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Ideology in Public Policy: An examination of aggressive paternalism and enculturation in Indigenous assistance programs

ABSTRACT

Although Australian Government officially rejected a paternal assimilation strategy as public policy in the late 1960s, its policy increasingly encourages Indigenous people to adopt 'mainstream' values and objectives. This paper examines contemporary Australian policy directions for their desire to promote conformity. By exploring recent policy responses to Indigenous affairs it considers the resistance that ideologically-imposed objectives foment in subject populations. The paper highlights the weakness of coercive approaches to public policy. The discussion concludes that imposed problem definitions and solutions will not satisfy the needs that liberal traditions uphold as the social agenda of western democratic Government. More importantly, they fail to address the needs and aspirations of Australia's Indigenous people in any meaningful way.

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Over the past decade in Australia, and since the election in 1996 of the Liberal-National party Coalition government under Prime Minister John Howard, a range of major policy initiatives have been introduced, many of which impact directly on Indigenous affairs. Informed by the Government's preferred ideology, these initiatives have signalled a fundamental shift in policy approaches away from targeted and special provision of Indigenous services to a more general 'mainstreaming' of services. This has resulted in a number of fundamental changes in the way that government deals with Indigenous matters and, as argued in this paper, reveals a number of deep-seated assumptions about Indigenous communities.

This paper critically examines the ideological dilemmas contained in Australian Federal Government policy intentions for Indigenous remote communities. It examines the statements that key policy-makers have released to the media that broadly reflect its policy approach in this area. It then assesses the capacity of these policy approaches to meet the needs of disadvantaged Indigenous 'clients' within the context of a neo-liberal, market-based economy.

Background and Policy Context
Indigenous Australians divide into two cultural groups - Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders - who together make up the most disadvantaged groups in the country. Most Indigenous Australians live in an urban or suburban context but those who live in remote communities, settlements such as Wadeye (300 kilometres south west of Darwin) and Palm Island (1400 kilometres north of Brisbane), are the most disadvantaged of this disadvantaged group. The Indigenous Australians of such locations[1] were, until European settlement, part of semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer societies but during the 20th century were settled in church-run missions or government-administered communities of these kinds.

Indigenous settlements in Australia were until 1972 subject to an unsuccessful 'assimilation' policy which deliberately subjected the Aboriginal client population to housing and education strategies to convert them to European culture and religion. This policy accorded with a conservative surety that mainstream culture was superior and therefore was needed by Indigenous people (Thompson 2005). After the election of the social-democrat Whitlam government, Australian policy changed to a 'self-determination' approach whereby Indigenous people were supposedly allowed to determine their own developmental agenda after being supplied with culturally appropriate housing, education and other social infrastructure. Even after the 1975 demise of the Whitlam government there was until 1996 a relative accord between political (Liberal-National and Labor) parties that self-determination policy was appropriate and that services should be provided to disadvantaged Indigenous communities so that they could develop according to their own culturally defined needs. Research tends to indicate, however, that the normative nature of social policy processes in Australia were quite prescriptive about the services and infrastructure that was 'needed' even in remote Indigenous communities (Thompson 2005). Such prescription of

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[1] Torres Strait Islanders and others indigenes who moved to fringe camps around towns or to cities are not discussed in this paper.

developmental directions limited genuine self-determination. Discussion below will consider the post-1996 neo-liberal[2] political manoeuvring which attacks Indigenous communities as 'cultural museums' and deplores self-determination in communities that are characterised by endemic social problems.

Appraising social conditions

The colourful Australian Senator, Bill Heffernan, recently visited the remote community of Wadeye. He expressed serious concern about the living circumstances of the **twenty-five hundred** residents. Accordingly, Senator Heffernan observed that young people in Wadeye were "bored shitless" to the point of rioting. The problem was, according to Senator Heffernan, that the young people were not attending school (Heffernan 2006: CA35). Heffernan (2006:CA) noted that "every Australian should be ashamed" of the situation in Wadeye.

Earlier in April 2005, the Prime Minister, John Howard, was photographed hugging children and expressing his concern about the pressing needs of Indigenous people at Wadeye. The settlement was considered a case example of a high priority Indigenous community for Australian government intervention[3]. Howard represented the Wadeye community as one that was recognisably in need of a new direction. He noted "their firm resolve to turn their community around, not only working in partnership with government but also by helping themselves". The government was confident of their success and was providing special funding to the community (Howard 2005:1a). These measures, announced on 2 April 2005 by the Australian Federal Government, were indicative of its "continuing commitment to the partnership established with the Wadeye community and the Northern Territory Government" (Howard 2005:1a). This intent to help and improve Indigenous conditions was based on the axiomatic statement that this community needed to 'turn around'. Heffernan reiterated that the priorities for the community were health, education, home ownership and economic opportunities (Heffernan 2006:24).

Senator Heffernan's statements reveal the value base behind government judgements about Indigenous communities and, as will be discussed later, highlight the dilemmas associated with social programs for Indigenous clients. This Howard government tends to view the conditions in places like Wadeye as running counter to the firmly held values of 'mainstream' Australia.

Appalling conditions in Aboriginal communities, such as Wadeye, seem to self-evidently require compassionate intervention (Heffernan 2006:24). If the young people are bored 'shitless', then, or so the logic goes, education seems foremost among the needs of Indigenous Australians. The identification of such 'needs' is then set in the priorities laid down in Federal/State agreements about intervention in Indigenous communities. These priorities are evidenced in the Commonwealth/Queensland agreement for servicing Indigenous communities which highlight:

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[2] Neo-liberal ideology here is considered to be an ideological position that emphasises individual independence within a free-market mode of economic production. This argues for minimal intervention into individual and family life and a small-government approach to governance.

[3] National Indigenous Council member Wesley Aird went on to say "They've been imposing bureaucratic models. But it has to be a genuine partnership if it's going to work"

- early childhood development and growth;

- early school engagement and performance;

- positive childhood and transition to adulthood;

- substance use and misuse;

- functional and resilient families and communities;

- effective environmental health systems; and

- economic participation and development. (Howard December 2005b.)

Policy Responses

These joint agreements for mainstream service delivery act to replace a more complex planning approach that existed under the auspices of the now-defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). "'Mainstreaming', as many call it, took effect from July 1 2004. All Indigenous-specific programs ($2.9 million in 2004-5 budget) were from that date the responsibility of functionally appropriate Commonwealth departments" (Rowse 2006:np). This approach stripped away years of Indigenous democratic development and agenda-setting arrangements. One major influence on Indigenous self-determination was the removal of powers among democratically elected representatives of ATSIC. The abolition of ATSIC ensured services were delivered to Indigenous communities by mainstream government departments or their agents rather than an Indigenous body. Instead, the government has adopted a 'can do' approach based on 'common sense' aimed at fixing complex problems.

Where Indigenous activists might emphasise that Australian history is a colonial history that requires a treaty and reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, "Around 1999, the Howard government began to contrast 'symbolic' reconciliation (a concern for Indigenous rights) with 'practical reconciliation' (a concern for Indigenous Australians' relative material deprivation)" (Rowse 2006:np). Howard considers that "the journey towards reconciliation will only be complete when indigenous Australians enjoy the same opportunities as other Australians" (Howard 2006:1a) and obviously education promotes individual opportunities. Though "real economic and social progress in indigenous communities … can only be built on a foundation of law and order", the fundamental basis for change rests, apparently, with education. Thus "education, formal or informal, has been the passport to progress in every culture since the dawn of time" (Howard 2006:1a). Mainstream education might also be considered to be the purest form of cultural assimilation as it is an intensive process focussed on teaching the values, beliefs and 'truths' of the dominant culture.

Prime Minister Howard draws on a case-study involving a young Indigenous girl who had "a bleak and aimless future because she dropped out of school" but became "a pioneer in indigenous contemporary art" because of education and individual effort (Howard 2006:1a). Howard (2006:1a) goes on to emphasise that "this is not a government achievement. It's her personal achievement. And it is part of a larger story of educational progress". Evidently, education is practical as it provides opportunities for advancement, but it is the individual characteristic of self-reliance which must stimulate Indigenous 'progress' and solve the 'appalling' circumstances that prevail in communities. This view emphasises the inherent worth of a 'mainstream' acceptance of neo-liberal perceptions of individual self-reliance and reduces complex historical and contemporary problems to individual shortcomings.

In respect to a different but similarly pressing community situation, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough (17 April 2006) has outlined the social order that is needed in these communities. He says:

> Well, it is desperate... these, …camps, … are … without governance, with inadequate law and order, where alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse are normal. And no part of Australia should have those circumstances. And I'm determined to work with the … territory government and also the local authorities there, …and also the Tjulyuru Aboriginal Corporation, to turn this situation around and to do it rapidly.

Official Panic Responses

This view by Minister Brough demonstrates a sense of urgency about government concern for Indigenous welfare and a sense of outrage over the supposed clash with mainstream expectations and values. Individuals can hardly be encouraged to strive for success if they are limited by community conditions that so work against the preconditions of successful activity. But the rhetoric hinges on a deficit model of human character that sees social problems as, in part, created by those people experiencing them. It follows therefore that government has to take a lead in addressing the problems of Indigenous communities. In 2006 Commonwealth Health Minister Tony Abbott, advocated a new "form of paternalism" to deal with the "appalling living conditions of many Aborigines' as he believes that 'someone has to be in charge of [these] struggling communities" (Abbott 2006b:1). He sees the problems of Indigenous communities as a failure of appropriate leadership that, by inference, can only be administered by others, namely government.

Behind these statements is an increasingly clear opposition to an earlier logic that social policy should be underpinned by principles of Indigenous self-determination and cultural integrity. These are seen as a misguided approach that has resulted in cultural enclaves that separated Indigenous people from the benefits of mainstream life. A "misplaced tact, and fear of imposing what are now seen as outside standards, rather than universal ones" has allowed a culture of failure to persist, according to the Commonwealth Minister for Health (Abbott 2006b: 3). A Commonwealth Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs met on June 16 2004 and developed a long-term vision for Indigenous Australians based on the principle that:

Indigenous Australians, wherever they live, should have the same opportunities as other Australians to make informed choices about their lives, realise their full potential in whatever they choose to do and to take responsibility for managing their own affairs (Vanstone 2004).

It seems that the Government agenda is highly paternalistic and culturally assimilationist. Its individualisation and mainstream education policies are key planks of a cultural assimilation approach that have been critiqued by generations of Indigenous activists and academics (Thompson 2005). Some academics, however, have supported the Government agenda. In a feature article in Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, an expert opinion recently referred to the Palm Island Indigenous community as a "jobless, welfare-dependent, intractable, dysfunctional slum" and the "most violent place on earth" (Hughes 2007:18-8/1/07). A Senior Fellow of the influential Sydney-based Centre for Independent Studies made this assessment: "Dogs are now probably in better health than people on Palm Island" (Hughes 2007:18). She further stated that only if these "living museums of traditional culture" are exposed to mainstream economic liberalism, will such problems begin to dissipate (Hughes 2007:18).

The Role of Values
Although the media, the ruling political elite and sections of the academic community cite dramatic cases such as Wadeye and Palm Island as evidence of the 'appalling' nature of Indigenous life, their assessments may be seen as just another reaction to the significant difference between Indigenous life and mainstream values. It is all too easy to react with horror to other assumed value systems and cultural conditions and then to contrast this with other areas of non-Indigenous life. The pronouncements of horror about Indigenous life are noticeably deficient in conveying the residents' judgements about their living conditions or their proposals about 'progress'. To be sure, there are many problems in these communities and these can be easily identified through various comparative health and other statistics. Moreover, many Indigenous spokespersons would agree that their communities require resources and services. However, the voices of Indigenous people have been largely overridden by a narrative that has constructed Indigenous communities as inherently pathological in character and therefore in need of urgent ameliorative measures. Thus the impassioned calls for intervention are, for all their humanitarian sentiments, a call to impose **mainstream values** about hygienic practices, eating norms, and child-rearing conventions on culturally different communities (Thompson 2006).

Self-evidently, the new policy direction – which in fact recycles policies from many previous administrations – recommends *imposed* change and prescribes the direction of this change. Thus, it is asserted that every Australian 'should be ashamed' that education, law and order, health and housing interventions have not penetrated these communities and changed these 'appalling' 'museum' conditions into acceptable ones. Decency demands acceptance of this argument and even some sections of the academic community are falling in line to paint Indigenous communities as requiring mainstream alternatives. Common sense and compassion demand that there must be no "stalling the Commonwealth's

efforts to improve policing, education[,] health and … private property rights" in these communities (Hughes 2007:18).

Implicit Ideology
The apparent consensus around the need to intervene urgently and radically in Indigenous communities has given legitimacy to the view that mainstream education, economic integration, law and health services, are the inescapable answer to these problems. If there is agreement that communities must be exposed to market-liberal conditions, then politically conservative desires for order and conformity are the preconditions that must be established before improvements can even begin. Perceived abuse and lawlessness reinforce impressions about the appalling divergence from mainstream expectations, and there is no perceived alternative to imposed change.

A 'mainstreaming' approach to Indigenous service provision has in recent years supplanted Indigenous-specific service arrangements, with the total dissolution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission indicative of this policy reform. If all of the Indigenous-specific programs are dissolved (as is nearly the case now) then all programs are mainstream, and mainstream values will dominate. This mainstreaming approach has appeased common-sense assumptions that Indigenous people need to be more like 'us', that arrogant academics and Indigenous activists have been put in their place, that law and order are replacing lawlessness and abuse, and that right is replacing wrong. This also implies the politically conservative notion that powerful mainstream leaders have superior ideas and have an inherent responsibility to impose policies on others. The inferred hopelessness of Indigenous communities tends, in a multitude of ways, to reinforce a sense of inferiority and a need for sympathetic (paternalistic) action.

Any opposition to this view is likely to be greeted with howls of protest as critics point out that culturally-relative arguments are academic nonsense in the face of the 'inadequate law and order', 'alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse' and 'child abuse'. These features of Indigenous life clash too dramatically with our expectations for us to examine these situations without emotion. We cannot ignore the pain we feel for innocent children who suffer abuse and lost human potential.

Over recent years huge governmental efforts have gone into dealing with the trauma of adult Indigenous people who suffer because of forced separation from their families and inappropriate fostering and care arrangements. Yet the evidence suggests that this 'stolen generation' of children was taken away because of the compassionate concerns of mainstream Australians who found their Indigenous care arrangements 'appalling' (ENIAR 2007:1).

Cultural Relativism, Right and Wrong
At this juncture a somewhat dramatic example might demonstrate the ethical complexity of cross-cultural judgements about the need for intervention. Berndt and Berndt (1991:180-3) cite various traditional Indigenous initiation ceremonies that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. Most of the procedures

they describe for male children and all of the procedures for females would be described as appalling physical or sexual abuse if they happened within mainstream Australian society.

It is reasonable to say that many cross-cultural experiences are extremely discomforting to those experiencing them and that they are very easily misjudged and punitively treated. Overreaction becomes the norm when strongly held values are offended. Even a desire to implement international conventions about the rights of children must be considered sensitively under cross-cultural conditions. For example, when Indigenous children were being removed from their families, the officials who were taking these children felt they were doing the right thing and protecting them from appalling circumstances. Irrespective of the perceived justice and seemingly self-proclaimed rightness of these actions, they had a documented dramatic and equally appalling negative impact on the stolen children.

A recent (2006) Australian Broadcasting Corporation 'Four Corners' documentary exposed nepotism and violence in a central Australian Indigenous organisation and was lauded for exposing the unfair practices that people faced in these communities. No recognition was given to the difficult challenges that face these communities where people are culturally obliged to look after family first and where individuals can be considered to breach traditional law by not doing so. If in the mainstream we derive our self-respect and self-esteem though our rightness of fit with our socially imposed norms or by being true to our values, then how can we expect Indigenous people to ignore their own values? Yet we easily label such actions as nepotism, corruption or appalling and laud their exposure to our punitive scrutiny. Consider the political leaders of the 'free world' and their perception of radical Islam's criticism and intervention into of our 'way of life', and consider how Indigenous people must see the scrutiny, judgements and interventions into their way of life as equally destructive. From the radical Islamic perspective, western morality is appalling and demands urgent intervention.

In simple terms, if western leaders confidently examine the world from within their unexamined value base **they will** find within any different culture the significant and 'appalling' breaches with firmly held beliefs that will justify dramatic interventions. Equally simply, there is no ultimate arbitrator of what constitutes rightful intervention across cultures. Simplistic notions of pain, harm, abuse, lost potential are all interpreted differently across cultures. How many traditional initiation ceremonies, even in western private educational institutions, would pass cross-cultural scrutiny and not be seen as reason for punitive intervention. Instances such as these would be considered by Australian government to be the business of Australians – as is the treatment of Indigenous people - and addressed as such, rather than by external colonial authorities. Otherwise the degree of ideological self-righteousness of oversighting government will dictate the degree of over-reaction to difference. It appears that the conservatism of Australia's policy-makers may result in over-reaction.

Values and Policy Implications
Consider the Australian government position on four (4) different case-studies. First, it seeks to intervene in Indigenous practices which clash with its values.

Second, it seeks to intervene in Iraq because it is perceived to need democracy, and removal of non-existent WMDs. Third, it rejects international scrutiny of its treatment of Indigenous Australians. Fourth, it rejects international scrutiny of its treatment of refugees. It appears that Australian government values are not just the right ones but they are the only values that should be considered in Australia.

What then about universal rights as proposed by the UN conventions and international conventions about the protection of children? Does not this argument overwhelm other constraints and require Australian government intervention to protect these powerless individuals? This argument assumes that if government lets Indigenous people set their own agenda, it will condone the abuse of children. This approach to policy intervention starts by saying that there is child abuse, therefore that Indigenous people are abusive to children, and therefore that government must intervene in these people's lives. Yet, if Indigenous culture were an untouched integral traditional culture and if government observed a clash of values with mainstream childrearing practices, would it be obliged to intervene to protect the children from its own construction of 'abuse'. What then if the protected children felt belittled by being stopped from participating in a key component of their cultural lives. This is exactly the same case as is detailed by the actions of Australian governments who were participants in the abuses of the 'stolen generations'.

The argument here is not that children should be left to suffer sexually abusive practices, or to be physically damaged, but rather that it is impossible to observe cultural practices from the outside and intervene without causing unknown damage. Officialdom can only discuss with the elders of the community what is right and what should be happening and assist this process UN conventions are predominantly western cultural constructs, and they certainly are not Indigenous conventions. The UN is capable of cultural imperialism just as the US is, and Australia is. In short, the government cannot 'protect' children from their own culture, and if it attempts to do so, however well-intentioned, then it causes more rather than less abuse. Moreover, the very construction of 'the problem' as besetting entire communities, irrespective of the efforts of Indigenous people to address complex issues, is in itself a colonial practice. Few would comment on an entire community if child abuse were present in one of Sydney's suburbs, nor would a paternalistic solution be the response. Indeed, it is likely that in these cases attention would focus on socio-economic issues, the lack of services and the resource limitations in the given area. Commentators would be mindful of the tendency to pathologise entire populations in the way Indigenous communities are pathologised.

According to Indigenous value bases, are the 'conditions' in these problematised communities 'appalling' or are they perceived differently from the imposed assessments? And how do the mainstream judgements about remote Indigenous circumstances impact on Indigenous residents of problematised communities?

Indigenous perceptions of 'need'

In respect to the first question there seems to be no systematic attempt to understand Indigenous priorities for living conditions, or life in general. Specifically, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertook a 2004/05 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS). The ABS also delivered a 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), and a 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (Hunter and Gray, 2002; Weston and Gray, 2006). The data from NATSISS are concerned with specific experiences of Indigenous people, 'such as Aboriginal languages spoken, distance to health facilities and current health problems…' (Altman and Taylor, 2006; Hunter, 2006). These surveys do not canvass the values and opinions of Indigenous people on specific social and civic priorities or personal perceptions of quality of life.

Although needs assessments are conducted in a variety of administrative realms, including surveys of indicators of Indigenous conditions, these tend to predetermine expected needs, or conditions, according to mainstream standards which then become the benchmarks for amelioration of problems. Even the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATAIS) assesses only predetermined indicators rather than Indigenous desires, attitudes or preferences for future development. The Australian Social Survey of Attitudes (AuSSA) assesses the values of so few Indigenous Australians as to be irrelevant in this aim[i].

The Impact of External Problematisation

In respect to the impact of imposed expectations and evaluation, previous work by Thompson (2005; 2006) traces from the late 1960s a discourse which externally examined Indigenous life, labelled it problematically **primitive,** and then argued for compassionate intervention though housing, health and education. This external problematisation was characteristic of governmental approaches to Indigenous communities such as Wadeye – a tendency common to European colonial history in Australia. The idea was similar to contemporary ideas that to 'get health and education right' 'get everyone to … school' and 'have home ownership'. Yet this has been a process in which Indigenous needs were ignored in favour of seemingly obvious mainstream objectives. That this has been the dominant government policy approach, even since the 1972 implementation of 'self-determination' policy, implies that contemporary Indigenous problems could be more a result of imposition than 'political correctness' (Thompson 2005). Thus historical problems are not a justification for more imposition; in fact, Reser argued in 1979 that the problems of remote Indigenous people are precipitated by a sense of lost control that is symptomatic of too much intervention.

Very little official credence is given to such arguments as those presented by Reser, and although ideas about individual control and empowerment are central to nearly all credible welfare and social work theory, there has been no attempt to allow the residents of remote Indigenous communities to set the development agendas for their communities. Additionally, the administration of Indigenous public funding has always been provided from Commonwealth and State sources attached to pre-defined programmes, such that housing policy money is spent on

housing and so on, irrespective of community priorities. Any community that activated and decided that it had greater priorities than the prescribed programs in a particular year might receive no fund allocations.

Contemporaneously policy change

If Indigenous intervention programs have always been predetermined by official problem-definitions and externally constructed solutions, then this poses the question: has the policy mix recently been changed? Only by considering the subtle differences in the intention of the policy can the future impact of change be predicted. Considering ideological differences in the policy statements exposes these intentions.

Thompson (2005) describes in housing policy terms how Indigenous intervention programs have since 1972 been focussed according to increasingly sophisticated assessments of quantitative 'needs'. Rather than the stated needs of clients, these estimates have measured a deficit against community expectations (Thompson 2005). These estimates, though imposed measures of the difference between the client conditions and community expectations, were actually conceptualised as a process that incorporated Indigenous participation in agenda-setting through Indigenous consultative bodies. Under earlier arrangements the problem was the unmet need, and the imposed strategy was the meeting of that need. By contrast, Senator Heffernan's appraisal of Indigenous living conditions as appalling is actually an officially sanctioned problem statement. Under such circumstances, rather than need assessments increasingly focussing on supporting Indigenous efforts to meet their socially constructed interpretations of need (helping), this official line proposes that the problems are about individuals not adhering to mainstream norms.

Previous processes were underpinned by liberal ideas about harm reduction and objectively measuring the level of unmet need that might cause harm. This resulted in a measurement of Indigenous deviance from accepted standards of amenity and so created an intervention strategy built on a culturally loaded and contested notion of 'need'. Recently the discourse has been reconstructed as an individualised account whereby Indigenous difference is perceived as unacceptable and each Indigenous person as requiring an educative process that will prompt him or her to normalise and compete in the market-place[4].

Though earlier humanitarian policy was underpinned by implicit control rather than genuine strategy for achieving satisfaction of client priorities (needs), recent policy approaches may achieve an overt economic conflict with Indigenous rationality. If, for example, Indigenous people have a collective strategy for achieving economic satisfaction, then confident imposition of order, education and health strategy will conflict with it and reduce further the sense of control that Reser argued is essential to mental health. Paradoxically, the mechanics of market-liberalism rely on self-determination at an individual level so that people can maximise their strengths and gain optimum satisfaction from available resources. Like many previous policy approaches, Howard's prescription

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[4] Much has been written about this government's 'mutual obligation' policy and its implicit pressure to participate in market competition.

damages these mechanics by limiting the strengths that these 'cultural museums' have provided to Indigenous individuals.

Howard's case example is one of an Indigenous person self-determining and succeeding through using those strengths that she has available to her because of her strong culture. If her 'cultural museum' had been destroyed then she would not have the strength or capacity to deploy in the market place. Her advantage is her cultural difference, yet the argument that is presented for Indigenous intervention is one of imposing mainstream values onto that culture and reforming these 'museums'. This does not hold a logical progression for that success in the market place which depends on Indigenous self-determination, innovation and achievement. These conservative approaches assume that the most knowledgeable Indigenous elder is a 'blank-slate' upon which must be written a basic mainstream knowledge system. Rather than developing Indigenous strength by allowing them to set their own agendas, the trend is to set an assimilationist agenda that will 'assist' them to fit into the economic system at the lowest skilled level in the lowest employment regions of Australia.

Conclusion
The purpose of this discussion is not to pretend that the health status of remote Indigenous communities is desirable. It is much worse by mainstream standards than the health of the broad Australian community, and such conditions speak for themselves. They seem, however, to be more a result of a colonial legacy of intervention than Indigenous culpability. The contemporary approach of government is, however, about measuring deviations from the mainstream and then expertly intervening in communities to bring about 'change'. Such an intervention methodology started in 1965 and continues to this day, to the detriment of the quality of life in Indigenous communities. Yet the health of Indigenous people surely is an Indigenous issue. Before white colonisation there was no concept of 'health', and personal afflictions were likely to be seen as the result of a curse or 'witchcraft' by 'kaditcha' men or others. Thus, reconstructing it as a matter of unhygienic Indigenous life is a perfect opportunity for colonial intervention.

At a simpler level: If I am not well but wish to spend my last remaining resources on my daughters, should the government forcibly intervene in my life because it holds humanitarian values. Should it prevent me from achieving my own intentions through these interventions? This is the argument for Indigenous health. Though they are in some places taking action to strengthen their communities against violence and socially destructive substance abuse, Indigenous people in remote communities are not agitating for health intervention. Health intervention is about imposing more change on them; and it may well be the constant change that has so disoriented them as to prevent them from achieving more satisfaction in life. Reser (1979) suggested this many years ago. Government will only know when it lets them determine their own priorities for their quality of life, including health, and assists them to pursue these priorities.

A confident move towards common sense intervention and practical reconciliation through imposed mainstream services is philosophically quite different from the intentions of the Australian government policy of 1972. This 1972 policy of promoting self-determination was principally about facilitating Indigenous

approaches to increased quality of life. Howard's new direction for Wadeye, if it is genuinely built upon a "firm resolve to turn their community around, not only working in partnership with government but also by helping themselves", will be a forward move. If, however, the same poor understanding which prevented self-determination policy from ever being implemented is now misjudging Indigenous conditions as being a result of too much self-determination and is justifying conservative policy authoritarianism, then greater problems hold for the future. The practical difference between the 1972 and 2006 approaches is/can be expressed in terms of authoritarianism and the level of conservative confidence with which they impose external values on client populations. As argued by Rowse (2006), these policy developments are not a deliberate move towards a previously discredited assimilationist approach to Indigenous servicing. They are an ideologically driven entrenchment of assimilationist practices that have never been driven out of policy. Conservative ideas control people and such control as this is not functional or sustainable in a liberal democracy.

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[i] It also uses language that could only confuse Indigenous Australians, including referring to 'migrants', but meaning non-Anglo-Saxon Australians.