention that the Stolen Generations had been “constructed”:

Who are these people? Who is the generation that took my grandmother, my father, my mother and my grandfather and my two sisters? Who is this generation that tried to take me from my family in 1960? What generation do we look to, if Mr. Howard says it wasn't this one? Where is this mythical group of Australians who made these laws, adopted these policies, put them into practice? Who took the kids? I'm at a loss for an answer; perhaps someone can tell me later ... Are not my two sisters part of this generation? Are not John [Howard] and John [Herron] part of this generation? If we're not part of the generation that took the kids, then who the hell is Mr. Howard talking about?

Dodson took heart from the fact that many white Australians had shown solidarity with Aborigines after the tabling of the report:

... I know that there are many decent and honest Australians who accept the truth of our history as part of who we are now. There is absolutely no difficulty on their part of acknowledging the facts of the last 50 years and more. Indeed, hundreds of thousands feel sorry about what happened and have said so. And they have demonstrated in my view, enormous collective courage and decency in accepting honestly our collective reality. And it's not out of a sense of blame or guilt, but from a deep sense of shame and loss, a sense that seeks to share and heal the pains of our past, and then to move on together.

⁶⁴ This speech was broadcast on ABC Radio National's *Encounter* program on July 11, 2000, two weeks after the Corroboree 2000 event, and shortly after John Herron's submission to the Senate committee on the Stolen Generations had been presented.

Dodson (2000) emphasized the need to “embrace the past honestly and acknowledge its truth”. This, he said ... “goes to the very depths of our national identity and what we stand for as peoples. We must rid ourselves of this psychological cloak of darkness before it becomes our shroud ... We can’t fold our tents and go home just because John Howard won’t apologize.” Former prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, (Gordon, 2005, April 28, *The Age*, p. 8), said on the issue of an apology to the Stolen Generations: “I believe there ought to be an apology ... The wider process of healing is not going to be fully understood or appreciated until there is a government that is prepared, on behalf of Australians, to make that apology.”

10.10 A common humanity

This thesis began with the idea that recognition and acceptance of cultural difference is a necessary first step for meaningful black and white relations in Australia. To this end, Martin Buber’s (1923/1970) *I-Thou* model of intersubjective relationship has been posited as providing an ethical relation of difference. As Michael Dodson (2000), has said:

... each of us is unique, we are different. We’re all Australians and we call this place home. Let us rejoice in our diversity and difference because it’s they that will ultimately enrich us as peoples [but] ... going forward is also about remembering, and I beg you to listen to those whispers in your heart and let them bellow out for a better future, a future that’s steeped in the spirit of reconciliation.

Buber’s analysis began with the premise that there are two possible forms of relating to the Other: the *I-It* and the *I-Thou*. The *I-It* manifests as a subject/object relationship,

wherein the other is reduced to the level of the thing. The unthinking alternative to respect for difference leads us to “reduce difference to the logic of the same” and thereby precludes any possibility of entering into an *I-Thou* relation. Buber conceptualized the *I-It* relation as a form of defensive interpersonal relating that is devoid of empathy for the Other’s humanity, and regards difference as a threat. In Buber’s analysis, then, the *I-It* manifests as a subject/object relationship, which in group terms could be characterized as “us” and “them”.

The *I-Thou* relationship, on the other hand, is a domain where subjective identification of one’s own position in the social and natural world is set aside, or suspended, in order to enter into what Buber has described as a true “meeting” with the Other. In this situation, the Other and the self are in a relation that requires neither fusion nor separation, but rather exist in a dialogue of “consummate reciprocity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 196). In such a relationship, the Other is approached as neither friend, enemy or stranger, but as a mystery. White Australians need to be able to meet with Aboriginal people on equal ground and respectfully listen to what they have to say. In this regard, I can do no better than to quote Michael Dodson, one man who has worked tirelessly for the Aboriginal cause, and for reconciliation:

In fact, the insistence on speaking back and retaining control are highly political acts. They are assertions of our right to be different and to practice our difference. They refuse the reduction of Aboriginality to an object, they resist translation into the languages and categories of the dominant culture. They are at times ancient, at times subversive, at times oppositional, at times secret, at times essentialist, at times shifting. It is for this very reason that I cannot stand here, even as an

Aboriginal person, and say what Aboriginality is. To do so would be a violation of the right to self-determination and the right of people to establish their own identity. It would also be to fall into the trap of allowing Aboriginality to be another fixed category. And more than enough 'fixing' has already occurred (Michael Dodson, 2003, p. 39).

10.11 Summary of Recommendations

1. Saying sorry

A formal apology to the Stolen Generations is required.

2. Recognition of indigenous Australians as First Nations peoples

Constitutional reform which includes a formal Treaty with indigenous Australians is required.

3. Recognition of Country

It is recommended that highway signage recognizing traditional clans be placed at entry and exit boundaries. This measure has already been put in place in some shires. Welcome to country by traditional owners to mark the opening of civic events has also become relatively common and should be maintained. The process of renaming crown land and National Parks with original Aboriginal titles should be extended. Indigenous cultural exchange programs run by indigenous rangers employed by Parks Victoria should be set up and facilitated in consultation with traditional custodians at the local level.

4. Education

Linda Burney (2006) has stated that: “Education is the key for unlocking the cycle of poverty” and argued that capacity building within indigenous communities starts with infant development and education from primary through to tertiary. Further, Burney has argued that the truth about Aboriginal history needs to be taught to all Australians: “The search for the mythical ‘real Australia’ can only be realized if people know and are proud of our shared history and our shared identity. We will never understand who Australians are if we leave out the Aboriginal element.”

The education of primary, secondary and tertiary students about the 500 nations should be fostered through the mainstream curriculum. This would enable both Aborigines and whites to take pride in the Aboriginal history of place and recognition of continued custodianship of country at the local level. Burney (2006) has described this as important for Aboriginal people to gain a sense of “civic identity” by reconnecting at the local level. The concept of bi-cultural teaching should be encouraged, and universal programs would need to be culturally sensitive and conducted in consultation with traditional custodians.

5. Recognition of Regional Authorities: Local solutions for local issues

Local authorities need to be recognized and consulted in policy decisions. Uncle suggested that regional authorities should be established along the lines of the three tier structure of family, spokespersons and Elders. The concept that

governments should establish powerful regional authorities to receive and distribute Commonwealth funds for spending in Aboriginal communities, has strong support from Aboriginal leaders across Australia, especially following the demise of ATSIC.⁶⁵

6. Recognition that “real” Aborigines are throughout Australia

The demographics of indigenous Australia must be factored into planning and delivery of services. Long term planning is required to facilitate the possibility of building relationships.

7. Capacity building

The gap left by the abolition of ATSIC should be filled, where Aboriginal people are included in the decision making process. The fact that self-determination cannot be achieved without capacity building also needs to be acknowledged.

10.12 Limitations

As discussed in the methods chapter (Sections 6.6.2 & 6.6.4), the conclusions drawn from the small sample of individuals from each cohort of participants in the current study cannot be generalized to the population as whole. The reader is reminded, however, that the limitations of the sample were offset by the inclusion of data from multiple sources in the embedded case study design. A second limitation concerns the large volume of data

⁶⁵ In a recent report for the future of Aboriginal youth commissioned by the Menzies Research centre, Bob Beadman has stated that strong regional authorities would be “a better co-ordinating mechanism for state and territory level funding and federal funding” than the distribution of Federal funds through mainstream government departments and agencies in Sydney and Canberra (Murdoch, 2005, September 9, *The Age*, p.11).

that was generated by the interviews. The scope of the thesis meant that some data, which related to additional themes, could not be included in the analysis.

10.13 Further research

This thesis has explored the relationship between black and white Australians in a given time, from a particular perspective. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, while Aboriginal politics was predominantly concerned with the fight for land rights and self-determination, Aboriginal communities and their supporters were able to cohere into a unified group. Recent moves to strengthen clan affiliations and restore cultural heritage at the local community level have revealed that the concept of Aboriginality is fluid and heterogeneous. Aboriginal people have multiple perspectives that change and adapt over time. While these recent shifts have created ruptures within and between some groups, the strengthening of indigenous identity has been associated with positive outcomes across a range of measures. Further research into the relationship between the ways that Aboriginality is structured within Australian society and the self-concept of Aboriginal Australians would assist all of us, black and white, in the struggle to become what Linda Burney (2006) has described as “honorable Ancestors”.

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PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR INDIGENOUS COHORT

Dear (Indigenous) Participant,

My name is Jane Saunders, and I am currently enrolled in a post-graduate research program at Victoria University of Technology. My research is looking at what it means to be an Aboriginal person living in a white mainstream community. While lots of research in Australia has focused on minority ethnic groups and the issues raised by their cultural differences from the white/Anglo majority, very few academic studies have addressed the cultural gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous groups.

As a white person, I am interested in getting an Aboriginal perspective on the interaction between black and white Australia, and what you, as an indigenous person, feel are the important issues. Part of my research will involve asking you about what it means to be an Aborigine, how you define your Aboriginality, and how important your Aboriginal identity is to your everyday life. I am also interested in finding out where your indigenous identity clashes with mainstream values and how such clashes might impact on you, your family, and your community.

What does being a participant mean?

Participation in this project will involve us arranging a mutually convenient time to sit down and talk for one or two hours in an informal interview. Although I have outlined some themes that might be important, there may be other areas that you wish to talk about. I will be asking for your permission to audio-tape the interview, to make sure that I have an accurate record of our conversation. The written transcript will be made available to you on request for further comment and/or alteration. To protect your privacy, the information you share will be treated with respect and will remain confidential. Names and biographical details of participants will not appear in either the final report or written transcripts, and transcripts will be kept in a secure file.

There will be plenty of opportunity for you to ask me any questions you may have about the research before we begin, or at any stage of the interview. I will not be asking you to disclose any knowledge which is culturally sensitive or is of a sacred nature. I recognize that discussion on the subject of racial identity and cultural difference may evoke sensitive and personally distressing information. Should you feel it necessary, you are fully entitled to request that some of the things we discuss be kept “off the record”. Although I will need you to sign a consent form prior to the interview, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact me on (phone number).

Thank you for your consideration,

(signed) -----

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR NON-INDIGENOUS COHORT

Dear (non-Indigenous) Participant,

My name is Jane Saunders, and I am currently enrolled in a post-graduate research program at Victoria University of Technology. My research is looking at what it means to be an Aboriginal person living in a white mainstream community. While lots of research in Australia has focused on minority ethnic groups and the issues raised by their cultural differences from the white/Anglo majority, very few academic studies have addressed the cultural gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous groups.

As a white person, I am interested in getting an Aboriginal perspective on the interaction between black and white Australia, and what you, as an indigenous person, feel are the important issues. Part of my research will involve asking non-Indigenous Australians (who have worked with, lived with, or who have had any other significant association with Aboriginal people) about their personal experience of the interaction. I am also interested in gaining insight from you, as a non-Indigenous person, into how an Indigenous identity or value system might differ from either your personal value system or your perception of mainstream values and how you might interpret those differences.

What does being a participant mean?

Participation in this project will involve us arranging a mutually convenient time to sit down and talk for one or two hours in an informal interview. Although I have outlined some themes that might be important, there may be other areas that you wish to talk about. I will be asking for your permission to audio-tape the interview, to make sure that I have an accurate record of our conversation. The written transcript will be made available to you on request for further comment and/or alteration. To protect your privacy, the information you share will be treated with respect and will remain confidential. Names and biographical details of participants will not appear in either the final report or written transcripts, and transcripts will be kept in a secure file.

There will be plenty of opportunity for you to ask me any questions you may have about the research before we begin, or at any stage of the interview. I will not be asking you to disclose any knowledge which is culturally sensitive or is of a sacred nature. I recognize that discussion on the subject of racial identity and cultural difference may evoke sensitive and personally distressing information. Should you feel it necessary, you are fully entitled to request that some of the things we discuss be kept “off the record”. Although I will need you to sign a consent form prior to the interview, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact me on (phone number).

Thank you for your consideration,

(signed) -----

Victoria University of Technology

Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be part of a study into Aboriginal identity and cultural difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,
of

certify that I am at least 17 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled:

“Between surfaces: A psychodynamic approach to cultural identity, cultural difference, and reconciliation”

being conducted at Victoria University of Technology by: **Associate Professor Ross Williams and Jane Saunders.**

I certify that the objectives of the research, together with any risks to me associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Jane Saunders

and that I freely consent to participation involving the use on me of these procedures.

Procedures:

A semi-structured interview of between one and two hours duration.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this research at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardize me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Witness other than the researcher:

Date:

.....}

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Jane Saunders, ph. 9687-5993). If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Technology, PO Box 14428 MCMC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 03-968 4170).

D.1 Introduction to the indigenous contributors

Appendix D provides a brief overview of each of the indigenous participants. The order of presentation follows the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

D.1.1 Indigenous interview 1: “Stuart and Trish”

Stuart and Trish, a young couple with no children, lived in a new home in a new housing development on the outskirts of Melbourne. The interview took place in their lounge room one evening after work. Trish, whose father was Aboriginal and mother European, was fair skinned with blonde hair and blue eyes. Her parents separated when she was young, and her mother’s European heritage was the main influence on her early life. She attended a private school, where she was the only indigenous student, followed by university studies. Although she had always been aware that she was Aboriginal, Trish did not make contact with the extended Koori community until she was in her mid-teens. As a young adult, her relationship with her father and her interest in her Aboriginal heritage had become more predominant. Her father was raised in a boy’s home between the ages of eight and eighteen, where he had been placed after stealing the wheels off a pram (to use on a billy-cart), and by the time he was released both his parents had passed away. At the time of the interview, Trish was employed as a graduate in the public service in a policy position.

Trish's partner, Stuart, had an Aboriginal mother and an Aboriginal father. In contrast to Trish, Stuart was dark skinned and had grown up among a large extended indigenous family of brothers, sisters, first and second cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Stuart's mother died when he was an adolescent. He had been in the care of his father and members of his extended family from an early age. At the time of the interview, Stuart was employed in the Commonwealth Public Service.

D.1.2 Indigenous interview 2: "Becky"

The interview with Becky took place in a café in a public park close to her place of work, surrounded by large gum trees. Becky, like Trish, was fair haired and fair skinned. Becky was adopted into a white family as a baby. Her adoptive parents had migrated to Australia from central Europe after the Second World War. Although she had grown up with the knowledge that she had been adopted, Becky only discovered that her father was Aboriginal at the age of twenty-one, when she began a search for her birth parents. Her file at the adoption agency contained enough information to locate her birth mother, who then assisted her in finding her father. Later on, she found out that her paternal grandfather was a white man who "hated Aborigines" and was a harsh disciplinarian, especially to Becky's father, who was his oldest son. Becky's grandfather had insisted that his children were raised apart from his wife's Aboriginal community. Becky only met her Aboriginal grandmother shortly before she died, and after she had been institutionalized for many years. The grandmother's last years were spent in a nursing home, a long way from her traditional country.

When Becky contacted her father, she found a lonely, damaged man who was disconnected from the Aboriginal community. One of her father's brothers was involved in the local indigenous community, but he had discouraged Becky from going there, as "things were really bad". In the nine years that elapsed from the initial shock of discovering that her father was Aboriginal, Becky had since embraced her Aboriginal identity and said that she had discovered a new sense of belonging within the Aboriginal community. Becky felt that finding out about her Aboriginal heritage had helped her to put many previously unexplained facets of her character into place.

D.1.3 Indigenous interview 3: "Uncle"

In his late sixties, Uncle was the oldest indigenous participant in this study. At the age of four he was sent interstate to stay with relatives to avoid being taken away by "the welfare". Before he was born, two of his older brothers had been taken into care and did not survive beyond infancy. At the time of the interview, Uncle lived in rural Victoria. Married with a large adult family and a multitude of nephews and nieces, Uncle had been involved in Koori politics for several decades. During the 1980s he had been involved in Indigenous affairs at the national level, but his more recent efforts had been directed towards the local interests of his own clan group. In particular, he and other senior clan members had been engaged with the Victorian State Government in a Native Title application for parts of their traditional country. Uncle had received very little formal education, and taught himself to read and write as an adult.

Uncle's education in indigenous culture and politics began early, when he was sent out on the road by his mother to meet with various leaders in the Aboriginal community. This experience was a seminal one, and gave shape to what would become a lifelong commitment to work for Aboriginal self-determination and land rights. He recalled the beginnings of the Tent Embassy and had taken an active part in the protest movement of the 1970s and 80s. The interview with Uncle was conducted at the home of the researcher in suburban Melbourne. At Uncle's suggestion, a follow up interview took place several months later during a field trip. This second interview was conducted in a National Park which fell within the boundaries of Uncle's traditional country.

D.1.4 Indigenous interview 4: "Nan"

Nan lived in the suburbs near a major population center interstate. The interview with Nan was conducted over the telephone and recorded on speaker-phone. At the time of the interview Nan was on leave from her job, which involved the promotion of indigenous access to tertiary education. She had helped to establish a learning center for indigenous students, where she had held a key management position for many years. Nan described how the center had evolved from the grass roots level to become a major concern within the institution: [To start with] ... "There were about three or four of us and we just put our life and soul into it, and, you know, we practically lived there for years, and stuff like that ... now it has great autonomy, with dozens of staff and lots of different programs ... things are really well established."

D.1.5 Indigenous Interview 5: “Graham and Chrissy”

Graham and Chrissy, a young couple who lived with their small children in regional Victoria, were both in their early thirties at the time of the interview, which was conducted in their home. Chrissy’s mother was Aboriginal and her father was a white Australian. Chrissy was raised by her maternal grandparents and had nothing to do with her white family while growing up. Both Graham’s parents were Aboriginal and he grew up with his parents and siblings on the local mission. As the parents of young children, Chrissy and Graham had only recently begun to learn about their Aboriginal culture from their respective families in the interests of passing this knowledge onto the next generation. Both had completed high school to year ten, and Graham had received some post-secondary education as part of a CDP initiative run by the local Aboriginal Co-operative. At the time of the interview, neither Chrissy nor Graham had been employed outside the Aboriginal community.

D.2 Introduction to the non-indigenous contributors

The following section provides a brief overview of each of the non-indigenous participants. Once again, the order of presentation follows the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

D.2.1 Non-indigenous interview 1: “Penny” – the community artist

Penny was the only female participant in the non-indigenous sample. A community artist, Penny had been involved in a number of community arts projects which included indigenous workers, and had been involved in training programs with young unemployed

people, both Aboriginal and white. Over many years, Penny had built up experience in developing and implementing community arts projects with groups of disadvantaged young people, including the homeless and unemployed.

Despite what she perceived as a clear need for building a skills base and providing meaningful work for indigenous youth, Penny had been frustrated by recent funding cuts which had impacted on projects for which the groundwork had been laid but for which the funding was stopped before the work had begun. Penny had grown up with Aboriginal people and had lived in Aboriginal communities while traveling around Australia with her parents as a child. Nevertheless, she was surprised at the level of friction between different sections of the Aboriginal community in Victoria, and had been personally hurt by the animosity projected onto whites who, like herself, were attempting to work towards reconciliation in practical and demonstrable ways.

D.2.2 Non-indigenous interview 2: “Mark” – the performing artist

Mark was a performing artist who had worked extensively with Aboriginal actors, playwrights and filmmakers across Australia. Like Penny, Mark had grown up among Aboriginal people interstate, with an Aboriginal Godmother (his father’s best friend’s wife) whose Aboriginality was never referred to because marriage between Aborigines and whites was not only frowned upon, but was illegal in Mark’s parents’ day. Mark’s contacts with several Aboriginal communities in Victoria intensified when he and his partner took a 10 year old homeless Koori boy into their home after his mother had been jailed for aggravated assault. No one else in the boy’s family was able to look after him,

because “everyone in that family was either on drugs or drunk.” During the 18 months that the boy lived with them, Mark and his partner had an “open-house” policy to the boy’s extended Koori family. Mark described his shock at discovering how this group, who were “at the bottom of the society” were living a completely separate existence in “third-world” conditions in the heart of suburban Melbourne.

D.2.3 Non-indigenous interview 3: “John” - the public servant

John had been employed in an interim position as a senior administrator in an Aboriginal organization for about three years. His tenure was short-term, with the aim that his position would be taken up by an indigenous person. John was committed to the concept of social justice and thought that it was only right and proper that an Aboriginal person should replace him. All of John’s co-workers were Aboriginal, and he had a good understanding of Aboriginal community politics across Victoria. Prior to taking up his current role, John had been a public servant for all of his working life. Restructuring in the 90s had left him without a permanent position, and he had jumped at the chance to be engaged in a role which aimed at capacity-building within the organization.

John had not had any meaningful contact with Aboriginal people prior to taking up his current position. Although he was in a position of authority, John was answerable to the board of the organization where he worked, and was amazed by the attention that his indigenous co-workers paid to the minutia of minute-keeping and other protocols around running a meeting. Eventually, he came to understand that this was an effect of the close scrutiny which was paid to such matters by Government departments. John said that he

had been “shirt-fronted” a few times by Aboriginal consumers, and that he sometimes felt ostracized as the only “whitefella” in the organization which employed him. The interview with John was conducted in his office, within the organization’s headquarters in an inner suburb of Melbourne.

D.2.4 Non-indigenous interview 4: “Barry” – the engineer

Barry was in his early thirties at the time of the interview, which took place in his office after work hours. Barry, an engineer, was employed by a company to project manage an extensive and long term Government initiative to build and maintain infrastructure within Aboriginal communities across Victoria. The budget allocated to the tender for this project was in the order of millions of dollars. As part of his brief, Barry had worked closely with community representatives across Victoria and in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. Barry liaised frequently with Aboriginal community members who were included in consultations regarding various decisions that needed to be made concerning the initiative. Until he began this work, Barry had never met an Aboriginal person. He had been in the position for about six years at the time the interview was conducted. Barry commented that it took a very long time to gain the trust of indigenous people, and attributed this to the fact that the majority of white professionals involved in setting up infrastructure within Aboriginal communities did not stay very long. Over the time that he had been involved, Barry had begun to form close friendships with some of the Aboriginal people that he worked with.

D.2.5 Non-indigenous interview 5: “Fred” – the technician

Fred was in his late-thirties at the time of the interview, and was employed as a technical expert in a major training institution. Drawing from many years of experience in the commercial media industry, his brief was to manage a section of the institution responsible for teaching the practical aspects of media production to post-secondary students. As an ancillary to his main responsibilities, Fred had volunteered to work with indigenous youth in a community media program, where he provided technical advice to assist in the production of community arts programs. Fred’s particular interest was in mentoring individual trainees so that they would gain sufficient skill to enable them to gain independent employment within the media industry. At the time of the interview, he had been involved with the program for three years. Unfortunately, traffic noise made the audiotape of the interview with Fred difficult to transcribe. This meant that less data was available for analysis from this interview and some detail was lost.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE MIRROR STAGE OF SUBJECT FORMATION

Between six and eighteen months of age, the infant begins to recognize that the image reflected back in the mirror belongs to him or herself, and this recognition enables infant to say to say of their reflection – “so there I am” for the first time. Lacan (1966, as cited in Rose, 1986) described this first act of self-recognition as a “jubilant” moment. Jacqueline Rose has stated that the child’s mirror image “is salutary for the child, since it provides the first sense of a coherent identity in which the child can recognize itself” (1986, p.30). As the story of Narcissus in the Greek myth has shown, the relation between the infant and the image reflected back in the mirror is essentially narcissistic. Freud (1914/1995) defined narcissism as an investment of libido in the ego. In *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, Freud distinguished narcissism from object love, in which libido is invested (cathected) in other people. Just as Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection while looking into a pool of water, so the infant develops an erotic attraction to their own image as reflected in the mirror stage by the Other. At the same time, the image is based upon an illusion, because the infant’s lack of motor co-ordination has been concealed within the apparently smooth and co-ordinated gestalt of the reflected image.

What the infant has really fallen in love with is the imaginary sense of mastery and integration that his or her reflected image invokes (Evans, 1996, p. 116). This is not an *I* falling in love with a *Thou*, but a “me” falling for an “I”, a parallel relation. There is an original lack of correspondence, then, between the uncoordinated and dependent infant and the “chimerical unity of the mirror image”. Therefore, Lacan reasoned, the gestalt that grants the infant “in a mirage the maturation of his power” is in fact external to the infant, and as such, it “simultaneously undercuts the illusion which it provides, namely, the totality, unity, identity, autonomy, and self-mastery of the subject” (Lacan, 1966, as cited in Chanter, 1997, p. 55).

In the mirror stage, the child is forced to begin to move away from the infantile illusion of omnipotence to the realization that the self is fragmentary and dependent. This is why the mirror stage is also the site of Lacan’s famous “divided subject”, the place where the subject becomes alienated from him or herself (Verhaeghe, 2004). Because the gestalt symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, while at the same time prefiguring an essential alienation from that *I*, Lacan linked the development of the “speaking subject” with castration. The “jubilation” felt by the child as a result of self-recognition is therefore precarious, because the imaginary unity of the ego is constantly threatened by fears of internal disintegration and fragmentation.