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Regulating Recognition in Redfern

Aboriginal Organisations and the Construction of
their Corporate Aboriginal Identity



Janneke Hulsker

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Aboriginal Organisations and the Construction of
their Corporate Aboriginal Identity

een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Sociale
Wetenschappen

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“Optimism is a precondition for sanity”

Prof.dr. Ali Mazrui (1996)

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Introduction: Working in Redfern

Three Aboriginal boys (aged 12 to 14 years) are standing on a wall behind the Koori Kafe with cigarettes in their hand. They are looking towards me when I walk by. One of them starts to talk.

Aboriginal boy: Do you have some money?

Janneke: No.

How did you get that flag? [points at flag on jacket]

I got it from an Aboriginal friend who wanted me to wear it when I got to the Northern Territory.

Have you been up to the Northern Territory?

Yeah, twice.

Do you fuck?

Isn't that a bit of a personal question?

Do you have a fag?

No, I don't smoke.

Do you have some money?

No, I don't.

What are you here for?

I'm going to visit Owen.

Owen is over there. See where that green truck is?

Yeah, I know. But I got an appointment at two o' clock and first I'm gonna have some lunch.

Oh, then you gotta go to the Koori Kafe.

Okay, I'll do that, bye.

(29-2-1996)

The conversation described above was the first conversation I had in Redfern, a metropolitan suburb in the city centre of Sydney, when I arrived in 1996. It is symbolic for the reactions I received during my fieldwork. The boys on the wall approach me in several ways. At first they are curious what I am doing in their street being white while wearing an Aboriginal flag. Then they are trying to shock me by asking questions about sex to find out if I am okay. Our contact ends with a gesture of acceptance by giving me directions and advising me where I should go for lunch. The curiosity, suspicion, character testing and helpfulness were an intrinsic part of my work in Redfern and influenced the way in which I was able to conduct the research.

In this introduction I will first introduce the argument of the thesis, its underlying presuppositions, and the concepts around which the argument evolves. Then I will pay special attention to the specific working environment Redfern is and the consequences this had for the fieldwork methodology as well as for me as a researcher struggling with especially ethical questions concerning working with Aboriginal people. I will end the introduction with a preview of the upcoming chapters.

1.1 The Argument

In the early 1970s the first Aboriginal community-based organisations were established in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. Set up by local Aboriginal people as a reaction to the prevailing poverty present in the urban Aboriginal community and to the violent police activities it was facing, these organisations provided services to Aboriginal people in areas such as: health, housing, education and law and justice. On the basis of their specific “Aboriginal” way of service provision they receive support from government institutions to be able to achieve their main aims: to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal people and achieve social equality and understanding within Australian society.

However, since the first organisations were set up, Aboriginal people started using different forms of Aboriginal identification more frequently. While on a national level people still identify as Aborigine, in other situations people prefer to use regional labels to refer to themselves in order to avoid the term *Aboriginal* and identify, for example as Koori. Also people nowadays more frequently identify as a member of an Aboriginal “nation”, based on local language groups. Hence a variety of forms of Aboriginal

identification has become visible and with this development the number of ways to interpret Aboriginal identity has also grown.

As a result of the more frequent use of these multiple forms of identification and the growing variety of interpretations of Aboriginal identity the Aboriginal organisations have to adapt their strategy of communication towards the different groups they interact with in Australian society. Because the support the organisations receive depends on their “Aboriginal way” of service delivery they need to be able to convince the government institutions and the general public of their Aboriginal character. In order to gain support from these groups, the organisations also need to be recognised by Aboriginal people because Aboriginal support increases the credibility of organisations that claim to be Aboriginal. Therefore the organisations need to legitimise their “corporate” Aboriginal identity towards a variety of people in Australian society (government institutions, media, clients, staff).

In this thesis I analyse the way in which Aboriginal organisations in Redfern communicate their “corporate” Aboriginal identity towards different groups in Australian society in order to legitimise themselves as Aboriginal organisations. I argue that, in interaction with each group an Aboriginal organisation faces, it emphasises particular aspects of its “corporate” Aboriginal identity. The reason for this is that by emphasising only particular aspects of Aboriginal identity the political potential of each of these aspects is used to convey a specific message towards each group that is most likely to convince them of the Aboriginal character of the organisation. In the following sections I will shortly introduce the key concepts of this thesis and further elaborate on the argument introduced here.

1.1.1 Redfern

The suburb of Redfern is close to the city centre of Sydney. Together with the suburbs of Chippendale and Waterloo it falls under the district of South Sydney. The boundary between Redfern and its neighbouring suburbs is artificial because the population living in the South Sydney area is regarded as one community and the boundaries of the suburb are continually changing to the disadvantage of Redfern (*Sydney Morning Herald* 20-12-1995). Apart from that the Aboriginal organisations based in Redfern cater for Aboriginal people in the wider Sydney region or even the whole state of

New South Wales. However, Redfern has a history of raids and riots since it became populated by Aboriginal people that is known throughout Australia and which has given the suburb its notorious reputation. All the Aboriginal people and organisations living and operating in this suburb can not be separated from this specific history as they still are confronted with the consequences of that history. For this reason I have chosen to concentrate on Redfern and not the wider area of South Sydney.

The reasons for the choice of Redfern are manifold. The suburb can be viewed as a dynamic place that is especially suitable for research into the relation between the Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal identity. For example, the first Aboriginal shop-front organisations as we know them now were set up in Redfern in 1970. Since then, more than a thousand organisations were founded all around Australia after the example of the first Aboriginal organisations in Redfern (Foley 1991). There is a high concentration of Aboriginal organisations in Redfern, which partly operate in an informal network. This makes this particular group very suitable for research.

Apart from that, Redfern knows an interesting Aboriginal political history and its residents have played an active role in bringing about political change throughout Australia. Important events in the political history of Australia were organised in Redfern, such as the erection of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972 and the rally of Aboriginal people from all over the country which was held in Sydney during the bicentenary of Australia in 1988. Apart from that, Redfern was the first place in Australia where Aboriginal people received land rights in the form of the property of a block of houses known as "The Block". Also the establishment of the Aboriginal organisations can be regarded as a form of political action as it demonstrated Aboriginal people's dissatisfaction with the services they were offered by mainstream institutions and set an example of a new way of service delivery directed towards Aboriginal people. With its focus on Redfern's indigenous urban political elite, this thesis can operate as a tool of comparative study in other urban settings, especially of other minority or indigenous groups over the world.

Another reason to choose Redfern is that Aboriginal identification is an important and intrinsic part of life for all Aboriginal residents in Redfern as well as its organisations. One of the main reasons for this I consider to be the fact that the identification as Aborigine in an urban environment is not a self-evident act but is often contested on the basis of a "lack of visible

Aboriginal characteristics". Due to their long-lasting and intensive contact with European Australians, especially urban Aboriginal people come from mixed relationships and were not raised in a "traditional" manner. Hence, for people who equate Aboriginal identity with visible traditional characteristics, many urban Aboriginal people do not look or act their part. As a consequence, the recognition of these people's Aboriginal identity in their daily contacts with other Australians is of great importance.

1.1.2 Aboriginal Organisations

The Aboriginal organisations that are the subject of this thesis are known as Aboriginal community-based organisations, which can be described as:

any type of organisation, formal or informal, which is based on a group of people living or working together and who associate to pursue common interests. They are characterised by being local in focus, and being directly accountable to their constituents. (Davidson and Peltenburg 1993: 13)

Robinson and White add that often community-based organisations "emerge autonomously in response to local economic and political circumstances" (1997: 12). These organisations differ from the earlier Aboriginal organisations set up in the 1930s which mainly focused on achieving civil rights for Aboriginal people in the sense that they were not local in character.

One of the reasons why I chose to study these organisations is the active pioneer role they once played in the public debate in the (re-) construction of the concept of Aboriginal identity. The organisations were the result of independent initiatives of cooperating Aboriginal people all over Australia who wanted to change the social circumstances of their people. When in the early 1970s the first Aboriginal organisations started operating, their staff, being active in the Aboriginal movement, played a pioneer role in the construction of a national Aboriginal identity (Burgmann 1993, Collmann 1981, Crick 1981, Dagmar 1990, Eggleston 1977, Jennet 1980, Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982, Pierson 1977a). The organisational structure facilitated this process as it provided people with new networks and the means to give expression to their Aboriginal identity.

Also, the study of especially these Aboriginal community-based organisations provides an excellent opportunity to study the complex

process of (re-) constructing and creatively using the concept of Aboriginal identity. In this respect I regard the organisations as magnifying-glasses through which the processes concerning Aboriginal identity construction and reproduction in an urban environment can be studied closely as the organisations are very explicit in their presentation of Aboriginal identity. I compare the policies, activities etc. of the Aboriginal organisations with what Harrison has called “identity symbols” as “they are all means by which social identity is more or less self-consciously constructed and expressed” (1999: 240). To be able to convince others of their “corporate” Aboriginal identity the organisations are forced to convey simplified versions of Aboriginal identity. Together, these different notions of Aboriginal identity give a clear insight into the aspects of urban Aboriginal identity, which staff members of organisations consider to be important.

1.1.3 Urban Aboriginal Identity

Whereas Redfern provides the setting for this research and the Aboriginal organisations offer a means through which the research subject can be studied, the main issue around which the argument of this thesis evolves is the concept of urban Aboriginal identity. Over the years identity has become a popular subject of study and discussion, not only in the academic world but also in society in general. Despite, or maybe thanks to, its popularity the usefulness of the concept has been questioned. At the seminar *Identity in Africa*¹ Fabian suggested we should think hard before using the concept of identity and posed the question: “Can we identify practices of discourse, of performance, of power, that we can understand better with the use of the concept identity? Does it explain something that we can not explain with other terms like culture?” (23-5-1997)

As in academic discussions the use of the concept of identity is questioned, I think it is necessary to elucidate why the concept of identity forms the main subject of this thesis. The inspiration for this research came directly from my former experiences in the field (see also section 1.2.1). For the Aboriginal people and organisations I came to know in 1992, when I visited Redfern for the first time, the concept of especially urban Aboriginal

¹ The seminar was organised by the research school CNWS, Africa Studies Centre and ASSR and held at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands on 22 and 23 May 1997. Professor Fabian was one of the discussants.

identity played such an important role that I decided to make it the subject of my thesis. The concept of identity is no longer an exclusively etic term to explain and interpret studied situations, it has been claimed by people in the studied societies in their struggle for recognition as a separable social or cultural group. Consequently the concept of identity has now also become an emic term that deserves attention.

In Australia Aboriginal people started using the concept of Aboriginal identity themselves in the late 1960s in an attempt to free themselves from the negative connotations that had been connected with their western categorisation as Aborigines. Around the same time the term Aboriginality was introduced "to denote Aboriginal identity, usually in the broadest sense" (M. Tonkinson 1990: 195-196). Since that time the concept of Aboriginal identity is a frequently discussed subject as well in academic literature as in public debate. At first Australian academics mainly focused on the contents of the concept (Coombs, Brandl & Snowdon 1981, Eckermann 1988). Later the emphasis was put on the political potential of Aboriginal identity to demonstrate that there was not one fixed Aboriginal identity (Attwood 1989, Beckett 1988b, Keeffe 1992, Morris 1989). As Morton argues: "[Aboriginal identity] is variable precisely to the extent that Aboriginal people and others vary in their judgements and practices concerning what constitutes 'real' Aboriginality." (1998: 377) To understand the variability of the concept of Aboriginal identity it is important to study the way in which Aboriginal identity is used and not to define it. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Dodson points out:

The fundamental assertion (concerning any definition) must be that indigenous populations must be recognised according to their own perception and conception of themselves in relation to other groups...I cannot say what Aboriginality is. To do so would be to fall into the trap of allowing Aboriginality to be another fixed category and more than enough fixing has already occurred. (1994)

Aboriginal identity can be viewed as an ethnic identity although Aboriginal people generally reject this form of identification because they do not want to be associated with other ethnic groups in Australian society as they all migrated to the Australian continent whereas the Aboriginal people consider themselves to be the original inhabitants. Still, the term ethnicity encloses also those who wish to distinguish themselves from others who do not identify themselves on the basis of first occupation. As Eriksen writes:

"[ethnicity] refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive." (1993: 4) He emphasises that it is "essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group" (1993: 12). Ethnicity is a dynamic concept as it can be viewed as "a continuous process of strategically negotiated identity and status" (Jones & Hill-Burnett 1983: 235). Apart from that, ethnicity also involves a creative process of negotiation. Epstein remarks that even though this process "involves some element of choice ... such choice is subject to a number of constraints" (1978: xiv).

In this thesis I mainly focus on the strategic use of Aboriginal identity by the organisations recognising the political potential of ethnicity in general. However, with this focus I do not want to underestimate the emotional power Aboriginal identity can have in this process. This approach corresponds with Keyes' view on the concept of ethnicity as he recognises the strength of what he calls primordial ties but recognises the importance social historical factors have in the emergence or construction of ethnic categories (1981, see also Linnekin & Poyer 1990: 11). Bell also combines the political and emotional aspects of the concept as he remarks that: "Ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest with an affective tie." (1975: 169)

Apart from the focus on especially the political aspects of Aboriginal identity, the argument of this thesis evolves around the concept of specifically *urban* Aboriginal identity. As I pointed out earlier, it is especially this form of Aboriginal identification, as opposed to, for example, those in remote areas where people have more "traditional" lifestyles, that is subject to disputation. In this thesis I use Hollinsworth's description of the concept of urban Aboriginal identity as an analytical tool (1992). He divides urban Aboriginal identity in three discourses, namely: Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity, and Aboriginality as descent. This division will play a major role in the argument of my thesis as, on the one hand, the separation of the concept of urban Aboriginal identity in three different notions helps to unravel it. On the other hand, the combination of these notions helps in forming a complete picture of the concept of urban Aboriginal identity explaining its internal seeming contradictions.

Because the thesis focuses especially on the use of the concept of identity by Aboriginal organisations as opposed to people, I use the concept of corporate identity. This concept is used in management circles to denote

the image of a company or organisation as a reflection of its corporate culture. There is a difference between the *internal* and *external* corporate identity of an organisation. The purpose of the first is to facilitate the identification of staff members with the organisation they work for in order to create a firm and loyal group of employees. The second is created in order to influence the image outsiders have of the organisation (Bax 1991: 134-135). The corporate identity of an organisation is carefully created by its Board and staff members in order to propagate an image of their organisation that fits the purpose. For Aboriginal organisations the purpose is to legitimise their existence in convincing others of the specific Aboriginal character of the organisation.

Because I have worked in an environment where the use of terms such as Aboriginal or identity can be viewed as a political act, I would like to stress that in this thesis I will speak mainly of *Aboriginal people*, except where the term *Aborigines* was specifically used by others or when I have to refer to Aboriginal people in a singular form. Over the years the term *Aboriginal people* has become more acceptable in the area where I worked as it recognises Aboriginal people as a people, whereas the term *Aborigines* is a colonial term and a derivative from an adjective. I could also have chosen only to use names that Aboriginal groups give themselves, such as Koori, Wiradjuri, Bandjalang etc. I did not do this as I expected this to become confusing especially for people who are not familiar with Aboriginal regional and local forms of identification. Apart from that I view the interpretations of urban Aboriginal identity as presented in this thesis as applicable to other urban situations as well thus making it easier to use the term Aboriginal. I will, however, continue to use the term *indigenous people* without capital "I", as it is not a proper name but a description for people who are indigenous to a place. Finally, I will refer to others, who are not Aboriginal, in different ways. When not being Aboriginal specifically matters I will speak of non-Aboriginal people to refer to anyone who does not identify as Aborigine. At others times I will use Australians. For the same reason I will also speak specifically of westerners, or western society when it specifically concerns the opposition of Aboriginal culture to western culture. In an historical context I will speak of British, referring to this specific group of colonisers, because they were the first to colonise Australia. The words *black* and *white* are only used when skin colour is specifically relevant.

1.1.4 The Credibility of a Corporate Identity

In order to be able to offer the Aboriginal population unique tailor-made services in the areas of health, housing, education and legal advice, the organisations were funded by federal and state governments as the Aboriginal initiatives fitted well within the Aboriginal welfare policies at the time. As a consequence a process of cooptation followed in which the organisations were incorporated in the system of Australian welfare. And the organisations slowly grew dependent upon structural funding. As resources became available this also meant that more people wanted to tap into them and as a result the competition between Aboriginal organisations grew. Consequently the Aboriginal organisations' existence depended more and more upon their recognition as genuine Aboriginal organisations. Thus, organisations had to present themselves in such a way as to convince everybody of their "Aboriginal" character, since this was not self-evident as Aboriginal identity in an urban situation is often contested. In order to maintain the political and financial support the organisations need to pursue their aims, they depend on their recognition as Aboriginal organisation by government institutions, the general public, and their own Aboriginal clients. The latter's support plays a crucial role in establishing whether an organisation fulfils its duties as an Aboriginal organisation towards the community it is working for. Hence, the organisations depend upon the way in which they present the image of their own "corporate" Aboriginal identity towards the outside world.

The central argument of this thesis is that in interaction with different groups in Australian society Aboriginal organisations present their corporate Aboriginal identity in different ways by constantly recreating their corporate identity and focussing on different aspects of the concept every time it is conveyed towards a particular audience. I argue that the organisations' representation of their identity depends on the message they want to convey towards their audience. The reason for this is that different aspects of Aboriginal identity have the potential to fulfil different functions. For the sake of the argument, in this thesis I analyse the interaction of Aboriginal organisations with four groups, namely: non-Aboriginal outsiders (especially government institutions), non-Aboriginal staff members, Aboriginal clients, and Aboriginal staff members. The first and third are groups with which Aboriginal organisations are dealing on a regular basis on especially a group level. The second and fourth are groups

that consist of members who can influence the organisations' corporate Aboriginal identity on an individual level.

In order to present an image of the organisation's corporate Aboriginal identity that appeals to the people addressed the organisations have to make use of many, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of Aboriginal identity to be able to function in a multifarious world consisting of groups and individuals who all have their own view of Aboriginal identity. The analyses of these different forms of interaction reveal which aspects of Aboriginal identity are regarded to be important to the Aboriginal organisations and which ones are strategically used to receive recognition as an Aboriginal organisation. One has to keep in mind, however, that this division has been created for analytical purposes as it makes understandable the way in which Aboriginal organisations perceive the concept of Aboriginal identity as well as their own corporate Aboriginal identity. Only the different focuses put together reflect a fuller image of what urban Aboriginal identity entails according to the Aboriginal organisations and how it can be used for political purposes.

With this thesis I aim to clarify the strategic use of concepts of identity in a politicised environment. The results of this research can contribute to comparative research into the strategic use of (ethnic) identities, to increase or regain power and wealth in changing social circumstances (Eriksen 1993) as can be found elsewhere in the world, especially with regard to other indigenous peoples. The study also pays attention to, what I consider to be an underexposed subject in the field of Australian Aboriginal Studies, namely *urban* Aboriginal people. Whereas Gale (1977, Gale & Brookman 1972) set the trend in the early 1970s for a short-lived popularity of urban Aboriginal Studies, today the gross bulk of them is still being published on Aboriginal people living in remote areas. This division no longer reflects the contemporary situation in which a growing number of Aboriginal people (80 % of the Aboriginal population) live in an urban environment (Horton 1994). What makes the urban environment such an important area of study is the fact that it harbours a situation of intense and inescapable contact between Aboriginal people and other Australians where social problems of mutual acceptance, recognition and respect occur.

With the special attention for the urban situation I aim to create more understanding for and give more insight into the use and definitions of the concept of Aboriginal identity amongst especially urban Aboriginal people, in this case mainly organisations. It is especially the group of urban

Aboriginal people whose claim on an Aboriginal identity is frequently disputed or rejected. As will become clear throughout this thesis it is still very hard for urban Aboriginal people to be recognised as such as they are often less visibly recognisable as being Aboriginal. By giving a clear insight in the aspects that the urban Aboriginal identity entails according to the organisations I aim to clarify why sometimes seemingly contradicting aspects of Aboriginal identity are used and how they can all be viewed as legitimate aspects of urban Aboriginal identity.

Apart from the urban environment another subject of this thesis I regard as underexposed concerns the Aboriginal organisations. Whereas the important role of the Aboriginal organisations in the past is recognised they have only appeared in academic studies sporadically. Most of the contemporary studies focus on the effectiveness of the organisations (Anderson & Brady 1995, Arthur 1998, Martin & Finlayson 1996, Smith 1995). This is of course a very important subject but the way in which these organisations deal with the concept of Aboriginal identity, upon which their recognition and thus existence depends, has remained underexposed. In the current world forum of indigenous peoples, such as the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, people often rely on accounts of non-governmental and community-based organisations such as the Aboriginal organisations, as the representatives of their people, it is therefore crucial to study how those organisations deal with their self-identification and the representation of their indigenous identity. This research attempts to fill a gap concerning this specific aspect of Aboriginal organisations.

1.2 Fieldwork Methodology

Although this research project officially started in 1995, my preparations before that time form an intrinsic part of this particular research and were indispensable to its success. In 1992 I visited Redfern for four months as part of my Masters of Cultural Anthropology and conducted fieldwork on the structure and functions of Aboriginal organisations through structured and semi-structured interviews (Hulsker 1992). It provided me with the basic information concerning the organisations and the necessary contacts. In 1994 I returned to Redfern to search for approval of my research proposal among the Aboriginal organisations studied before and make arrangements with them on cooperating with me on the upcoming research. That same

year I also took the opportunity to do a literature study at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. It focused on the social changes within Australian society in the early seventies and the origin and development of the Aboriginal organisations and the role of the concept Aboriginal identity herein.

The thesis itself is based on fieldwork that was conducted in Redfern from February 1996 until February 1997. On the basis of my 1994 visit I selected several organisations - the majority of them located in Redfern - I wanted to work with on the basis of their areas of service delivery. I chose for a wider approach as opposed to an in depth study of one or two organisations because of the interrelatedness of both the organisations and the areas of service delivery. During my first month in the field two organisations declined their cooperation. Two other organisations turned out to be unsuitable to work with on a daily basis and yet another organisation would become unsuitable because of events in the field. I was introduced to two new organisations that formed a welcome addition to the remaining organisations. These were the organisations with which I ended up working:

- Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern
- Aboriginal Children's Service
- Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern
- Mudgin-Gal Women's Corporation
- Aboriginal Housing Coalition
- National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council

Next to the organisations above with which I worked on a regular basis, I also talked with people from Tranby College, Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Urimbirra Aboriginal Corporation, and the Lismore office of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern. Apart from that I visited related institutions such as the Sydney ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) Regional Office, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales, the South Sydney City Council, and several courts and correction centres in the Sydney area and the rural area of Lismore. I collected my data while spending working days with the Aboriginal organisations. My main method of gathering information involved (participant) observation (Spradley 1980) and informal interview techniques (Fetterman 1989,

Spradley 1979). Next to the fieldwork methodology I consulted and analysed documents, like leaflets and annual reports of the organisations and other resources such as newspapers, and radio and television reports (Silverman 1993).

Besides the events and activities that were directly related to the organisations I also attended other events that broadened my view on the subject of study, for example, the course Indigenous History, Heritage and Culture Training that was given by an Aboriginal woman regarding Aboriginal culture and protocol. Halfway through the year I attended the *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum*, which resulted in the establishment of the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council, allowing me a close perspective on the establishment of a new Aboriginal organisation. Fortunately I also had the opportunity to be present at the public hearings in Redfern of the *National Inquiry into Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. The inquiry investigated the effects of the assimilation policy (from 1900 until 1970) under which Aboriginal children were taken away from their families.² I also joined different forms of protest organised by Aboriginal groups, such as rallies, vigils and demonstrations. As well I visited Aboriginal sites, museums, video and book launches, and theatre performances and movies made by Aboriginal people. Next to that my daily contact with non-Aboriginal Australians provided me with yet another perspective on the subject of study.

1.2.1 Advocacy and Academics

For the duration of this research project I was confronted with ethical issues that had a profound effect on the course of the research. For this reason I find it important to dwell on this topic. First, the conception of the idea for this research arose from a moral point of view as my incentive to set up this research was motivated by the Aboriginal people I had met in 1992. In that year I visited Redfern for the first time. During that field trip I developed sympathies for the organisations and the Aboriginal community of Redfern. Despite the negative stories that are spread about Redfern I was struck by

² The results of the inquiry were published in the report *Bringing Them Home*, which was presented to the Australian Government in May 1997. This has been covered by the media all over the world.

the perseverance and hope of the Aboriginal people who were working in the Aboriginal organisations and wanted to contribute to their struggle through emphasising positive and constructive developments in Redfern. Apart from that, I was led by their frequent use of the concept of Aboriginal identity to make this the topic of my study. I thought that a research into the Aboriginal organisations and the way they dealt with the concept of Aboriginal identity would create a better understanding of the organisations and demonstrate their usefulness as *Aboriginal* organisations.

The question can be posed whether moral intentions can be the first motivation to conduct research. I think that the research has to be relevant both to academic debate as well as to the people involved, particularly in a changing world where, especially indigenous, informants demand control over (parts of) the research. In this day and age where the studied people are more and more able and equipped to conduct research themselves one has to negotiate how research can benefit both parties. To come back to the question whether moral incentives can be the first motivation without endangering the validity and reliability of the research, I think they can, as long as the researcher is aware of his or her motivations.

As a consequence, I had to think for myself how I wanted to give content to my advocacy for the Aboriginal organisations. The fieldwork with the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern taught me that the people involved are usually better advocates of their own cause than others are (see also Henriksen 1985: 122). So, I limited my advocacy to my writing and lecturing in my own country about the situation in Redfern. I was convinced this was the best way and this was confirmed by one of my informants who said to me: "We do our part of the struggle over here, you do your part in your country." With this thesis I intend to present a balanced picture of the organisations focussing on both positive as well as negative aspects because this enhances the reliability of the research and increases the chances for recognition of the Aboriginal organisations described in this thesis. To conclude, I would like to agree with Cohen who once said: "I decided long ago that my advocacy – such as it is – had to lie in my ethnography: in presenting them and the complexity of their lives in a way that they would feel did them justice." (in Paine 1985: 258)³

³ For further discussions on anthropology and advocacy I refer to D'Andrade (1995), Hastrup and Elsass (1990), and Scheper-Hughes (1995). About professional codes of ethics for anthropologists see the AAA Code of Ethics, Bovens (1993), Mentzel (1993).

1.2.2 Gaining Confidence

After the initial phase of making a research plan I had to enter the field to collect the data. This brought specific problems, as Redfern is an extremely difficult area to enter. The most important reason for this is the general distrust with which Aboriginal people encounter non-Aboriginal people in this suburb. I had already experienced this on my first trip in 1992. On top of that, it seems that especially researchers are approached with reserve. I have come up with several reasons for this.

First, Aboriginal people often suspect that researchers have a hidden agenda. For many Aboriginal people, who consider Australian institutions to be a part of the dominating and oppressing western society, the link between a researcher and the Australian government is easily made. Most researchers in Aboriginal Studies are either funded by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) - an Institute which has its origin in Australia's colonial past but is now staffed entirely by Aboriginal people - or by a university which is most likely to receive government funding as well. This especially concerns Australian researchers. The suspicion towards researchers is understandable because past government policies concerning Aboriginal people that are nowadays considered to have had negative effects, were often based on social research, as was done elsewhere in the world.⁴

⁴ Maquet writes in his article on the place of anthropologists in colonial Africa that the information obtained through anthropological research was used to develop policies concerning the studied communities. Even though anthropologists wanted to preserve the existing situation among the people they studied, the images they created were often used to show to the public how lucky those communities were to have encountered Western societies. Later on the same information was used by governments to magnify the value of traditional culture to be able to ally themselves with traditional groups against progressive forces in Africa. (1964: 50)

In 1969 three authors, Berreman, Gjessing and Gough, called for a discussion on the new responsibility of the anthropologist in the journal *Current Anthropology*, which evoked strong reactions. The articles were written in reaction to the changing status of anthropologists in post-colonial countries and the development of anthropological studies being used for military purposes by the United States Government. Newly established independent countries in Africa and Latin-America refused to grant Western scientists admittance to their countries.

Second, there is a growing tendency among Aboriginal, and other indigenous, people to protect what they consider “their knowledge”.⁵ People are convinced that past researches have not benefited the communities involved and researchers are accused of doing research for personal gain (Brettell 1993: 4). The knowledge that was collected was seldom shared with the people involved. As the Research Ethics Committee of Tranby College writes in her research policy: “Research has been carried out on Aboriginal people that has disempowered them by directly damaging their cultures through the dissemination of secret or sacred knowledge or across gender or kin groups in a way that violated traditional laws.” (1996)

This has stimulated Aboriginal communities and their organisations to develop codes of ethics for future research concerning Aboriginal people. Also, institutions in the area of education and research in Aboriginal Studies have incorporated policies that prevent this from happening, such as AIATSIS and the Aboriginal organisation Blackbooks. This protective behaviour goes hand in hand with a recent development among politically active indigenous peoples around the world to try to gain (complete) control over the research process (McBeth 1993: 153, van Meijl 2000: 89). Despite the negative feelings towards researchers it is undeniable that social scientists also have contributed knowledge which has benefited Aboriginal people. One example is the assistance of anthropologists in claiming land rights over particular areas through providing information on traditional knowledge and genealogies that connect Aboriginal communities with certain areas.⁶

Third, the history of Redfern adds to the reserved attitude towards researchers. As I mentioned before, since Aboriginal people moved into the suburb of Redfern in the fifties and sixties it has built a notorious reputation, due to a history of raids and riots. Even among other Aboriginal

⁵ The possession of knowledge has been a sensitive issue for many years in Aboriginal Australia. For Aboriginal communities living in the remote areas it is important that what is considered to be culturally sensitive material is handled with care. They are concerned that “sacred”, thus restricted, knowledge is becoming public or that culturally sensitive knowledge is spread without their consent as was done in the past. An example is the taboo on the publishing of photos of deceased family members.

⁶ The Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair as described by R. Tonkinson (1997) provides an excellent example of the dangers of interfering in such cases as an anthropologist.

communities Redfern has a bad name.⁷ Because of this, the Aboriginal residents of Redfern have often been stigmatised as political radicals, addicts, and criminals. As a consequence, these negative images are often used as a reason to dispute these people's claims of an Aboriginal identity. This makes the residents very cautious in their contacts with people from outside. Many people even believe in conspiracies to get rid of the Aboriginal community in Redfern. These beliefs were strengthened by the real estate developments in Redfern since 1994 that announced the coming of the Olympic Games to Sydney in the year 2000. Many Redfern residents believed that the Government wanted to get rid of the Aboriginal people before that time.⁸ They thought the Government would use every means to reach this goal and would draw different people and institutions into its conspiracy to expel the Aboriginal community from Redfern.

Apart from the general mistrust concerning researchers some people also had rather unflattering ideas about anthropologists. One of the Aboriginal people with whom I worked told me: "Anthropologists are terrible. They go to the Aborigines and they ask how kangaroo tastes instead of trying it themselves." Also, my status as an MA student made a difference as I found it harder to re-enter certain organisations when I returned in 1996 as a PhD student. Apart from my professional background, my western background was reason for people to approach me in a particular way. On some occasions I was confronted with the colonial history of my country to show me that on the division coloniser-colonist I stood "on the other side". As an Aboriginal woman once said to me:

It's a habit of colonising countries, including your country, to interpret rules of indigenous people in a western way. They have never respected or recognised their rules. You have dominated for too long. This is our country and everyone else is an intruder. You came in and killed everyone without showing any respect to the people that lived here. And your country will get in a whole lot of trouble and I am happy about that because you created so many problems. Spain, England, The Netherlands,

⁷ One of the consequences of this bad name is that people keep on giving parts of Redfern new names (Sydney Morning Herald 20-12-1995).

⁸ As was to be expected the Aboriginal community has not been expelled from Redfern before the Sydney 2000 Olympics and even the Block that was supposed to be redeveloped before the Olympics was still in the process of being demolished. This is probably one of the reasons why Redfern and some of its outspoken Aboriginal residents were noticed by the international media during the Olympics (see for example *de Volkskrant* 12-8-2000, 26-8-2000; *Vrij Nederland* 9-9-2000)

Germany, even Italy. I do not want to be rude but we will get our right. The time is right not to tolerate these people anymore. (13-7-1992)

Luckily there were also aspects that had a positive influence on the way people perceived me. It mattered, for example, that I was not Australian (see also van Meijl 2000: 92). This made me less likely to be a part of the Australian institutional hegemony some people were disapproving of. Instead, I was from a country that some Aboriginal people perceived as a progressive country because of the Dutch drugs policy and attitude towards AIDS and other sensitive issues. Some people were also pleasantly surprised by the idea that somebody from the other side of the world took an interest in them.

To be able to establish a good working relationship based on confidence I had to circumvent the problems that could result from especially my professional background that made people suspicious. So I choose not to emphasise my professional background. It meant that I did not introduce myself as a PhD student in anthropology but as a student in social science. I would only inform people more broadly about my background on their request. I thought it important to present myself as humble and eager to learn, with a genuine interest in the people in Redfern. I was convinced my professional background would hinder me in this. My conviction proved right when I started working with a solicitor. She thought it was very important what status I had and she always introduced me to Aboriginal people as a PhD student in anthropology from the Netherlands. After a while I asked her to stop doing that because it created an unnecessary distance between me and the people I wanted to talk with. I saw people shut up like a clam when they were introduced to me by the solicitor. After a while I decided to separate our ways because I thought she might be harmful to the working relationship I was trying to establish with Aboriginal people.

Being aware of the sensitivity of the people in Redfern I had to make sure that people trusted me enough to work with me despite their possible reservations. In order to do so I had already returned in 1994 to hand over my MA thesis of 1992 and tighten contacts I had made before. I also consulted the Aboriginal people in Redfern about my proposal for a PhD. research and asked for their consent. Fortunately all the people I spoke with were positive about my research plans and thought it could contribute to more knowledge about Aboriginal people in Sydney and especially

Aboriginal organisations. I would not have continued my work if it were not for the positive reactions I received then.

Despite the positive reactions and preparedness to cooperate with me on the research I had to reintroduce myself and the research plan again in 1996 because organisations had taken on other staff, new policies etc. During the first weeks of negotiation about the form of co-operation several organisations provided me with their codes of ethics concerning researchers. Murawina Preschool and the Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern rejected my research proposal and declined any form of cooperation on the grounds that my proposal did not meet the requirements as set by the Murawina board members and the Aboriginal Medical Service's Research Priorities Committee (See Appendix 1). In response to their demand for community control I emphasised that I regarded the research as collaboration between the participating parties on an equal footing. I considered the full control over the research by one party as disrespectful to the other party.

The codes of ethics I received all spoke of culturally appropriate behaviour, or customary and traditional laws. Because of the importance people attach to this aspect of research I decided to follow a two-day training course called Indigenous History, Heritage and Culture Training⁹. This course was set up to provide both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with knowledge to reduce racism and stereotyping among Australians and facilitate the contacts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. One part of the course dealt with communication and protocol. It provided practical advice on how to approach Aboriginal people and how to observe their codes of behaviour. The three main points that were stressed were: 1) not to draw attention to an individual in a group; 2) not to directly approach people in either behavioural way (eye contact, assertiveness) or talkative way (direct questions, criticism); and 3) not to be formal, rigid or restrictive (thus allowing people leeway, be relaxed). With the measures I had taken and the course I had followed I felt I had done all I could to conduct my research as culturally appropriate as possible.

⁹ The course was organised by Kuracca Consultancy on 5 and 6 March 1996 at the Eora Centre, Redfern.

1.2.3 Maintaining the Working Relationship

After I had prepared myself for the actual data collection I managed to establish a good and regular working relationship with enough organisations to provide me with sufficient data for the research. But now that I had managed to gain people's confidence I had to be able to maintain it for the duration of the project. In a politically sensitive area as Redfern this had bigger implications than I could have foreseen. I had to be aware that every choice I made during my research (to talk to some and not to others, to talk about some things but not other things) could influence the perception people had of me, as well as their confidence in me. It was not that I had to uphold an image that was not true to myself, it was my awareness of the factors that played a role in people's confidence that made me so conscious about everything I said and did.

I felt obliged to conduct my fieldwork in a way that would not disturb people's daily routine or annoy them. To be able to do this I had to adapt my methodology to the situation in the field. Because of earlier experiences with conducting fieldwork in Redfern I knew that there were two things people had objected to in the past. First, I knew that many people did not accept the use of a tape recorder. If people agreed at all with the use of the recorder I noticed that their answers were influenced by the presence of the tape recorder. For example, they would formulate their sentences carefully so I would not be able to catch them on certain comments. This demanded another way of gathering field notes. I chose to carry a small notebook in order not to offend or discourage people to talk with me. On some occasions, however, I was asked to put away even my notebook and pencil because people felt threatened by it. I was allowed to remember, not to write. I always respected these wishes. Apart from that I also offered people the opportunity to read my field notes on their request so they could correct or comment on what I had written down. As a consequence of this methodology the fieldwork material that appears in this thesis is not a literal representation but a reconstruction of detailed field notes. All key words, however, were used by the informants.¹⁰

The second disturbance involved the way of asking questions. Asking questions is a delicate matter, especially when it concerns a highly politicised area as Redfern where the "wrong" questions can result in

¹⁰ This methodology is not unique and has been used by Schwab, working with urban Aboriginal people in Adelaide, as well (1988: 94).

refusal to cooperate and the loss of important information. I had the same experience during earlier fieldwork. Often people felt they had to defend themselves when I asked a critical question. At other times the informants would get bored and were not motivated to answer correctly, fully or elaborately on certain questions. To avoid these problems I chose to avoid asking questions as much as possible. Of course I would ask for explanations when something was not clear to me. But I chose to give the Aboriginal people the opportunity to talk about the issues that concerned them instead of steering them in a particular direction. When I did ask questions I took into account the lessons learned at the Indigenous History, Heritage and Culture Training. This involved a way of interviewing that was relaxed, indirect and free of jargon.

Another important consequence of conducting fieldwork in Redfern was the fact that only limited access in the field was possible. The initial decision to focus on organisations was already made under the influence of the knowledge that Redfern was a difficult field to enter. In choosing organisations, chances for a successful entrance were thought to increase as the organisations were part of the public domain. As a consequence, the people with whom I spoke during the research always spoke as representatives of the organisations with which they worked, whether I talked with them during work time or after. Hence, I did not have access to the private domain

Despite the initial plan to also involve Aboriginal residents in the research who were not connected with any of the organisations, developments in the field prevented me from establishing a working relationship with these people. These developments involved an internal dispute within the network of Aboriginal organisations I studied. It concerned the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Aboriginal Housing Coalition, two organisations that disagreed on future developments in Redfern (I will analyse this situation in Chapter 8). The dispute divided the Aboriginal community in Redfern into two groups. And people, both within and outside Aboriginal organisations, were expected to choose sides in the conflict. One of the side effects was that individual residents associated approaches by strangers with the struggle between the Company and the Coalition. And for this reason people were very reluctant to talk to strangers.

Another consequence of the dispute was the fact that I was forced to take sides as well. In the beginning of my research I had established good

contacts with several people and organisations that were involved in the dispute. All of whom expected me to be on their side. At first I refused to take sides, as I feared the consequences for my research. Apart from that, I could not figure out whom to believe. Even though in time I developed a preference for one of the two I was afraid my judgement was clouded by the rhetoric that appealed to me most. After a while of playing the neutral outsider I noticed that I did not receive any information that had not already been in the papers or was made available to the public in other ways. The question was: did I want to stay an outsider for the rest of the time? I tried to uncover the position of the residents on the subject by talking about the fight with everybody I met. I found out that all the people I talked with, both staff from the Aboriginal organisations as well as residents who did not have any links with the organisations were on the side of the Aboriginal Housing Coalition. When I received an offer to join the Aboriginal Housing Coalition I accepted. One of the establishers of Coalition with whom I had already had contact for a couple of years invited me to the fortnightly meetings held by the Coalition. Because I could not attend the meetings of the Aboriginal Housing Company, as they were only accessible to members of the Company, I saw this as an opportunity to get a closer look at the issue.¹¹ I was very aware that this choice limited my access to Aboriginal Housing Company staff even further and that the picture I would see of the struggle would only focus on one side of the story. I thought that it was better to accumulate subjective information than no information at all.

Apart from the effects on my fieldwork methodology, the working relationship I had been able to build also had its effects on the writing process. Because of the confidence people had shown in me and my work I was obliged to maintain my respect for the Aboriginal people with whom I had worked during the process of writing the thesis. At first I had difficulty writing down things that could possibly be interpreted negatively. It took me a long time to distance myself from the intense experiences in Redfern and come to analytical insights that rose above the emotional connection I had with these people. This does not mean that I did not carefully consider how to write the thesis without hurting or endangering the people involved.

¹¹Earlier attempts to conduct my research at the Company, which I had started long before this struggle, had failed because people were not available.

One of the ways in which I tried to accommodate the people with whom I have worked is the use of fictitious names. Because there is such high rate of change of staff within the organisations this is an efficacious measure to protect people's identity. People who appeared in public I call by their real name. I also did not camouflage the names of the organisations because they offer such specific services and are known by everybody that it is impossible to hide their identity. Another way to accommodate the people with whom I worked was to give them access to what I had written and provide them with the opportunity to react on that. For this reason I returned to Redfern in March 1999 with the first draft of my thesis. I looked up all the people that I could find with whom I had worked in 1996 and handed them my first draft. Several people wanted to discuss its contents with me. Most of the people had only read those paragraphs concerning themselves or their organisations. In our discussions people were generally positive and made some comments on incorrect details as dates, names, and other spelling errors. Some of them took the opportunity to point out to me my use of politically sensitive terms they experienced as derogatory. Others tested my knowledge and view on some of the subjects in the draft, such as the concept of Aboriginal identity, to find out if I had understood them correctly. All comments were valuable and I was happy with these people's contributions. It gave me the confidence I needed to finish my thesis in a satisfactory way: a thesis which would reflect the results of a successful cooperation between the Aboriginal people of Redfern and myself.

1.3 Introducing the Thesis

In this introduction I have given an overview of the events that preceded the writing of this thesis. As in every chapter in this thesis, I started with a scene from the field, serving as an illustration to go with the academic text that follows. I paid special attention to the problems I encountered in the field, as Redfern is a very difficult area to conduct research in. For each stage of the research I described how the limitations of the field and my personal choices influenced the research methodology up until the process of writing the thesis. Then, I introduced the argument of the thesis and shortly introduced the key concepts that appear in it.

Chapter 2 describes the social and historical background of Redfern: the place and its people. To place the subject of this thesis in a historical perspective I will start this chapter with an outline of Australian Aboriginal

history with special attention for the Aboriginal people in and around Sydney. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss the main events that took place in Redfern in the 1970s because of their grave importance to the establishment of Redfern as an Aboriginal suburb and to contemporary Australian Aboriginal history in general. I will close this chapter with a description of the social background of the Aboriginal population in Redfern, giving an overview of some of the current issues that play an important role in the daily life of the Aboriginal people of Redfern, with special attention for racism, namely: the Australian justice system, Aboriginal-police relations, and media representation.

In Chapter 3 I will introduce the Aboriginal organisations to demonstrate how they differ from mainstream welfare organisations in Australia. I will explain which factors led to the rise of the organisations to be able to place these events in an (inter-)national perspective. Apart from that I will give an overview of some remarkable features of the organisations that give them their “Aboriginal” character and the specific functions the Aboriginal organisations fulfil.

Having introduced Redfern and the organisations, in Chapter 4, I will elaborate on the subject of urban Aboriginal identity. The chapter starts with a short overview of early forms of Aboriginal identification, as current notions of urban Aboriginal identity are a result of past and present (re-) constructions. This is followed by an overview of different forms of Aboriginal identification in contemporary Sydney that gives an insight in the multiplicity and complexity of Aboriginal identification in urban Australia. For this purpose the case of an Aboriginal protest in Sydney is analysed. At the end of this chapter I will briefly discuss three theoretical notions of Aboriginal identity that form the basis for my analyses in the chapters that follow.

With Chapter 5 the Aboriginal organisation’s communication with the federal and state governments is discussed. I will analyse the case of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) and the oral statement it delivered at the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*¹². Because of the specific relation of the ALSR with the outside world I will precede this case with some background information that led to the organisation’s closure in 1996. The case will serve as an example to demonstrate that in their contact with outsiders, as the government institutions, Aboriginal organisations emphasise particular

¹² Held in Redfern in July 1996.

aspects they ascribe to urban Aboriginal identity. These specific aspects serve a particular goal, namely to convey as an Aboriginal organisation a credible image of its corporate Aboriginal identity towards this group of outsiders.

Chapter 6 follows from the issues discussed in Chapter 5, as it focuses on what happens when outsiders become insiders. It deals with Aboriginal organisations and their relation with non-Aboriginal supporters. In order to explain the relation between the two, I will analyse the case of the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council that was established at the *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum*.¹³ The case focuses on the process of establishing a new Aboriginal organisation and gives some insight in the development of boundaries between what Aboriginal organisations consider being outsiders and insiders.

In Chapter 7 the central theme is how the Aboriginal organisations try to legitimise their corporate Aboriginal identity towards their Aboriginal clientele. For this purpose I will analyse two cases, namely: the Saturday and After School Programme organised by the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern and the Young Mothers Programme organised by Mudgin-Gal and others. The two cases combined give a good overview of the way in which Aboriginal organisations deal with their clients. Just as with their interaction with outsiders, the organisations emphasise particular aspects of urban Aboriginal identity in order to present a credible corporate Aboriginal image of themselves. However, these involve different aspects than the ones emphasised in interaction with outsiders and they have their own purpose in creating a credible image of urban Aboriginal identity towards the Aboriginal clientele.

Finally, Chapter 8 deals with the need for Aboriginal organisations to maintain their Aboriginal identity towards other Aboriginal organisations and their own staff. The case described in this chapter demonstrates that other people's perception of an Aboriginal organisation is connected with the recognition of the Aboriginal identity of its own staff members. By gaining insight into the process of establishing or rejecting people's Aboriginal identification I demonstrate how staff members' individual recognition can influence the credibility of the organisation he or she is working for. For this purpose I will analyse the internal dispute that played a role in Redfern in 1996, which I mentioned earlier. It concerns the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Aboriginal Housing Coalition who

¹³ Held in Sydney in July 1996.

disagreed on the future development plans for the Block. The thesis is closed with an overview of the chapters and a recapitulation of the argument in Chapter 9.

The Reality of Redfern: The Aboriginal History of a Metropolitan Suburb

Only minutes after the train has left Central Station the voice-over calls: "Next stop: Redfern." I get off at a station that looks like any other station in Sydney with the exception of one or two black men in uniform checking the tickets. Opposite the station a long wall covered with Aboriginal paintings marks the gateway to Sydney's own Aboriginal land.¹⁴ On the wall the rainbow serpent features next to protest scenes, the Aboriginal flag and abstract Aboriginal designs. "40,000 years is a long, long time. . .40,000 years still on my mind" is written between the illustrations. Above the wall the skyline of Sydney's city centre rises. Aboriginal land in the centre of a metropolis. For this reason Redfern is probably one of the most over-exposed parts of Sydney, maybe even Australia, but it still hides many secrets.

I turn left and cross the road towards Eveleigh Street. This must be the most notorious street in Australia. On the left is the building of the Aboriginal Housing Company. I notice that it has just been painted over. The entrance of the Aboriginal Housing Company is crowded with people drinking and smoking. Just around the corner the street is covered with used needles and broken bottles spread in front of the entrance of Nââmoro, an Aboriginal job skill centre. In a rage an Aboriginal man smashes beer bottles against a blind wall. A child tries to imitate him while throwing around a plastic soft drink bottle. When I walk down Eveleigh Street I hear the broken glass of beer bottles crush under my feet. Some Aboriginal people come up to me and ask for a "quid to buy a fag". The occupied buildings with their broken windows and graffiti are alternated by the ruins of abandoned houses. Defaced cars are scattered on the street and the sewerage water runs down the gutter. While some people sit outside in front of their houses their children are playing barefoot and dogs roam free. This is what the residents call "The Block".

¹⁴ As will be explained later in this chapter a part of the area known as the Block was handed to the Aboriginal Housing Company in 1973.

Most Australians have heard of this notorious suburb in Sydney. Known for its history of raids, riots and radicals, nearly everybody has an opinion of Redfern and in particular its Aboriginal population. But how many people have actually walked the streets of Redfern? How many have taken the time to learn about what really goes on in Redfern? Because this thesis focuses on the Aboriginal organisations operating in Redfern, in this chapter I will describe the social and historical background of the Sydney suburb and its Aboriginal people. To place the subject of this thesis in an historical perspective I will start this chapter with an outline of Australian Aboriginal history with special attention for the state of New South Wales (NSW). Then I will discuss some of the main events that gave Aboriginal Redfern its shape, starting with the migration to the cities in the 1950s, followed by the establishment of some Aboriginal organisations. The Aboriginal Housing Company deserves special attention as its establishment was not only of major importance to contemporary Australian Aboriginal history, but, as a case, also offers an insight into the way in which different groups were involved in Aboriginal issues. I conclude this part with a description of the social background of the current Aboriginal population in Redfern. In the final part of this chapter I will tell something about the way in which the Aboriginal people of Redfern are confronted with racism, focussing on: the Australian justice system, Aboriginal-police relations, and media representation.

2.1 Historical Background of Aboriginal People in Sydney

Throughout the history of Australian Aboriginal people their group identities have taken on many different forms. Before the British invasion in 1788 the continent was inhabited by hundreds of indigenous groups.¹⁵ Identification as Aborigine did not exist. These people's identities depended on complex kinship systems and their linkages to the land (Berndt 1977). They divided the people that surrounded them into groups they belonged to themselves, groups they traded with in an economic as well as a cultural sense, and groups they had nothing to do with. More than 300 languages were spoken throughout the continent and people had different lifestyles, beliefs, and rituals. There was neither reason nor incentive for the

¹⁵These groups were referred to as clans or tribes. Nowadays Aboriginal people prefer to use the term *nation*.

inhabitants of Australia to conceive of themselves as one people (Attwood 1989: 149, Hollinsworth 1992: 138, M. Tonkinson 1990).

It was only after the British encountered the people of Australia that they were considered as *one* people.¹⁶ Because of the extreme differences between the indigenous people and the British and the unfamiliarity of the latter with the indigenous cultures, the settlers¹⁷ seemed unable to differentiate between different groups. Because the indigenous interpreters knew about the different groups and possibly informed the British about it, it is likely that there was at least some awareness of existing differences between the indigenous groups. This could not, however, prevent the indigenous people being seen as one people: the Aborigines. The creation of this group and the division this caused between the original inhabitants of the Australian continent and the visitors formed the basis of the social relations between the two from the moment of first contact until now.

2.1.1 First Contact: 1788-1849¹⁸

When in 1788 the First Fleet arrived at the East Coast of *terra australis incognita* at what is now called Botany Bay in Sydney a new period was ushered in for the groups populating the area (Appendix 2).¹⁹ At first both the newcomers and the residents displayed curiosity towards one another and first contacts were generally friendly. But it was in these very first, friendly, stages of contact that the future of the indigenous people had been decided. Because the groups peopling the area did not visibly work the land and did not build houses they were regarded as people that did not own the

¹⁶ This concerns the indigenous groups from the Australian mainland. The people living in Tasmania and on the Torres Strait Islands (also belonging to Australia) were considered different peoples.

¹⁷ Although I speak here of the settlers as one group, in reality this was a heterogeneous group as well. For example, British and Irish Australians had different associations with Aboriginal people.

¹⁸ I have chosen to start with the arrival of the First Fleet, the ships that brought in the first immigrants, realising that this was not the first fleet to arrive at the Australian coastline and that it was not the first contact of the Australian indigenous peoples with others (see for example the Macassan traders from Indonesia, and the Portugese and Dutch explorers in earlier centuries).

¹⁹ Flynn gives an extensive account of the dispersion of the different language groups at the time of the arrival of the First Fleet also explaining how they were related, how they interacted and where they got their names from (Flynn 1995: 36-45).

land. The dominating theory at the time was that people could only have sovereignty over land when they visibly changed and worked the land (Broome 1982: 26). Apart from the absence of a visible relation with the land the groups also seemed to lack a hierarchical structure. There was no recognisable system of government, nor were there any leaders to negotiate with.²⁰ As a consequence the British settlers dispossessed the indigenous people of their land without an official battle or treaty basing their actions on the idea that the land was empty (*terra nullius*²¹), or inhabited by people with whom one could not reasonably battle or make arrangements. Reynolds argues that although “Aborigines were in possession of their land as that term was understood in both international and English law” it was both “European ignorance” as well as “European philosophical and political ideas” that Aboriginal occupation was overlooked (1992: 22).

From the 1820s onwards, colonial expansion seriously started with exploration for land and resources. It drove the indigenous groups to the edges of the Sydney area. Regularly there were confrontations between indigenous groups who fought to defend their territory. Within a short time Europeans outnumbered the local population (Borsboom 1987: 224). The British settlers had started clearing the area to prepare for residential and agricultural use. Wells, rivers and hunting grounds were occupied, preventing the indigenous people the access to their former economic sources. The growing scarcity of the once so rich and abundant economic resources triggered more intense forms of resistance by indigenous people. While new settlers tried to set up agricultural businesses many violent confrontations between farmers and local groups occurred. Local groups and organised bands led by resistance leaders stole cattle as compensation for the scarcity of their food resources. In turn the settlers fired on local people approaching their farms, poisoned nearby water holes or the flour the indigenous people received. The worst cases of violence against the indigenous groups were the numerous massacres throughout the Australian continent that took place over a period of at least one hundred years (Elder 1998). There were either local settlers who took the law in their own hands or local police officers who participated in well-organised

²⁰ Throughout Australian history British settlers themselves crowned local men as kings and turned these men into official representatives of whom they expected they represented their local community.

²¹ The legal term itself has only been introduced later on (McRae et al. 1991).

massacres of indigenous people until the 1930s and 1940s (McRae et al. 1991: 19-25).

Besides starvation newly introduced illnesses like smallpox and sexually transmitted diseases took their toll. In 1824 only 400 people from the various groups that had lived in the Port Jackson area had survived and they combined into one Sydney tribe. In 1857 the last local people were seen begging for food in compensation for their lost resources in the streets of Sydney (Willey 1979: 216).

Broome speaks of three factors that shaped the culture contact between the first settlers and the indigenous people of Australia (1982: 24-26). The first factor he mentions was the difference in outlook. The indigenous Australians stressed spiritual values and continuity, while the new settlers valued materialism and change. The second factor was that the new colony started as a goal and the majority of the first settlers were in fact convicts or other people who could not make a living in Britain. This must have had a major effect on the violence between the indigenous groups and the settlers. The third factor was that the new settlers had preconceived ideas (the idea of the "savage" and the "noble savage") about the indigenous people they encountered and approached them accordingly. These factors that played a role in the initial stages of contact between the indigenous people and the first settlers would continue to shape Australian contact history in the years to come.

2.1.2 Legally Defined and Dominated: 1850-1939

By 1852 the majority of the Australian colonies was self-governing (M. Tonkinson 1990: 202) which gave them the power to formulate laws concerning the residents in the colony, including the indigenous people, which were simply called "Aborigines", after the Latin *ab origine* which meant: from origin. Until the late 1800s the colonies had largely left the Aboriginal people alone in the legal sense, expecting the Aboriginal population to die out anyway (ibid. 1990: 208). But even though the original Aboriginal population was declining the number of people of mixed Aboriginal and European descent rose (Rowley 1971: 7,9,19) and throughout Australia colonial governments established special reserves under the segregation policy to protect the Aborigines from further

harassment by new settlers.²² Of course, it was also to the advantage of the settlers who could now occupy land that formerly belonged to Aboriginal groups and who had now been removed to reserves. Aboriginal groups were taken away from their own land and were sometimes transported to places hundreds of kilometres away from their birth land. In the reserves different groups were often forced to live together.²³ In the reserves the people were under the supervision of reserve managers, positions that were often taken by local police officers (McRae et al. 1991: 19-25). The government-controlled reserves and the missions run by Christian fellowships have been compared with total institutions (Broome 1982: 99).

The Aborigines now formed a special legal group with special laws that only applied to them and which excluded them from Australian citizenship. Each state or territory implemented its own Aboriginal Acts, laws that restricted Aborigines' lives extensively. In 1909 the *New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act* was implemented. Now, people needed special permits to leave the reserve. They were not allowed to drink alcohol, manage their own money, or marry non-Aboriginal Australians. The speaking of traditional languages and the performing of rituals was forbidden (Miller 1985: 159-170).

But in the 1930s a change in attitude towards the Aborigines became visible. Broome mentions three factors contributing to this change: protest of European Australians (such as the Association for the Protection of Native Races with chairman anthropologist Elkin), protest of Aboriginal people (such as the Aboriginal-run Australian Aboriginal League and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association), and a more realistic insight in Aborigines and their cultural background through anthropology. The studies of Aboriginal people at the time advocated that Aborigines were not inferior but just different (1982: 161-168).

At the first Commonwealth Conference on Aboriginal Welfare in 1937 the policy of assimilation was officially adopted as an alternative of the protective segregation of the decades before. Its aim was to change Aboriginal people into Australians by both trying to "breed out" their colour as well as to prepare Aboriginal people who were able for their introduction into western civilisation. The people from mixed descent on

²² For a comparison of the way in which Australian and Canadian colonies treated their indigenous population I refer to Weaver (1984: 186- 188).

²³ The consequences of migrations of different groups to the same reserve have been described by Stanton (1990).

their turn formed a special legal category and were classified according to colour and other phenotypic features. It was generally thought that these people were both genetically as well as culturally mixed. Special terms were developed to categorise the amount of Aboriginal blood someone possessed, such as: *half-caste*, *quadroon*, and *octoroon*.

The full-blood or “tribal” Aborigines were regarded as unable to assimilate and were still expected to die out. Therefore, these people were allowed a quiet life on the reserve. Especially light-coloured children were seen as best equipped to blend in with white society. Thousands of mixed descent Aboriginal children were taken away from their families to be raised in special institutions, such as the boys and girls homes run by missions or government agencies. The children were educated to work as servants or manual labourers to encourage people to move to the cities because reserves were full. At a later stage these children were given up for adoption by white adoptive parents. The policy under which children could be taken away from their families operated until 1969 (Read 1982). Today, these children are known as the stolen generations.²⁴ Many of them were never told about their Aboriginal descent and even today people are discovering their Aboriginal identity (Cummings 1990). In between the groups of “no-hoppers” and “promising children” were the Aboriginal people that had to struggle with acceptance by western society themselves. Some Aboriginal people retreated to the act of “passing for white” to escape rigorous measures and restrictions applying to Aboriginal people, risking the loss of family security (Keen 1988: 4, M. Tonkinson 1990: 212). Sometimes this was done consciously. At other times people were kept in the dark about their descent resulting in identifying with other people such as Indians (Morgan 1987).

It was especially in the period in which the colonial authorities made up laws concerning Aboriginal people that the contact between both groups was characterised by racial theories. These so-called scientifically sound theories of the time replaced the more philosophical ideas of the “savage” and the “noble savage”. Some racial theories were based on biblical explanations, others on biological or environmental determinism, and yet others on the ideas of the social Darwinism (M. Tonkinson 1990: 203). As Tonkinson says: “Aborigines were seen as embodying the antithesis of all

²⁴ An extensive historical account of these events is given in the report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997). For an inside view it is good to read Cummings (1990), Edwards & Read (1989) and Peeters (1995).

that whites thought (or wished) themselves to be, and the differences were accounted for in racial terms." (ibid.). Although in these days such theories are no longer accepted, some elements of racial thought that found their origin in this period have never disappeared and are firmly rooted in particular parts of contemporary Australian society as material presented later in this thesis will show.²⁵

2.1.3 Aboriginal Protest and Australian Acceptance: 1940-1999

During World War II an estimate of 1,000 Aboriginal people fought on the side of the Australian army, even though only European Australians were supposed to be recruited (Parbury 1988: 116). On the front all recruits were equal and the Aborigines had the chance to show they were ordinary people just as other Australians. But immediately after the war unemployment awaited and the services the Aboriginal people had done for their country were not rewarded.²⁶ Although they did not receive the same recognition as other Australians the attitude towards Aboriginal people slowly changed after the war.

With the abolishment of the special protection policies in 1961 (M. Tonkinson 1990: 213) people were free to go where they wanted and a period of migration to the urban areas commenced. But with the continuing absence of civil rights and of the improvement of the general living conditions, public outcry of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians made the 1960s and 1970s the decades of protests and demonstrations. According to Broome there were two factors which shaped the climate for the protest and changes in the 1960s and 1970s, namely: the growing number of Aborigines and the growing number of Aborigines in the cities (Broome 1982: 173-175). This second factor brought Aboriginal people closer to the centres of power and in the eye of the media.

In 1965 the assimilation policy was changed into a policy of integration, supporting the idea that Aboriginal people should be able to integrate into western society without having to give up their own cultural manners, as

²⁵ For example, even though the terms of full-blood and half-caste have been banned since the early seventies and Aboriginal identity is legally defined in terms of self-identification, many Australians still divide the Australian Aboriginal population along the lines of full-blood and half-blood.

²⁶ More about Aboriginal service men and women in NSW and Victoria is written by Jackomos and Fowell (1993).

was propagated by the assimilation policy. The Aboriginal people were able to choose their own way of living and were allowed to go where they wanted. At the end of the 1960s the Aboriginal Acts were abolished. This change in policy was followed by the granting of citizen rights in 1967, after a referendum demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of the Australians agreed that Aboriginal people should be recognised and counted as people. It was decided that the federal government would mostly be responsible for Aboriginal policies and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was established under the Prime Minister's Department. Although there was still state government control, this control was gradually supplemented by new federal agencies. From that moment onwards the policy focused on the improvement of the bad living conditions of many Aboriginal people.

In 1973 the Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced that his new policy for Aboriginal people was a policy of self-determination (Broome 1982: 181). This policy was executed through the introduction of four new establishments (Sanders 1982: 5). First, the Government introduced legislation that enabled Aboriginal people to run their own affairs at a local level. Organisations such as the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Housing Company were the first in its kind receiving government funding. They formed the embodiment of self-determination as they were run and controlled by Aboriginal people. Later on the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* was established under which the Aboriginal organisations could be set up.²⁷ Second, in 1973 the Government established the NACC (National Aboriginal Consultative Committee), an elected council of Aboriginal people that functioned as an advisory body to the Government. This body was succeeded by the NAC (National Aboriginal Conference) in 1977 and operated until 1985.²⁸ Third, the new Government was the first to introduce a system for Aboriginal land rights. It installed the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission to study how to realise Aboriginal claims on land rights in the Northern Territory (which falls under federal authority). Then in 1976 the *Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act* was passed.

²⁷ Eckermann and Dowd have a lot of critique on the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* calling it a form of structural violence (1988). One of the weaknesses of the Act is, for example, that only one council is allowed per one community leaving other people no opportunity to represent their community (Eckermann & Dowd 1988: 64).

²⁸ Weaver gives a good description of the history of both the NACC as well as the NAC and the relation of both bodies with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (1983).

This development led to nearly 40% of the Northern Territory being Aboriginal land in the 1980s. In NSW the Aboriginal people had to wait until 1983 until they had their own *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*. Fourth, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was changed into the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) in 1972. The DAA was responsible for the execution of government policies and programmes regarding Aboriginal people and was responsible for the division of funding among Aboriginal organisations and projects. Despite its promising potential the weakness of the self-determination policy was that government bureaucrats had a large influence in deciding which Aboriginal projects fitted well in the self-determination policy, still leaving the non-Aboriginal people to decide what should happen to Aboriginal people (Cowlshaw 1998, Hughes & Pitty 1994: 14).

In Australia of the 1990s the policy of self-determination still holds, despite the abolition of the NAC and the replacement of the DAA with the ATSIC, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission run by elected Aboriginal members. One important change was the introduction of the *Native Title Act 1993 (Australia)*. In 1982 Eddie (Koiki) Mabo, a Torres Strait Islander, challenged the legal concept of *terra nullius* claiming that the islands he came from were inhabited before the arrival of the First Fleet. Ten years later in 1992 the High Court in Canberra reached a verdict and annihilated the legal concept of *terra nullius*, recognising the occupation of the Torres Strait Islander people and opening the way for a new land rights system.²⁹ After this verdict the *Native Title Act 1993 (Australia)* was installed. The Act made it possible for Aboriginal people to claim back land on the basis of proven traditional links with a particular area. For people living in highly urbanised areas a compensation fund was set up.³⁰ The last fifty years have brought forth drastic changes in the way in which Aboriginal people and other Australians relate to one another. But, as this thesis will demonstrate, this relation is complex - sometimes difficult - and still in development.

²⁹ Sharp gives an extensive account of the ten-year history of the Mabo case with both legal, Meriam and other indigenous perspectives (1996).

³⁰ Although the Native Title Act 1993 was appraised on an international level by other indigenous peoples and the United Nations, the Act remains under attack by particular institutions in Australian society (see for example the Wik case evolving around the discussion if pastoral leases were overruled by the Native Title Act 1993 or not).

2.2 The Making of Aboriginal Redfern

Because of its vicinity to the harbour and the flow of the Tank Stream through the area the place where present-day Redfern is situated was one of the first areas where the new European settlement emerged. In 1817 surgeon Sir William Redfern and his wife were given several acres of land which became the Redfern Estate. In 1855 the first railway line became operative between Sydney and Parramatta, a western suburb, crossing the former Redfern Estate. From that moment on Redfern developed into an industrial suburb (Neutze 1972: 118). Between 1860 and 1880 rich industrialists settled in the area to live in their mansions close to their businesses, mostly labour-intensive manufacturing factories. The factories attracted a lot of labourers from the first settlers of Anglo-Irish descent. The mansions were replaced by small workers' cottages, which were occupied by the labourers. The residents mainly worked at the Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Redfern and the Australian Glass Manufacturers in the neighbouring suburb Waterloo (Anderson 1993b: 319, Weary 1984: 15).

In the 1930s the great Depression hit the area and Redfern started to empty. Because of the high unemployment the residents were no longer able to afford to pay the rent and many of them were evicted. In the 1950s migrants from Southern Europe, such as Italians and Maltese, came to Redfern in search for cheap accommodation and work (Neutze 1972: 119). The largest group of Greek migrants in Sydney lived in Redfern in the 1970s (ibid. 1972: 13). In the 1970s Lebanese and Turks were moving into the area followed by Vietnamese and Koreans in the early 1980s (Jopson 1980).

Throughout its history Redfern developed into a multicultural metropolitan suburb embracing people with many different ethnic backgrounds. In this respect Redfern does not seem to differ from other Australian metropolitan suburbs. It was only when the Aboriginal people started settling in the suburb that Redfern gained its unique character. Actions undertaken by Aboriginal people from Redfern would pave the way for new developments, which would have a serious impact on the political developments concerning Aboriginal people. Redfern became the first place where Aboriginal land rights were handed over to Aboriginal people in the city and where the first Aboriginal community-based organisations emerged.

2.2.1 Aboriginal Migration to Redfern

From the 1930s until the 1970s Aboriginal people migrated from the rural towns, missions and reserves to urban areas throughout Australia. One of the main reasons for this migration was the dissolution of the mission and reserve system in the 1950s and 1960s. It made it possible for Aboriginal people to go and live where they pleased and people started migrating to the cities in small numbers.³¹ Besides the newly gained freedom the rural recession was another reason why people migrated to urban areas (Smith and Biddle 1975, Rowley 1971). Smith and Biddle mention that migration was also a way to escape the racial prejudice in country towns (1975: 43). In their study among Adelaide Aborigines Gale and Brookman wrote that during the Second World War and the early post-war period the majority of Aboriginal people moved to the cities under church or private sponsorship (1972: 83). Especially children were brought to urban areas by the Child Welfare Authority for placement with western families and government institutions. Only in later years Aboriginal people migrated to the cities voluntarily.³²

The first Aboriginal migrants who moved to Redfern mainly came from Dubbo and Moree in NSW. In the 1970s many came from Queensland. Most of the migrants would settle with or close to relatives who had already moved to the city. Also, a lot of people brought their children to live with relatives to give them a better future, so-called chain migration.³³ Inner Sydney suburbs were popular amongst Aboriginal people for their cheap housing, employment opportunities and easy access to public transport. Redfern combined all those features: public housing, unskilled labour in the Eveleigh Railway Yards and other industrial outlets and close access to Sydney's Central Station. Beasley's research among 273 Aboriginal people from the Redfern and Chippendale area in 1964 found that 40% came to

³¹ In the more remote areas this resulted in the outstation movement where Aboriginal people returned to their "traditional" living grounds.

³² Gale and Brookman point out that more than forty percent of the Adelaide Aboriginal people were forced to move to the city for medical or legal reasons because the city was the only place where welfare services were centralised (1972: 87). They also mention education and sport as reasons for migration.

³³ Beasley found that of the Aboriginal population in Chippendale and Redfern 46% were children under 15. Of these children 25% did not live with their own parents because of lack of accommodation, removal by Child Welfare Authority and illness (1964, in Rowley 1971: 369).

Sydney to find work, 30 % because the person or a relative was sick, 23% came to find better accommodation / to create better opportunities for their children, 4 % came for social reasons and 4 % for other reasons. About five years later it was mainly work and opportunities for the children that made people migrate (1970: 152). The number of Aboriginal migrants in Redfern reached its peak in the 1970s. In the 1950s only 10 Aboriginal families lived in Redfern (Maguire 1984). In 1965 an estimate of 12,000 Aboriginal people lived in Sydney and in 1976 the number had risen to 14,000 (Broome 1982: 174).

In 1948 the urban drift to Sydney became an issue and the effects of possible ghetto forming were discussed for the first time. From the 1950s onwards the Redfern All Blacks, a local football team formed in 1951, drew large crowds on Sunday afternoons (Rowley 1971: 367). In the 1960s the Aborigines Inland Mission conducted open-air meetings in the Lawrence Rest Area in Caroline Street (Anderson 1993b: 319). The immigration of Aboriginal people into Redfern brought with it an increased membership of religious organisations which had welcomed Aboriginal people in rural areas, like Pentecostalism. These expressions of Aboriginal culture in Redfern raised questions about assimilation. While the non-Aboriginal residents of Redfern claimed that such expressions stood in the way of successful assimilation Rowley (1971) argues that assimilation was indeed taking place with the Aboriginal migrants taking on the lifestyles of other Australian lower social classes.

While the Aboriginal population grew steadily so did the problems. Aboriginal people in the Redfern post-war period were the poorest people in Australia in every way possible (Lipmann 1970, Scott 1973). Beasley found that of the 103 adults dependent on employment only three were in skilled employment, fourteen unemployed and the rest were at work as low skilled workers (1964, quoted in Rowley 1971: 369). They struggled with many problems that were all interrelated. Because of their poverty many lived in crowded, unsanitary conditions which led to health problems and stress. With 70% of the Sydney population living in houses with more than one person per room (including the kitchen) the houses were heavily overcrowded (Beasley 1970: 161). In spite of the fact that families took in relatives many Aboriginal people walked the streets, squatted or slept with different friends every night (Rowley 1971: 369).

But apart from their financial and health problems the Aboriginal migrants were also confronted with discrimination in the housing and

rental market (Anderson 1993a: 88) and racism in the streets. Although the living conditions in Redfern were not as good as people might have hoped for, it was better than the situation in rural areas where (seasonal) work was decreasing, people lived in shacks, and racial prejudice was enormous. From the people that migrated to Redfern some returned to the country while others moved to the outer suburbs of Sydney, such as: Blacktown, Campbelltown, and St. Marys (Broome 1982: 174, Rowley 1971: 370).

Finally, there was yet another problem, that is not mentioned in the studies above, the new residents had to cope with, namely: how to accommodate to city life.³⁴ Coming from rural towns, missions and reserves the Aboriginal people themselves had to find new ways to accommodate to a new way of life. But the non-Aboriginal residents had to get used to their new neighbours as well. That this mutual accommodation did not happen without difficulties can be read in the following sections, which focus on the establishment of Aboriginal organisations, which played an important role in the accommodation of Aboriginal people to city life.

2.2.2 The Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern

As I discussed above the Aboriginal people who settled in Redfern had to deal with a range of problems. One of them was the difficulty their non-Aboriginal neighbours had accepting the Aboriginal people. They feared that with the arrival of the new residents Redfern would become a ghetto. In order to keep this from happening the non-Aboriginal residents regularly made an appeal to the police force. For instance, the residents took offence at the *goomies* (*goom*: Aboriginal word for spirit, later methylated spirits). They were alcoholics who wandered around the streets dressed in rags. As a consequence the relation between the newly settled Aboriginal people and the local police force was bad from the beginning.

The problems underlying the Aboriginal-police relations in Redfern go further than residents agitating against their new neighbours. Apart from the fact that the police force acted by order of the local residents, it is likely to assume that they were influenced by the prejudice held by the non-Aboriginal community (Gale et al. 1990: 116). According to the residents'

³⁴ For more information about Aboriginal people's distinctive lifestyles not fitting in with middle class norms I would like to refer to Sansom's book about Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin (1980).

stereotyped view Aboriginal people were drunk, lazy and immoral (cf. Gale & Brookman 1975: 8). The Aboriginal residents, in their turn, distrusted the police force because they were involved in carrying out a range of Australian policies concerning Aboriginal people in the past, such as running the reserves and taking away children from their families. For them the police represented the Government and the laws that had suppressed the Aboriginal people for so long. This attitude of disrespect is not confined to the police force alone but is part of a general attitude of disrespect for Australian authorities as a way to defy Australian sovereignty (Cowlshaw 1988, Langton 1988).

The larger the crowd of Aboriginal migrants grew the more aggressive the policy on the Aboriginal residents became. An Aboriginal man who lived in Redfern during the end of the sixties told me: "At that time there were a lot of police raids. There was a special division within the police force to deal with Aboriginal people, the 21st division. There was a nine o'clock curfew for Aboriginal people in those days" (1-5-1996). The police used to organise raids every Thursday and Saturday evening. The officers blocked the street where the Empress and Clifton Hotels were situated on both sides with their police vans to lock in the people who wanted to leave the hotels. Then they would enter the hotels to arrest the Aboriginal clients and charge them with drunkenness, offensive language and offensive behaviour (Wootten 1974: 60). The arrests involved a lot of aggressive behaviour and there was no way to escape the violence. According to local Aboriginal people the officers used excessive force. The arrested men were beaten up and on some occasions even women were raped.

To put an end to this ill treatment a group of young Aboriginal people who lived in Redfern taped the arrests to look for the support of Trade Unions, political parties and students. When some law students and teachers who saw the tapes accompanied the Aboriginal people and witnessed the arrests themselves they saw the need for action (Faine 1993: 15). Hal Wootten, one of the law teachers, was able to get some of his colleagues in the legal profession to offer their services for free.³⁵ Together with the Aboriginal people who had made the tapes the solicitors set up the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) in 1970 (Wootten 1974: 60). It was

³⁵ J.H. Wootten became the first president of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern from 1970 until 1973. In 1988-89 he was one of the five commissioners of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Howie-Willis 1994b: 1197-1198)

the first Aboriginal community-based organisation in Australia. As one of the members of the Aboriginal group that undertook action reminisces:

Redfern used to be a practice area for the rookies who just came from the Academy, it was part of their training to bust Aboriginal people. They had maps in the police station marking the houses where the drugs and alcohol users were. They used to block the streets and arrest as many Aboriginal people as possible. Because of those arrests we decided to seek help from lawyers and we set up the Aboriginal Legal Service. (1-5-1996)

At first the ALSR's task was mainly to represent the Aboriginal people who had been arrested during the raids in court. Later the ALSR extended its services to representing Aboriginal people in criminal and civil court cases, as well as trying to change state policies regarding Aboriginal rights and improving Aboriginal-police relations in Redfern. The original idea was to run the ALSR as a purely voluntary organisation based on the free services delivered by the solicitors. When the media got a hold of the initiatives taken the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, William Wentworth, approached the group and offered his help. They put a proposal to the Commonwealth to open up a "store-front" office in Redfern (Wooten 1973: 162-163). The federal office of Aboriginal Affairs granted funding for the first year and continued to do so (under different names) until 1997.³⁶

In its first year the ALSR only asked solicitors in the metropolitan area for their help. Only two years later they approached the country solicitors, which would eventually result in ten sister organisations of the ALSR being set up in country towns in rural NSW. In 1973 the ALSR gained a full Aboriginal Board (Coe 1991). Since the service has been in operation its staff has been involved in setting up the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Housing Company, Murawina Pre-school, the National Black Theatre and the Aboriginal Children's Service. The ALSR's example was followed throughout the state and on a national level resulting in an Australia-wide network of Aboriginal Legal Services.

³⁶ In 1997 the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern was succeeded by the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service.

2.2.3 The Aboriginal Medical Service

One of the people who were involved in setting up the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) was Mum Shirl, also known as the black saint of Redfern (Sykes 1981). She was an Aboriginal woman from Cowra who was well known for her care for Aboriginal people in jail and newly arrived people in Redfern. She used to take in people who had nowhere to go and until the 1990s she raised over 60 children from broken homes and from the stolen generations (Howie-Willis 1994b: 995). She worked for a long time together with Father Ted Kennedy, a Presbyterian priest who celebrated his 25th anniversary in the parish of Redfern in 1996 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 25-11-1996).

In the first year of operation of the ALSR Mum Shirl and the Aboriginal field officer visited a client who could not afford the medical treatment for his illness. It gave them the idea to set up a medical service (Deemal 1980). Besides the fact that most Aboriginal people could not afford medical treatment many of them were reluctant to visit doctors or hospitals. They found general health services to be hostile and frightening. Because of this reluctance as well as a lack of money to pay for a healthy lifestyle or proper medical care the state of health amongst Aboriginal people in the poor areas, such as Redfern, was abominable. A 1977 survey shows that 70% of the 6000 Aboriginal children in Sydney were underweight and ¼ of them was suffering from malnutrition (Poulsen & Spearritt 1981: 96).

After a series of meetings with ALSR staff and other people from the community the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) was set up. In 1971 the founders applied for the AMS's development at the local council. Although the council tried to obstruct and delay the development the AMS was able to open up a small shop front in Regent Street in the same year. In its first year of operation the service was used by 40% of the Aboriginal residents. As with the ALSR the AMS's first goal was to provide immediate care. A food programme was run to provide Aboriginal families with fresh fruit and vegetables and inform parents about healthy eating habits. Later on the AMS extended its services and it is now providing a wide range of health services for Aboriginal people within the Sydney metropolitan area. Since their first year the AMS has also set up branches in rural NSW. Similar initiatives were taken by Aboriginal people around Australia. A couple of years after the AMS in Redfern was set up the state government established Aboriginal units within their health departments in order to make their

mainstream services more accessible to Aboriginal people (Mayers & Fagan 1994: 689).

2.2.4 The Aboriginal Housing Company

Apart from the bad Aboriginal-police relations and the lack of legal and medical care the housing conditions of the Aboriginal people in Redfern were not too good either. Earlier on, in section 2.2.1, I mentioned that the newly arrived people often moved in with relatives and in combination with a lack of financial means this often resulted in overcrowded living conditions. As a consequence a number of Aboriginal people had no fixed address and were forced to sleep on the streets or squat in the empty houses West of the Railway. Some of the vacant houses on the Block were squatted by the *goomies* I mentioned earlier on. They also had a couple of runaways from foster homes in their care. In this section I will give a summary of two articles of Anderson (1993a, 1993b) that give an extensive account of the events leading up to the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company.³⁷

In October 1972 one of the squatters was followed by the police because he had stolen something, leading the police to the squatted premises. When the police discovered the other fourteen squatters who had taken refuge in derelict premises awaiting redevelopment in Louis Street (Appendix 3) the officers arrested them all. A trial followed in which they were represented by a lawyer who worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (Anderson 1993b: 321).

Two Redfern Presbyterian priests, Father Ted Kennedy and Father John Butcher, who were known to the squatters' lawyer, offered their church's school hall for temporary shelter for the homeless men so that the squatters did not have to go to jail. The priests had moved to the area in 1972 to lend a helping hand to the people in need. They were of the opinion that the Catholic Church was not offering enough assistance in that area. Within weeks over fifty Aboriginal people resided in the church. Inspired by the Emmaus Movement of Abbe Pierre from Paris, personally known to Father Kennedy, the priests started a "bottle brigade". The squatters collected bottles for sale and the money was used to pay for food, beds, gas and

³⁷ For more information on the first days of operation of the Aboriginal Housing Company see *Aboriginal News* (1974: 16-19).

electricity. But within weeks after the priests started their refuge service the council of the City of South Sydney declared the church hall a "danger to children and community health". Especially the offensive behaviour and the way the squatters were dressed were a source for local complaints. The Church had seven days to evict the premises. This provoked a campaign for black housing.

The priests, joined by Aboriginal local resident Bob Bellear, talked with the council explaining that there was a need for communal housing that could not be offered by the current Housing Commission because they owned properties which were dispersed over the area. They asked for the council's assistance to look for an alternative for the church hall. By this time the squatters had formed an Aboriginal Housing Committee. The Committee consisted of five members one of which was Father Butcher. They sought new premises in Redfern and found out that a single developer had bought a row of terraces in Louis Street, the former squatters' area. Both priests and squatters saw this as excellent location for communal housing. Contacts were made with Commonwealth officials and trade unions. Together with "Nugget" Coombs, a well-known advocate for Aboriginal causes who worked as consultant for both Aboriginal agencies as well as the Government (Howie-Willis 1994a: 226), they filed a submission for extended housing in Redfern.

The housing plans were supported by Aboriginal activists, the same people that were involved in other Aboriginal initiatives in the area. They strongly advocated the idea that Aboriginal people should live together. The new housing plans enabled them to demonstrate their difference with other Australians and it fitted right in with the popular views of Aboriginal culture as one of solidarity, equality and harmony, as was prevalent among that group at the time. The commune would lay the emphasis on the importance of family and the principle of caring and sharing in the Aboriginal community. What Anderson does not mention is that not all Aboriginal people from Redfern supported the activists behind the plans. Gilbert writes extensively about the setting up of the Aboriginal Housing Company in 1973 and describes the event as a nasty struggle in which Aboriginal people faced each other and fought each other for positions within the Company (Gilbert 1973: 165-182). He even accuses former Company members of favouring their own family above the people who really needed the houses at the time (ibid. 1973: 169).

In her articles discussing these events Anderson (1993a: 90, 1993b: 322) writes that in supporting the Aboriginal activists in their struggle the priests were able to work on their own agenda. It gave them the opportunity to criticise the conservative wing of Sydney's Catholic Church. On the one hand, the priests supported the idea of communal housing because they had found that the Aboriginal people considered themselves as one big family and preferred to live together. On the other hand, the communal character appealed to the priests as a means to counterbalance the individualism in Australian society. So, in a way the image of communality with the reminiscence of the "noble savage" idea was perpetuated with the Aboriginal people living together serving as a good example for the individualistic Australians. The priests anticipated that the block of houses at Louis Street was a good spot for the "black commune", as the communal housing plans were also called, because it was in full view of passing passengers to Sydney's Central Station.

Besides the priests, the Trade Union movement also supported the plans of the Aboriginal Housing Committee and also this group had its own reasons for it. The housing plans fitted in with the socialist ideology of the lower classes taking up arms to fight against the dominance of the capitalist society.

In the squatters, Bob Pringle [president of the radical Builders' Labourers' Federation, BLF] saw an opportunity to unite the oppressed classes and support a communal project, one which offered a 'socialist alternative' to the proposed 'capitalist development' for Louis Street. (Bellea 1976: 23)

Pringle placed pressure on the developer of the Louis Street terraces to offer his houses for the temporary occupation of the squatters, threatening that his people would no longer work with him on future developments. "Their strategy lay in imposing what later became known as 'green bans' where labourers ceased work on development projects that the union believed threatened low income housing and environmentally sensitive sites." (Anderson 1993b: 324). The developer gave in and said two of his premises could be used by the squatters. Bob Bellea, then president of the Committee, announced that the offered houses in their current state were uninhabitable and together with the BLF, the Plumbers Union and the squatters' "mop and bucket brigade" they cleaned up the houses and made them ready for future residents.

Next to the priests and the Trade Unions the new Federal Labor government had a stake in the struggle as well. The housing plans fitted into their new self-determination policy, supporting Aboriginal people to take their lives into their own hands. This was just what the Aboriginal people in Redfern did. The new Minister for Urban and Regional Affairs, Tom Uren, also supported the plans because they served as an example of “rehabilitation”, a new strategy to upgrade inner-city suburbs. In January 1973 Gordon Bryant, the new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, visited the cleaned up houses at Louis Street and saw that 45 members of the “mop and bucket brigade” occupied the houses. Before leaving he encouraged the Committee, now consisting of 13 Aboriginal members, to file an application for commonwealth funding for a co-operative housing scheme.

The Aboriginal Housing Committee’s proposal included purchase of the whole block between Louis, Caroline, Eveleigh and Vine Streets (Appendix 3). They hired an architect to draw up new housing plans. The architect also had a little stake in the struggle because he was eager to promote his idea of communal housing. He wanted to combine all the backyards of the terraces into a communal area to create the opportunity to bring the caring and sharing principle into practice.³⁸ Anderson accuses the architect of inscribing within the proposal “idealisation of Aboriginality that equated it with tradition” (1993a: 92). But his ideas of Aboriginality fitted right in with those promoted by the Aboriginal activists.

Even though the plans were supported by a number of groups for a number of reasons, not all people were in favour of the development plans. The local South Sydney City Council, for example, was fiercely against the plan to allocate housing to the Aboriginal squatters. In 1971 the council had already obstructed and delayed the Aboriginal Medical Service’s development application because they were afraid a ghetto would form (see section 2.2.3). In their battle against the housing plans some council members used stereotyped images of Aboriginality to appeal to local public sentiment. When the local council heard that the developer had talked with commonwealth officials about the sale of all 41 premises the council recommended to the police that the area of Louis and Caroline Street should be monitored frequently to guarantee the safety of the other residents in Redfern. From late 1972 into 1973 there were many confrontations between the police and Aboriginal residents.

³⁸ The communal backyard did not last long and soon after tenant complaints about violence and vandalism the old gates were restored.

In January 1973 Bryant talked with the local council and the state government to persuade them to go along with the redevelopment plans of the Aboriginal Housing Committee. Both the council and the representatives from the state government did not agree and felt bypassed by the Commonwealth's mingling in local affairs. According to the local council the plans would encourage Aboriginal people without money to come to Redfern while there was not enough place to accommodate them.

In March 1973 the local council summoned the developer to clean up the houses in Louis and Caroline Street and they approved the development application for the renovations to Louis Street properties on the condition that the houses were only made available for single family housing. This excluded the life style that the Committee had in mind. In another attempt to pester the Aboriginal Housing Committee and its followers the council ceased to fund the South Sydney Community Aid. This was a welfare organisation, which offered assistance to the Redfern Aboriginal community and used its funds from the council to employ Dick Blair, the new president of the Aboriginal Housing Committee. Mid-March 7 houses of the developer were renovated by the Committee, around 150 Aboriginal people were living there now. In a last attempt in March 1973 the South Sydney Residents Protection Movement was formed to fight the "festering sore" at Louis Street.

In April 1973 Bryant announced the approval of a commonwealth grant for the purchase of 41 houses in Louis and Caroline Street thus handing over the very first Aboriginal land rights to an Aboriginal owned and controlled organisation. The new Aboriginal Housing Company hired as many Aboriginal labourers as possible to renovate the houses. From then on they were a non-profit organisation providing cheap housing to Aboriginal people only. The local council was furious and retaliated by refusing further proposals for renovation. The failure of the local council to stop the development plans was followed by an increase in arrests of Aboriginal people. Between March and May 1973 410 arrests were made of the Aboriginal residents of Louis Street on drunkenness and disorderly behaviour.³⁹

³⁹ In these same months meetings were held between the police, the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR), and other Aboriginal organisations as a result of the conflict in Redfern. One of the outcomes of the meeting was the establishment of an Aboriginal-Police Liaison Committee. Although at first the results seemed staggering the ALSR claims that the relations deteriorated again when Aboriginal people gained more control of the service. By mid 1975 the Liaison Committee had ceased to operate (Cunneen 1990: 2).

In her papers Anderson demonstrates how in their struggle both parties manipulated the image of Aboriginality to their own advantage. As a consequence “Aboriginal Redfern was constructed out of multiple and contradictory discourses and practices” (ibid. 1993a: 87). On one side were the Aboriginal activists and their non-Aboriginal supporters who struggled for housing and “for whom Redfern became a sphere of indigenous protest, an heroic site of resistance to European culture and colonialist control” (1993a: 81). The Aboriginal activists drew on the concept of a shared history making all Australian Aboriginal people part of their struggle, transforming their local campaign into “a ‘pan-Aboriginal’ struggle against ‘White’ Australia” (ibid. 1993a: 86). They used oppositional concepts to strengthen the differences between Aboriginal people and other Australians.

On the other side stood the non-Aboriginal local council members and residents who were afraid Redfern would become a ghetto. They saw the breakdown of Aboriginal culture in the city and probable racial tensions as a danger to their living environment. The group of residents and the local council used their own interpretation of Aboriginality. In their view Aboriginality in the city equalled drunkenness, laziness and the deterioration of Aboriginal culture and values. They perpetuated negative stereotypes of Aboriginality and found support in the media that played an active role in confirming these negative images. Anderson concludes that the battle that led to the granting of the first Aboriginal land rights was of great importance to the formation of Redfern as it is now as well as the image of Redfern that is perpetuated since that time.

In the case of the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company it can be seen how the parties which had a stake in the struggle used one another to reach their own goals. The priests, trade unionists, and government officials all used the plans of the Aboriginal activists for their own purpose while at the same time the activists profited from the support. In some occasions the co-operation with non-Aboriginal supporters is an advantage and Aboriginal people are able to make stronger statements when they rely on a large group of supporters. When Aboriginal people receive non-Aboriginal support they face the danger that their struggle might seem less genuine and within the Aboriginal community it can raise questions of authenticity.

2.2.5 The Aboriginal Tent Embassy and Other Initiatives

Around the same time the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Housing Company were set up, Redfern was buzzing with activities. One of the most well known activities that originated from Aboriginal people in Redfern was the erection of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. On Australia Day 1972 - ten months before the federal elections - Prime Minister Bill McMahon made a speech regarding Aboriginal land rights in which it became clear that the Liberal government of the time was not willing to grant such rights in the future. In reaction to the speech a couple of young Aboriginal people gathered together in Redfern and four of them went to Canberra to start a demonstration. That same night they agreed to set up a few tents on the lawn of Parliament House and camp out until their friends in Redfern had collected enough people to join them. They found out that as long as there were no more than eleven tents it was in fact legal to camp there. The encampment was baptised the Aboriginal Tent Embassy because, according to the protesters, McMahon's speech had in effect declared Aboriginal people aliens in their own country (*Landrightsnews* 1988). Beckett argues: "By calling the tents an embassy the protestors made a claim to nationhood; by selecting land as their central demand, they claimed a territory in which to practise their nationality." (1988b: 204) One of the men involved in the erection of the Tent Embassy remembers:

We were involved in the setting up of the Tent Embassy. We would sit together and suddenly say: 'Tomorrow we are erecting the Tent Embassy', and then we would do that. A lot of Aboriginal people nowadays claim to have been part of the group that erected the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972. But that is not true. There was only a small group from Redfern. If there was a national thing going on at that time you didn't need any invitations. It just happened. The Tent Embassy just happened. (1-5-1996)

In the following months the Embassy was visited by Aboriginal people from all over the country expressing their support. While the news spread more and more people came to visit, including non-Aboriginal supporters and even tourists. The encampment grew steadily and police deliberated what measures to take. In July 1972 three attempts were made to tear the tents down. The confrontations were violent and 200 to 300 police officers were used to remove 3000 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians who

had by then gathered around the Embassy (*Landrightsnews* 1988).⁴⁰ The forceful removal of the camp and its residents reached the international media and the problems of the Aboriginal people of Australia were put on the world map. It was the first time that the subordinate position of the Aboriginal people was made known to the world. According to Broome this event marked “a new direction in Aboriginal affairs” in three ways: a) reflecting the emergence of a pan-Aboriginal identity; b) marking a change to more direct methods of protest; and c) revealing the growth of a group of young and assertive Aboriginal leaders (1982: 184). Two decades later the Embassy was re-erected and it is still there.

Besides the highly successful protests on the lawns of Parliament House the same group of Aboriginal activists from Redfern was responsible for the national land rights march in July 1972 launched at Redfern Park that attracted nation-wide media coverage (Anderson 1993b: 319). Apart from organising their own protests the activists also made clever use of the different demonstrations organised at the time, like anti-Vietnam demonstrations. One of the most famous is the Anti-Springbok demonstration in 1973 in Sydney. At this demonstration Australians protested against the arrival of the South-African rugby team, the Springboks, to condemn the South-African apartheid regime.⁴¹ Aboriginal people used these demonstrations to show the Australians that there were similar problems in their own back yard (Faine 1993: 14). Paul Coe, who was one of the founding members of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, says about this:

Because oppression was taking place in other places, and people were voicing their concerns about the war in Vietnam and the system of apartheid in South Africa being evil and oppressive, we raised these issues and drew the parallel. We made people aware that similar conditions existed in their own country, under our noses, and yet people were continuing to ignore those conditions. (*ibid.* 1993: 15)

⁴⁰ When later that year Gough Whitlam, the new Labor Prime Minister, came into power he dropped all charges against the people arrested at the Tent Embassy (Howie-Willis 1994b: 1178).

⁴¹ Aboriginal people in Redfern regularly make the link with South Africa claiming that South Africa had consulted Australia during the Boer Wars and had based their Apartheid system on the separation policies set up in Australia. In the 1970s the resemblance between the then still present apartheid system and Australia’s treatment of Aborigines was a major issue.

Apart from organising protests and demonstrations Redfern Aboriginal people were also involved in starting up small projects to improve living conditions of the Aboriginal community. One of those was the breakfast programme, which was run in a park in Newtown, a neighbouring suburb. It was based on an idea of the Black Panthers in Oakland, U.S.A. (*Landrightsnews* 1988). The local Aboriginal women who ran the programme started providing warm meals for children as well. When it turned out that the Aboriginal mothers did not have the time to take care of their children because they had to work, the women of the breakfast programme set up Murawina Pre-school on the Block. The programme was run on donations until in 1973 they received funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Rowlands 1979).

The National Black Theatre was another project, which was set up to conduct classes in writing and reading, and to produce plays by Aboriginal writers. Paul Coe who was involved in setting up the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern applied for funding but it was rejected because there was no professional actor involved. In 1972 Coe met the Aboriginal actor Bob Maza who performed street theatre in front of the Tent Embassy in Canberra. So in 1974 the National Black Theatre received its first funding. They collaborated with white theatre organisations. The first play staged in the Theatre was Bob Merrit's *The Cake Man* in 1975 (Howie-Willis 1994a: 8). The Theatre itself no longer exists but many of the people who were involved or trained at the Theatre are now working for organisations like the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) and the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA). In the following years the Aboriginal Children's Service and other organisations were set up in Redfern to answer to further needs in the community. In other States similar organisations were founded after the example in Redfern. Since then, more than 1200 Aboriginal organisations have been founded in Australia (Burgmann 1993: 36). The beginning of the 1970s was a very fruitful period for the Aboriginal community of Redfern. It brought forth initiatives, which would have a lasting impact on the rest of Australia and changed the course of history. Self-determination was truly happening.

2.2.6 Redfern in 1996

Apart from the unique events described above, Redfern also distinguishes itself from other Australian metropolitan suburbs in another area because it

is one of the poorest metropolitan suburbs in Australia. The quote below of a Redfern resident provides an illustrative example:

I am a single mother and live on the Block. I have two kids and luckily I found a boyfriend who helps me out a bit because it is very difficult to be a single mother. But even though he helps out I still carry the responsibility because they are my kids. It is very hard to live on the Block because you never get a good night sleep. Every night cars are stolen and the police are coming around, checking the area. I want to move out because my children are starting to pick up on the bad behaviour of the other kids. They are already using a lot of bad language and pretty soon they will be old enough to learn how to steal a car. I want to prevent that from happening. I want to move to a quiet area. More into the country because I miss the quiet and the space. I have lived on the Block from when I went to preschool. I used to move back and forth between the country and the city with my mother. She died ten years ago and I have lived on the Block ever since. (15-8-1996)

Hunter (1996) found that indigenous people now make up an increasingly bigger proportion of the population in distressed urban areas than before. They are particularly affected by high unemployment and live in specific suburbs. Aboriginal people are isolated from other Australians by social distance. But even when Aboriginal people move into better neighbourhoods the social distance does not decrease.

In 1996 there were 352,970 indigenous people⁴² living in Australia.⁴³ In Sydney the Aboriginal people live spread over the metropolitan area, concentrating in the poorer suburbs near the city centre, falling under South Sydney, and at the fringe of the metropolitan area, such as Blacktown, Campbelltown and Penrith. The indigenous population of the Sydney metropolitan area is 34,286 on a total population of 3.7 million people, making up slightly less than 1% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1997b). The majority of the Sydney Aboriginal population originates from rural towns in NSW, such as: Brewarrina, Moree, Dubbo, Kempsey, Tweed Heads and Cowra. A minority comes from places out of state. Redfern, part of South Sydney, has 6,858 residents of which 393 are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Of the indigenous population 237 live in Eveleigh Street.

⁴² People identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

⁴³ This is an increase of 33% since 1991 but the growing number is not expected to bring a change in the needs of the indigenous population (Taylor 1997).

The poverty in Redfern is reflected in the differences in employment status between the indigenous and non-indigenous population.⁴⁴ The unemployment rate as a percentage of the labour force is 33% (47% for Eveleigh Street) for the indigenous population, while it is 12% for the non-indigenous population.⁴⁵ People have estimated the actual unemployment figure for the Redfern Aboriginal community to be 85% (Howie-Willis 1994b: 932, Maguire 1984). The high unemployment puts heavy pressure on the indigenous population where only a small part of the population is in the labour force and has to take care of the majority of the indigenous population consisting of children and people aged 65 years and over. This is substantiated by the dependency ratio: the number of persons aged 0-14 and 65 years and over divided by the number of persons aged 15-64. For the indigenous population the dependency ratio is 0.59 (0.78 for Eveleigh Street) while that for the non-indigenous population is 0.36. The high dependency ratio is reflected in the division of types of household. Redfern has a high percentage (66%) of one-parent households in the indigenous community. Among the indigenous population in Redfern there are 29 couple families (832 among the non-indigenous population) compared to 56 one-parent families (320 among the non-indigenous population). Daly and Smith note that indigenous sole parents are younger, lower educated, more unemployed, have more children to support and a lower income, resulting in a higher adult dependency (1997: 21).

The high unemployment figure also correlates with low levels of education. When asked about their highest qualification 182 out of the 247 indigenous people in Redfern stated that they were not qualified. Luckily nearly all young Aboriginal children in Redfern attend school, such as Redfern and Darlington Public Primary School, and Cleveland Street and Pemulwuy High Schools. The attendance rate, however, drops when the children get older. According to the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) the current educational system is failing Aboriginal children

⁴⁴ For all the figures to follow I refer to Appendices 4 to 7 taken from the 1996 Census, unless another reference is given.

⁴⁵ Considering that people with no fixed address were not included in the 1996 Census it can be assumed that the above figures for the indigenous population are slightly different in the disadvantage of the indigenous population because Redfern has a considerable floating population of Aboriginal people living on the streets and they do not have a job. For the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area these figures are less contrasting, but still negative for indigenous people, suggesting that Redfern is indeed one of the poorest indigenous neighbourhoods in Sydney.

and is perpetuating the policy of removal of Aboriginal children. In their submission to the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*⁴⁶ they stated that Aboriginal children are often banned from schools. Many Aboriginal children are illegally suspended, excluded or expelled. Some children in Redfern have not been to school for 12 months. In some cases the children never go back to school because the parents believe that the children are not allowed to go back to school. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children who attend school remains wide. Of the Aboriginal children 12% are expelled, this figure is four times higher than for non-Aboriginal children. Sometimes schools even expel five year-old Aboriginal children. The AECG called for the education of parents about the rights of their children and the education of the teachers. They were of the opinion that cultural appropriateness of teaching methods in the classroom needed to be reviewed (AECG 5-7-1996).

Because of their low income most residents can only afford cheap housing. On the Block the majority of the houses are rented out to Aboriginal residents by the Aboriginal Housing Company. These houses have been in very bad shape until a large number of them were demolished in 1997. Some of the remaining premises, awaiting redevelopment, were being squatted in 1999. When a couple of years ago the premises were still rented out most of the houses were rotting away and it was moist and damp inside. Some of them were infested by cockroaches or other vermin. Therefore the houses were and the remaining houses are a source of bad hygiene and bad health, causing, for example, breathing problems.

Apart from the generally low income and bad housing conditions in Redfern, many Aboriginal residents also cope with a generally bad health. The discrepancy between the health conditions of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is found on a national level. For instance, the life expectancy for Aboriginal people is 17 years below average and the infant mortality rate is three times higher than the Australian average (ATSIC 1994: 8). I have distinguished a number of factors contributing to the bad health of Aboriginal people in Redfern. First, because of their low income people can not afford to pay for healthy food or medical services. Although

⁴⁶ The *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* was organised by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in order of the federal government and held public hearings in Redfern from 1-7-96 until 6-7-96. This statement of the AECG was made during those hearings.

one should take into account that the services at, for example, the Aboriginal Medical Service are free. Also, some of the money is spent on drugs or alcohol. Second, due to their low income the Aboriginal people, especially in Eveleigh Street, are confined to unhealthy living conditions, contributing to conditions such as asthma. Third, statistically speaking being Aboriginal in Australia raises the chance of particular health conditions, such as a higher risk of diabetes (ABS 1997a) and ear infections.

When Aboriginal people in the Sydney ATSIC region were asked what their main health problems were they responded: alcohol (52%), drugs/other substances (32%), diabetes (12%), diet/nutrition (9%), and heart problems (6%) (ABS 1996b: 19). Apart from physical health problems a lot of Aboriginal people also suffer from mental health problems, as recognised by all Aboriginal health services in the area. Stress amongst the Aboriginal population is often caused by a combination of factors, including for example: overcrowded living conditions, young parentage, domestic violence and being from the stolen generations.

To escape from stressful situations people often resort to substance abuse. Larsen found discrimination to be one of the main reasons that leads to alcoholism under Aboriginal people (1980: 391). A worrying development is the increase of petrol sniffing amongst Aboriginal juveniles (Brady 1992). The use of drugs and alcohol are a health problem in itself. Not only do they affect the body and mind in a harmful way, they also cost a lot of money (which is needed for more important things) and can cause a lot of stress in the form of domestic violence or other destructive behaviour. This serves to show that many people in Redfern are living in a vicious circle trying to escape their problems through resorting to substance abuse and at the same time creating new problems they want to escape from.

According to Broome discrimination and racism stand at the basis of the current bad living conditions of Aboriginal people in general. It was the combination of poor education and low paid jobs that forced Aboriginal people to live in substandard housing and obstructed them from receiving good medical care, higher educational skills or legal representation. The situation that then emerged Broome calls a "multi-causal cycle of poverty" (1982: 150) to which the Aboriginal people reacted in two ways. One was "alienation and despair", the other an "attitude of defiance" (1982: 150). This first reaction is related to what Lewis calls the "culture of poverty". In such a "culture" people live on the fringe of society and as a consequence construct their own subculture that operates independently from the

mainstream society they are part of. Members of this subculture cope with “a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority” (1966). Langton warns however that Lewis’ theory is dangerous as it “explains away the tragic living conditions of Aboriginal people which have resulted from dispossession, and the tenacious ways in which Aboriginal people have survived the brutality of white invasion.” (1981: 18) The two reactions as described by Broome in his multi-causal cycle are still relevant. The alienation and despair is mirrored by the high figures of Aboriginal people involved in substance abuse and Aboriginal people with mental health problems. The attitude of defiance will be discussed more elaborately in Chapter 5 that discusses the notion of Aboriginality as resistance.

2.3 Racism, Raids and Riots

As many Aboriginal people in Redfern are often confronted with racism, it is important to determine what racism is and in which ways it is expressed. The idea of racism is based on the division of humans into biological or physical categories, called races, which are groups with specific genetic characteristics. It is assumed then, that these genetic characteristics determine people’s cultural expressions. The cultural differences that thus exist can give rise to “the belief that some races are superior to others”, which is the definition of racism according to the Oxford’s Dictionary. Whereas the acceptance of the existence of races in itself could be considered as an act of racism, I regard racism to be a combination of assumptions with regard to these genetic differences. To be able to recognise racism in the following sections I will regard those practices as racism where people do not only separate a group of people on the basis of biological differences but also view that because of these differences they should be treated differently.

When using these two rules to recognise racism, it can be said that Australia as a nation was build on racist premises. The first contact with the original inhabitants of the continent was characterised by a distinction made between the inhabitants and the visitors on the basis of biological differences and as a consequence the visitors treated the others in a different way. M. Tonkinson elaborately discusses how the British settlers, and later Australians, introduced racial divisions into Australia as a basis for their new society. Racial theories formed the basis for numerous policies concerning Aboriginal people. As a consequence, the history of Aboriginal-

Australian relations is based on these racial divisions (M. Tonkinson 1990: 202-214). Broome mentions several factors underlying the racism that “came to dominate the thinking of most Australians by 1900 and beyond” (1982: 88). First, cultural and physical differences between the first settlers and the indigenous people lead to misunderstandings and lack of sympathy on both sides. Second, scientific theories about “savagery” and “evolution” formed the basis for a racial ideology. Third, the British settlers needed rationalisations for the dispossession and violation of the indigenous peoples and found it in racist theories in which the indigenous people were “savages” and the Europeans the “pioneers” (Broome 1982: 88-91). Considering the specific history of Australian race relations, the racial heritage of the past can not be ignored as “the past remains present in a complex social milieu where social relations and identities have been constructed around racial categories and differentiations” (Cowlshaw 1998: 146).

Examples of historical events based on racial thought are, for instance, the assumption that the Australian continent was not occupied and could therefore be claimed for the British Crown without conquest or treaty (see also section 2.1.1). This was partly based on the notion that the original inhabitants were not equal to the British settlers. Also, during trials Aborigines and other Australians were not punished equally for the same crimes. While Aborigines were hanged for killing settlers or stealing their cattle, the settlers were seldom punished when killing Aborigines because this was not seen as a real crime.⁴⁷ The same rules of inferiority were applied when the Aborigines were placed under the Flora and Fauna Act. Until the Aboriginal people received citizen rights in 1967 the cows and sheep were included in the census but Aboriginal people were not (Howie-Willis 1994b: 933-4⁴⁸). Also, the White Australia Policy of last century promoted the preference of Caucasian immigrants over others.⁴⁹ At that time the current national anthem was introduced referring to the dream of a great white

⁴⁷ In the area of current NSW the Myall Creek massacre was one of the most famous because it was one of the few massacres that resulted in the hanging of settlers involved in killing the local people (Blomfield 1986: 29-31, Elder 1998: 83-94).

⁴⁸ Although it was not common practice everywhere census figures have been kept in some of the States from the 1930s onwards (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics 1973)

⁴⁹ A book promoting Australia dating from the 1940s also refers to that dream with its opening: “To the Pioneer Men and Women of Australia whose labour and sacrifice have laid the foundation of a Great White Nation” (Australia Story Trust 1945: 3).

nation with the words: "Advance Australia Fair".⁵⁰ When the first Aboriginal people moved to Redfern it was still common practice to be thrown out of pubs or hotels, being served last - if served at all - in shops, or being called "boong" or "coon" in public.⁵¹ Until the 1960s public places like swimming pools, cinemas and pubs had separated areas for Aboriginal people and other Australians. Although, in 1994 I myself have visited a pub in Tennant Creek (Northern Territory) where Aboriginal and other people still had separated entrances, drinking areas, and toilets.

Since the Referendum in 1967 and different policy changes preceding the Referendum Aboriginal people became recognised as Australian citizens, gaining the same rights as any other Australian. Over the years Australian federal and state governments have introduced institutions and laws to fight racism, such as: the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Australia)*, the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Ombudsman. But even though Australia has signed the United Nations *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965* Amnesty International continues to condemn Australia's continuing violation of human rights (*Sydney Morning Herald* 30-3-1996). Also, Australia has frequently received criticism from the United Nations with regards to policies concerning Aboriginal people (*Sydney Morning Herald* 15-3-1999, R. Tonkinson 1999: 136, see also *De Volkskrant* 30-8-2000).

Despite these changes there are still sections in Australian society, which are overtly racist. This was demonstrated by the election of Independent Pauline Hanson in 1996 who established the right-wing One Nation Party. She was considered to be the new personification of Australian racism.⁵² She is known for her vigorous statements against Asian immigrants and Aboriginal people. Her success could partly be explained from her perpetuation of some persistent myths concerning Aboriginal people which are very popular amongst certain sections of Australian society. For example, Aboriginal people are often regarded as drunks while in fact the alcohol abuse rate for Aborigines is less than the average figure in Australia (Palmer & Collard 1994: 28). The most persistent belief is that

⁵⁰ Many indigenous and non-indigenous Australians nowadays have trouble with these words in their national anthem because it still refers to the White Australia Policy.

⁵¹ The word *boong* possibly comes from *boondocks* which is American slang for *bush*. The word *coon* is a derogatory term comparable with the word *nigger*.

⁵² Cowlshaw even speaks of Hansonism (1997: 6).

Aboriginal people receive more money in the form of higher social security payments and special subsidies. One often points at Aboriginal people's own federal department (the ATSIC) which receives millions of dollars out of the general budget of the federal government (*Sydney Morning Herald* 20-4-1996a). Tickner, former Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, emphasises that Aboriginal people do not receive higher social security payments nor do they receive special subsidies which are not available to other Australians (1992). Only in education is there special tutorial assistance available under the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme but this scheme is a recognition of the "denial of educational opportunities throughout much of Australia's history" (Tickner 1992: 2).

The Aboriginal people in Redfern are confronted with racism on a regular basis. From the files of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern I learned that it is still common practice to refuse Aboriginal people certain services on the grounds that they are all the same untrustworthy people. I have heard of an undertaker who refused to bury Aboriginal people because he had met one Aboriginal family who was not able to pay the bill. I have seen bartenders who threw out all their Aboriginal clients when only one person started to pick a fight. And I have experienced cabdrivers who refused to pick up Aboriginal people because they did not expect them to pay the fare. In the following sections I will explore three areas in which the residents of Redfern meet contemporary forms of racism.

2.3.1 Aboriginal People and the Australian Justice System

Because especially urban Aboriginal people are often associated as a group with criminal activities, I would like to elaborate on this subject. On a national level, Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system by ten times (Harding et al. 1995: 2). When comparing an unemployed Aboriginal person and an employed non-Aboriginal person the first is 258 times more likely to be imprisoned (ibid. 1995: 14).⁵³ According to McRae et al.: "the Australian criminal justice system remains an alien and discriminatory instrument of oppression, through which Aborigines are harassed, subjected to unfair legal procedures, needlessly

⁵³ But in 1988 it was only in the areas of drunkenness (46.4) and "good order" offences (17.4) that they were over-represented (McRae et al. 1991: 247). One of the reasons for the overrepresentation as a result of drunkenness is because drinking among Aboriginal people is more public (ibid. 1991: 248).

jailed, and all too often die whilst in legal custody.” (1991: 238) They write that this can be partly explained by the history of the Australian legal system. They mention as the most important reasons: 1) the imposing of an alien criminal justice system on people unfamiliar with the system; 2) the criminal justice system had a xenophobic attitude without providing reinforcement of Aboriginal law system; and 3) it became a system of oppression as it was used to enforce policies on Aboriginal population (1991: 238-239).

The enormous overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system was put on the national political agenda with the installation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which was active from 1980 to 1989. It investigated the deaths of 99 people that had died in that period. The commission found that “the principal and immediate explanation for the large number of Aboriginal deaths in custody is the disproportionate rate at which Aboriginal people are detained, arrested and imprisoned in Australia” (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991: 5). It came up with 339 recommendations of which many have been adapted in new policies.⁵⁴ Despite these efforts even more Aboriginal deaths in custody have occurred in NSW in the five years after the investigation than in the period studied by the Royal Commission (Murphy & Mellor 1992, *Sydney Morning Herald* 9-11-1996).⁵⁵

As in the rest of Australia the Aboriginal people in Sydney are also strongly over-represented in the justice system.⁵⁶ Within the Sydney ATSI region 18% of the Aboriginal people said to have been arrested in the last five years. The four main reasons for the arrests were: drink driving offence (31%), disorderly conduct/drinking in a public place (22%), theft/burglary (17%), outstanding warrants/breach of order (14%) (ABS 1996b: 56). Gale et al. claim that large differences between overrepresentation in remote and urban areas in Western Australia are a consequence of the perception that remote Aboriginal people are more “real”, resulting in special police policies and strategies for remote areas, while this is much less the case in urban areas (1990: 117).

⁵⁴ For a short and clear overview of the report I refer to Cunneen (1997) and Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991).

⁵⁵ Although one has to take into account that since the recommendations of the Royal Commission were published in 1991 there has been better and more accurate registration.

⁵⁶ In NSW there are 1200 Aboriginal inmates in total: 800 male, 200 female and 200 juvenile. An additional 200 work on CSOs. (22-8-1996)

It is especially worrying to see how many Aboriginal juveniles are involved in the juvenile justice system. While the Aboriginal juvenile population of NSW is 2% they form 25 % of the juvenile inmates. According to Luke and Cunneen's report (1995) there appears to be some bias against young Aboriginal people in police decisions to arrest and prosecute, which has harsher consequences on a higher level. The conclusion of their report was that Aboriginal juveniles are not treated differently at the level of the Children's Court. This claim is substantiated by Gale et al. (1990: 119). The main reasons for the high levels of Aboriginal over-representation according to Luke and Cunneen are:

- extremely high apprehension rates (nine times higher with 215 per thousand)
- a relatively small but compounding bias against Aboriginal children in key police decisions
- a court sentencing structure which, while apparently equitable, reinforces previous systemic effects (Luke & Cunneen 1995: vii)

The population of Aboriginal offenders in NSW is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population and Aboriginal juveniles have their first contact with the justice system at an earlier age. They are charged more frequently with trivial offences (see also McRae et al. 1991: 243) which increases the chance that they build up an extensive prior record more rapidly than non-Aboriginal juveniles do. This can result in longer records at an earlier age which influences decisions by police and courts. Young Aboriginal people also have a 10-15% higher chance of going to court rather than receiving a caution. And Aboriginal juveniles are least over-represented in less punitive interventions but most over-represented in more severe interventions. The effects of these differences over time are substantial because the accumulation of more serious punishments negatively affects the judgment of the last crime. Because the majority of the Aboriginal population lives in rural areas Aboriginal juveniles are more likely to appear before a non-specialist Children's Court which can also have a negative effect on the punishments given by the judge. As Johnston explains in the *National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*:

[T]he decision to charge can have dire long term consequences...The complaint has frequently been made that young Aboriginals are unnecessarily or deliberately made the subject of trivial charges or multiple charges, with the result that the appearance of a

serious criminal record is built up at an early age. This follows them through life, is a handicap against defending themselves or seeking mitigation if charged again, and also handicaps them in relation to employment and in other ways. (1991a: 275-276)

It is, as Johnston says, a “complex interrelation of factors” that leads to Aboriginal youth offending (1991a: 275). An attempt to give an overview of the complex interrelation of factors is made by Harding et al. (1995). They discuss three theories which give some general explanations for Aboriginal crime each from a different angle: 1) the strain theory; 2) the labelling theory; and 3) the conflict theory.

The first theory is called the strain theory, which is explained as follows:

An extension of this idea argues that the frustrations caused by deprivation, especially those caused by dispossession, often turn inward on the self so the behaviour loses meaning and becomes self-destructive. The theory asserts that deviance or criminal behaviour is one of the few ways open to those deprived of the normal capacity to assert identity or acquire the material benefits of the Australian lifestyle, or to escape the stigmatisation of poverty and low self-esteem through alcohol abuse. (Harding et al. 1995:6)

Also in Redfern it appears that many Aboriginal people direct their frustrations towards themselves and the people in their immediate surroundings. Being unable to tackle the cause of their frustrations because of the vastness and variety of causes or to attack those whom they feel unjustifiably treated by (the police, the politicians); they have to get rid of their anger in some other way. Instead they direct the violence towards themselves resulting in substance abuse, domestic violence, or suicide. Some people direct their anger towards society by engaging in criminal acts. This is a form of self-destruction as well because the offenders will end up in jail. And once they have ended up there it is hard to stay out of the criminal environment. This vicious circle is also called the “deviancy amplification spiral”.

The second theory, the labelling theory, notes that when Aboriginal people become associated with crime as a group they are more likely to be watched by the police (see also McRae et al. 1991: 248). This is apparent in the constant police surveillance of the area around the Block. People are confronted with this on a regular basis. As an Aboriginal woman told me once: “One day I had to park the car for a while to go to the bank and I left my kids inside. When I came back the police was talking to them and they

thought they had stolen my car and my handbag.” The labelling also works on an individual level. Because when somebody has committed a crime he or she will be watched carefully by the police and the next time something happens this person is more likely to be suspicious.

In their study in Adelaide Gale and Wundersitz (1987) did not find that the police discriminated on race. Instead they found that especially unemployment was a bias on which police arrested people. And because Aboriginal people are more likely to be unemployed they are over-represented in the justice system. The study of Gale et al. substantiates this (1990). They (1990) found that Aboriginal-police contacts in Adelaide are hostile and offensive increasing the likelihood of an arrest. Black explains this by stating that when suspects demonstrate a disrespectful attitude towards the police the arrest that follows is not so much an action of enforcement of law but the police enforcing their authority upon the suspect (1990: 97). He found that especially disrespectful behaviour towards the police has a significant effect on the likelihood of arrest (1990: 95). During his study among Afro-Americans Black did not find evidence that the police arrested on the bias of race but that Afro-Americans were more likely to behave disrespectfully towards police officers. He adds in a postscript, however, that the evidence he used “no longer appear[s] sufficient to answer the question of whether the police discriminate against blacks” (1990: 107). The disrespectful behaviour towards Australian authorities such as police officers can also be found among Aboriginal people.

This behaviour can be explained by the conflict theory, the third theory discussed by Harding et al. The theory supports the idea that “the legitimacy of the law is rejected by the ‘deviant’ or ‘outsider’ group on the grounds that it fails to recognise or represent their values” (1995: 10). This is certainly true for the majority of Aboriginal people who still feel they are not properly represented on government levels. There is a strong feeling that the police are not there for the Aboriginal people but for other Australians. As discussed in section 2.2.2 ill feelings towards the police force go as far back as the times in which many police officers acted as the managers of reserves. Ever since these practices the police are regarded as the embodiment of the Australian Law, the Government and society of which many Aboriginal people feel detached.

Some elements within the younger generation agitate against the representatives of the society by provoking or offending police officers or resisting arrest. McRae et al. claim that: “A stay in prison enhances their

[young Aborigines] prestige among peers.” (1991: 281) In a way Aboriginal street offenders can sometimes better be regarded as “primitive rebels” according to Harding et al. (1995: 10). Cunneen (1989) confirms that crime can also be regarded as a form of resistance, even though it is not well organised in a conventional manner but rather spontaneous. The same is claimed by Cowlshaw who focuses on contemporary confrontational manifestations of resistance in studying Aboriginal-police confrontations in rural NSW (1988). However, Hutchings notes that there is a danger in portraying crime as an aspect of Aboriginal identity (1993: 350) because the image of Aboriginal crime perpetuates the situation (1993: 358).

2.3.2 Aboriginal-Police Relations

Now that I have explained the background behind the position of Aboriginal people in the Australian justice system I would like to continue with a description of the Aboriginal-police relations in Redfern because it has been characterised by expressions of racism. And they have a big impact on how life in Redfern is experienced. Despite numerous initiatives over the years to improve the relations between the police and the Aboriginal community, such as the Aboriginal-Police Liaison Committee and the Aboriginal-police liaison officers who are working in the area nowadays, they remain delicate to say the least.

I have distinguished three problems, which stand in the way of a better relationship between the Redfern Aboriginal community and the police. First, the police are over-policing the Block (Cunneen 1990: 33, cf. Johnston 1991b: 89). They watch over the Aboriginal community through infrared cameras on the TNT Towers and patrol the area day and night. Many Aboriginal residents experience this as provocative behaviour. Second, the police make mistakes during arrests, raids, and the handling of arrested persons. This is confirmed by the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, Amnesty International (1993) and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Third, racist views are still prevalent among the Redfern Aboriginal police force. The cases discussed below substantiate this. As a consequence, police officers continue to arrest Aboriginal people for minor offences as disorderly behaviour, offensive behaviour and offensive language, in much greater numbers than non-Aboriginal people (Luke & Cunneen 1995).

In his report on the Redfern raid of February 1990 Cunneen (1990) discusses a selection of the raids in Redfern in the 1980s (see Appendix 8). Cunneen remarks that the information given in his report is “by no means” complete. The table shows that there were many clashes in Redfern between Aboriginal people and different squads of the police force in the 1980s. Some of them are worth looking at more closely to get an idea of how the clashes occurred. The examples will show that in the cases described below the police force is involved in provocation and that in reaction to misbehaviour of Aboriginal people they resort to excessive means. What follows is a summary of some of the cases as discussed by Cunneen (1990).

In November 1983 a major policing operation which started at the Clifton Hotel was the cause for many arrests. At the Hotel the band No Fixed Address was giving a concert. When two Aboriginal people left the premises to have a fight outside a police car pulled up and radioed for assistance. Police cars arrived from as far as North Sydney (a North Shore suburb). When the concert was finished and more people came out of the building they were confronted by police officers with batons. Ten arrests followed. Later that night a group of Aboriginal people started harassing a cab driver resulting in another forty taxis to appear to help out their colleague (Maguire 1984). The police responded with a raid on Eveleigh Street and the neighbouring areas that same night. Officially thirty Aboriginal people and three police officers were injured during the raid. The day after the newspapers spoke of a race riot involving 350 Aboriginal people (ibid. 1984). All 34 arrests were made under the *Intoxicated Persons Act 1979 (NSW)*. Serious injuries were caused such as knocked out teeth and a hit in the groin, which resulted in the miscarriage of a sixteen-year-old girl. Complaints were filed to the NSW Office of the Ombudsman by the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern as a result of the 1983 raid.

In 1988 fifty police in riot gear and fifty Aboriginal people clashed in Eveleigh Street and the police made repeated baton charges into the crowd. After this the NSW Police Association called for the permanent establishment of the Tactical Response Group (TRG) in Redfern. The TRG was formed in 1982 and is a specialist riot control group.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Although the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made a recommendation to review the use of the TRG (recommendation 61) the TRG is still being used after the publication of the report (Johnston 1991b: 82), as well as the decriminalisation of drunkenness (recommendation 79, 1991b: 87), as well as monitor offensive language (recommendation 86, 1991b: 88).

In April 1989 David Gundy was killed during police raids at Marrickville made by the South Region police who were also responsible for some of the confrontations with the Aboriginal people in Redfern. They were looking for a murder suspect but instead they found Gundy sleeping in his bedroom. He was killed by a shot gun blast fired by a member of the Special Weapons and Operations Squad. At the coronial inquiry it turned out the gun had been fired accidentally during a struggle. When the Commissioner of Police was unwilling to review the events concerning the death of Gundy, as was recommended by the Ombudsman, Hal Wootten from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody tried to investigate the death. The state government tried to stop him from doing so through a court order but Wootten successfully appealed and wrote a lengthy report on Gundy's death to be included in the National Report of the Commission (Howie-Willis 1994a: 439).

In July 1989 five or six plain clothed police officers disturbed a children's carnival at Alexandria Park which was celebrating National Aboriginal Day. They entered the park with their guns drawn firing bullets while children were in their immediate vicinity. The week after the incident Aboriginal people marched to the police station demanding an inquiry. In August 1989 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* conducted a public hearing in Redfern to gather evidence.

Most of Cunneen's report focuses on the raid of February 1990, code-named Operation Sue, which included 135 police from the Tactical Response Group, the Anti-Theft Squad, the Rescue Squad and others. About seventy members conducted the raids on eight houses from four o'clock in the morning. They had at least eight search warrants and used iron bars and sledgehammers to enter the houses. Some police were armed with shotguns. Eight persons were arrested for goods in custody, possession of the implement for the use of drugs, unpaid warrants, warrants related to breach of bail and fail to appear in court. Three of those warrants were five to seven years old. The main complaints concerned the degree of force used by the police, the condition in which the houses were left, and the fact that goods were considered to be stolen when people were not able to show a receipt.

The day after the raid a community meeting was organised at which 100 residents discussed the events of the night before and issued a press

release. When the police were asked for an explanation for the raid by the media the Sydney District Commander answered:

Our normal surveillance activities can't operate in a place like the black community. You stand out like you know what. Where do you survey the activity when they are all the one breed? So you then have to look at alternative methods and that was what today was all about. (*Sydney Morning Herald* 9-2-1990 in Cunneen 1990)

The use of the term "one breed" suggest that the commander considers all Aboriginal people to be one and the same but different from other Australians as they are not susceptible to "normal surveillance activities". Cunneen states that the raid was fundamentally racist because certain police activities are justified on the basis of a racial category.

Cunneen ends his report with recommendations to the *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* to seek a departmental review of the raid of February 1990. He concludes that over-policing and the use of excessive force occurred in the Redfern Aboriginal community and that the Aboriginal-Police Liaison Officers had their advice ignored, were informed too late, or not at all about operations and incidents involving Aboriginal people. He suggests reviewing the role of the Aboriginal-Police Liaison Officers and the Tactical Response Group. About the TRG he says that "the use of Tactical Response Group in policing Aboriginal communities has functioned to increase polarisation between Aboriginal people and the police" (1990: 34). Their provocative and violent appearance in combination with the lack of ties to any locality makes it the "antithesis of community policing". Finally, Cunneen states that the Redfern raid can be regarded as an act of racist violence because a notion of race was used to plan special activities/police practices to be adapted within the Redfern Aboriginal community. During the raid Aboriginal people fell victim to physical violence, psychological violence and violence to property. The *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* published its findings in 1991 and found that racial violence and harassment continues to a considerable degree. The Commission found that "police officers were frequently the perpetrators of racist violence against Aboriginal people" (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1991: 211). "There are compelling reasons for considering the use of violence by police officers against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as part of an institutionalised form of racist violence." (ibid. 1991: 14).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ More about the *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* can be read in Moss (1990).

The 1994 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey* showed that in NSW 10% of the respondents were hassled by police in the last year while 2% were physically assaulted (ABS 1996a: 42). But people who feel mistreated seldom file a complaint. According to the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) people feel threatened and are afraid of repercussions because suspects are often known by the police officers. Also, many Aboriginal people are of the opinion that their complaint will not make a difference. At the ALSR files were kept on police misconduct in and around the Redfern area. Some of the files were brought to the attention of the Ombudsman Office in the hope that they would look further into the cases.⁵⁹ For an example of such a file collected by the ALSR I refer to Appendix 9.

The above has shown that the chances that the Aboriginal-police relations in Redfern will improve quickly are small. Especially when one considers that in February 1997 the Redfern police force decided to tighten the control on the Aboriginal community once again because of the increase in petty crime on the streets in the months prior to that.

2.3.3 Redfern in the Media

Because for many Australians the media is the most important provider of information about Aboriginal people (Trigger 1995: 118) it has the power to create a certain image of Aboriginal people or to maintain an image that is already created. Unfortunately in the past these images have mostly been negative ones (ibid. 1995: 102, 104).⁶⁰ What does this mean for racism? The *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* found that sensationalist reporting, particularly in headlines, was a major negative influence on the image other Australians have of Aboriginal people. "Research on media reporting of Aboriginal people has argued that there has been a shift over the last thirty years from stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal people as 'victims' to stereotypical portrayals as 'criminals'." (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1991: 117). A study of Palmer and Collard (1994) confirms this.

⁵⁹ These civil actions are no longer done by the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, which has replaced the former Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, because the Government only funds criminal law activities.

⁶⁰ For an account on the use of photographic images of Aboriginal people in the media I refer to Dewdney (1994).

The above appears to be especially applicable to the media representation of the Aboriginal people in Redfern. In the case of Redfern the media has played an important role as well in shaping the image of the suburb of Redfern as people know it now. A large part of its notorious reputation was brought on by the media, which depicted the events happening in Redfern in a particular way. This started in the 1950s when the first Aboriginal residents settled in Redfern, resulting in excessive media attention for the arrests made among Aboriginal people (Anderson 1993a: 95-96). In the 1970s the media focused on poor living conditions of the Aboriginal population in Redfern, calling it "Australia's own Third world". In the 1980s and 1990s Redfern was represented as a restless place of raids and riots.⁶¹ A good example of the continuation of a negative image of Redfern in the 1990s is depicted in the newspaper article in *The Daily Telegraph* early 1996: "LINE OF FIRE: RIOT POLICE CONFRONT GANG OF 40 MUGGERS Riot police took to the streets of Redfern today after a gang of 40 youths went on a crime spree." (*The Daily Telegraph* 31-1-1996)

The article covered the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* with a large picture of riot police in action. Further down the newspaper another two pictures of Redfern Aboriginal residents witnessing the raid accompanied the remainder of the article. The article describes how 20 Patrol Support Group officers in full riot gear raided Eveleigh Street in the early hours of the morning after four people were mugged at the railway station. With the publishing of the article the newspaper depicts Redfern as a violent and restless area, an image which has been used many times before. It answers to the image the readers already have of Redfern and once again perpetuates the stereotyped image of the suburb. Because violence sells well and Redfern seems to equal violence the article appeared on the front cover.⁶²

Despite the regular appearance of similar articles Trigger stresses that it is too easy to say that the media are racist. The issue is much more complex than that. Not only is there no such thing as a racist ruling class dictating

⁶¹ For a small collection of negative media publicity on Redfern see Sarkissian et al. (1986: 20-24).

⁶² One day later another article tries to take back some of the earlier vigorous statements by picturing another view towards the riots condemning the raid as an over-reaction. But by placing this article within the paper (not on the cover) the first image depicted the other day will remain with the readers and the second image will not have such an impact that it will actually change people's views on the riot as depicted the day before (*The Daily Telegraph* 1-2-1996).

the media to spread racist ideology there is also the reader who plays an active role in accepting or questioning the information he or she receives from the media (Trigger 1995: 104-105). Apart from that, over the years the serious media have become more sympathetic towards Aboriginal people in general. That media attention can also lead to positive results is illustrated by the following case.

In the beginning of the 1990s the controversial documentary *Cop it Sweet*, broadcast by the ABC, shocked Australia when it showed how Aboriginal people got arrested and were treated by the Redfern police (Murphy & Mellor 1992). This broadcast was followed by the broadcasting a few weeks later of an amateur video which shows a so-called "bad-taste party" with police officers off-duty dressed up as Lloyd Boney and David Gundy, two deaths in custody (Murphy & Mellor 1992). A similar television event happened in May 1989 when the Channel NINE programme *Sixty Minutes* included an item called "The County". It featured police officers of the Redfern Police Station referring to the area around Eveleigh Street as "the county", meaning: "Coon county". The programme became subject to a complaint of the Redfern Youth Action Group to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (Cunneen 1990: 11).

What made the documentary *Cop it Sweet* special was that it resulted in immediate action. The hour-long documentary was broadcast in March 1992. For the programme a team from the ABC had followed the police officers of Redfern Police Station for some weeks in the (Australian) winter of 1991. At the moment of shooting 78% of the officers at Redfern police station were under 25 years of age. The documentary shows how the officers go through their daily routine. Some incidents shown in the documentary had their consequences after the documentary was shown on national television. One of these incidents went as follows:

A police officer drives through Eveleigh Street at night to patrol the streets. He passes a few Aboriginal people. When the police car has just passed one of them shouts: "Get out, fuckin' shit!" The officer stops his car, gets out and calls for back-up on his police radio: "Can I have a second police car? I have an Aboriginal person causing trouble." Then he walks up to the man who was shouting and asks him: "What's the reason for swearing on the street?" The Aboriginal man answers: "I don't like you studying the Block." He has to repeat it several times because the officer does not understand him. When the police van arrives the officer arrests the man for offensive language and orders him to step into the car. With an expression of amazement the man gets in while calling: "Bullshit, I have done nothing." At Redfern Police Station the Aboriginal man

has to give his personal details and possessions. At first he does not want to co-operate and keeps on making sounds of disbelief. He points out to the camera crew to get this on film. Later that evening an Aboriginal woman arrives who tries to prevent the Aboriginal man from getting into more trouble because he tries to swear at the officer. At one moment the officer declares that swearing in public is illegal and that the law applies to everyone equally. The documentary ends with the Aboriginal man being taken to a police cell by two police officers. The documentary reports that the man had to appear in front of Redfern Court, he pleaded 'not guilty' and was released. (*Cop It Sweet*, ABC Television 1992)

Within hours after the programme's screening the Redfern Patrol Commander and 140 of his officers were placed under investigation. The day after, two of the officers that appeared in the programme were transferred from Redfern station to other duties. Four more police were transferred after an internal inquiry. Mr Tickner, federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, said that the views and actions expressed by police officers in the programme were an indication why Aboriginal imprisonment in NSW had increased by 80% over the past five years (*Sydney Morning Herald* 5-3-1992, 2-4-1992a). Mr Carr, leader of the NSW Labor Party, agreed with Mr Tickner's view when he stated that the arrests for offensive behaviour had increased from 3,000 (when the *Summary Offences Act 1988 (NSW)* was introduced) to 11,000 in 1992. As a result of the controversy around the incident shown in the documentary Carr asked for a review of the offensive language provisions of the Act (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2-4-1992b).

Even though this particular form of attention for Redfern lead to some positive results it again connected Aboriginal people with crime. It is at least partly due to the continuing connection between Aboriginal people and crime in the media that Redfern has never been able to rid itself of a negative image. Redfern's reputation will not change easily in the near future because the media is still very influential when it comes to representing current developments in Redfern.

Making a Difference: Features and Functions of Aboriginal Organisations

When I arrive at the Service it is lunchtime. Next to a small kitchen is a room with a large round table in the middle. The table is covered with papers, dirty cups, a telephone, and a pot of tea. Some staff members sit around the table eating the lunch they bought at the corner shop. They tell me that the woman who is on maternity leave has delivered a baby boy and named it after famous Aboriginal men. I overhear David talking on the phone introducing himself as the brother of Betty. He explains on the phone that he is filing a lawsuit against the Government because he is one of the children of the stolen generations.

While I eat my lunch I talk with Chris and Laura about the cold Sydney winters and the winters in the Netherlands. Later the Aboriginal liaison officer from the South Sydney City Council walks in. He sits down and starts reading a magazine about Aboriginal hostels. After a while I ask him about the introduction of the Young Mothers Programme at Mudgin-Gal tomorrow morning. He tells me he is here because there was supposed to be a meeting about the Debutante Ball for NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee)-week. A woman drops in for the meeting and together with the liaison officer and Laura they arrange another meeting because nobody else showed up. Chris tells the officer that he is the secretary of a football club. He says he needs some strong blokes for a security job for the Indigenous Knockout End of Year, a major Aboriginal football event in New South Wales. The officer answers that he will think about it. Then the staff members go back to work. (24-6-1996)

This is a typical lunch at the office of an Aboriginal organisation. Always busy, always full of people, always something to talk about. But who are these people sitting around the table at lunchtime? Or rather, what are they doing after lunch? In this chapter I will introduce the organisations that form the subject of this thesis. First I will focus on the conditions that led to the emergence of the Aboriginal organisations, demonstrating that these

initiatives did not stand on their own but were part of international developments going on at the time. Then I will describe the features with which the organisations distinguish themselves from mainstream welfare organisations. I will close this chapter with a short analysis of the functions these organisations fulfil. This acquaintance with the organisations provides the necessary background against which the operation of the organisations to be described in the following chapters can be understood.

3.1 Why the Aboriginal Organisations Were Set up

While in the former chapter I mainly focused on the direct events that lead to the establishment of particular organisations in Redfern, in this section I will elaborate on the factors that played a crucial role in the rise of the Aboriginal organisations in general. According to Crick these organisations are the result of *epigenesis*: “a deliberate creation of a new kind of organisation to cater to new needs created by a new set of circumstances” (1981: 53). I have distinguished three factors that played a role in facilitating the emergence of these organisations:

- the lack of proper services offered by government and private welfare institutions
- the inspiration Aboriginal people drew from other groups
- the changing attitude towards Aboriginal people of other Australians

Together these factors demonstrate that the emergence of the organisations can not be seen independently from developments that were going on at the time both in Australian society as well as in the rest of the world. While driven by the local need for action and personal dissatisfaction, the Aboriginal activists in Redfern were influenced by international developments of the time and were dependent upon the preparedness of both the Australian public as well as the governments to make the establishing of the organisations a success.

3.1.1 Lack of Proper Services

In the former chapter I described that Aboriginal people migrated to the cities in search for work and away from poverty. However, in the urban environment they were confronted with new problems such as overcrowded living conditions and intolerance from their new neighbours. This was not a local phenomenon. All over Australia Aboriginal people had to cope with similar problems. But the bad living conditions did not get unnoticed. Altruistic groups, such as church institutions cared for poor Australians as well as poor Aboriginal people. See for example the interference of the Presbyterian priests in Redfern described in the former chapter. Besides, the federal and state governments ran welfare services that were available to all Australians.

The problem with these forms of help however was their ethnocentric point of view. The welfare services run by state governments and altruistic groups often failed to reach the Aboriginal community (Copeman 1988: 251, Deacon 1981: 30, Dodson 1988: 137, Pierson 1977a: 50, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, Wootten 1974: 62). The welfare services at the time were available for the less well-to-do Australians but their help did not suffice to improve the situation many Aboriginal people were living in. The lack of proper services provided by existing welfare organisations added to the dissatisfaction with the situation at the time which stimulated the Aboriginal people in Redfern to set up the organisations.

Although there was a lot of goodwill present within the existing welfare organisations there was a conflict of interests between the providers of the services and the Aboriginal recipients. Jamrozik wrote: "A welfare system is an instrument of policy; hence, the provision of welfare services is a political act, and the providers of these services have a certain kind of power." (1983: 1) In his paper about welfare organisations Jamrozik points out that these organisations, besides offering assistance, performed a form of social control. In the case of the Aboriginal people the social control also meant *class* control and *racial* control because welfare was directed towards the poor and was based on the belief of racial superiority. This control could be maintained because the welfare organisations had the power to do so. The powers Jamrozik refers to are: legal power, administrative power, moral power, and the power of knowledge. In the case of the *governmental* welfare organisations the possibility of state sanction enhanced this power even further.

Another shortcoming of the organisations was the “inflexibility from being rule-bound and paper-bound”, which Loveday concluded when writing about service delivery to outstations in Arnhem Land (1982: 107). Because of this they delivered specific services and were, in general, not able to involve other types of service which fell outside the scope of their expertise. For example, medical services restricted themselves to medical assistance only and did not get involved in economic or housing problems, which were often related with health problems. Most problems Aboriginal people dealt with were interconnected so a holistic approach was needed to make that connection and tackle the problems on different levels.

Although welfare organisations were accessible to Aboriginal people the latter were often reluctant to visit governmental welfare services (Copeman 1988, Gale 1966, House of Representatives 1992: 221, Lyons 1984) and this is still the case. There are several reasons for this reluctance. First, Aboriginal clients are intimidated by the organisations because of the power distance (Jamrozik 1983, Loveday 1982). They feel uncomfortable opening up to white authorities because they do not trust them. They are not convinced the services act in their best interest because the organisations represent the Australian authorities, which are responsible for the disruption of Aboriginal communities and families in the past. They are not convinced that the same Government would now actually help them. Aboriginal people have difficulty opening up to non-Aboriginal service providers in general (van Reijk 1993). This might be connected with the distrust in governmental institutions.

Second, there is a problem of communication. The staff of these services, all being non-Aboriginal in the past, often has difficulties communicating with their Aboriginal clients because they do not speak the language or understand Aboriginal cultural matters. The communication problem makes it difficult for the staff of the organisations to understand or recognise psychological problems. This results, for example, in the lack of attention for psychological problems while many clients feel alienated from their culture and are depressed because of all the suffering they have gone through. Currently the communication problem is tackled by employing Aboriginal liaison officers in institutions such as government departments, police forces and hospitals, inspired by Aboriginal organisations which employ Aboriginal field officers. Since the early 1990s all government departments are obliged to employ an Aboriginal liaison officer who has to

educate the non-Aboriginal staff of the departments on Aboriginal issues as well as to maintain contact with the Aboriginal communities.

Because the welfare organisations failed to reach Aboriginal clients, services were needed that would be able to overcome the problems of the existing welfare system at the time. A preventive and holistic approach as well as a smaller power distance were necessary to deliver welfare services to Aboriginal clients in a “proper” way. Aboriginal people needed organisations which would have the same interests as their clients and whose actions were not based on a feeling of racial superiority. They needed Aboriginal service providers who would understand the problems their clients were dealing with and whom the clients could trust. So there was a need for organisations that were set up and run by Aboriginal people themselves.

3.1.2 Inspiration from Other Activists

Apart from the dissatisfaction with the existing welfare organisations another factor contributed to the establishment of Aboriginal organisations, namely the inspiration Aboriginal activists drew from their predecessors in the 1930s and the overseas liberation movements that were blooming at the time. As an Aboriginal staff member told me: “We heard about Jack Patten, Bill Ferguson, Pearl Gibbs and the others and we started to find out about the resistance in the early days like Pemulwuy.” (1-5-1996) Aboriginal people I spoke with told me that these people were the first to use political means to stand up against the western domination and improve the living conditions as well as the politically disadvantaged position of Aboriginal people at the time. Of course Aboriginal people had fought the settlers from the very beginning. Pemulwuy, an early resistance leader⁶³, being one of the great examples for the Aboriginal people in Redfern. As an Aboriginal woman told me:

Pemulwuy, one of our great warriors, had the attitude of “I’d rather die than crawl on my knees for you”. Cooper, Patten, and the others had that too. The whites can never wipe that out. We are strong, proud, and powerful people. (9-7-1996)

⁶³ Pemulwuy was an Eora man from the Sydney area, who had assembled a group of followers. More about Pemulwuy can be read in Willmot (1994).

The bad living conditions were not a new phenomenon and as early as the 1930s Aboriginal people were involved in setting up organisations for the advancement of Aboriginal people. As early as 1924 Aboriginal people organised themselves politically in the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) set up by Fred Maynard. It was the first organisation that managed to create formal links between different communities (Goodall 1996: 149-170). William Cooper established the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) in 1932 in Melbourne to ask for better conditions for Aboriginal people.⁶⁴ In 1937 William Ferguson formed the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) at Dubbo that aimed for full citizenship. A year later William Cooper, Bill Ferguson and Jack Patten organised the “Day of Mourning” protest on January the 26th. In order to protest against the celebrations of Australia Day they marched to the Australia Hall in Sydney and presented a declaration demanding civil rights for Aboriginal people. While at the same time other Aboriginal people were forced to participate in the re-enactment of the “glorious” arrival of the First Fleet these activists risked imprisonment by their provocative act (Broome 1982: 166, Parbury 1988: 106-107). After the Second World War the struggle continued with the rise of new organisations. In 1958 Pastor Doug Nicholls⁶⁵ and Stan Davey founded the Aboriginal Advancement League in Melbourne and Faith Bandler and Pearl Gibbs founded the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship in Sydney. Also the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (FCAA) was established to coordinate the Aboriginal political groups’ activities. It turned into FCAATSI in 1964 to recognise the Torres Strait Islander identity (Parbury 1988: 127).

The 1960s were characterised by a second wave of protests for the improvement of the position of Aboriginal people. Unlike the first wave in the 1930s which focused mainly on obtaining civil rights these protests focused on land rights and taking back control over Aboriginal identity. Local and small-scale Aboriginal protests and other forms of resistance had always existed since the arrival of the British but they were seen as incidents or regarded as a curiosity and they formed no serious threat to Australian hegemony. And until the early 1960s, Aboriginal people had been forced by circumstances to protest on a local level, asking for social improvements. A combination of factors made it possible to lift these local protests to a national level. Migrated to the cities Aboriginal people from different areas

⁶⁴ For an extensive account on the AAL see Goodall (1996: 185-192)

⁶⁵ For more information on Pastor Doug see Clarke (1965).

met each other. Contact between Aboriginal groups from all over New South Wales intensified and the same was happening in other states. Because of their regained freedom Aboriginal people also gained access to means of communication and transportation that facilitated further contact. This way, both inter and intra-state contact was realised between Aboriginal groups from all over Australia. The migration to the cities also brought them closer to the political centres and the media (Rowley 1972: 340-1). This played an important role in gaining a support base for protests. Now the Aboriginal people had the power to ask for fundamental political changes on a national level in the form of land rights⁶⁶ and self-determination (Burgmann 1993, Kukathas 1978). These significant changes on a national level were necessary to solve the local problems.

The core group of Aboriginal activists mainly consisted of young urban Aboriginal people, many of whom came from the Sydney suburb of Redfern. They were educated through the western system, had familiarised themselves with western politics and were willing to fight for their rights. This group of young radicals formed the core of what would become a nation-wide Aboriginal movement. According to Jones and Hill-Burnett: "Aboriginal assertiveness together with the government's response to it converged to produce an Aboriginal elite." (1982: 223)

These people learned from one another that they had similar problems through the local protests going on at the time. There were: the bark petition against mining activities of the Yirrkala community in north eastern Arnhem Land in 1963; the freedom rides lead by Charles Perkins⁶⁷ in New South Wales in 1965 to attract the public's attention to the discriminatory practices in rural towns; and the strike at Wave Hill to demand land rights by the Gurindji community in 1966 (Broome 1982: 141, Jenet 1980: 4-6, Lippmann 1992: 38). Through new contacts and networks Aboriginal people started to support each other's protests. Slowly the local protests turned into a national Aboriginal movement when Aboriginal people got together to demand the same rights. The protests and events in Redfern fitted right in with these developments and were therefore part of the national Aboriginal movement.

⁶⁶ For a comparison of the indigenous Australian and Canadian protest movements regarding land rights I refer to Weaver (1984: 192-193).

⁶⁷ He was the first Aboriginal head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. About the life of Charles Perkins who has been and still is active in many areas concerning Aboriginal people I refer to the biography by Read (1990).

Apart from the inspiration Aboriginal people drew from their predecessors of the 1930s, the Aboriginal movement in the 1960s gained a serious impetus because of events happening overseas. The end of the sixties was characterised by the newly gained independence of many African countries, the Vietnam War, and the rise of liberation movements. Both the new developments in Africa as well as the difficulty the United States had to win the war in Vietnam created a new image of the otherwise so strong and powerful western countries. It demonstrated that the western countries were not able to maintain power over everyone and were less invincible as they would have liked the world to believe. These events contributed to the rise of liberation movements around the world.

Especially the Black American movement was a source of inspiration for the young urban Aboriginal people that set up the organisations (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982). As An Aboriginal man from Redfern told me:

In those days we got our information from overseas as well. We had contacts with other groups from all over the world. Our heroes were Che Guevara and Malcolm X. It was an intellectual revolution. Redfern was the Black heart [of that revolution]. (1-5-1996)

The first contact between Aboriginal people and Black Americans was made during the Second World War when Americans came over to Australia (Watson 1974). In the sixties the contact with Black Americans grew. In 1967 Charles Perkins, one of the Aboriginal activists at the time, met Jesse Jackson (Burgmann 1993: 34). Two years later people from the American Black Power movement visited the Australian Aboriginal people and a delegation of Aboriginal people visited a Black Power Conference in the United States (Jennet 1980: 16). Apart from the Black American movement Aboriginal people also had contacts with the American Indian movement and with communist China.

Members of the politically active Aboriginal people advocated the principles of Black Power. Only this time the economic base that was sought was not *black capitalism*, as the American "blacks" wanted, but land rights and compensation for the loss of land (Jennet 1980: 6). But because the young activists adapted the radical language of the Black American movements, they had only a limited support base (Burgmann 1993). Still, they proved to be a powerful force within the Aboriginal movement witnessing the success they had with amongst others, the erection of the Tent Embassy (section 2.2.5).

This serves to show that the setting up of the organisations was not an isolated event restricted to Redfern, Sydney, or even Australia but was influenced by and part of both national and international developments going on at the time. As Jennet writes:

In order to understand the basic issues over which Aborigines were protesting it is necessary to situate land rights and Black Power in their international context of anti-colonial liberation movements (which can be interpreted as including the American Black Power and Red Power movements). (1980: 19)

3.1.3 Changing Attitude Towards Aboriginal People

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, in the 1930s anthropologists contributed to a changing attitude of Australians towards Aboriginal people. Through their articles, especially in the journal *Oceania*, anthropologists such as Elkin and Radcliffe-Brown tried to educate Australians about Aboriginal people, describing Aboriginal people as human beings that others could learn from (Broome 1982: 163-164). These ideas were supported by humanitarian circles and Aboriginal protection societies, which were active in the United Kingdom and Australia in the 19th and 20th century. Also the Second World War had brought Aboriginal and other Australians together at the battlefields (McGrath 1994: 286). At the battlefields the distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people had fallen away and this also contributed to a more susceptible attitude towards Aboriginal people. Also the Australians in the army who had fought overseas had been able to compare the situation of Aboriginal people in their own land with other countries (Parbury 1988: 117). In the 1960s and 1970s the same liberation movements that inspired the Aboriginal people in their actions, made the other Australians more susceptible to the problems the Aboriginal people had. Apart from that, Aboriginal people themselves pushed the Australian public towards acceptance through using social developments elsewhere in the world to draw more attention to their own situation, such as anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and the anti-*Springbok* demonstration (see section 2.2.5).

Apart from the changing attitude of the Australian public, the role of both federal and state governments should not be forgotten either. As Howard (1982) shows in his article about Aboriginal brokerage these

governments played a major role in allowing or facilitating the means necessary to make important political developments, such as the rise of the Aboriginal organisations, possible. Dagmar mentions that while the Aboriginal people needed organisations to increase their influence "Australian administrators were in need of responsive Aboriginal groups in order to make discussions easier." (1990: 101)

If it was not for the help the Aboriginal people received from non-Aboriginal supporters throughout history it would have been much harder to establish the Aboriginal organisations. The role these non-Aboriginal supporters have played has been illustrated by the story about the establishing of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern and the Aboriginal Housing Company in the former chapter. In using the sentiments that were aroused by protests of other liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s the Aboriginal people succeeded in building a large network of supporters for the Aboriginal cause. This network stretched from the man on the street to politicians in Canberra, making it an excellent time to set up the organisations. So, not only was the establishment of the organisations part of a national as well as an international liberation movement, it was an event that could only have taken place because of the cooperation with the people surrounding the Aboriginal activists.

3.2 Features of Aboriginal Organisations

Now that I have described the conditions which laid the foundations for the emergence of the Aboriginal organisations I will discuss some of their specific features. In Redfern the organisations are non-profit and provide services to Aboriginal people only in specific areas, such as housing, medical services, and legal assistance. In the inner city most organisations are specialised in offering assistance in one area of service delivery only. In outer suburbs such as Liverpool and Blacktown, the organisations are mostly multifunctional offering a range of services. All of the organisations offer free services or give a reduction, such as the Aboriginal Housing Company.

The majority of the organisations now run in Redfern were set up in the 1970s and 1980s by local Aboriginal people. All of them are run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors. In most cases all the staff members are Aboriginal as well, apart from some hired specialists such as doctors or solicitors. The organisations are generally small-scale with an average of

eight staff members. The clients are Aboriginal people only. In cases when they can not help the client themselves the organisations refer clients to other agencies. The organisations depend on funding from different government departments or donations from other institutions. For an overview of the features of the organisations I studied I refer to Appendices 10 and 11.

Apart from these general features the Aboriginal organisations share characteristics, which distinguish them from other welfare organisations in Australia. When I first visited the organisations in 1992 staff members strongly emphasised that their organisations were run in an “Aboriginal way” and were therefore better equipped to cater the Aboriginal clients than non-Aboriginal organisations. During my fieldwork I myself noticed specific features of the organisations which, in my opinion, do indeed reflect the Aboriginal character of the organisations. I identified four such features which I will discuss below, namely: 1) the role of women; 2) equality between staff members; 3) loyalty towards the organisation; and 4) informality at the workplace.

3.2.1 The Role of Women

The first feature of the Aboriginal organisations is the role of women within the Aboriginal organisations. What caught my attention is that at least half of the staff members of the organisations I studied is female and many women have leading positions within the organisations or are the driving force behind them (see also Appendix 10). The leading role of women within Aboriginal organisations is recognised by Boyle (1983), Davis (1992), Gale (1983), and Grimshaw (1981). Grimshaw explains this prominent role in Aboriginal affairs nowadays through the comparison with the role of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal society in pre-colonial days. Although she heard many Aboriginal women tell her that: “Women were the equals of men in traditional society, and therefore are equal now,” she refines this view by stating that: “It was not so much the *equality* of women which carried over into the contact period, I suggest, but the continuing importance of that strong, separate, ‘women’s sphere’, and the feminine consciousness which accompanied it.” (1981: 90)

Gale confirms this by showing that the roles of men and women in Aboriginal society are different rather than superior or inferior (1970). Davis (1992) seeks his explanation in the fact that within the urban Aboriginal

community the head of the family is mostly female and this is reflected in the composition of staff within the organisations. Although he stresses the difference between urban Aboriginal organisations with political agendas, such as the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, and those with a locally focused programme. The first are male-dominated while the latter are mostly run by women (ibid. 1992: 37). This would be the result of a more ambitious approach of men towards positions within the political arena, while women would be more interested in working at a grassroots level. But, as Davis says himself, the composition of staff does not necessarily reflect accurately if the organisation is male or female-dominated because: “[a]n individual, often a male, elected or appointed to a particular position may be, and frequently is, no more than a nominal title-holder, while the actual function associated with the office is carried out by a non-elected woman” (1992: 35). Even though organisations seem to follow structural procedures important decisions are often made after the meetings, Davis claims. He has encountered Aboriginal organisations, which were, in practice, run behind the scenes by Aboriginal women of high influence in the community.

To the question as to why women seem to be more active than men, certainly on the grass roots level, within these organisations, different answers are given. Davis mentions the destructive influence of alcohol as an explanation why there are so few men involved as well as the loss of self-respect and self-esteem (1992: 37-38). When the men turned to drugs and alcohol they left the women to take care of their families and communities. While the women Davis talks about do not give an explanation why women were not influenced by the distresses of the past in the same way as the men, the women I spoke to *did* give an explanation why the problems did not have the same effect on women:

Women can cope better with the past. See, we are taking care of the children and we see that they deserve a better future than we had when we were that age. And we look around us and see our brothers and cousins are beaten by the white oppression of the last 200 years. That gives us women the knowledge to survive. We work hard to survive. (20-8-1992)

According to my informants women receive their self-respect not just from themselves but from their children as well. Children provide their mothers with an extra sense of self-esteem and pride because, on the one hand, the mothers have a function to fulfil (raise the children) so their lives are not

meaningless, and, on the other hand, their pride is fed by the achievements of their children. This point of view was also found by Keneally:

Women are the strong ones. I don't know why. Maybe it's because even with Aboriginal people a man's pride is his own and gets crushed real easy when he gets crushed. But a woman's pride is wider than that. It spreads out to the parents, uncles, husbands and children. So it can take a lot of blows and still stand. (1978)

But Davis stresses that the idea that women took over when the men were no longer able can not be regarded as the single motivation for the women to take on such an important role in the organisations. In his article he also mentions the role of the woman as the passer-on of cultural inheritance. The above quotations show another motivation for Aboriginal women to be involved. As can be read above the responsibility as a mother is an important motivation. Motherhood is a key concept in Aboriginal cultures as is demonstrated by the focus the Aboriginal people I spoke with put on the matriarchal structures of Australian Aboriginal culture.⁶⁸ The importance of motherhood is characteristic for several indigenous people around the world. Krosenbrink-Gelissen, for example, has written about how the motherhood concept was used by indigenous organisations in Canada (1991: 127). Because family and community are intrinsically linked in Aboriginal culture it is a small step from responsibility towards the family to responsibility towards the community as a whole. So, to work for an organisation that works for the welfare of the local Aboriginal community is to act upon this feeling of responsibility. This might at the same time provide an explanation for the fact that women are less frequently spotted on high-ranking positions concerned with national politics, which is further removed from local communities. Another reason for this could be the fact that national political functions demand more mobility and time, which can conflict with family responsibilities.

One of the conclusions Davis draws from his article is that there is a tension between national and local Aboriginal politics. This is so because women are not equally represented on the national level as they are on the grass roots level, which makes the national representation limited and

⁶⁸ Many people stress that in Aboriginal culture family is traced and named via the female line, although literature suggests that only a minority of Aboriginal communities do this. But the emphasis on women can be explained by the situation in Redfern where most families have a female head of the household (cf. Davis 1992, Eckermann 1977: 299, Young 1982: 6, see also Pereira 1981).

affects the acceptance of such national organisations. Davis: "It is a reasonable assumption that when communities are influenced in their decision-making by a predominantly female perspective, the community view is unlikely to be represented accurately in a male-dominated institution." (1992: 40)

The role women play within the organisations in Redfern has resulted in a lenient attitude towards family duties. In general, the organisations have flexible policies in order to facilitate the combination of work and duties of family responsibility or motherhood in particular. In practice, this means that some women take their children with them on the job, mostly when they are still toddlers. The baby is then taken care of by other staff members while the mother is working. Also, women are allowed to leave the office to bring their children to and from school. Besides the staff, many clients take children with them as well. It is normal for the organisations to have children roam around.

3.2.2 Equality Between Staff Members

The second characteristic of Aboriginal organisations is the relative equality between staff members working within Aboriginal organisations. In his study of cultural differences within offices of a multinational company in different countries, Hofstede has defined equality amongst staff members in terms of power distance. This is: "the measure in which less powerful members of institutions or organisations in a land expect and accept the fact that the power is distributed unevenly" (1991: 39).⁶⁹ Hofstede remarks that in a culture with a small power distance the power inequality between people is kept as small as possible. This seems to correspond with the way Aboriginal staff members relate to one another within and outside organisations. In the daily contact between staff members of different ranking it can be seen that all staff relate to each other on an equal level. At most organisations all staff members sit together in the same coffee room discussing issues related to their work and personal life. The fact that most Aboriginal organisations are relatively small-scale contributes to a smaller power distance in itself. However, often staff members complained about the relative power distance between them and the Board of Directors. The most heard complaint was that the Board members have the power to

⁶⁹ Author's translation of the Dutch text.

change policies and make important decisions while they do not have the experience in the field as do the staff members.

As equality amongst the staff members is favoured behaviour that emphasises inequality between people is strongly rejected. In cases where managers or directors draw attention to their authority, which they derive from their function, they do not make themselves popular with their staff. Aboriginal people who flaunt their properties, power, or fame are often unpopular and accused of not being able to share with their family or community. People who have access to special privileges are expected to share them with others. When such privileges are not used for the benefit of the community this can endanger the popularity or even the credibility among community members of the person concerned.

Not only are people expected to share their economic and political resources but also their time and attention. Especially people within politics or other representative roles are severely monitored when it comes to that. Their frequent contact with non-Aboriginal Australians, such as ministers and other dignitaries, seems to increase the power distance between them and the Aboriginal people at the grassroots level. Especially when it prevents them from having regular contact with the latter. Howard states that contact with government departments increases isolation (1982: 176). This also explains the unpopularity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners who are involved in local as well as national politics. Despite good achievements of many of such individuals for the Australian Aboriginal community, it often happens that their function on a national political level is disapproved of because of the bigger power distance it seems to create.

The equality between staff members was also reflected in the recognition of mutual dependency. The networks the Aboriginal organisations have set up together are but one example of this. Another example is the case of the Aboriginal Children's Service where the staff is aware of the mutual dependency between the general staff and their superiors. Because of this dependency, it is important to maintain a good and relaxed atmosphere in which the staff can continue to work closely together on often straining and sensitive cases. For this purpose the Service organises "bitch sessions". These are staff meetings which offer the opportunity to say anything that is on anyone's mind. The staff members can get rid of their problems and irritations with one another. Frustrations or tensions between staff members are therefore quickly resolved and work

can continue. These sessions could very well have contributed to the fact that some of the staff members are working at the Service for ten years or more while many Aboriginal organisations cope with staff members leaving after much shorter periods (Harkins 1986: 317, Lyons 1984: 157).

Hierarchy within the organisations seems mainly functional. It is mainly in order to achieve a recognised status that a western hierarchy is operational within the organisations, such as a Board of Directors, a Chairman, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. This hierarchy is needed to receive recognition from official institutions that provide funding. There is, however, no special power or authority placed on the figure with the higher function. When asked about this "lack" of hierarchy, Aboriginal people often referred to their perception that in the past Aboriginal cultures were not hierarchical. Instead, people acted as *primus-inter-pares*. It was on specific occasions that certain people were highly valued for their knowledge and skills and would take on a leading role within that particular situation (compare with Bell 1984).

Another factor contributing to greater equality is the idea that subordinates are expected to be consulted. Staff members I spoke with preferred to reach consensus but there are many occasions in which it is impossible to do so because the decisions to be made involve too many people. I myself was present at a conference where a national Aboriginal organisation was going to be set up. Aboriginal representatives from all over Australia were present. But when the first general meeting was held to make some temporary decisions it was impossible to reach a decision. Most of the representatives claimed they were unable to make such important decisions without first consulting their communities at home. Even the assurance that the decisions would be temporary until the next meeting could not bring these people to make a decision for the people they represented.

The alternative is to replace a decision based on consensus with a decision made on democratic grounds involving, for example, elections. The elected Boards of the organisations as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which introduced an election system in which people at the grassroots level are given the opportunity to elect representatives on a regional level who elect the federal ATSI-Commission, are based on this principle. But the system of representatives is often subject to criticism because it is seen as a "western way", alien to Aboriginal culture and people are afraid they are not represented properly.

Finally decentralisation can contribute to a greater equality. The way in which the Aboriginal organisations were set up with their branch offices all over the State or even the country is one form of decentralisation. The current welfare system is based on regionalisation and stimulates the establishment of decentralised Aboriginal “community-based” organisations. In 1990 the federal government replaced the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, a centralised bureaucratic body, by the more decentralised ATSIC. The ATSIC consists of regional and local commissions, although opinions are divided on how decentralised ATSIC really is.

3.2.3 Loyalty Towards the Organisation

Apart from the role of women and the equality between staff members, the loyalty the staff members have towards the organisations is a striking feature. This is connected with the way staff members seem to perceive of the organisation. The employer-employee relationship is considered as a moral connection, as though it is family. Colleagues who are not related are often treated as family. One example is a school where the children call their teachers “auntie” and “uncle”. But seeing the organisation as a family is not just a perception of staff members, in many cases it is reality. Within Aboriginal organisations it is common that people are related. In Western-European culture this is not a generally accepted practice and can sometimes be regarded as a form of corruption. In other cultures family ties within organisations are very normal. For example, the family-oriented structure of commercial businesses in Japan (Bax 1991: 97-122). But family relations within Aboriginal organisations are not always seen as a blessing by Aboriginal people and organisations are often accused of serving their family instead of their community.

Because the organisations are dependent upon the support of the community and the clients they serve the staff members try to remain loyal to their local community as well. The basis for this loyalty lies in the idea that personal relations are important in Aboriginal society. As soon as a community member does not act according to the rules of its community or is not loyal enough this person loses popularity quickly. From Aboriginal organisations this loyalty towards the community is expected as well. I have found several ways in which the organisations maintain their personal relations with the community and show their loyalty.

First, the organisations try to serve the community they work for by employing the power they have in the service of the local community. Just as within a personal relationship the organisations are obliged to care for and share with the community they are from. To make sure that this happens in a way that is accepted by the community, annual general meetings are organised to offer the organisations the opportunity to account for their actions over the previous year towards the community members. Second, through the use of field officers the organisations maintain direct personal contact with members from the community. The role of the Aboriginal field officer was introduced by the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern to maintain contact with the Aboriginal community and act as mediator between the solicitors and the Aboriginal clients. For instance, the attendance of funerals of community members is a way to show the organisations' commitment to the community. In some cases, whole organisations close down for a (couple of) day(s) because the staff has to travel to a remote rural town to be able to attend a funeral. Third, organisations offer the opportunity for social contact between community and staff members through the drop-in function. People are nearly always welcome to drop in for a cup of tea at the organisations. Work might be interrupted for a conversation with someone from the community. Also, on the streets of Redfern, staff members stop to have a yarn with community members passing by. This is an informal conversation to keep up with the latest news of shared family and friends.

Because the Aboriginal community is relatively small it often happens that the staff members know their clients. This makes them feel even more obliged to help them. Staff members of the Aboriginal Children's Service for example, felt personally responsible for their clients and it happened more than once that staff members took children home with them because they had nowhere else to go. Taking into account that at the Aboriginal Children's Service some staff members were responsible for more than thirty cases which all bring emotional luggage, one can say that this loyalty towards the organisation and the community does not make it easy to work for an Aboriginal organisation. Because many staff members have to put up with a lot of disadvantages, such as stress, lower wages and the insecurity concerning career opportunities, I think that for many staff members working for an organisation is not an average job but a vocation to work for the community.

3.2.4 Informality at the Workplace

The fourth and last feature I would like to discuss is the informality at the workplace within the Aboriginal organisations. During my stay at several organisations I experienced the atmosphere within as well as outside the organisations as informal (see also Lyons 1984: 140). This is reflected in the way staff members approach their colleagues as well as their clients. According to Hofstede informality within an organisation is connected with what he calls a low insecurity avoidance. This is defined as: "the measure in which members of a culture feel threatened by insecure or unknown situations; this feeling is expressed through stress and a need for predictability: formal or informal rules" (1991: 144).⁷⁰

Within the organisation itself informality is reflected in the attitude that there should be no more rules than strictly necessary. The rules that are there are needed to function orderly and consequently to be accepted as an organisation within Australian society. But the existing rules are flexible. For the staff this means that this informality accommodates possibilities to answer to responsibilities to family and community. It allows people to give enough attention to their personal relations, such as special arrangements made for the attendance of funerals (Smith 1995: 8). Also the relatively intimate character of the relation between organisation and community - as discussed in the former section - is an expression of that informality.

During my stay I noticed that the informality which is characteristic for Aboriginal organisations can have different effects. For example, when studying an educational programme I noticed that, on the one hand, the informal atmosphere made the organisation concerned a pleasant place to work. Both teachers and students seemed to enjoy their work and the relation between the teachers and the students was good. That the students enjoyed their classes became clear on the occasions when the teachers were absent and the students organised their own classes. Also, the creative contributions the students made to the contents of their courses testify to this. On the other hand, the informality caused a lack of regularity and the rules to enforce this. This resulted in irregular attendance of both students and teachers, which stood in the way of a thorough education. At times teachers did not show up, showed up late, or the regular staff was not able to find a replacement in time. It also happened that the students did not

⁷⁰ Author's translation of the Dutch text.

show up. This caused frustrations on both sides and sometimes even resulted in students quitting the programme.

Where there are fewer rules there is more space for flexibility: thus for innovation and new ideas. Consequently there is a great tolerance towards deviant and innovative ideas within the organisations. And the organisations are able to react quickly to new developments within the community. According to Robinson and White, the capacity for innovation is one of the strengths of civic organisations, such as the Aboriginal organisations (1997: 18, see also Edwards & Hulme 1992: 16). Eggleston points out the innovative role the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern has played with the introduction of the shop-front service in the 1970s in setting an example for the later established nation-wide Legal Aid Centres serving all Australians (1977: 359).⁷¹ Not only the organisations are in themselves innovations, they also introduced many innovative ideas which were sometimes taken over by government departments. They were responsible for the implementation of new strategies of service delivery, such as a preventive and holistic approach, that were not used by mainstream and government organisations. But there is also a downside to this flexibility. Some Aboriginal organisations get in trouble when they depend on other institutions, which are not as flexible. On several occasions I have experienced that funding institutions refused to extend funding to organisations they had funded for years on the basis of the fact that the organisations concerned were only a few days late with their filing for renewed funding.

According to many Aboriginal people flexibility has been part of Aboriginal culture throughout history. They often describe themselves as a resilient people and it is because of this resilience and flexibility that the Aboriginal people and their culture have survived, despite all that has been done to destroy them and their culture. The flexibility and innovative qualities of Aboriginal cultures have been described in literature, suggesting that this is an inherent quality of Aboriginal cultures. Examples are the innovation and adaptation of rites to adjust to changes has as described by Borsboom (1978, 1986) and Kollig (1981).

Now that I have described the above features it is easier to understand where the differences lie between Aboriginal and mainstream welfare services. It offers the opportunity to understand why certain aspects of a

⁷¹ For more information about flexibility of the Aboriginal Legal Services I refer to Lyons (1984: 144-145).

western-structured organisation are easily adopted while others conflict with the “Aboriginal way” of service delivery. The matters occurring within Aboriginal organisations which are least understood by outsiders, such as funding bodies, the media, and society in general, are often these characteristics which contrast most with western aspects of Australian society. According to Hofstede’s study, Australia is the second most individualistic country in the world after the United States (1991). This indicates that the loyalty staff members have towards the organisation and each other is one of the aspects which contrasts most with mainstream Australian society.

3.3 Functions of Aboriginal Organisations

Even more important than what the Aboriginal organisations look like is what they do. The organisations that are discussed here have several functions, some of which are general services which can be fulfilled by any welfare organisation, but other services are unique and were firstly introduced by the Aboriginal organisations I am talking about. The importance of the organisations, and especially those extra functions, are recognised by many authors in the field of Aboriginal Studies (Copeman 1988, Crick 1981, Dagmar 1990, Jones & Hill Burnett 1982, Pierson 1977a).

To be able to discuss the different functions in a clear way a distinction needs to be made between two sorts of functions. I distinguish *direct* and *indirect* functions.⁷² Direct functions have a direct effect on the clients and benefit clients visiting the organisation only. Indirect functions have an indirect effect through an attempt to accomplish change in a different area, which will affect the problem to be dealt with. This means that indirect functions do not only benefit the Aboriginal clients visiting the organisations but can also benefit other Aboriginal people and possibly other Australians. The first are functions, which can be expected from a welfare organisation: to fulfil an immediate need of a client in the form of a solution or remedy. The latter are the sort of functions which are not directed towards a specific client, nor do they offer the client an immediate solution, rather they focus on outside factors within society that are related

⁷² Littlewood makes the same distinction but speaks of expressive functions which benefit individual clients only, and instrumental functions which seek to accomplish change for benefit of all Aboriginal people and possibly other Australians (1982: 43).

to the problems clients cope with. I distinguish three direct functions, namely:

- remedial function
- preventive function
- social function

The indirect functions can be divided in:

- buffer function focused on changing Aboriginal- non-Aboriginal relations
- political function focused on changing government policies / legal concepts
- psychological function focused on supporting Aboriginal identity

3.3.1 Remedial Function

The remedial function is the basic function of a welfare organisation. Although the help offered by Aboriginal organisations does not differ drastically from help offered by mainstream organisations, the way in which the help is offered does. This has mostly to do with the fact that the staff members of the Aboriginal organisations are Aboriginal. Although being Aboriginal does not necessarily mean that the organisations are better equipped to offer help, it *does* mean that it often facilitates offering help to Aboriginal clients.

As I have written earlier in section 3.1.1, the relationship between the non-Aboriginal service provider and their Aboriginal clients in mainstream organisations was problematic. The Aboriginal service provider automatically has some features, which reduce these problems that existed for non-Aboriginal providers. A good Aboriginal service provider has experience being Aboriginal, has background knowledge on the history of Aboriginal people, is a good communicator and is known within the Aboriginal community. The fact that the service provider is Aboriginal relieves him or her from the lack of trust that generally exists with non-Aboriginal service providers, as is confirmed by:

The Australian Council of Social Services [which] has concluded that the Aboriginal legal and medical services are far more effective than services run by whites for blacks

because they are not separated from the Aboriginal community, but are seen as belonging to that community. (Burgmann 1993:39)

As was told to me many times, Aboriginal people are more willing to open up to an Aboriginal person than to a non-Aboriginal person. This gives the Aboriginal service provider a head start. Apart from that, the presence of background knowledge on Aboriginal cultures offers the client the feeling that he or she does not have to explain everything. When the provider is a good communicator this will translate itself in the way the client is approached and treated by the use of the correct (body-)language that makes the client feel more comfortable with the service provider. Finally, being familiar with the local community or, even better, *belonging* to the local community, is an advantage because then, the client is already familiar with the service provider and the provider knows what goes on in the community. This enables the service provider to seek solutions within the community (when possible) before resorting to alternatives.

From the above it can be concluded that non-Aboriginal people can function well as service providers too as long as they meet the requirements that were described above. What I have seen in some organisations is that a non-Aboriginal staff member functioned very well within the Aboriginal organisation and was accepted by the clients as long as the person worked according to the Aboriginal ways of relating and approaching clients. Although, it must be said that in these cases it helps to have a coloured skin. The above also shows that only *being* Aboriginal does not suffice to be a good Aboriginal service provider. Some staff members have been criticised for their lack of communicative skills, lack of knowledge, or lack of contact with the local community.

Another way in which the offered help differs from mainstream organisations, apart from using Aboriginal staff, is the approach to the client's problem. Whenever a client turns to an Aboriginal organisation for help the problem is looked at from an "Aboriginal perspective". This means that by trying to find a solution for a problem certain Aboriginal moral values are being considered. For example, the Aboriginal Children's Service has a policy which states that Aboriginal children have to be placed with extended family before resorting to placement with other people within the Aboriginal community. This policy recognises the importance of the extended family in raising children. Also, some Aboriginal health organisations operating in outback communities are susceptible of the use of herbal medicines next to western medicines.

Besides this so-called Aboriginal perspective, a holistic approach is used as well. Eggleston mentions that the first Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern was prepared to become involved in social welfare because they realised legal and social problems were “inextricably interwoven” (1977: 360). The same goes for the Aboriginal Medical Services (Copeman 1988). This approach places the individual problem of the client within a broader perspective of Aboriginal history and the current situation involving high unemployment, bad health, substance abuse and others. The Aboriginal Children’s Service developed an adapted education programme in collaboration with a High School for one of their young clients they had placed with a new family. As an Aboriginal staff member once explained to me:

You have to be a Jack-of-all-trades in this job. I do a lot of welfare work even though I was not trained for that. But with this sort of work you can not stick strictly to your job description because there are always people that need your help. (10-12-1996)

3.3.2 Preventive Function

The second function concerns the education of Aboriginal people in order to prevent certain problems arising from a lack of knowledge (Crick 1981: 70-74). When the first Aboriginal organisations were set up in the 1970s it turned out that many Aboriginal people were not aware of the possibilities to improve their situation. The Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) made Aboriginal people aware of their legal rights (Eggleston 1977, Harkins 1986, Lyons 1984, Pierson 1977a) by demonstrating that the organisation was able to use the Australian legal system to the advantage of their Aboriginal clients. They showed their clients they could not be arrested without a good reason and that even if they were arrested they still had rights. Since Aboriginal people are aware of their legal rights, they take their own initiatives to use the legal system the way other Australian citizens do; not just in criminal law cases but family and civil law cases as well.

The importance of education also became clear when the Aboriginal Medical Service started up. They found that many Aboriginal people were badly educated about healthy food, immunisation and such. They started up food programmes bringing fruit and vegetables around and making the

people aware of the importance of healthy food. They taught women that breast-feeding was healthier for babies because women were taught in the reserves that breast-feeding was shameful as it involved the uncovering of breasts. In their 25 years of operation the Aboriginal Medical Service has produced a lot of prevention material such as leaflets, brochures, and instruction videos about subjects such as: diabetes, AIDS, domestic violence, immunisation, and substance abuse.⁷³ Apart from educating their clients some organisations also train their own staff, such as the Aboriginal Medical Service that started in 1984 with an Aboriginal Health Worker Education Programme (Foley 1991).

The material that has been produced by the Aboriginal organisations, and particularly the Aboriginal Medical Service, is especially made for Aboriginal clients, using straightforward language (thus avoiding jargon), clear illustrations, or re-enactments (on video). Because local slang, Aboriginal illustrations and Aboriginal actors are used the material is more appealing to Aboriginal people as well. Especially in their early years of operation these instruments of prevention and education were only used by the Aboriginal organisations. Later mainstream organisations took over some of the preventive methods to educate or inform Aboriginal people. Nowadays some of the Aboriginal units from state departments have their own educational material for Aboriginal people.

3.3.3 Social Function

Besides offering methods of prevention and specific help the organisations often fulfil a social function as well. This third function is mentioned by Crick (1981), Fagan (1984) and Pierson (1977a). It corresponds with the way Aboriginal people relate to one another as I have discussed above when talking about loyalty towards the organisation. Clients are hardly ever sent away. Instead, they are offered a cup of tea or are asked about the latest news regarding the community. In practice most organisations offer this drop-in function without specifically referring to it. The lunch I described at the beginning of this chapter is a good example of the way people walk in and out. Since my first visit to Redfern in 1992 a couple of organisations have become less open to people who just want to have a yarn or hang

⁷³ The Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern won an International Health Education Award in Spain for one of their instruction videos (Foley 1991).

around. I noticed one organisation that actually had a note on the wall saying: "Coffee or tea only available to staff or students". Another organisation has moved to a new building and can now only be entered after first stating the purpose of the visit through the intercom.

Pierson shows that the social function was especially important in the early years when Aboriginal people who had just moved in the area sought contact with other Aboriginal people (1977a). It seems this is still the case in areas where Aboriginal people live scattered over a wider area as opposed to Redfern where Aboriginal people live close together. But there the distance between the organisation and the place a person lives could be too big to drop in without a specific reason. I do not know of any non-Aboriginal welfare organisations that offer the same informal environment that is ne to provide this social function.

3.3.4 Buffer Function

The first of the indirect functions the Aboriginal organisations fulfil is the buffer function. Crick (1981: 53) mentions this function to emphasis the role of the Aboriginal organisations as translators between two cultures: the "Aboriginal culture" and the "Australian culture". As an example Crick describes how the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) translates legal procedures into understandable terms for the Aboriginal client while at the same time the ALSR solicitor translates, as it were, the situation of the client for the people in court (see also Harkins 1986: 18). Especially in the early years of the ALSR the people working at the Australian courts needed education on Aboriginal issues badly, such as: bad living conditions, the role of the historical factors in this, and the possible influence of Aboriginal Law. Dagmar calls it that the organisations help Aboriginal people "to accommodate to processes of change" (1990: 101).

By educating Australian society about Aboriginal culture the organisations serve as mediators as well, translating their knowledge about Aboriginal culture for the non-Aboriginal society that surrounds them. Pierson mentions that the organisations attempt to overcome discrimination and prejudice (1977a: 55). The organisations try to educate the Australian society in order to improve the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians (Butler 1993: 17). They do this either by organising courses to educate non-Aboriginal people or by emphasising positive features of Aboriginal culture. Organisations such as Tranby College, the

Aboriginal Medical Service and Murawina are involved in giving courses to non-Aboriginal participants on Aboriginal issues. In the media and at schools there is also a growing attention to Aboriginal issues and often Aboriginal organisations are consulted in order to provide correct information on Aboriginal issues.

Apart from providing education, the organisations try to emphasise positive characteristics of Aboriginality to compensate for the negative images people often have of Aboriginal people and especially those in Redfern. For example, Aboriginal organisations put forward young Aboriginal talent in sports and arts. Something which is done especially by art organisations like Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative⁷⁴, NAISDA (National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association), and the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern. Another way of emphasising positive features is to organise activities which put Aboriginal people in the spotlight, such as the successful fashion show in Paris which was organised by the Aboriginal Medical Service in 1987 (Leser 1990). Tranby College organised the Building Bridges Project in 1988, which involved concerts with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists and a record with songs from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists.

The buffer function is partly copied by mainstream organisations that provide services to Aboriginal clients by employing Aboriginal liaison officers who take on the role of the mediators between the non-Aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal clients. On a federal level the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has the task to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and other Australians through education and contact. The Council's local projects bring people together and offer them the opportunity to learn from each other and get to know each other.⁷⁵

3.3.5 Political Function

The second indirect function of Aboriginal organisations is a political one. This is perhaps the most discussed function of the organisations in literature and denotes a combination of political functions. I have distinguished three

⁷⁴ For more information on Boomalli see Croft (1992).

⁷⁵ This Council had to deal with some heavy blows in 1997 when prominent Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people resigned from the Council to protest against the policies of the Liberal Government which did not contribute to reconciliation, even endangered the process towards reconciliation, according to the ex-council members.

political functions: 1) creating an Aboriginal power base; 2) attracting attention of governments and media; 3) acting as representatives.

First, from the day they were set up in the early 1970s the Aboriginal organisations have played an important role in mobilising Aboriginal people and creating a “political power base for black leadership” (Fristacky 1976: 17). The establishment of the organisations mobilised a group of young Aboriginal people. The new organisations facilitated the communication between Aboriginal communities from all over the country and brought people together (Duncan 1975: 62). They offered these people the means to establish and support a network of politically active people and also offered the opportunity to act out their political beliefs. As Copeman points out the organisations function as “a focus for organising and empowerment” (1988: 254). The establishment of the organisations itself was a political act (Duncan 1975: 58) because it facilitated the rise of the Aboriginal movement. But also because it was a direct protest against the Government’s political inability to guarantee equality for Aboriginal people in practice and solve the bad living conditions.

Second, Aboriginal organisations did and still do attract public and political attention to numerous issues (Pierson 1977a: 53, Foley 1982) by organising demonstrations, rallies and vigils. This is of course a method that is used often by many groups in society and is therefore not specific for Aboriginal organisations. But the number and the constancy with which those demonstrations take place in Redfern is rather striking. Every year the same demonstrations take place to commemorate events such as the Day of Mourning (held on National Australia Day) and the rally to commemorate the death of John Pat and all other Aboriginal deaths in custody. And regularly demonstrations are organised to protest against a recent event such as the threat of demolishing the Australia Hall and the cut back plans of governments. In the past such demonstrations have had a huge impact, such as the Tent Embassy in 1972 and the March on Australia Day in 1988. In 2000 the Sydney Olympics again placed people and their current situation in the international media, not least because of the bold remarks made by some staff members of Redfern organisations (*de Volkskrant* 12-8-2000).

Third, the organisations function as representatives of Aboriginal people towards governments and the general public (Dagmar 1990: 101, Littlewood 1982). They do this by informing different groups in society about problems Aboriginal people deal with and offering suggestions to

solve these problems. The decentralised structure of Aboriginal organisations reflects the multiplicity of Aboriginal communities that exist in Australia. This increases the chance that these communities are thoroughly represented. Some of the organisations are very active to bring permanent change to government policies or legal concepts (see also Butler 1993: 17). The former Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern especially is known for its political role and its challenging attitude towards state and federal governments.

Aboriginal organisations are nowadays regularly consulted by official policy makers whenever it concerns Aboriginal welfare. For example, the Department of Community Services, which is responsible for the fostering of children on a state level regularly consults with the Aboriginal Children's Service. It has taken over the policy of placing Aboriginal children with their extended family, or else in the same community they come from.⁷⁶ Also, at national inquiries the expertise of Aboriginal organisations is called upon. During the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* in Sydney several organisations were allowed to make a submission, for example: the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and Link-Up (an organisation which tries to reunite Aboriginal people from the stolen generations with their family⁷⁷). Even the United Nations nowadays have their official instrument to consult Aboriginal organisations, namely the only official Aboriginal ngo (non-governmental organisation) NAILSS (National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat).⁷⁸

While in the 1970s the role of the organisations was partly political, this is no longer the case for every organisation. Nowadays Aboriginal organisations mainly stick to their specific services. One staff member of an organisation told me, however, that even though some organisations do not seem to be politically active on the surface nowadays, they still carry an unwritten political responsibility even though the Government does not fund organisations to be politically active.

⁷⁶ Although in 1987 only 51% of the Aboriginal children under the care of DOCS were placed with Aboriginal foster families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997: Chapter 3).

⁷⁷ For more information about Link-Up see Read (1989).

⁷⁸ See for an official submission of NAILSS to the United Nations Coe (1992).

3.3.6 Psychological Function

The last function of the Aboriginal organisations, which I call a psychological function, deals with the redefinition and support of contemporary Aboriginal identity. This function is connected with the political function I discussed above because, especially, in the early years of the organisations this function was politically charged. For the organisations it is one of the most important functions (Crick 1981: 54, Dagmar 1990: 103, Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982) because it stood at the basis of the emergence of the Aboriginal organisations and it has provided them with their unique right to existence. In my MA thesis I claim that without this psychological function the Aboriginal organisations would have had little basis for their existence because it was the first and foremost function that demonstrated the Aboriginal character of the organisations themselves (Hulsker 1992).

In the early 1970s the urban Aboriginal people who worked for the organisations had an irreplaceable role in the construction of a so-called pan-Aboriginal identity (Burgmann 1993, Collmann 1981, Crick 1981, Eggleston 1977, Jenet 1980, Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982: 236, Pierson 1977a). Many of them were part of the Aboriginal movement. Motivations behind the land rights and equal rights movement were self-determination and self-definition. Not having any means of economic or political pressure, such as Trade Unions, Aboriginal people were forced to get their strength from something else. Aboriginal people were able to exert moral pressure on the Australian establishment. But in order to do that they needed to act as a united front. Because solidarity was crucial to the success of protests on a national scale a feeling of unity between all Australian Aboriginal people needed to be supported and maintained.

The answer to this need lay in the reclaiming and redefining of Aboriginal identity, which was one of the core issues of the Aboriginal movement at the time. Aboriginal people reclaimed the right to self-definition and searched for new ways to formulate their Aboriginal identity. It was especially a core group of activists, including staff members from Aboriginal organisations, which played a major role in describing what were the most important aspects of Aboriginal identity with which every Aboriginal Australian could identify. The construction of such a pan-Aboriginal identity demanded a description of cultural resemblance and symbols. It had to be decided which cultural features were regarded as important within the overall concept of Aboriginal identity:

Through discussion *they [the core group] would define* the concerns and values common to all Aboriginal people, clarify which of the significant differences among Aboriginal cultures they wished to retain, and continue to establish what they wish in the way of Aboriginal culture in Australia. (Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982: 232)

One of the characteristics of this new Aboriginal identity was the perception of the Australian Aboriginal people as a unity. It functioned as the connecting glue between Aboriginal groups taking part in the national political struggles. The notion of a national Aboriginal identity can thus be considered as a cultural construction (Beckett 1988a: 2), which is being used to give a meaning to a political ideological struggle. The implication of unity collides with the diversity of Aboriginal communities, which distinguish themselves through “traditional” cultural differences (like language) and differences in living circumstances and locality. The process in which an ethnic group is constructed is called “ethnogenesis” and can be compared with “nation-building”. But “successful ethnogenesis involves working through distinction” (Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982: 237). As Burgmann says:

Certainly there are divisions and disagreements within the black movement, yet - it is in the process of constituting itself as a social movement that the black movement constructs meaningful linkages between all manner of Aboriginal people. In formulating demands upon which all in the imagined community can agree, the black movement transcends many of the problems of difference within this community and disagreements about tactical matters. (1993: 42-3)

The Aboriginal organisations played a key role in the process of ethnogenesis (Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982: 236) because they provided a structure from which activists could operate. They offered the possibility to form nation-wide networks with Aboriginal people everywhere facilitating the process of redefining Aboriginal identity because people could draw inspiration from one another. Apart from the role staff members played in the redefinition of the concept of Aboriginal identity, the organisations themselves were an expression of this new identity. The establishment of the organisations was a way of achieving self-determination (Collmann 1981: 49, Deacon 1981: 30, Eggleston 1977: 357) and consequently the organisations became an “indispensable means of providing an expression of cultural identity” (Littlewood 1982: 28, cf. Crick 1981: 63, Eggleston 1977: 362, Fristacky 1976: 17).

Not only were the organisations involved in the redefinition of Aboriginal identity, they also played a role in supporting it and raising the self-esteem and self-respect of Aboriginal people. The organisations made use of norms and values that descended from Aboriginal Law and culture, like the respect for the extended family. By offering their services in their own way and giving special attention to increasing self-esteem among their clients the organisations fulfilled a psychological function that had never been fulfilled by any non-Aboriginal organisation before. The Aboriginal staff of the organisations was convinced that improvement of the practical problems their clients coped with was not enough, they needed psychological support to be able to overcome these problems, many of which were actually connected with the psychological well-being of people. Part of raising the self-esteem and self-respect of the Aboriginal people was to present a positive image of Aboriginal identity to both the Aboriginal people as well as the Australian society.

But the role of the organisations concerning the development and support of Aboriginal identity has changed. The psychological function is now mainly prevalent within educational organisations and programmes. The relation between the concept of Aboriginal identity and the Aboriginal organisations has taken on another form. While in the early years the organisations' staff members played a role in giving shape to a new Aboriginal identity, promoting it to the outside world, and supporting it amongst their own clients, nowadays establishing the organisations' own Aboriginal identity has become even more important. To establish and maintain the organisation's Aboriginal identity is an ongoing process.

One Aboriginal People or Many? Aboriginal Identification in an Urban Setting⁷⁹

It is at the end of a weekday when I join a couple of Aboriginal people to the Redfern RSL Club. Inside it is dark and there are no windows. Locked from the outside world people are wrapped up in their gambling games. While some of them watch the televisions, which show horse races, others are busy trying to get their money's worth from the "pokies", the fruit-machines which are lined up besides one another. The furniture inside the RSL looks cheap and does not contribute to a nice atmosphere. We sit down at one of the tables in the middle of the club and Robin gets us some drinks.

Fern, a tall dark Aboriginal woman with an Afro hairdo, tells us that one day she had to show her "Aboriginality papers" just to pick up some money at the post-office. Showing her drivers license and another ID was not enough. She just couldn't believe it, especially because she looks as Aboriginal as can be. Everyone agrees that it must have been a terrible experience for Fern and her story brings them to talk about people who claim to be Aboriginal only to take advantage of it. Esther and Tessa say that they feel very uncomfortable with people like that but they do not dare to confront these people with their suspicions. When I ask how they know a real Aboriginal person from a person that only claims to be Aboriginal Esther explains: "A Koori knows a Koori. It is a matter of feeling. It is not your skin colour. It matters if you are known within the Aboriginal community and if you abide to the cultural rules of the community by caring for your family and community. Then we know who is a Koori and who is not." Tessa and Esther name some Aboriginal people they know and they do not like because they think those people have a hidden agenda to call themselves Aboriginal. The others agree and nod their heads when the names are mentioned. (29-3-1996)

In the fragment above Aboriginal people share their ideas about the Aboriginal identity of other people they know. It gives an example of the

⁷⁹ Part of this chapter has been published in Borsboom & Hulsker (2000).

complexity of relations between people who identify as Aborigine. But what is Aboriginal identity? Not only has the term *Aboriginal* had various definitions in different periods of Australian history, it also means something different for every single person identifying as Aborigine nowadays due to the multiplicity of Aboriginal identifications people use. In this chapter I will describe some of the main forms of contemporary urban Aboriginal identity. For this purpose I will analyse the case of an Aboriginal protest held in Sydney in August 1996, which showed a colourful display of different forms of Aboriginal identification in Sydney. To be able to place the discussions concerning Aboriginal identity in this chapter in a historical perspective, I will first look at the way in which Aboriginal people have always been able to create their own forms of identification from an Aboriginal identity that was constructed by the British colonists and their European predecessors. I will end this chapter with the introduction of the analytical tools that will be used in the rest of the thesis to analyse the way in which Aboriginal organisations use different notions of Aboriginal identity when interacting with different groups in Australian society.

4.1 Early Forms of Aboriginal Identification

As I described in Chapter 2, the “Aborigines” as such did not exist until the British settlers and their predecessors met the indigenous inhabitants of the Australian continent and regarded them as one people. Since then Australian contact history was characterised by the constant construction and categorisation of a group of people who had never identified as one group before (Attwood 1989). In this process, however, the people described as Aborigines were not the passive victims of their categorical construction but played an active role in the construction of their own forms of Aboriginal identification.

The first signs of indigenous people adapting their group identity as a result of the arrival of the British settlers took place at the early stages of first contact. Forced by circumstances, such as exposure to foreign diseases, alcohol, fire arms, and decreasing access to food resources, they had to cooperate together or chase other groups away in order to survive. There are indications that, when the first settlers arrived in the Sydney area at the end of the 18th century, indigenous groups merged into new groups. Willey

mentions the existence of a group of survivors from various groups around Port Jackson who combined into a "Sydney tribe" (1979: 216).

Also during the segregation period people found their own ways to identify with one another. The removal of Aboriginal people from their land into reserves and missions had a deep impact on the observance of their cultural practices, which made it hard or even impossible to maintain pre-existing group identification. As a consequence, the relevance of pre-colonial group identities based on kinship, marriage, and relation to the surrounding land started to decrease. People adapted to the new situation in constructing new forms of group identification. For example, partial identification was taking place on the basis of which mission one was from (Bell 1964, Brock 1993, Keen 1988: 7-8, Morris 1988b). I have heard people who grew up in the Cherbourg mission in Queensland call themselves Sherbies. Also Koepping (1977: 171) wrote that there was a strong sense of community feeling in that particular mission. Brock substantiates this view by claiming that the reserves played a necessary role in Aboriginal survival by "consolidating their communities" and serving "as havens against the racism of non-Aboriginal society" (1993: 163).

When in the 1960s Aboriginal people officially became Australian citizens and were free to leave the reserves and missions, the act of identifying as Aborigine gained a new impulse. The period that followed is known as one of cultural revival.⁸⁰ While Aboriginal people had always adapted to and incorporated western notions of Aboriginality, this period distinguished itself from the former years of Australian contact history because Aboriginal people now actively, visibly and on a large scale started using the ascribed Aboriginal identity for their own purpose(s). There was a "rediscovery" of Aboriginality "as a potent political and social force" (Tyler 1994: 11). The Aboriginal movement that emerged around the same time actively and on a national scale challenged the existing dominating discourse of Aboriginal identity. New notions of Aboriginality as constructed by Aboriginal people were taken over by the State (Beckett 1988b: 193). As Weaver points out:

The process of defining public ethnicity has evolved historically from one wherein nation-states were the only significant agents in the defining process, to one (in the 1960s)

⁸⁰ Creamer writes in his article (1988: 55) that Elkin wrote in 1975 about a period of cultural revival in the 1930s as well, which was marked by initiation rites that were performed on the north east coast of NSW.

wherein aboriginal minorities became active in attempting to negotiate their own symbols of public ethnicity. (1984:185)⁸¹

As a result many more people identified themselves as Aborigine than before. People who had previously hidden their Aboriginal descent were now identifying themselves as Aborigines (Deacon 1981: 37). In the North the outstation movement of the early 1970s saw many people return to their home grounds picking up their cultural practices like before and creating new forms of such practices as an adaptation to the new situation (Borsboom 1978). At the same time people in the South East (especially New South Wales) who felt they had lost a lot of their cultural knowledge went and searched for that knowledge within their own family, asking the older generations what they could remember. This has resulted in the publication of numerous (auto-)biographies describing the lives on missions, as cattle drivers etc. (Anderson 1996, Bropho 1983, Dodd 1992, Keating 1994, Morgan 1987, Walker & Coutts 1989, Wharton 1998). The cultural revival also provided Australians with alternative ways to look at Aboriginal people and influenced ruling notions of Aboriginal identity in Australian society. As M. Tonkinson says: "It is perhaps not a coincidence that official policy shifted from assimilation to self-determination about the same time as self-conscious promotion of Aboriginal identity by Aboriginal people ... was taking place." (1990: 196)

4.2 Multiple Variations of Aboriginal Identification in Sydney

Now that I have given a short historical account of Aboriginal identification in the past, I have come to contemporary urban Aboriginal identification. For this purpose I have chosen to analyse an Aboriginal protest. In August 1996 a demonstration was organised in Sydney's Hyde Park to protest against the proposed funding cuts in Aboriginal Affairs and other sectors announced by the newly elected Liberal Government. It was organised to assemble people in Sydney who would join other Aboriginal and non-

⁸¹ Weaver makes a distinction between "public ethnicity" and "private ethnicity", two concepts that are meaningful in distinguishing between the public - and generally accepted - definitions of Aboriginal identity and the way Aboriginal identity is experienced by Aboriginal people themselves (1984).

Aboriginal protesters in Canberra the following day.⁸² Due to the combination of the protest being locally organised but being part of a national protest the next day, the protest forms a unique environment in which to study different forms of Aboriginal identification in an urban environment. While it became clear in Chapter 2 that the Sydney Aboriginal population appears to be rather heterogeneous - coming from places in and out of the state - this does not hinder its members in identifying themselves as Aborigines. The protest described below demonstrates that the identification as Aborigine is not a self-evident act but a process under the influence of interaction with the social environment.

4.2.1 An Aboriginal Protest in Sydney

On a lawn in the park a stage was built, decorated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and a banner with the text: "Indigenous Resistance" and an illustration of a black fist. The audience consisted of a few hundred people, the majority of whom were Aboriginal. Some of them were covered in the Aboriginal colours: black, yellow and red. Others held Aboriginal flags or had subtly used the tricolour pattern in their clothing.

As part of the demonstration several performances took place on stage. At the beginning of each performance the participants paid respect to the Eora people, the original inhabitants of the Sydney area, for allowing them to perform on their land. Some of them also greeted the crowd in their own Aboriginal language. There were several bands that performed that afternoon. One of them consisted of Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander and Aboriginal band members. The lead singer was an Aboriginal actress who sang about the Koori heroin Black Mary. There was also a rap group consisting of Aboriginal students from the Eora Centre⁸³ in Redfern. They sounded like Afro-Americans when they sang about their lives as Kooris in the "ghetto" of Redfern, known for its crimes, drugs, and police raids. An Aboriginal writer, belonging to the stolen generations, gave another performance. She captured the audience by her storytelling under accompaniment of a didgeredoo player and told everyone a local creation story about how the black snake became poisonous.

The performances were alternated by a range of Aboriginal political speakers working for different Aboriginal organisations in Sydney. They all made emotional speeches and some of them accused leading figures in Aboriginal politics of selling out their own people to white

⁸² The national protest in Canberra made international headlines because an angry crowd managed to enter Parliament House on Budget Eve by breaking through the glass walls and doors which separated the politicians from the protesters (see also *Sydney Morning Herald* 20-8-1996).

⁸³ Aboriginal unit of TAFE (Technical And Further Education).

politicians. They said that Aboriginal people in Canberra can not be trusted because they are *gubbahs*⁸⁴ and that it is time for other Aboriginal people to win their power back. They incited their audience to unite and undertake action. Rude words and name-calling were not shunned and the audience cheered and applauded after every speech.

After all the political heavyweights had spoken an unknown young Aboriginal man entered the stage. He was dressed in a cloak with feathers and other ornaments and carried a staff. But before he had even said a word some people in the audience started joking about him. They hissed and did not seem to agree with what he was saying even though the message of his speech did not differ that much from his predecessors. One Aboriginal woman said to another woman: "Who does he think he is?" The other woman answered: "He must be a member of the Wannabee nation."⁸⁵ They both started laughing. (18-8-1996)

The above fragment of an Aboriginal protest gives an example of the multiple possibilities to identify as Aborigine. On the one hand, the speakers at the protest talk about indigenous resistance, inciting their Aboriginal audience to unite and undertake action against the federal government. On the other hand, both the speakers as well as the public make distinctions between Aboriginal communities and individuals on the basis of cultural differences as well as behaviour. During the protest some people are judged for their lack of "Aboriginality". Out of this complex display of Aboriginal identifications, I have distinguished three main forms of contemporary urban Aboriginal identification, the way I encountered it in Sydney: identification as indigenous Australian, as Koori, and as member of a local Aboriginal group.

4.2.2 Indigenousness

The first form is the identification as indigenous people. At the protest the people seem to use the term *indigenous* a lot. According to the Oxford Dictionary the term *indigenous* means native; belonging naturally to a place. When applied to people one could say of indigenous people that "their ancestors lived in the land before the ancestors of the rest of the population arrived" (Maddock 1991: 4). The United Nations however handle their own definition of *indigenous* adding the condition that indigenous people are a minority in the country they live in. Both the banner, as well as the two

⁸⁴ Aboriginal slang meaning *white men*, derived from the word *governor*.

⁸⁵ Wannabee is a fictitious name derived from the words *want to be*.

different flags, illustrate the inclusion of other indigenous peoples who do not identify as Aborigine. On stage the pop group confirms this inclusion with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Pacific Islander band members. The question is: Why are people who do not identify themselves as Aborigines actively involved in an Aboriginal protest? Apparently identifying as Aborigine means identifying as an indigenous Australian. The identification as indigenous Australian places people in opposition to non-indigenous Australians, while at the same time it connects them with other indigenous peoples around the world who see themselves placed in opposition with other non-indigenous people.

The inclusion of other indigenous peoples in Aboriginal protest can however be an issue of discussion. I know of protests where Aboriginal people objected to the participation of Torres Strait Islanders because they were of the opinion that both peoples do not share the same experiences of oppression. They argued that Torres Strait Islanders were treated better by the colonists than Aboriginal people were on the basis of the cultural differences. When the colonists first encountered Torres Strait Islanders they were seen as horticulturalists as opposed to the Aboriginal people who were considered to be primitive hunters. Some Aboriginal people also compared the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as one group with the misguided perception that the groups who inhabited Australia in the past were one people, regarding such treatment as another attempt of authorities to control who belongs to whom.

During fieldwork I noticed that on the occasions where urban Aboriginal people identify as indigenous Australian the commonality they stress is the "common experience of dispossession and racism, and 'survival' as an identifiable people" (Hollinsworth 1992: 141, see also Broome 1982: 155). They have survived more than 200 years of western domination. All Aboriginal people were affected by this in one way or another. Some important effects of these past experiences were that people were dispossessed of land, had - at least for a large part - lost control over their own lives, and last but not least, suffered from the racist and denigrating aspects ascribed to their Aboriginal identity. Therefore, it was not surprising that land rights, self-determination and revaluation of Aboriginal identity formed the most important issues within the Aboriginal movement. The fact that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture as a whole survived the atrocities of the contact history and proved resilient enough to adapt to all sorts of situations is seen as an important aspect of

Aboriginality. History has thus divided the Australian population along the lines of the colonised and the colonists: the Aboriginal people and the “white” or “western” Australians. At the same time it unifies all Australian Aboriginal people on the basis of a shared contact history, resistance and survival.

To keep this division intact indigenous people attribute new meaning to known concepts in western culture. Keeffe claims that the exploitation of a culture is a form of resistance to that culture (1992). With regards to the Australian Aboriginal people, he speaks of a “sometimes exciting combination of rejection of the surrounding white society and creative borrowing from and interaction with it” (1992: 90 see also Keesing 1989: 23, M. Tonkinson 1990: 215). Examples of this are the Aboriginal protests, the banners, the erection of the Tent Embassy, and the Aboriginal flag.⁸⁶ The flag has proved a very strong and lasting symbol of Aboriginality and is used frequently all over the continent since its first appearance. Also at the protest above its colours were visible everywhere.

Apart from the commonality on the basis of historical experience, there is also a resemblance between what different indigenous peoples perceive of as their heritage. In the case of the Australian Aborigines this heritage involves an ideological framework which determines how Aboriginal people should behave (Carter 1984: 127). Appropriate behaviour involves the use of specific languages and particular styles like deportment and etiquette (Carter 1988, Schwab 1988). The ideological framework emphasises, amongst other things, the importance of kin-relations expressed in encouraging caring and sharing with family members; the importance of land which is seen as a means to obtain (economic) independence; and a world-view based upon the concept of the “Dreamtime”, entailing, for example, the ability to be in contact with the spiritual world. Each of these themes is loosely based on knowledge about the past that has been passed on by way of oral delivery. Another source of knowledge is found in remote areas, such as Arnhem Land, where indigenous cosmology, social structure and land still form a more or less coherent system.

⁸⁶ The flag was designed by an Aboriginal artist and was first seen in public in 1971 (Howie-Willis 1994a: 371). It has a red and black surface with a yellow circle in the middle. The black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia. The yellow represents the sun. And the red represents the red earth of the Australian continent but has later also become known to represent the blood that has been shed since the invasion of the British.

Together these themes are said to be part of an Aboriginal heritage connecting contemporary Aboriginal culture with that of their ancestors in the past. This connection serves as a legitimacy of their unique position as first inhabitants of the Australian continent. For urban Aboriginal people it also serves as a connection between themselves and Aboriginal communities in remote areas where people maintain relatively tradition-oriented lifestyles. The emphasis on these particular themes as kin, land, and spirituality can serve to stress the opposition between indigenous people and their western counterparts. As Beckett points out, elements referring to a pre-colonial past or to Aboriginal cosmology as experienced by Aboriginal people from areas such as Arnhem Land “only come alive in the course of political, social and cultural conflict” (1988b: 212). The general themes of shared experience and heritage, emphasising a special relationship with kin, land, and the spiritual world, are not only stressed by Aboriginal people but play an important role in other indigenous people’s identification as well, such as American Indians, about whom Keyes (1981) writes:

a number of American Indian leaders have attempted to forge a pan-Indian ethnic identity through the symbolic reinterpretation of the history of Indians of the whole country. In this case, ethnic change has involved not only the assertion of new interests to be pursued by those who share the same ethnic heritage but also the assertion of a new ethnic identity. (1981: 25)

Apart from the inclusion of other indigenous people, the illustration of a black fist on the banner refers to the inclusion of “black” people around the world. This inclusion was especially popular in the late 1960s when Aboriginal people maintained regular contact with Black American movements, such as the Black Panthers (Burgmann 1993, Jenet 1980, Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982). At that time the idea of “Black is Beautiful” was introduced in Australia and taken over by Aboriginal people. The emphasis on “blackness”, “black culture” and “black power” was part of an attempt to create a positive identity and served as a uniting force (Kukathas 1978: 57). This new notion of “Blackness” stressed the beauty and sense of pride in being “black” or coloured. The American version of being “of different colour” gained importance in Aboriginal identity because it provided the Aboriginal people with the necessary rhetoric to support their Aboriginal identity and find pride in being from a different colour. Although the rhetoric of the 1960s is outdated now, Afro-American culture still plays a

role in Aboriginal identification. Nowadays Afro-Americans are popular amongst young Aboriginal people. The popularity of Afro-American culture can be regarded as an aspect of globalisation or the global ecumene of cultures as Hannerz calls it (1992: 217-267). Together with McDonalds hamburgers and Coca-Cola cans the Afro-American sports people, actors and singers are exported as popular products around the globe. Aboriginal children in Redfern do not seem that different from white children in any Dutch town in their admiration for the same basketball players, Afro-American movie stars, and R&B musical artists. Only for the Aboriginal children these images can serve as role models.

The division that is made along the lines of "black" versus "white", however, differs substantially from the division indigenous versus non-indigenous. Although "blacks" around the world share a history of oppression by "whites" on the basis of racial differences, they do not necessarily share the basis upon which indigenous identification is founded, namely the claim that they were the original inhabitants of a specific area.

That people have made divisions along the lines of "Indigenesness" suggests that there is a purpose to do so. On the occasion where people identify as indigenous person they do this to demand an equal position in relation to the non-indigenous population. Indigenous people also want to derive exclusive rights - such as land rights - on the basis of the special status they attach to themselves (Maddock 1991, Peperkamp & Remie 1989, van der Vlist 1994). They base this status upon their unique position as original inhabitants of the area that separates them from other ethnic groups that migrated into Australia. Reynolds argues that:

The starting point must be that there is a fundamental difference in the circumstances of aborigines and islanders on the one hand, and immigrant minorities on the other. Ethnic minorities have rights of cultural preservation and can demand an end to discrimination but they have 'no clear, recognizable, or useful legal or theoretical foundation' available to them 'for demanding self-determination, but all Aborigines do'⁸⁷ (1996: 181).

In Australia the Aboriginal people express the view that resources - political as well as economic resources - are not equally divided among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. They want to change their subordinate position in society by trying to enforce such special rights in the form of land rights as well as monetary compensation for the confiscated land.

⁸⁷ Werther (1992: 24)

Throughout Australian history Aboriginal people have united on particular occasions on the basis of their shared subordinate position in order to accomplish these goals (Goodall 1996, Lippmann 1992). Examples are the protests surrounding issues such as: land rights, Aboriginal deaths in custody, and the stolen generations. Solidarity based on shared experiences of oppression serves as a means to bring about change and to dispute the unequal allocation of resources, for which the Australian authorities and the Australian public in general are held responsible. The same was happening at the Sydney demonstration where the protesters wanted to confront the federal government with their proposed funding cuts.

4.2.3 Kooriness

Apart from the regular use of indigenous identification, the speakers at the protest also refer to their identification as Koori. The contents of some of the performances reflect this regional form of identification by specifically using regional issues in their performances. One example is the band that sings about the Koori heroin Black Mary. Black Mary is an Aboriginal historical figure called Mary Ann from Wingham, northern New South Wales, who was legendary for her controversial relation with Captain Frederick Ward and their lives together as bush rangers (Janson 1996: 1, McGrath 1994: 139). Being a regional historical figure she will much easier be recognised by people from the New South Wales region than people from, for example, Arnhem Land. Also, the creation story as told by the poet has a regional origin, referring to species that live in the area the story originates from.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Aboriginal people increasingly replaced the term *Aboriginal* with regional Aboriginal names to refer to themselves. In New South Wales and Victoria people call themselves Koori. They also use this term to denote everything referring to people identifying as such. They speak for example about the Koori way, Koori organisations, Koori history, and use expressions such as Koori time. The term *Koori* means *man* or *people* in many languages that were used in the southeastern part of Australia. Variations on the word Koori, such as: *coorie*, *kory*, *kuri*, *kooli* and *koole*, are found in many districts in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. In the lower Murray region in South Australia *Kuri* referred to a major dance cycle (Howie-Willis 1994a: 559).

The name *Koori* has similar regional counterparts in the rest of Australia, like the Murri in Queensland, Nung(g)a in South Australia and

Yolngu in the Northern Territory.⁸⁸ These collective terms all originated from Aboriginal languages and can often be translated as people, friends or speech. Berndt and Berndt stress that these regional names are not tribal names but labels which are used to “attempt to arrive at a general social identification in terms of Aboriginality ... as a result of alien impact, and of increasing estrangement from traditional Aboriginal ways” (1988: 35). Hence, they had the capacity to include Aboriginal people who had no knowledge about their traditional background or group affiliations. Even though some of the terms were already used in the 1950s and earlier, in the late 1960s and early 1970s names as Kooris and Murris were increasingly chosen to refer to Aboriginal people from specific regions in Australia. For instance, Pierson claims that even though the term Nunga was already used by a selected group of Aboriginal people in one of the reserves close to Adelaide, its popular use by Aboriginal people in Adelaide from the 1970s onwards was partly the result of the popularity of the local all-Aboriginal football club, called Nunga (1977b: 321).

As is the case with the identification of Aboriginal people on the basis of their shared history of oppression, the massive use of regional names also became more popular on the basis of particular needs. These needs concerned not so much the equal distribution of economic or political resources but the control over their own identity, as even this had been largely in the hands of the colonists. When Aboriginal people increasingly started using regional names they no longer wanted to be labelled by others but decide for themselves who they were and to whom they wanted to belong. The regional identification was a rejection of the identification methods as described in various terms over time by Australian law.⁸⁹ According to Keeffe the use of these regional names is a form of resistance (1992: 54). By using words that derive from original languages, including these names, Aboriginal people form symbols of survival of Aboriginal culture. These symbols “are used to express the determination of Aboriginal people to resist cultural homogenisation into the European-dominated mainstream” (ibid. 1992: 54).

With the introduction of regional names it became possible to identify as people distinct from other indigenous people. After all, the term

⁸⁸ Other regional names are: Anangu: Central Australia; Goori: North Coast of New South Wales; Nyoongar: South West Australia; Palawa: Tasmania.

⁸⁹ For a discussion on the legal definitions of Aboriginality used by different governments and the inconsistency between those definitions see McCorquodale (1997).

Aboriginal did not make such a distinction. As the Aboriginal author Fesl wrote:

The word 'aborigine' is a noun that refers to an indigenous group of *any* country. It is a term that the English first used to describe our people when they invaded our country. As a name of a group of people it is non-descriptive, placing us into a hodge-podge of peoples, without giving us a named identity. Into this linguistic 'stew' they have also placed the people of the Torres Strait Islands, whose languages and culture differ considerably from ours... The worst thing about the use of 'Aboriginal' is that it places us into the category of being non-existent people, thus sustaining (as is no doubt intended) the 'legality' of the *terra nullius* annexation of our land. (1995:1)

Through the use of regional names Aboriginal people were not only rejecting the western label *Aboriginal*, but also "asserting the distinctiveness of the many Aboriginal groups here before 1788 and reminding whites that the word 'Aboriginal' and its meanings are not theirs" (Burgmann 1993: 37). In his book *Koori: A Will to Win* Miller states that he prefers to use the name Koori because the term Aboriginal "did not give my people a separate identity" (1985: vii).

Finally, the regional identification offered the capacity to include Aboriginal people who had no knowledge of their traditional background or group affiliations (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 35). Through the construction of regional group identities Aboriginal people, also those who lost the knowledge of their own tribal backgrounds, were able to create imaginary communities providing a means to stress commonality on the basis of Aboriginality. The commonality, which partly derived from experience of dispossession and oppression by the newcomers, between Aboriginal people functioned at the same time as a means of making a distinction between Aboriginal people and other Australians.

By referring to regional features of their Aboriginality the participants at the protest demonstrated that they identify as Koori. These regional features concern for instance, regional historical events, regional heroes and mythological figures, but also the importance of specific places, plants and animals. However, it is difficult to establish whether some of these features are considered to belong to a region or a specific nation. Some of these features /events that involved a particular nation are adopted and accepted on a regional level as being part of Koori culture while others are not. Hollinsworth notes that especially in education particular "ways" or "rules" that originate from specific groups are generalised to be used in educational

programmes, like the “Yolngu rules”, which were transformed into general “traditional learning styles” (1992: 145).

The only distinct Koori element I have been able to find during my research was the use of Koori words in the Aboriginal-English slang the Redfern residents spoke. In their mainly Australian English speech they incorporate Aboriginal words which are either derivatives from European words - for European phenomena - or which originate from an original Aboriginal language (Eckermann 1977: 308, see Appendix 12). The Aboriginal words added to the language differ per region. For example, the Koori word for white men is *gubbahs*, derived from the word *governor*. Yolngu call a white man a *balanda*, taken over from the Macassans, derived from the word *Hollander*, meaning Dutch man - after the Dutch that sailed along the coast of the Northern Territory in the 17th century (Borsboom 1996: 8). The Murriss have two words for white men, namely: *migalus* or *wadjimen*, of which the second word is a derivative of *white men*.

On the basis of their regional expressions it is safe to assume that an Aboriginal protest with the same goal would look quite different in another region of Australia because there the people would give their own regional interpretations of Aboriginality, reflecting, for example, their Nunga or Yolngu identity. Identifying as Koori enables the urban Aboriginal people of Sydney to unite; not on the basis of a label that was introduced by the colonists, but on a name they have chosen for themselves. At the same time the use of the term Koori recognises the cultural diversity amongst people who identify as Aborigine.

4.2.4 Local Identifications

Apart from the indigenous and Koori forms of identification, there are also local forms of identification which can all be regarded as types of Aboriginal identification. I distinguish three main forms of local identification, namely through Aboriginal nations, through the family, and through region or town. Martin and Finlayson remark that the term:

‘Local’ can be either social or geographic or both, and the two are frequently related, for example, through relations based on affiliations to traditional lands. Localism is characterised by such features as a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, and by priority being accorded to values and issues which are grounded in the particular and local, rather than in the general and regional or national. ... Localism can take different

forms in different Aboriginal societies. For example, in western Cape York Peninsula it may be based upon region-of-origin groupings . . . while in many urban societies it may be based upon what are termed 'families' defined through complex historical, region-of-origin and genealogical linkages. (1996: 5)

When listening to the political speakers at the protest demonstration as well as the reactions of the audience to the different performances different forms of local identification come to the fore. Most speakers introduced themselves as people from a particular nation by stating this specifically or by using their nation's language. In this way they legitimised their own Aboriginal identity towards the audience. Another example was the rap group of Aboriginal students from the Eora Centre who identified with the suburb they came from. They sang about their lives in Redfern, their confrontations with the police and the specific places where they hang out.

In recent years Aboriginal people tend to fall back on pre-colonial notions of indigenous group affiliation, called "nations" after the Native American adaptation of the term. In New South Wales there are many different nations, such as the Bandjalang, Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and Dhan Gadi nations. These nations correspond with specific language groups, although in New South Wales there are not as many languages left as there are nations or language groups with which to identify. Nations consist of clusters of families. Individual people identify with particular nations through their families. But family membership does not necessarily mean that one is identifying with an Aboriginal nation. In the *1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey* it turned out that within the Sydney ATSI region 42% of the people questioned said they identified with a clan, tribal or language group, whereas a majority did not or did not know (ABS 1996b: 10).⁹⁰

The strength of identification with a nation lies within its capacity to link people with a distant past. The Aboriginal nation, as any nation, can be regarded as a symbolic construction providing people with a unique history. In the case of Aboriginal people this history goes beyond the arrival of the First Fleet. As a consequence an Aboriginal nation offers a link to a pre-colonial past, which strengthens its people's "authenticity". This is especially important for urban Aboriginal people because they sometimes seem to lack visible distinctions from other Australians, such as can be seen

⁹⁰ In the survey 10% of the people stated they were taken away from their family (ABS 1996b: 9).

with more remote communities in Central Australia and Arnhem Land. Not only does the Aboriginal nation symbolise everything that was good in the pre-colonial past and offer a range of “traditional” practices and possibly language belonging to that nation, it also provides a link with the past through descent. It is via the families, of which the nations consist, that people are linked to generations in the past that carry back to that pre-colonial period. This is important when searching for recognition as the first inhabitants of the Australian continent. As Beckett notes:

While the blood tie between the Aboriginal and his or her parents, the tie which makes them Aboriginal, is a ‘natural tie’, the link to the Ancestors is a tie of metaphoric blood; the mediator between the ‘natural’ blood of the family and the metaphoric blood of History is ‘code for conduct’ (conceived by urban Aborigines as activism). (1988b: 208)

Whereas Aboriginal nations seem to provide the possibility for a symbolic form of identification, in face-to-face situations, family ties provide the Aboriginal individuals with a recognisable identity (Barwick 1978: 154; 1988: 27, Eckermann 1973: 39, Kendall 1994, Schwab 1988, Toussaint 1992: 21). In the past, complex kinship structures provided people with means of identification along the lines of lineages and moieties, and this is still maintained in more remote areas. In urban areas the structures have become less complicated but extended family groups still provide people with their local group identities. Whenever Aboriginal people meet each other for the first time they ask: “Who are you and where are you from?” When it concerns unknown people from the same region (New South Wales) most people will recognise a family name and often know someone from that family, witnessing expressions such as: “Oh, you’re a Dickinson from Lismore!” In the urban situation of Redfern and its surrounding rural towns in the rest of New South Wales these two themes combined (family name and place of birth) form a simplified method of establishing someone’s identity by simply recognising the combination of name and place. Because the families are relatively big and the percentage of Aboriginal people living in the state is relatively small, Aboriginal people in Redfern often claim to know every single Aboriginal family in the state if not from personal contact then from hearsay. Some Aboriginal liaison officers who have the duty to maintain contact with the Aboriginal community have especially impressed me with their vast knowledge of Aboriginal families and family ties around the state.

A person is not considered a “real” Aboriginal person according to many if he or she is not able or willing to give their family name or place or is not able to back up the descent claim with correct information. Hence recognition is based on genealogical factors (Pierson 1977a: 49). When people can not establish their link with a particular kin group they are unable to fully participate in social life because they “lack the bases of social identity” (Birdsall 1988: 143). At the protest, the last speaker who was unknown to the audience and failed to introduce himself properly, made his own identification as Aborigine open to suspicion. The joke about the Wannabee nation, referring to identification with Aboriginal nations, showed that some people suspected him of pretending to be Aboriginal to take advantage of it. The importance that is given to Aboriginal identification on the basis of descent for the acceptance of an individual, can have serious consequences for persons who are not able to verify their Aboriginal identity on the basis of family name and place of birth. For, according to Australian law, people are recognised as Aborigine on the basis of their descent, their individual identification, and their recognition by the Aboriginal community. If people lose the recognition of the community they lose their Aboriginality and the specific rights based on their Aboriginality.

This poses a serious problem for people from the stolen generations who have often lost all contact with their Aboriginal family and have difficulty establishing where they originate from, thus establishing a crucial part of their Aboriginal identity (Kendall 1994: 19). At one of the hearings held by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission at the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, the Aboriginal organisation Link-up pushed for the official recognition of people from the stolen generations as a separate Aboriginal community in order to steer clear of the problem that these people are supposed to have the knowledge on the exact family name and place to be recognised as Aboriginal.

Consider the case of a woman in Sydney who wanted to run in local elections as an Aboriginal candidate, which shows how Aboriginal people deal with unknown persons identifying as Aborigine. The woman in question stated that she was related to a well-known Aboriginal woman of a Wiradjuri family. But a number of Wiradjuri people who were related themselves to this Wiradjuri woman had never heard of the woman claiming to be related. When they confronted her and asked in what specific way she was related, the woman failed to give a credible explanation. This

made the people even more suspicious and they started a petition in which they questioned her Aboriginality. People who knew that she was lying were asked to sign the petition. This incident shows that there is a strict social control on anyone who claims to be Aboriginal.

Apart from local identification with an Aboriginal nation, Birdsall writes that also "regional and town identity derive from family membership" (1988: 143). One example of such forms of identification is the way in which Aboriginal people can identify with the reserve they grew up in, calling themselves Sherbies after the Cherbourg mission in Queensland. Another example is the way Aboriginal residents identify with the suburb of Redfern. People say they are "from the Block" or walk proudly around with a teeshirt with the text: "London New York Redfern". It demonstrates that it is more to them than the place they live. It is a way of life and can therefore be seen as a form of Aboriginal identification. Even when in 1999 there was not much left of the Block because half of the houses was emptied and derelict, people still said they felt a connection with Redfern they could not explain. As one woman told me: "I still have a lot of heart for Redfern."

There are several arguments why Aboriginal residents identify with this suburb. Anderson claims that the Aboriginal organisations and the events connected with them in the early 1970s made it possible for people to identify with the suburb of Redfern (1993a: 88). Despite the numerous occasions on which the Aboriginal people were challenged or attacked it is an area that was successfully claimed by Aboriginal people in the early 1970s, gaining the first Aboriginal land rights in an urban area. According to Smith: "there are well-established and long-term families resident within Redfern, providing support networks and a strong sense of attachment to a Redfern Aboriginal identity, and promoting internal resistance to intervention by non-Aboriginal outsiders." (1995: 11)

What I believe to be an important reason for this strong attachment to this particular suburb is its position amidst the western dominated city centre of Sydney. Being surrounded by people who are not considered to belong to the Aboriginal community strengthens the residents' sense of community, especially because the environment surrounding them is regarded as the "cradle" of the Australian nation-state and is currently Australia's economic centre. This makes Redfern the perfect place for resisting Australia's hegemony, explaining the notorious, rebellious and sometimes even anti-western image of Aboriginal Redfern. On many occasions the Aboriginal residents had to face up to western people who

did not welcome them in Redfern, such as angry local residents, local council members and the instrument of the former two groups: the police force.

The local forms of Aboriginal identification as discussed above have always played a role but seem to have become more and more visible in the last two decades. A possible explanation for this could be that over the years resources have become available to Aboriginal people that were not available before. In the past Aboriginal identity was something that could better stay concealed otherwise the consequences could be devastating (considering the way in which Aboriginal people were treated over the years). Nowadays land rights, monetary support and specified jobs can be granted to people on the basis of their Aboriginality. Hence, someone's Aboriginal identity is worth something. Apart from economic resources, political resources have become available as well. At the present time the Government employs a large number of Aboriginal people as liaison officers in government departments or in the federal employment scheme CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects). Sometimes this is sarcastically called "the Aboriginal industry". Others occupy political positions in Aboriginal organisations and act as representatives. Therefore it is not surprising that people in these positions are watched closely.

This development also resulted in competition over the division of resources: who or which group gets what? For example, the funding which has become available to Aboriginal organisations over the years has provided means to fight over. Each year organisations compete for the limited funding offered by government departments with other organisations (Crick 1981, Jones & Hill-Burnett 1982). This makes some organisations competitors of one another instead of collaborators, which they had been in the early 1970s when there was no funding available for anybody. The division of funding or the amount of political power Aboriginal people can receive depends on either the size of the population residing in their area or the number of people voting for them. People from bigger families or with larger networks are more likely to have more political power and access to more money. In this struggle for power and money especially local forms of identification offer the possibility to successfully unite on a small scale because they provide its individual members with strong emotional links. These are the local groups such as families and nations.

With the economic resources and political power that have become available acceptance on the basis of family membership seems no longer enough to be accepted by other Aboriginal people, especially when people are acting as representatives. For instance, at the protest leading political figures were accused of selling out their own people and acting as *gubbahs*. In the eyes of the speakers as well as the cheering audience, these people failed to live up to the expectations of their fellow-Aboriginal people. They failed to properly represent their people and were not acting in the appropriate "Aboriginal way". Thus being Aboriginal is not enough; people should also act accordingly.

At the protest the display of local forms of Aboriginal identification did not serve as a means to create competing sections but served as a reflection of the cultural diversity amongst all those who identified as Aborigine. On the basis of their local identifications the individual participants of the protest tried to receive recognition from the audience as legitimate Aboriginal people who had a right to speak at the Aboriginal protest. Whereas most succeeded, at least one participant seemed to fail but this had no direct consequences, possibly because he did not form a threat.

4.3 Introducing Three Urban Aboriginal Discourses

Now that I have given a general overview of contemporary forms of urban Aboriginal identification, I have come to the introduction of the analytical tools I will use in the rest of thesis. Because it is within this climate of multiple variations of Aboriginal identification that the Aboriginal organisations have to operate, in the rest of the thesis I will focus on the way in which the organisations handle this. To be able to provide their services and achieve their goals it is important for the organisations to be accepted as *Aboriginal* organisations by different groups in Australian society for different reasons. They need the support of their clients, the motivation of their staff, the legitimisation by their community (also consisting of staff), the monetary and political support of Australian (government) institutions, and the acceptance of the Australian taxpayer. So how do the Aboriginal organisations present themselves towards these different groups and convince them of their Aboriginal character when Aboriginality denotes so many things?

While an organisation itself can not have an identity because it can not identify itself, the organisations need to be able to operate in an

environment where identification as Aborigine is extremely important. To deal with this phenomenon I use the term “corporate” Aboriginal identity. As I wrote in the introduction the concept of corporate identity is used in management circles to denote the image of a company or organisation as a reflection of its corporate culture.

As with Aboriginal individuals, Aboriginal organisations, which are claimed to be Aboriginal, need to legitimise their corporate Aboriginal identity to gain or maintain recognition from their environment. In the following four chapters I will demonstrate that the Aboriginal organisations use particular strategies to receive this recognition. They need this in order to provide their unique Aboriginal services to Aboriginal clients and to receive money to do that, and be allowed to function in the name of Aboriginal people as Aboriginal organisations. These strategies involve the selective use of different notions of Aboriginality that enables the organisations to function in a multi-faceted world consisting of groups and individuals of which each have their own view of Aboriginal identity. In each of the following chapters I will present a group with which Aboriginal organisations interact on a regular basis to clarify which strategy is followed to receive that group’s recognition. Chapter 5 deals with the organisations’ interaction with people who are not affiliated with an organisation and who are clearly regarded as outsiders, such as Australian authorities, the media and the general public. Chapter 6 focuses on the special group of non-Aboriginal staff members who can be regarded as insiders - because they participate in the organisation - as well as outsiders - because they are not Aboriginal. In Chapter 7 the organisations’ interaction with their Aboriginal clientele is being discussed. Finally, the relation between the organisations and their own Aboriginal staff members is the subject of Chapter 8.

The analyses of the cases I am going to present focus on different forms of interaction of the Aboriginal organisations with the people that surround them. The purpose is to explain why organisations emphasise specific elements of Aboriginality in specific situations. By unravelling when and why organisations use particular notions of Aboriginality that are sometimes said to be excluding, opposing or contradicting one another, the analyses contribute to a greater understanding and possibly a greater acceptance of the organisations’ claim on a distinct Aboriginal identity.

In order to analyse the cases I describe I will use three discourses of Aboriginality as analytical tools to facilitate distinguishing the particular strategies of legitimisation used by the Aboriginal organisations I studied in

Sydney. In *Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia* Hollinsworth (1992) gives an overview of discourses of Aboriginality in urban Australia. He distinguishes the three following discourses: Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity, and Aboriginality as descent.

However, it was Keffe who laid the foundations for the distinction Hollinsworth made. Keffe came up with the idea to split up Aboriginality into two discourses, namely: Aboriginality as resistance and Aboriginality as persistence. Keffe defines Aboriginality as resistance as follows:

it is not only a specific set of ideological elements, but also a living set of cultural practices which are in dynamic interaction with white society, and the cultural practices that characterise it ... The elements that are stressed when this aspect is dominant are such things as resistance to white authority, political struggle and collective solidarity. The means to express these elements are drawn from the resources of the dominant society. (1988: 68)

He describes Aboriginality as persistence:

as a belief in an inherently unique identity, the continuity of cultural practices that originate in traditional Aboriginal culture and the common sharing of these by all Aboriginal people in Australia. The emphasis on persistence and continuity that characterises this aspect of Aboriginality, and in some contexts delimits it, is founded on a particular notion of culture as a fixed body of knowledge and concepts that are described as being genetically transmitted and reproduced. (1988: 68)

With regard to the first discourse Hollinsworth discusses, Aboriginality as resistance, he refers to Keffe's work as well as several other authors who made a contribution to the study of culture of resistance. The difference between Hollinsworth and Keffe lies in Hollinsworth's division of what Keffe calls Aboriginality as persistence, which combines elements of descent and heritage, into two separate discourses: Aboriginality as cultural continuity and Aboriginality as descent. According to Hollinsworth Aboriginality as cultural continuity refers to "a universalistic Aboriginal commonality derive[d] from possession of a shared cultural heritage" (1992: 143). With reference to Aboriginality as descent, he notices that "[ideas of biological determinism] are frequently articulated by Aboriginal people as the basis for their unity as an ethnic or racial group" (1992: 142).

I have chosen Hollinsworth's distinction above the one of Keeffe because it reflects more accurately the differences I encountered myself. In the thesis it becomes clear that in interaction with outsiders Aboriginal organisations mainly emphasise elements of resistance (Chapter 5). However, this emphasis can cause problems as it leaves open who can join in using these elements of resistance. As a consequence, outsiders can become insiders, which can form a threat to the corporate Aboriginal identity of the organisations (Chapter 6). In interaction with their Aboriginal clientele organisations focus more on aspects of cultural continuity (Chapter 7). On a face-to-face level, individual staff members mainly seem to judge one another on the basis of notions of descent, which can have an effect on the corporate Aboriginal identity of the organisations (Chapter 8).

One has to take into account that I treat these discourses separately only for analytical purposes. I am aware that the use of these notions of Aboriginality are interchangeable and ambivalent. While in one context a particular aspect may fit one purpose, in another context it can fit another. The incorporation of specific aspects of Aboriginality into specific discourses and the attachment of specific features and functions to these discourses are purely analytical methods of classification. The distinction between the three discourses as described by Hollinsworth merely makes it easier to notice general tendencies within the interaction between Aboriginal organisations and others. I find his distinction useful as it reflects the different strategies I have seen the organisations use in their presentation as an Aboriginal organisation.

Confront, Challenge and Change: Aboriginal Organisations and Government Authorities

The Crossroads Church in Redfern is packed with Aboriginal people and other Australians. Radio reporters, camera crews and journalists make up the larger part of the non-Aboriginal audience. It is July 1 1996, the first day that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission commences its *National Inquiry into Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* in Redfern. From the outside the church is no more than an ordinary building. Inside the only clues that betray that it concerns a church are the hand-made tapestries with depictions of biblical symbols and the large cross on the wall with an Aboriginal flag behind it. At the front of the church two tables are reserved for the three commissioners and the guest speakers. The tables are covered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. Behind the Commissioners black and white pictures of Aboriginal children in mission homes and government institutions give the theme of the inquiry away.

When the Commissioners want to address the audience about the procedures of the inquiry they are suddenly disturbed by an Aboriginal woman who enters from the back of the crowd and walks towards the microphones at the front. All cameras are following her moves and photos are being taken. The woman introduces herself as being from the stolen generation and she says: "I am sick and tired of the first people of this country always coming last. I do not mind what your procedures are. I am going to tell my experiences to you and I am going to do it now. You people have a habit of losing documents. And I do not want other people speaking for me. Nobody represents me. And I do not trust the community-based organisations because all they do is help themselves, their own family ... Do you see that flag? (She points at the Aboriginal flag.) That flag links all our people together. Urban Aboriginal people had to cop a lot. But our identity is not a question of colour. Our spirit is our Aboriginality. You can't take that from us." Then she barges off and walks out of the room. She leaves the audience and the Commissioners startled. (1-7-1996)⁹¹

⁹¹ The next day the Aboriginal woman made national headlines and appeared on the front cover of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2-7-1996).

The description of the start of the hearings of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* demonstrates that communication between Aboriginal people and government authorities is a difficult and delicate process. Even though at the inquiry the Aboriginal people were not dealing with government officials themselves but with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission acting by order of the federal government. The sudden appearance of the Aboriginal woman at the beginning of the hearing sums up the issues that were relevant during the sessions of the inquiry in Sydney. Not only was she emotional about what had happened to her she also has a fair amount of distrust towards the Commissioners and the Aboriginal organisations who are supposed to represent the Aboriginal view during the hearings. Her act of taking over the official opening and demanding all attention was an act of resistance against the official procedures laid down by the officials and reflects the way in which Aboriginal organisations can interact with government officials.

In this chapter I will show that in their interaction with government authorities Aboriginal organisations mainly emphasise the notion of Aboriginality as resistance. For this purpose I have chosen to analyse the case of the oral statement of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) at the national inquiry of 1996 mentioned above. Because all Aboriginal organisations are part of the Australian welfare system they depend directly or indirectly on funding of government departments. The single most important requirement to qualify for monetary support is the corporate Aboriginal identity of the organisation. Therefore, all organisations need to legitimise their claim on an Aboriginal identity. Also, for the Government to support Aboriginal organisations the welfare policies upon which the funding is based need public acceptance. Consequently, the interaction of Aboriginal organisations with a non-Aboriginal audience is a frequently recurring event where organisations take the opportunity to strengthen their claim on an Aboriginal identity. If it fails to prove its Aboriginal identity - or support its claim to represent Aboriginal people - in the eyes of its audience, it risks losing both legal and moral rights to Aboriginal funding provided for by government departments.

Before I come to the case analysis, I will first give an overview of the official relations between government institutions and Aboriginal organisations in general. Then I will discuss the events that lead to the closure of the ALSR after 25 years of operation because this event clarifies the context in which the case to be discussed should be placed. Both the

closure of the ALSR as well as the oral statement it gave at the national inquiry of 1996 provide useful information in fathoming the relation of an Aboriginal organisation and the Australian authorities who are responsible for their funding.

5.1 Aboriginal Organisations and Federal and State Institutions

In order to understand what sort of interaction Aboriginal organisations have with government institutions it is important to know what the relation is between the Aboriginal organisations and federal and state departments. First of all, government departments deliver services to Aboriginal clients, just as the Aboriginal organisations, and for this purpose they sometimes work together. Looking at Robinson and White's descriptions of the different relations existing between the State and civic organisations, as they call them, the Aboriginal organisations fulfil a substitutive role "where there is an agreed division of labour based on comparative advantage or an acknowledgement of the limitations of state provision" (1997: 24). The relationship of the Aboriginal organisations with the federal and state governments is a complementary rather than a competitive one. The Australian federal and state governments recognise that the organisations fulfil functions which are not offered by the governments themselves witnessing the fact that departments sometimes cooperate with Aboriginal organisations and funding is granted to them.

On a state level different forms of cooperation with state departments exist. Some departments have their own Aboriginal unit or an Aboriginal liaison officer to make their services more accessible to and more focused on Aboriginal clientele. The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs is monitoring the effectiveness of these units as well as administering Acts that concern Aboriginal people, such as the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*. Examples of Aboriginal units are Gullama (Aboriginal unit of the Department of Community Services), Alleena (an Aboriginal unit of the HACS (Home And Community Services) programme), and Nââmoro (operating as a job network). Some of these units work closely together with Aboriginal organisations through, for instance, frequent meetings to discuss combined policies, such as the Aboriginal Children's Service and Gullama. On other occasions departments themselves approach Aboriginal organisations to work together. A good example is Urimbirra that works together with a range of departments.

Apart from the complementary services they deliver, the relation between Aboriginal organisations and government institutions is characterised by financial dependence. All Aboriginal organisations depend on funding from one or more government departments. They either receive funding from (several) governmental departments or from the federal body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The Aboriginal staff members working for Aboriginal organisations in Redfern are very aware of this situation and it is viewed by many as a form of contemporary colonialism. With this term they express their feelings that the period of colonialism has never ended for the Australian Aboriginal people because there are now other and more subtle ways for the Government to control - or colonise - them.⁹² According to Aboriginal staff members contemporary colonialism is not only reflected in the dependent position of Aboriginal organisations upon government funding but also in numerous government projects set up in order to contribute to Aboriginal welfare. Examples are the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), under which Aboriginal people perform work for the equivalent of their social security payment, and the land councils legislation in NSW, under which Aboriginal land is administered by land councils instead of Aboriginal individuals, preventing actual land ownership by Aboriginal individuals.

Based on my own fieldwork experiences I am inclined to agree with the view of the Aboriginal staff members. All organisations I worked with, whether they had good or bad working relationships with funding institutions, were often frustrated by the limitations they faced due to the operating welfare system. Even though I am not able to say whether non-Aboriginal welfare services face similar difficulties there is enough evidence that suggests that Aboriginal organisations have a special position when it comes to their relation with government authorities.

One example is the inconsistency in funding for Aboriginal organisations. The funding for the Aboriginal legal services around Australia, for example, seems to have been distributed unequally from the beginning. In 1985 Walton noticed "extreme differences in the amount [of funding] per capita" (1985: 2). When searching for the criteria on which the

⁹² Another field, in which some Aboriginal people speak of contemporary colonialism, concerns Aboriginal imagery. In this context the term refers to the way in which non-Aboriginal "experts" appropriate the Aboriginal realm, such as researchers in the field of Aboriginal Studies and to media influencing the image of Aboriginal people.

distribution was based he found that the figures could not be based on population distribution per state or the population to be serviced. Obscurity concerning the funding distribution continued to exist until at least the end of my fieldwork witnessing an Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern staff conference held in July 1996, where a solicitor stated: "The Legal Service in NSW receives \$75,- per head and is funded to employ 66 people. In Western Australia they receive \$114,- per head and are funded to employ 90 people." There is also a difference between Aboriginal legal services and mainstream legal aid. Harkins demonstrates that the annual salaries for ALS-solicitors are lower than those of solicitors of (non-Aboriginal) Legal Aid Centres (1986: 143).

Another example is the apparent exceptional position Aboriginal organisations take when it comes to accountability. Richards is surprised to find that the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976)* - under which many Aboriginal organisations are incorporated - infers very high levels of surveillance compared to similar legislation for non-Aboriginal entities (1996: 4). This is especially strange since the compliance to the Act's requirements - involving annual financial reports, financial statement audits, and Annual General Meetings - "do not necessarily infer accountability" (ibid. 1996: 6). He finds that "Aboriginal associations appear to have been singled out for particular attention in regard to compliance and accountability" (1996: 4) and wonders why the Commonwealth spends so many resources on the surveillance of the Act when "compliance with the Act is only incidentally concerned with 'accountability'" (1996: 6).

The above suggests that Aboriginal organisations take a special position in the area of Australian welfare. For this reason I too think that the relation between the Aboriginal organisations and government institutions in general is characterised by an amount of dependency which I consider to be more of a restrictive factor than I believe to be the case in other areas of Australian welfare. That I, as an academic, do not stand alone in this viewpoint, is proven by a large amount of literature which challenges and opposes the current relation between Aboriginal people and the Australian government in general and the Aboriginal organisations and the funding institutions in specific. I agree with Jones and Hill-Burnett that many of the activists of the Aboriginal movement became part of the government structure and integrated in the system of oppression they attempted to combat (1982: 224). This has created a situation in which Aboriginal organisations operate within a system against which they agitate. They are

dependent upon and thus directed by those institutions that they would like to see changed (Cowlshaw 1988: 102). According to Collmann:

The Commonwealth and state governments have tried to institutionalise conflict over Aboriginal affairs under their own control. As a result of these developments, Aboriginal welfare has emerged as a relatively autonomous field of activity in the context of the government and the wider community. (1981: 53)

In Collmann's view the relation between Aboriginal organisations and government authorities is one of *cooptation*. This is "a social process in which the bureaucratic relevance of the client's identity as client is simultaneously asserted and denied". The Aboriginal client's identity is asserted by "the construction of welfare worker-client boundaries" while it is denied by "the imposition of bureaucratic discipline upon clients" (Collmann 1981: 49).

I also believe that throughout Australian contact history Aboriginal political action has always depended upon non-Aboriginal policy makers. In his discussion of the development of the use of the Aboriginal broker throughout Australian history, Howard gives an overview of how Aboriginal political power has been carefully managed, manipulated, and structured by non-Aboriginal policy makers (1982). According to Howard Australian administrators and policy makers have been able to serve their own goals and to define the borders of Aboriginal (political) power by using Aboriginal brokers:

The existing socio-economic system...has served primarily to block Aboriginal bids for power and drain Aboriginal society of its intellectual resources by co-opting the better educated and more articulate Aborigines and incorporating them in a structure that functions to control Aborigines. The government has thus created a rather subtle structure of indirect rule. (1982: 159)

Apart from that, I am convinced that, despite the current policy still being one of self-determination, economic as well as political power remains under the control of non-Aboriginal politicians. Paine invented the term *welfare colonialism* to describe this phenomenon for Canadian indigenous people (1977). He argues that colonisers "make the decisions that control the future of the colonized" on behalf of them but "in the name of the colonizer's culture" (1977: 43). According to Tyler:

The term denotes the policies and practices through which liberal democratic governments sought to reconcile the status of citizenship (and access to welfare benefits) with that of its denial in policies, which nurture dependence in the name of equity. (1993: 324)

According to Hughes and Pitty colonialism is still prevalent in Australia since the Mabo case because Australian society is still based on historic principles of the past (such as *terra nullius*) which are now partly rejected (1994: 14). They claim that the policy of self-determination is a new form of internal colonialism which Hughes has labelled *dependent autonomy*. Eckermann and Dowd speak in this case of *structural violence*, a form of systematic frustration of aspirations where “the predominant social order denies one category of persons access to the prerequisites of effective participation in a system developed and controlled by powerful interest groups” (1988: 56).

Thus, the current relation between Aboriginal organisations and government institutions is one of dependency. Not only because the organisations literally depend upon financial support from the government institutions, but also because the Australian welfare system can be viewed as an extension of a political system in which the power concerning Aboriginal people still lies mainly with non-Aboriginal politicians and institutions.

5.1.1 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Whereas the relations between Aboriginal organisations and state government departments are rather diverse and concern only particular government departments, on a federal level the Aboriginal organisations only deal with one institution that handles all Aboriginal issues on a federal level. This is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). It was erected in 1990 as a successor of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and the Aboriginal Development Commission. As opposed to the DAA the ATSIC is run by an elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission consisting of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders only. Also, the percentage of Aboriginal staff within the ATSIC has increased.

The ATSIC divides all federal funding regarding Aboriginal people (including social security payments, infra-structural programmes etc.) and

advises and recommends the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. It is also responsible for the streamlining of policies concerning Aboriginal issues between the different government departments and the division of funds among the ATSIC Regional Offices and other projects and programmes concerning Aboriginal people. A Regional Office divides its budget in dialogue with the Regional Councils over Aboriginal organisations, which are registered under ATSIC, in its constituency. Some of the organisations I studied depended heavily on annual funding from the ATSIC to be able to run their organisation. Other organisations had only received incidental ATSIC funding to finance the building of a new office or the purchase of a van. There were also organisations that had never received ATSIC funding. Both staff members from the Regional Office as well as the Regional Councillors maintain contact with the Aboriginal organisations. In some cases Regional Councillors also work for Aboriginal organisations.

The structure of ATSIC is set up to facilitate a bottom-to-top approach where policies are initiated from the grassroots level. It also supports decentralisation of the power and control by handing the power to the 60 Regional Councils. According to Martin and Finlayson the focus of government policies on decentralisation, also called regionalisation, is based on the idea that smaller organisations are more likely to be accountable to their constituents. But because of localism this is not necessarily the case with Aboriginal organisations. It does not matter how small the organisation is, only organisations that have attempted to incorporate the diversity of their constituents into their organisations are capable of achieving internal accountability (1996: 22).

Since its establishment in 1990 however, the ATSIC has been subject to a lot of criticism from both Aboriginal people as well as other Australians. Most of the Aboriginal people I met had a strong opinion about the ATSIC and I have the impression that their criticism was widely accepted. Their first point of criticism concerns the issue of representation. While the ATSIC was established to serve as a representative body of the Aboriginal people to be made up of councillors who are elected, people seem to have trouble seeing the ATSIC as their representatives. They often call ATSIC "just another name for the DAA", referring to its former role as ordinary government department. But because 40% of current ATSIC staff formerly worked for the DAA this accusation is at least understandable although this percentage will probably drop when older staff members retire. Apart from that, there is a lot of distrust in the functioning of the representative system

using elections. People fear their voice will not be heard and this gives rise to suspicious theories. For example, people claimed that the majority of the Aboriginal people did not vote for 1990 ATSIC elections.⁹³ They were either afraid to register, not able to register due to the fact that they have no fixed address, or had difficulty reaching the polling booths. The system of candidacy is also thought to be corrupt because the number of obtainable votes depends on the extent of someone's social network (cf. Martin & Finlayson 1996: 4-8). Finally, the bureaucratic structure of the ATSIC contrasts with Aboriginal people's ideas of good service delivery and is considered alien to Aboriginal society. The people I worked with regarded bureaucracy synonymous with impersonal, time-consuming, and standardised service, whereas Aboriginal organisations prefer a more informal manner with time spend on the clients and a personalised way of service delivery. For this reason the ATSIC was considered not to be a "proper" Aboriginal organisation.

Next to representation, the second point of criticism concerns the distribution of money. Critics claim that funding control is still heavily centralised through the executive powers of regional office managers. While officially the Regional Officers divide the money in dialogue with the Regional Councillors who were elected by the people, in reality the actual funding decisions are often made by Regional Officers alone. Regional Councillors are said to be vulnerable to corruption. People stressed it is important for Aboriginal organisations to foster a good relationship with the regional ATSIC members to assure funding or political support in the future. When I confronted the ATSIC regional manager of the Sydney metropolitan region with these allegations he answered:

There are allegations that Regional Councils allocate money according to favourite projects or programmes or to community members they prefer. But again, I don't see that that is any different than political parties and mainstream allocated funds to the Green Movement or to whatever. I think that's a sort of an international thing. So, we ought not to be too concerned about that sort of criticism. (12-3-1996)

Also, the division of funding along the lines of the ATSIC regional zones is considered to be unfair because it is claimed that in some zones more people are living than in other zones while it is thought that all zones

⁹³ The fairness of the ATSIC elections in 1990 was also questioned by Libesman and Cunneen (1996: 39).

receive an equal amount of funding. This is illustrated by the way in which Aboriginal organisations in the outer suburbs of Sydney reproached the Redfern organisations for receiving more funding whereas the Redfern organisations claimed exactly the opposite.

Despite this criticism people realise that currently ATSIC provides the best means to exert some Aboriginal power over issues concerning Aboriginal people and it needs to be protected for this reason. How protective people actually are of the ATSIC became clear when, in April 1996, just after the elections, the newly elected Liberal Government launched an offensive against the ATSIC. Aboriginal organisations funded by ATSIC as well as ATSIC itself were accused of mismanagement and Prime Minister Howard announced an overall ATSIC audit (*The Daily Telegraph* 16-4-1996, *Sydney Morning Herald* 13-4-1996, 16-4-1996, 20-4-1996b, 21-4-1996). As a reaction many Aboriginal people, who had formerly strongly opposed ATSIC, were suddenly very concerned with the ATSIC being under attack because they realised it was their only way to maintain some control over their own affairs. This resulted for example in the national protest in Canberra against the first Budget where Aboriginal people, trade unionists and others formed a united front to protest against the Budget on Budget eve (*Sydney Morning Herald* 20-8-1996).

5.1.2 Funding Requirements

Government departments are the main providers of funding for Aboriginal organisations. The organisations have to meet certain requirements to receive funding. The first requirement is that all the members of an Aboriginal organisation have to be Aboriginal. The second requirement is that they have to be incorporated as a body corporate, in other words, under legislation. In NSW this can be under the *Corporate Societies Act (NSW)* or under the federal *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976)*⁹⁴.

The third requirement is that the organisations have to use the allotted money for specific purposes, such as the execution of certain programmes within the organisation. These programmes have to fit in with either state or national policies, which influences the direction the organisations should take in regard to their own policies (Lyons 1984, Sackett 1990: 202). The

⁹⁴ Currently about 2400 Aboriginal organisations are incorporated under the Act (Richards 1996: 5).

financial dependence upon these government institutions has consequences for policy direction and implementation of the organisations. As I wrote in section 3.2.4, one of the strong points of the organisations is their innovative power as they were responsible for the introduction of new ways of service delivery. Because funding institutions have a tendency to fund those organisations and projects that already proved successful Aboriginal organisations need to invest time and money to prove the necessity or effectiveness of unconventional approaches and methods. Often the organisations lack the time and money to do so. As the regional manager of the Sydney ATSIC Regional Office told me:

The ... difficulty is that it's very hard for Regional Councils to initiate new programs. Most of the funds that Regional Councils allocate are for continuing projects. ... The scope of starting something new is limited unless they cut off something old. And if you try to cut off the Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation or the Children's Service there are protocols that have to be followed before you can cut them which is demanded by, what we call, natural justice. And so it can take as long as two years to liberate some old money for new projects and that causes antagonism and bad feelings. (12-3-1996)

A fourth requirement is that the organisations have to report on a regular basis on their expenditure. The organisations have to be accountable to the funding institutions about the money they received. According to the accountant Richards accountability means "an ability to demonstrate that the resources of the entity were effectively and efficiently applied to meet the stated or implied objectives of the entity" (1996: 1). One of the difficulties with the issue of accountability is that there are different kinds of accountability. Martin and Finlayson (1996) distinguish *external accountability* and *internal accountability*. The first form involves (financial) accountability towards people outside an organisation, the second form means that organisations need to account for their actions towards their own members "related to such factors as representativeness, responsiveness and to equity" (ibid. 1996: 21). They notice that in the media and public discussion the focus is mainly on external accountability "in terms of its financial dimensions" while both forms of accountability are intrinsically linked. They claim that Aboriginal organisations that are able to be internally accountable are also more likely to be externally accountable (ibid. 1996: 22).

Also, the funding institutions and Aboriginal organisations have different approaches towards the issue of accountability. While funding

institutions are concerned with strict compliance to their rules, even though this compliance does not guarantee accountability (Richards 1996: 6), by Aboriginal people “accountability itself is often assessed ... against local priorities and values, rather than the broader ones typically emphasised by bureaucracies” (Martin & Finlayson 1996: 8). Some of the criticisms often heard from the organisations is that the yearly reapplying for funding costs a lot of extra time and stands in the way of long-term planning which is required to implement successful strategies aiming for long term effects (Crick 1981: 75, Lyons 1984: 154, Walton 1985). This can have a straining effect on the staff members of the organisations. As a staff member of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern illustrates:

We, the organisations, are funded on a three-month basis for over twenty years. We have to justify every cent we spend before the next allocation. All our time is needed to survive. We can not plan ahead, we only have the resources to respond to emergencies. (5-7-1996)

Despite the funding Aboriginal organisations receive, authors in the field of Aboriginal Studies as well as staff members I worked with agree that under-funding is a chronic problem of the organisations which seriously affects their operation (Crick 1981, House of Representatives 1988: 9, Lyons 1984, Walton 1985: 3). One important effect is under-staffing. Because of a lack of money not enough staff can be employed to offer the necessary services. For example, the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern had to service a population of 22,000 with a staff of 23 (Harkins 1986: 313) and the Aboriginal Children’s Service with 11 staff members catered for 620 juvenile clients in 1996. This increases the workload, often resulting in work pressure and stress. However, the workload is not compensated by high wages; also because of a lack of money. Together these problems result in difficulties with staff retention and rapid turnover. This is acknowledged by the staff of the organisations as well as by several authors (Harkins 1986, Lyons 1984, Robinson & White 1997).

5.2 The End of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern

Even though all the organisations I have studied have to deal with their non-Aboriginal surroundings at one point or another, I consider the ALSR as the best example to demonstrate how the interaction between an

Aboriginal organisation and non-Aboriginal outsiders takes place. The reason for this is the politically (re-)active role of the ALSR over the past 25 years. Lyons acknowledges this role while talking about legal services:

Some of the New South Wales Services ... are distinguished from the 'conservative' Services because of the way they view themselves (as legal *and* political organisations), because of their forceful, confrontationist stance in negotiations with the government (especially over funding levels), and because of the emphasis they place on community development work. (Lyons 1984: 151)

At this point the ALSR distinguishes itself from the other organisations I studied. Next to the representation of their clients in court the ALSR actively tries to bring about political and legal changes on both state and federal level and has taken on the task to lobby for international recognition of Aboriginal people on an international level. Although other organisations also try to accomplish changes on a broader level, such as policy changes with regard to their specific area of service delivery, the actions of the ALSR often concern goals which rise above the Aboriginal legal services area. The outspoken political role makes the ALSR a specific but very suitable organisation to serve as a representation of other organisations operative in Sydney. The ALSR serves, as it were, as a magnifier of the political role all Aboriginal organisations are trying to take on; to instigate changes for the benefit of their Aboriginal clients and the Aboriginal people in general. Other reasons why the ALSR is representative of other organisations in this case is the fact that the ALSR was the first service of its kind and its constitution formed the blueprint for many other organisations set up in Sydney and elsewhere.

Within half a year after the ALSR had presented its statement at the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* the Service was closed down after 25 years of service. For this reason I will first discuss the events that lead to the closure of the ALSR. I have distinguished three factors that contributed to this closure: 1) the political role of the ALSR; 2) the diminishing support base within the community; and 3) the Liberal Government coming into power in 1996. Together these factors give an insight in the political role the ALSR played over the years and the way it has shaped their relation with government institutions.

5.2.1 Political Role of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern

The Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR)'s history with the government starts with its establishment in 1970 by politically active and outspoken members of the Aboriginal movement, some of whom openly supported the radical Black Power movement. The erection of the ALSR was a protest against the violent police actions that happened at the time. This radical heritage the founding members brought into the ALSR remained present throughout the organisation's existence because some of the key figures of the ALSR have been working there from the beginning. In 1972 Hal Wootten, involved in setting up the ALSR, still claimed that the ALSR had been "determinedly non-political" and that "we tried firmly to restrict ourselves to being a service organisation" (1973: 174-175), not knowing that it would become one of the most politically active organisations in Australia.

From the first day of operation the ALSR has defied the Government and explored the borders of the requirements to receive funding. This was inherent to the innovative and creative approach of the ALSR in exposing existing situations and trying to come up with new solutions for it. During its 25 years of operation the ALSR introduced concepts of legal aid in Australia that were formerly unknown. These innovations influenced the ways of Australian service delivery towards Aboriginal clients for good. For instance, it took over the shop-front service approach from "Black American" organisations and served as an example of the later erected Legal Aid Centres in Australia (Eggleston 1977). Furthermore, the Service introduced the function of Aboriginal field officer whose specific task it is to maintain a relationship between the Aboriginal clientele and the organisation. Later on, the ALSR was the first to introduce an Aboriginal-police liaison committee (Cunneen 1990) to improve the relationship between the Aboriginal community and the Redfern police force, which later turned into the appointment of Aboriginal-police liaison officers. The idea of the field officer and liaison officer has resulted in the appointment of liaison officers in, for example, government departments and private service institutions such as hospitals.

Even though some of the ALSR's pioneer work found acceptance and imitation, the existing welfare system was only partly susceptible to new approaches. Other initiatives clashed with the borders of what was acceptable to the funding institutions: first the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and later the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Commission. Because of its continuing political role the ALSR has been in constant struggle with government officials often risking their funding. But, according to Lyons:

The Services have been most effective when they have been able to challenge what might be described as 'institutionalised racism', that is, those time-honoured procedures, decision-making processes and practices that systematically work injustices for Aboriginal people...[T]hey challenge aspects of a discriminatory *status quo* [and]...are also interested in challenging and exposing systems that brings those people before the courts. And they are interested in introducing Aboriginal people to the power that can flow from use of civil-law processes. (1984: 145)

The challenging and politically sensitive activities that influenced the ALSR's relation with its funding institutions, include, for example, the ALSR's decision to extend its services from representation in criminal law only to representation in civil law as well, only a few years after the Service had started operating. This choice of policy direction of the ALSR was more than an extension of its services. It represented the staff's wish to change Aboriginal people's position in Australian society forever, not just to deliver a Band-aid service for a current problem. Representation of Aboriginal people in criminal law cases was necessary and was recognised by the Government. Representing them in civil law cases would offer Aboriginal people the opportunity to use the Australian legal system to its full extent as was already possible for other Australians through the use of private solicitors who were almost inaccessible to Aboriginal people. That this policy direction was a political statement was consolidated by the reaction of the DAA. Collmann (1981) mentions that the extension of services was against the wishes of the DAA, which preferred the ALSR to continue to represent Aboriginal people in criminal matters only. The Department even threatened to stop funding when the ALSR continued to do as they pleased and handle civil cases in contradiction with the wishes of the DAA (cf. Eggleston 1977, Lyons 1984).

But the ALSR continued to spend money on projects that were considered less popular with the governmental funding institutions. One of them was the challenging of the legal term *terra nullius*. In 1979 ALSR founding member and barrister, Paul Coe, challenged the legal concept of *terra nullius*, on the basis of which Australia had been confiscated by the British without battle or treaty (*Coe versus the Commonwealth* (1979) (McRae et al. 1991: 88). Coe failed to convince the Court and his demand was

rejected because, as the presiding judge said: “what is important is the legal theory, and for this purpose historical fact may give place to legal fiction” (Detmold 1985: 60, cf. Tatz 1981: 45). That Coe and the ALSR were ahead of their time was proven when from 1982 to 1992 the Mabo case challenged the same legal concept and resulted in the abolition of the term *terra nullius* (see section 2.1.3).

Apart from the ALSR’s efforts to have the term *terra nullius* rejected the ALSR also wanted to challenge the federal government on the issue of stolen generations. In 1996 the ALSR agreed to represent several Aboriginal people from the stolen generations in the future to ask the Government for monetary compensation. The outcome of such trials would set a precedent for future claims of children from the stolen generations. When in 1997 the ALSR was replaced by the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service this task was taken over by Australian Legal Aid which has set up a special unit to represent people from the stolen generations.

Another project that challenged the existing procedures, as set up by the NSW government in this case, was the ALSR’s attempt to claim land rights over areas before official land councils could get a hold of it. In 1996 the ALSR was in the process of challenging the current system of land councils operating under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*. This system still operates next to the *Native Title Act 1993 (Australia)*. Since the introduction of the new Act the federal government allocates money to recognised bodies who are allowed to handle land claims. One of the authorised bodies is the State Land Council. The ALSR asked for this status in 1994 but never received authorisation. The Service did this because it has a problem with the fact that the local land councils, falling under the State Land Council, are not community-based but government-run organisations. Whenever the land councils obtain land it is property of the council which is rented to Aboriginal people. Hence, the land claims obtained by the land councils in NSW do not belong to individual Aboriginal people but to the state government, says the ALSR. Although the land councils are occupied and run by Aboriginal people they have to justify themselves towards the NSW government and handle within the guidelines set by that government (Wilkie 1985: 119, 124). The ALSR wanted to challenge this situation and hand back the ownership of the land to the traditional owners: to the people, not the land councils. For this purpose the ALSR wanted to make solid arrangements with the State Land Council about the allocation of

money to the ALSR for this particular purpose. Before an arrangement could be made the ALSR was closed down.

Apart from the actions described above the ALSR has also played a major role in spreading information on, what they consider to be, the dependent situation of Aboriginal people. The staff of the ALSR has been responsible for setting up many demonstrations, vigils and other forms of protest to draw attention to these problems (section 2.2.2 to 2.2.5). The ALSR has also been involved in many inquiries to demonstrate the faults and weaknesses of the contemporary Australian political and welfare climate. It has collaborated on inquiries such as: the *National Inquiry into Racial Violence*, the *National Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, and the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Apart from informing the Australian public about the (past) injustices concerning Aboriginal people the ALSR has also taken its battle for justice abroad informing other countries and indigenous peoples about the position of Australian Aboriginal people on numerous occasions at international conferences and at the United Nations. Some staff members of the ALSR have invested a lot of time in lobbying at the United Nations and voicing their complaints against the Australian government. That the years of lobbying had its effect was proven in 1996, when NAILSS (National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat), the national umbrella of all Aboriginal Legal Services, was the first Aboriginal organisation of Australia to receive an ngo-status. This means that the Aboriginal people now have a recognised voice in the United Nations. Also, delegations have travelled the world to spread the word. One of the last actions was the petition that was handed over by the head of the ALSR and the executive manager to Nelson Mandela in Canberra in August 1996 when he was visiting Australia.

Considering the above, it is fair to say that many of the activities the ALSR has undertaken in its 25 years of existence have added to a rather delicate relation with government institutions which funded the ALSR but were at the same time constantly under attack from the ALSR. As Lyons states it: "Because of their ability to make claims on the broader political process through the use of legal channels, the Services are a potential thorn in any government's side." (1984: 156) Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that this political role has contributed to the ALSR's closure.

5.2.2 Diminishing Support Base Within the Community

Apart from the vulnerable relationship the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) had with federal and state governments due to its political role, the relation with its own support base, the community or the clients, was not too good either. Complaints about the ALSR among clients are not new (Alexander 1985: 94, Harkins 1986: 20-29) but the Service became extremely unpopular in 1996. Its unpopularity was omnipresent and could be noticed with the federal government, the media, the general public, the Aboriginal community and clientele as well as staff members of the ALSR.

During my fieldwork I have not heard of any other Aboriginal organisation that was so unpopular. Most people I met in Redfern were able to tell me a story about how badly someone was treated by the ALSR. I also found that clients distrusted the ALSR even before they were helped by the Service because of the stories they had heard. Once an Aboriginal woman told me she did not trust one of the solicitors because she had seen him on television. I contribute the growing dissatisfaction to several factors, namely: 1) the radical attitude of the ALSR; 2) seeming prevalence of political action over local community attention; and 3) worsening services of the ALSR.

First, the radical way in which some of the ALSR's staff members demanded attention for different subjects in the media has contributed to the diminishing support base of the ALSR. As I mentioned in the section above some staff members were members of the Black Power movement and belonged to the radical section of Aboriginal protesters in the 1970s. Through these early experiences some staff members build themselves a reputation of being difficult, not just among non-Aboriginal Australians but also among Aboriginal people. I refer to the earlier statement that also in the 1970s the support base for the Black Power movement was limited. But it is these members that have continued to play an important role in the ALSR and occupied influential positions within the organisation despite calls for change of management.

A second factor was, in my view, the seeming prevalence of political action over local community attention. As became clear in the previous section the ALSR pursued larger goals than just providing legal assistance to its clients. While these larger goals have in many instances resulted in invaluable changes in the Australian welfare system one can also imagine that the attention for these issues might have gone at the cost of local clients. These large projects, such as attending U.N. meetings in Geneva, cost time,

money and staff that could otherwise have been spent on local clients. Combine this with the ALSR's task as administration and head office of other NSW legal services and there is not much left for local clients. Apart from that, the ALSR also had to cope with chronic lack of staff and funding, as do most Aboriginal organisations. Combining these factors one has to come to the conclusion that this can easily lead to the perception of clients that they are not being serviced satisfactorily.

But even if the causes for dissatisfying service were out of the control of the ALSR, which is disputable, then it would still be hard to keep the clients satisfied. Clients need service and attention. Whenever they feel neglected because the attention is divided between them and other issues they are free to get their service somewhere else. Since the establishment of the ALSR things have changed. Aboriginal clients are no longer completely dependant on the ALSR for legal representation. They are now able get service elsewhere. So the clientele of the ALSR is no longer a matter of course but something that the ALSR needs to compete for. The ALSR did not do this. In my opinion, not out of a lack of interest but out of inability, as the service provision in 1996 shows.

The worsening services of the ALSR in 1996, the third factor, were, in my view, directly connected with the well being of the staff of the ALSR. And all was not well. When I was at the ALSR in 1996 the organisation was under heavy pressure. From the beginning of the year the ALSR was under constant attack by the media and the federal and state government. This had its effects on the staff members who felt insecure about their future and at the end of the year many people resigned just before the ALSR was fully closed down in December 1996. These events had a serious effect on the atmosphere in the office. Everybody was always in a hurry. People needed to be at two or three places at the same time and sometimes accused each other of not being in the right place while the person in question claimed he or she had to be somewhere else, which was just as important. The staff I worked with complained about the stress, the pressure they had to work under, the insecurity of their future, the lack of funding, the lack of staff and the lack of career opportunities within the ALSR.⁹⁵ This resulted in a working atmosphere that was filled with tensions between certain staff members who accused each other of all kinds of things. With these working conditions it was hard to provide satisfying services to all customers.

⁹⁵ Bad working conditions and complaints from staff members were not new. Also Harkins mentions this (1986: 142, 317),

Although the pressure on the ALSR in 1996 was extreme one can assume that similar conditions might have existed within the office in other periods as well, considering the way in which the ALSR had been under the constant surveillance of different institutions throughout their existence.

The lack of client support contributed to the closure of the ALSR because there was nobody that jumped to the defence of the ALSR, apart from the ALSR itself. As one of their clients put it: "The ALSR has dug its own grave." This lack of support raises the question whether it was such a bad thing that the ALSR was closed. After all, an organisation that can not count on community support does not deserve to operate as a community-based organisation.

5.2.3 Liberal Government Coming Into Power in 1996

When in March 1996 a Federal Liberal government was elected after 12 years of Labor government it soon became clear that this new Government had firm ideas about the direction of policies concerning Aboriginal affairs. Within one month after getting into power the Government announced an audit of two Aboriginal Legal Services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). These actions suggested that the new Government was going to be less lenient towards political Aboriginal organisations than the former Government.

On the first of April 1996 the federal government announced that there would be an inquiry into financial mismanagement at the Aboriginal Legal Service Victoria and Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR). During a broadcast of Seven Nightly News (1-4-1996) ATSIC representatives stated that both ALSs had to work on their accountability and that the ATSIC was happy with the inquiry. Ministers of the different States stated that they did not blame ATSIC for the financial mismanagement but would like to see the people punished who wereresponsible for the mismanagement. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the "investigation followed the leaking of an ATSIC audit" (2-4-1996) to Channel NINE. Channel NINE was the first to bring rumours about the ALSR into the media. In September 1996 the Court decided that the audit was illegal. An ALSR solicitor said about the case that Channel NINE never bothered to check if the information they received about the ALSR was correct. After this verdict the ALSR planned to undertake legal action against the people responsible. But the ALSR was closed down prematurely by order of the ATSIC.

While the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs praised ATSIC for its correct handling of the affair concerning the ALSs it was not long after this incident that ATSIC itself became the subject of an audit. On the 10th of April Prime Minister Howard announced an overall ATSIC audit (*Sydney Morning Herald* 13-4-1996). The results of the audit were that 80% of the ATSIC-funded organisations had been in breach of funding guidelines (*Sydney Morning Herald* 13-7-1996). Richards, however, argues that “the ability of a financial audit to detect fraud is a popular misconception” (1996: 2) and warns that non-compliance with the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act* (1976) does not necessarily say anything about the organisations’ accountability (ibid. 1996: 6). The audit cost the ATSIC \$1.4 million (*Sydney Morning Herald* 17-8-1996). A frequently heard comment from Aboriginal people was that if the Howard government was going to be so strict on the ATSIC they should spend as much time auditing the other departments as well because only focusing on Aboriginal affairs would be discrimination.

As a result the ATSIC budget was heavily cut by \$400 million as announced in the first Budget of the newly elected Government presented in August 1996 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 17-8-1996). And because the ATSIC is responsible for the division of funding amongst Aboriginal organisations, including the ALSR, the funding cuts automatically had their effect on Aboriginal organisations. The ALSR undertook action against the proposed funding cuts for ATSIC in August. The Service filed a writ to High Court against the Government as they believed it to be acting against the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965) signed by the Government which states that the Government has to treat the Aboriginal people equally. The ALSR claimed that by cutting the ATSIC budget more heavily than cutting other areas affecting all Australians the Government discriminates against the Aboriginal people and does not abide by the declaration it signed.⁹⁶

In December 1996 I noticed a private security guard company was removing the files from the ALSR office and making sure that ex-staff members were not entering the building. It was finally over for the ALSR. In January 1997 the ALSR was replaced by a new Aboriginal Legal Service

⁹⁶ This view was shared by Noel Pearson, an Aboriginal commentator and spokesperson for the Cape York Land Council at the time. He called the proposed funding cuts of the Howard government discrimination in a news broadcast on television (30-8-1996). He said that the 30% funding cuts on Aboriginal welfare was a much higher percentage than the percentage of funding cuts that would affect the whole Australian population.

called the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service and run by one of its former Aboriginal field officers. In a talk I had with the general manager he explained to me that the close down was part of the state government's plan to decentralise the running system into more community legal services (26-3-1999). The current Legal Service is no longer funded to handle civil cases, as the Government wanted from the beginning. The Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service has a civil solicitor coming in every Friday in the Sydney, Wollongong and Blacktown offices. They are private and Aboriginal people are only brought in contact with them but they still have to pay for it themselves.⁹⁷

As can be expected the staff members of the ALSR had no doubt about the motivations behind the closure of their service. One of their solicitors said: "I think the Government wants the ALS to shut up in time for the Olympics and the upcoming Indigenous Forum. They are afraid of what the ALS might say because it has always been the only organisation that stood up against the Government." (27-9-1996) Personally I view that it was a combination of the three factors described above that contributed to the closure of the ALSR. With its politically radical reputation the ALSR had never succeeded in building a solid relation with the government institutions it depended upon. When, with a change of government, the ALSR's management of (especially) financial affairs became subject to investigation, there was no one to jump to their defence. Because the ALSR had not invested enough into their client relations their support base in the community had rapidly deteriorated.

5.3 Resistance as Strategy of Identification

In the following section I present an oral statement given on July 1 1996 by the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR). It accompanied a written submission that was made to the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission executed the national inquiry by order of the federal government. Its task was to collect evidence on the effects of the assimilation policy and especially the authorised separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, known as

⁹⁷ For further information on policy changes for Aboriginal Legal Services in New South Wales I refer to Christian and Beacroft (1998).

the stolen generations (see section 2.1.2). The Commission travelled through Australia to receive submissions from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals and institutions concerning the stolen generations. In July 1996 the Commission visited Sydney for this purpose (four days in Redfern and one day in Airds). The ALSR was represented by an Aboriginal barrister (who is also the head of the ALSR), the Aboriginal executive officer and a solicitor working at the ALSR. The people attending the hearing consisted of an audience of Aboriginal people who attended the forum voluntarily and an audience of non-Aboriginal people who attended the hearing mainly for professional reasons, such as commissioners, reporters, camera crews etc. The Commission published its findings and recommendations to the federal government in the report *Bringing Them Home* (1997).

The following case analysis demonstrates that in communication with non-Aboriginal outsiders Aboriginal organisations emphasise resistance elements of Aboriginal identity. By doing so the organisations serve specific goals they have during the interaction with non-Aboriginal outsiders. The submission of the ALSR is a good example of the rhetoric used by Aboriginal organisations in communication with non-Aboriginal people because of its outspokenness. The speaker uses recurring themes in rhetoric I have heard staff members of several Aboriginal organisations use. In this case the ALSR embraces the oral statement to voice its point of view on the stolen generations - the purpose of the inquiry - but also to directly question and challenge the federal government. In this way the ALSR presents its corporate Aboriginal identity as a contemporary, urban identification based on elements of resistance.

5.3.1 The Oral Submission of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern

Before the head of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) starts his submission he mentions that he will talk on behalf of Aboriginal people who have been taken away from their families even though he did not experience this himself. But he has talked with people who have experienced it. The speaker starts off with condemning Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Herron, who associated himself with a book which propagated the idea that the assimilation policy has brought forth positive results, referring to Herron doing the book launch.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ *The Australian* (18-6-1996).

The speaker: "What future is there for us in this country? It takes another three or four generations for the effects of these policies to die out. If it comes to human rights this country is based on hypocrisy. There is a difference between the way Aboriginal people see and do things and the way non-Aboriginal Australians see and do things. For example, we have to acquire the skills of accountability in western terms. But it is just another way of assimilation. We are forced to account to Canberra, the western way. They say that the money they give to us is compensation but it is not because we have to account for it all the time. Also, drinking in a public place is socialising in Aboriginal terms but it is an illegal criminal offence in western terms. I have major concerns if the Government has the willpower to act upon the recommendations that are going to come from this Inquiry. We have to look elsewhere for remedies. We have to go to the High Court to ensure that the debt is paid. Nobody in this current Government has the intellect to see that they owe justice to the Aboriginal people."

"There is a lot of racism against the Aboriginal people of New South Wales. There was resistance and there were languages and cultures. And we are still here today. But are the people who are responsible for all those crimes in the past going to be punished? It is time that the perpetrators are brought to account. Or is it again a case that we are just Aboriginal people? No grief counselling was ever given to *our* refugees or the victims of the Aboriginal deaths in custody. It was given to external refugees who came from war zones. You deny our past and you deny our future. Like during the bicentennial. But I am nothing without my history. But [Prime Minister] John Howard does not understand that, he is an idiot. (The audience applauds.) There are different phases in the history of Aboriginal people. First there was colonialism, second there was assimilation, and now we are in a phase of Aboriginal people being treated as a museum piece. We are not participating as people. And did not Tatz⁹⁹ say: 'The Kakadu man is legit but the Redfern man isn't?'"

The speaker addresses the commissioners when he continues that he has great concerns that not all the records [concerning children in mission homes and institutions] are being offered. The Aboriginal Justice Commissioner says that the records were systematically wiped out and in 1953 a fire destroyed records in relation to the adoptions made before that time. The speaker says that although there is Freedom of Information legislation [*Freedom of Information Act 1989, (NSW)*] getting access to government records is more a matter of costs. The access is sometimes difficult and expensive for Aboriginal people because most archives are in the city and people from rural areas have to pay a lot for the transportation. The material can be copied for 20 cents per copy. The speaker adds that, besides the government records, it is necessary to look at the church records too. Each mission had its own church that controlled it. The speaker: "In the Mitchell Library the classified records are available to students of a particular bonafide area. But what right do they have to deny access to Aboriginal people? The records should be in the hands of the Aboriginal people, not in Government hands. Another issue is the fact that our

⁹⁹ Author in the field of Aboriginal Studies.

children were never paid for the work they did. That did go back in internal revenue. Why is the ICAC [Independent Commission Against Corruption] not investigating this?"

"And what about the victims of the assimilation policies. How should they learn parenting skills and mixing with the community because they do not know how to do that? The fact is that children are still being taken away. They are taken away by the police to be placed in custody and after that they are placed back in other communities. But Aboriginal communities are not all the same. They should be placed back in the community where they were born into. But the kids are being placed by the white people of DOCS [Department of Community Services], and the juvenile justice system with a biased perspective. But there are alternatives. You can place children within the extended family. Also, all the Juvenile Justice Centres are in the metropolitan area so there is a lack of contact with the family. The Aboriginal Legal Service will provide this Inquiry with case studies concerning this issue. The juvenile justice law has changed recently but the Aboriginal Legal Service was only notified about that instead of properly consulted. This is the current self-determination." (1-7-1996)

5.3.2 Oppression and the Representation of Aboriginal Identity

On the surface it seems that during this oral statement which the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) made to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission the ALSR wants to get across a message about the issue of the inquiry: the stolen generations. But this message also contains a hidden message that does not have anything to do with the issue of the inquiry but with something else the ALSR wants to get across: its corporate Aboriginal identity. This is achieved in two manners. On the one hand the ALSR presents itself as linked with all Australian Aboriginal people because it has to legitimise its role as representative of Aboriginal people. On the other hand the ALSR presents an interpretation of Aboriginality. Both the link with other Aboriginal people and the image of Aboriginality the ALSR presents are important in their legitimisation as an Aboriginal organisation.

The link the ALSR presents with other Aboriginal people is needed to convince the auditors that the ALSR represents Aboriginal people. By acting as representatives of the Aboriginal community the Service secures its own Aboriginality as it strengthens the credibility with both federal and state governments as well as the general public. That this representative role is not self-evident was shown at the opening of the inquiry where an individual Aboriginal woman claimed she did not feel represented by the Aboriginal organisations (see the introduction of this chapter). The speaker tries to make a connection with other Aboriginal people by emphasising the

shared experiences of past and contemporary oppression. The speaker mentions that in pre-colonial times Aboriginal people had different languages and cultures but shared experiences of racism and shared their resistance against the newcomers.

To emphasise that oppression is not something from the past the speaker tries to demonstrate that forms of oppression that were thought to belong to the past, are still continuing. For example, while the inquiry concerns the issue of past policies of separation of Aboriginal children from their families, the speaker claims that separation policies are still continuing, although in another form. He refers to the juvenile justice system and the *Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987 (NSW)*, under which DOCS operates, to show that Aboriginal children are still growing up away from their families. In the eyes of the speaker this creates yet another generation of Aboriginal people growing up without their own family just as the children from the stolen generations did. Hence, Aboriginal people are connected on the basis of contemporary oppression, which needs to be stood up against.

Another example, is the speaker's suggestion that racism against Aboriginal people is still present today when stating: "No grief counselling was ever given to *our* refugees or the victims of the Aboriginal deaths in custody. It was given to external refugees who came from war zones." With this particular comparison the speaker wants to demonstrate that there is a lack of attention for the past injustices against Aboriginal people in general and the stolen generations in specific. The use of the words "just Aboriginal people" refers to the speaker's conviction that Aboriginal people are not treated the same - maybe even valued less - and thus not worth the recognition of past injustices. With this statement, at the same time, he places the Aboriginal people on a different level from other Australian ethnic minorities, such as these refugees. While Aboriginal people are often treated as one of the ethnic groups of Australia the Aboriginal people have always specifically banned the label *ethnic group* and referred to themselves as indigenous believing that on this basis they possess a special status which implies special rights.

Part of this form of oppression is the lack of recognition. The speaker continues that not only were these past experiences not recognised, many Aboriginal people are denied their future as well. With his statement "I am nothing without my history" he emphasises how important history is in creating a self-image. People who are denied their past are denied a part of

their identity. This is especially true for the people of the stolen generations. They have been and are denied their past - and thus their possibility to construct a healthy self-image - in different ways. The reason why the speaker brings up the denial of history has to do with the issue of the inquiry: the children from the stolen generations. One way in which especially these people are obstructed in creating their Aboriginal identity, according to the speaker, is that the Government has done nothing to facilitate the access for Aboriginal people to records concerning this part of history. Apart from the costs involved, the main obstacle is the right to access certain information. In this way the Government controls the access to information that directly concerns the history of thousands of Aboriginal people. Hence, the Government controls the process of self-identification for those people who have to rely on these records in order to be able to reconstruct their personal past.

Another way in which these people are obstructed in this process concerns the Australian law that only recognises someone as an Aborigine on the basis of self-identification, descent and recognition by the community. But lacking the knowledge of one's personal background hinders the process of acceptance by other Aboriginal people. Not being able to prove their biological descent, lacking the specific knowledge on their descent, the people from the stolen generations are thus denied their Aboriginality by law. For this reason, the Aboriginal organisation Link-Up presented a proposition to recognise the people of the stolen generations as a separate Aboriginal community at the national inquiry that same week in Airds.

But it is not just the Aboriginal people from the stolen generations who are denied an Aboriginal identity, as the speaker refers to the discrimination between real and fake Aboriginal people. With the quote: "The Kakadu man is legit but the Redfern man isn't." he points out that he feels there is still a distinction being made. Only the Kakadu man - Kakadu referring to Kakadu National Park in Arnhem Land where Aboriginal people have picked up "traditional" lifestyles again - is a legitimate Aborigine. The Redfern man on the other hand is denied an Aboriginal identity altogether. The speaker feels that especially his organisation, established and run in Redfern, is suffering from this distinction. With this example the speaker links the ALSR with other Aboriginal people on the basis of lack of recognition.

The speaker tries to strengthen the connection between the ALSR and other Aboriginal people even further by stating that also the ALSR suffers from oppression within the Australian system of Aboriginal welfare. To demonstrate this, the speaker pours out his heart about the requirements of accountability his organisation has to abide to. He claims that accountability in the western sense is a form of assimilation. Aboriginal accountability to the Government is, in his eyes, a way to control Aboriginal spending and thus Aboriginal self-determination. He also draws the attention to what he sees as a "seeming" say in Aboriginal issues of the ALSR by pointing out that when the juvenile justice law was changed the ALSR was only notified instead of properly consulted. So, the ALSR is caught in the same web of silent oppression as all Aboriginal people in Australia, according to the speaker.

Apart from the connection it tries to demonstrate between the ALSR and all Aboriginal people, the second way in which the organisation tries to legitimise its own Aboriginal identity is by giving its own interpretation of Aboriginal identity. In the submission the ALSR presents an image of Aboriginal identity which focuses on urban aspects of Aboriginality. The speaker says that "there is a difference between the way Aboriginal people see and do things and the way non-Aboriginal Australians see and do things." As examples of cultural distinctiveness between the two groups the speaker mentions the different ways of looking at accountability and drinking in public places. The examples he uses to illustrate the different ways of thinking and acting are issues, which are relevant to all Aboriginal people over Australia. So with these examples the speaker does not only present an image of Aboriginality, he also connects urban Aboriginal people with other Aboriginal people in Australia. The two issues - accountability and drinking - seem carefully chosen because, not only do they connect urban and other Aboriginal people, they also are elements of Aboriginality which fit the image of the urban Aboriginal. Some elements of Aboriginality would be considered to be misplaced by the non-Aboriginal people when used by urban Aboriginal people. If the speaker would have talked about spiritual connection to the land or the importance of the Dreamtime he would have been taken less seriously than when he sticks to issues which are recognised as linked with urban Aboriginal people, such as accountability and public drinking.

When discussing both subjects he demonstrates that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have different ways of looking at these two subjects.

As I said before the speaker considers accountability to be a means that is being used by non-Aboriginal people to control Aboriginal organisations. A better example is the habit of drinking in a public place, which is considered as a way of socialising in Aboriginal terms according to the speaker, but it is a criminal offence according to Australian law.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to see the speaker using the example of drinking because specifically the act of drinking, as well as gambling, on the reserves was seen as example of a culture of resistance, which was a “clear inversion of bourgeois notions of social respectability, including sobriety, industry and self-discipline” (Morris 1988b: 51, see also Beckett 1964: 40, Broome 1982: 155, Gilbert 1973: 156, Reay 1949: 103). Morris shows that some of these acts were a continuation of earlier indigenous values:

The perception of ‘bad’ values (drinking) and ‘good’ values (saving, work, discipline) was informed by a focus on the individual. By contrast, Aboriginal drinking and gambling remained collective group activities based on the exigencies of establishing ‘free space’. Such collective activities, in a sense, reproduced a cultural emphasis on sharing. In the context of assimilation policy where the dispersal of sites which might produce a sense of collective identity was an essential part of policy, their persistence became a political act, and remained so through to the 1960s. (1988b: 52)

Consequently, according to this submission, not only do Aboriginal people share experiences of oppression, they also share views and behaviour which distinguishes them from others. Hence, a division is created between Aboriginal people and other Australians. Or in this case, the ALSR and the Aboriginal auditors versus the Commission acting by order of the Australian government and the non-Aboriginal auditors (such as the media). In the statement all Australian Aboriginal people are specifically included while other Australians are excluded. The speaker states that Aboriginal and Australian culture are two different entities and the fact that the latter rules over the first causes situations that only further the separation between the two cultures. By regarding Aboriginal people as one group the speaker implies that in interaction with government authorities

¹⁰⁰ Langton has written an interesting article on the image of the Aboriginal drunk as seen by white society over the decades in which she claims that: “The image of drunkenness is one of the ways that white society projects inauthenticity onto the ‘half-civilised’ native... The drunken Aborigine provides this narrative [of tragic failure] presenting a modern image of uncontained and undisciplined violence which cannot be made to accept and adopt the genteel constraints of civilisation.” (1993: 205)

internal cultural differences are not as important as the shared experiences of oppression. The emphasis on especially these subjects points in the direction of a presentation of Aboriginality as resistance because “Aboriginality-as-resistance is an ideology that stresses collective solidarity and opposition” (Keeffe 1992: 90).

5.3.3 Aggression and the non-Aboriginal

In the former section I argued that the ALSR tried to legitimise its corporate Aboriginal identity by emphasising elements as shared oppression and contemporary images of urban Aboriginality. As a consequence a division was created between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal auditors present at the inquiry. This means that the ALSR in this situation has placed itself opposite a non-Aboriginal audience consisting of representatives of the government (in the form of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) and other non-Aboriginal professionals. This is important to know because the environment in which an organisation interacts plays an important role in the identification process going on at the time. Identification always takes place in interaction with and in relation to others. The tenor of the interaction with the non-Aboriginal people present is in this case one of resistance. The ALSR wants to confront the non-Aboriginal audience with the oppressive situation that still exists according to the ALSR.

The focus of their anger, however, is directed mainly towards the Government as the Government is chiefly responsible for past policies - including the separation policy - and the current situation and it has the power to instigate change. One can ask the question whether this attack towards the Government is misplaced because the submission concerns a submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) which is an independent body that investigates by order of the federal government. I have the impression that the representatives of the ALSR viewed the HREOC merely as messenger that would get their message across to the Government. Apart from that, it was the Government that was responsible for the assimilation policy, which caused the separation from Aboriginal children from their families. Also, the Government is the only one that can actually bring about change by recognising the pain and suffering that was caused as an effect of the assimilation policy.

In the former section I demonstrated how the choice of subjects that were discussed by the representative of the ALSR seemed to represent an image of Aboriginality as resistance as the ALSR effectively divided its audience in “us” and “them”. But apart from the choice of subjects, also the manner of interaction seems to point in that direction. Apart from strengthening the organisation’s links with the Aboriginal audience present, it also had the task to convince “them”, the non-Aboriginal audience, of the existence of past and current forms of expression and the need to change this. In order to reach this last goal, the representative of the ALSR used a particular way of interaction. A way that is based on confrontation and challenge. Earlier in this chapter it became clear that this way of interaction is characteristic of especially the ALSR. During the submission this confrontational and challenging way of interaction involves the frequent use of coarse language and aggressive and offensive behaviour.

The speaker frequently uses strong language. He talks for example about “hypocrisy”, “idiot”, “perpetrators” and claims that “nobody in this current government has the intellect” and implies that the government is “corrupt”. The use of strong language and aggressive behaviour are forms of resistance frequently described in literature. In her article about public swearing and fighting Aboriginal author Langton demonstrates that such acts can be orchestrated events or acts adapted from earlier forms of conflict resolution in pre-colonial indigenous societies (1988: 202). Although fighting and swearing were first and foremost used in resolving internal conflicts, in contemporary society it is also used against non-Aboriginal people as “tactics of sedition” (1988: 219). The acts thus also serve as a means to show non-Aboriginal people that Aboriginal people do not want to comply with the dominant society and do not recognise its institutions, which impose its values upon the Aboriginal people. As Langton writes:

White society, regarded as lawless, and its legal system, regarded as illegitimate, become the accused in these incidents of black-white dispute settlement. ... The swearing and fighting which Aboriginal people aim at individuals and institutions of dominant society are forms of protest against discrimination, deprivation, dispossession and brutality. (1988: 218)

The targets of this aggression in the submission are all government authorities from both federal and state governments. Two people are referred to by name, namely: Senator Herron, the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and federal Prime Minister Howard. He uses the latest

incident surrounding federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Herron to show how ill-equipped the people in the Government are who are supposed to work for Aboriginal people.¹⁰¹ Besides, this particular incident touches upon the issue of the Inquiry because it concerns the policy of assimilation under which Aboriginal children were separated. Later on he calls Howard an idiot and accuses the Government of corruption. Although it is indeed true that the Government used to save the money the children owed for them in special accounts, which could not be accessed by the children. There are lists of children whom the Government still owes money for the work they have done.

The image the ALSR has of the Government is characterised by distrust. The speaker's statement "What future is there for us in this country" testifies to this. The same is the case with this national inquiry. The results and the recommendations of the HREOC will be presented to the federal government to act upon them. The speaker shares his doubts with the Commission when he states that he has "major concerns if the Government has the willpower to act upon the recommendations that are going to come from this Inquiry." This lack of trust in the Government is not unique to the ALSR representative but is often heard among Aboriginal people as has been discussed in section 3.1.1.

Apart from the use of coarse language, non-compliance with authority is another form of resistance. Whereas coarse language can be seen as an expression of non-compliant behaviour, the ALSR in fact complied with the procedures set by the inquiry by handing over a written submission and elucidating it with an oral statement. However, to everybody's surprise, someone else at the inquiry gave an excellent example of non-compliance with the authorities. I refer to the woman who barged in at the beginning of the inquiry, which I described in the introduction of this chapter. Before the inquiry had even started, she just told her story even though she was not supposed to do that in public but during a private session. Non-compliance with authority often dominates interaction between Aboriginal people and authority figures, for example, Aboriginal youth and the police, as described in section 2.3.1. Since the first authority figures started to run the lives of Aboriginal people, like managers in reserves, Aboriginal people have always regarded rebellion against authorities as an act of bravery and

¹⁰¹ Other incidents have come up around the Minister before the one referred to here, such as when he made a misplaced joke about wife-bashing to a Member of Parliament who was married to an Aboriginal woman (*The Australian* 21-6-1996).

standing up for the community. Over the years this aversion against authority has taken on many forms. It started with local heroes, like Pemulwuy, that fought against the first settlers. This turned into non-compliance with authorities on reserves¹⁰², protests against governments and challenges to police officers and other figures of authority nowadays.

Not only the use of coarse language and the non-compliance to authority but also the submission itself can be regarded as an act of resistance. In this respect, it can be compared with other actions where Aboriginal people used western means to challenge western hegemony, such as the Aboriginal flag and the Tent Embassy. The ALSR's use of the submission for its own goals poses the question whether it is possible to challenge those who control the means by which one can challenge the other. Sider points out the weaknesses as well as the strong points of this strategy:

Counter-hegemonic cultural forms often use an arsenal of symbols which are borrowed from the existing hegemony (and inverted, mocked, etc.) in order to express experiences and claims different from the elite's; the use of these symbols implies limits and constraints to the thoroughness of the opposition. These constraints can, however, be partly breached: first, by the fact that the counter-hegemonic strategies can expose the contradictions within the hegemony, and second, by creating an experience of opposition. Counter-hegemonic strategies, like other forms of culture, do not just emerge out of people's thoughts and individual experiences, but out of their mutual understanding of their social relations. (1980:26)

The manner of interaction between the ALSR and the others during this submission was clearly one of resistance. These acts of resistance or opposition do not only contribute to unifying Aboriginal people engaged in such activities but also function as a means to exclude people who reject this behaviour on the basis of a differing value system, thus perpetuating a division between Aboriginal and the dominant Australian culture. Cowlshaw speaks in such a case of *oppositional culture* which "refers centrally to the existence of a world of meaning and practice other than that which dominates institutions of the wider society" (1993: 186). It is expressed through behaviour that seems to oppose the "proper" behaviour

¹⁰² In his description of the Dhan-Gadi of New South Wales Morris shows how the Dhan-Gadi manage to create their own space apart from the reserve managers and other Australian authorities through, what he calls, their "culture of resistance" (1989).

according to the values of dominant society, such as: swearing, fighting, drinking and gambling. She argues:

Rather than responding with shame, oppositional culture acts as both a challenge to those who would despise Aborigines, as well as a defence against them. The fact that certain of its features are an immediate trigger to white hostility confirms and reactivates the oppositional nature of Aboriginal culture. ... In rejecting the humiliation involved in, for instance, being gaoled, Aborigines are taking an active role in the reproduction of racial separation. They have not conformed or surrendered to white hegemony. Thus it is in opposition that the ongoing recreation of a distinct cultural heritage occurs. (1988: 98-99)

In Cowlshaw's discussion about the rise of welfare colonialism she expresses her concern of the effect of oppositional culture within the Aboriginal welfare system where Aboriginal staff of organisations, for example, are expected to cooperate within the system. These people have to make a choice to either cooperate within the system on terms of the funding institutions of dominant society or to stick to the oppositional culture of their Aboriginal community. Cowlshaw is afraid that when oppositional culture is maintained in a situation of welfare colonialism it "can make Aborigines appear to be biting the hand that ... feeds them" (1988: 100).

This leaves us with the question whether the ALSR succeeded in its attempt to contribute to the official recognition of the problems concerning the stolen generations and legitimise its corporate Aboriginal identity. To get an answer to the first part of this question I shortly have to dwell on what happened when in May 1997 the report of the HREOC, called *Bringing Them Home*, was presented at the Australian Reconciliation Conference. Its major recommendations were that there should be an official acknowledgement and apology for the suffering caused by past practices of child removal and compensation should be paid to those who suffered from the policies (*Sydney Morning Herald* 27-5-1997). Prime Minister Howard, however, refused to make a full national apology. Although some high ranking figures, such as the Prime Minister himself and Governor-General Sir William Deane, made *personal* apologies the news was spread internationally that the Aboriginal people had received a *national* apology (as could be read in a variety of Dutch newspapers and seen on news broadcasts on CNN). But they did not and Howard claimed he was advised not to give a national apology because it would have legal consequences.

The issue of compensation as suggested by the report was not even discussed.

The refusal to make a full national apology triggered a national outcry of incomprehension because many Australians saw this report as the opportunity for the Government to live up to its promises of reconciliation. These events set in motion the resigning of the larger part of the Reconciliation Council (consisting of prominent Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members) whose task it was to reconcile Aboriginal people and other Australians before the year 2000. Its members did no longer trust in the process of reconciliation when the Government refused to make a national apology and tried to reverse Aboriginal land rights. After a year of turmoil and discussions concerning the Wik-plan - which was to reverse a part of the *Native Title Act 1993 (Australia)* - between the High Court and the Government, the Liberal government called a new election in April 1998 and the Howard government was re-elected. In March 2000 again the report became an issue of discussion because Senator Herron officially spoke of "only" 10% of the Aboriginal population being of the stolen generations. This made Charles Perkins and others furious and their call for actions during the Olympics made international headlines in April 2000. To answer the first part of the question, one can say that the ALSR, together with the other submissioners and the HREOC, only partly succeeded because the report evoked some personal apologies but not the desired national apology which could have had serious consequences for the people involved.

To answer the second part of the question - whether the ALSR was successful in legitimising its corporate Aboriginal identity - one could find the answer in the ALSR's closedown later that year. Apparently the Government no longer viewed the ALSR as a serious representative. This suggests that (especially resistance) elements of Aboriginality which the ALSR found important to get across were not accepted. In my view there is one main reason that makes the acceptance of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance by non-Aboriginal people problematic, namely: the dividing character of the notion. As is demonstrated during the submission Aboriginality as resistance not only divides people on the basis of past oppression in descendants of oppressors and oppressed, but also divides on the ground of current forms of oppression between especially the executors of an oppressive system, the Government, and the Aboriginal oppressed.

For non-Aboriginal people this can be an unacceptable way of looking at the current situation as no one wants to be viewed as an oppressor.

Especially not, when one is convinced that the past forms of oppression have made place for more power, control, and opportunities for Aboriginal people than ever before. There are even special laws and rules for Aboriginal people based on the fact that they are the indigenous inhabitants of the continent. So, if one wanted to one could even speak of discrimination in favour of Aboriginal people - an argument that is frequently used by right-wing politicians. But the speaker at the inquiry argues the opposite. Thus the division based on experience of contemporary oppression is only acceptable to an audience when it can be convinced that oppression is still going on. Only then, can they accept the elements stressed as part of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance.

So why has the ALSR used these elements in its statement when it did not have the desired effect, namely the acceptance of resistance as element of Aboriginality, and consequently the ALSR's corporate identity? The notion of Aboriginality as resistance was emphasised over the other notions of Aboriginality for its unifying capacity on a pan-Aboriginal level, its capacity to divide people on the basis of their experiences of oppression and its forward-looking capacity which offered the ALSR the opportunity to demand change. Even though it did not have the desired effect now, in the past this image of Aboriginality as resistance had proved useful because many of the ideas introduced by the ALSR were later accepted in the mainstream. Apparently, in the past there were enough non-Aboriginal people around who accepted and recognised the image of Aboriginality as resistance and the claims that there were still forms of oppression going on. Even though during this oral statement the ALSR could no longer convince its audience that resistance is still needed in the challenging of current forms of oppression, in the next chapter I will show that there are still enough non-Aboriginal people present who do share these beliefs and that the notion of Aboriginality as resistance even has the capacity to include these people.

Mixed Membership Mayhem: Aboriginal Organisations and Non-Aboriginal Supporters

It is March 1996. Close to the Harbour Bridge a part of an empty office block provides the Aboriginal History Committee with a meeting room where its members are able to hold their fortnightly meetings. Perleeka Television, an Aboriginal broadcasting organisation, is squatting in the building and has allowed the Committee to use one of the rooms. Tonight's meeting is attended by nine people, four of which are Aboriginal. At the opening of the meeting Harry, the Aboriginal station manager of Perleeka Television, informs the Aboriginal History Committee it has to move out of this room because Perleeka had been warned that the building would soon be emptied by the original owners. But office space is needed at the moment because the *Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum* later this year has to be organised. One of the non-Aboriginal members says that the Committee received \$5000 of funding to start off with. She wants to use this money to pay the rent for an office in Liverpool Street in the city. It is a shared space with other non-profit organisations and has copiers, faxes, computers etc.

A South American member suggests looking for free space with Aboriginal organisations in order to stay in touch with the Aboriginal community. But the other members tell her about how they were evicted from former venues by several Aboriginal organisations. According to them this has a lot to do with the fact that non-Aboriginal people are on the Committee. One of the organisations only gave a three days notice before they were "kicked out" of their last venue. This is what they want to avoid by having an independent space. The Committee passes a motion to go for the office space on Liverpool Street. (16-4-1996)

At the meeting described above the members of the Aboriginal History Committee deal with the issue of mixed membership. They are aware that it hampers them in their actions and are looking for a way to become a recognised Aboriginal organisation. In this chapter I will focus on how an Aboriginal organisation deals with its non-Aboriginal members. For this

purpose I will analyse the case of the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Committee (NAHHC), an Aboriginal organisation that was set up in 1996. The focus, however, does not lie on which notions of Aboriginality are emphasised by the organisation to legitimise its corporate identity but on how it dealt with its own non-Aboriginal members while trying.

Just as the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern had done during the national inquiry, the people of the NAHHC emphasised notions of Aboriginality as resistance because, especially during the forum where they wanted to establish a national body, these people faced an audience of unknown Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The unifying capacity of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance was important for them to be able to communicate with other Aboriginal delegates from organisations and Aboriginal guest speakers who were not personally known to them. It helped the Aboriginal organisation to express its Aboriginal identity, to establish the outsiders' Aboriginal identity and to connect with the Aboriginal people who were not affiliated with the organisation.

The unifying aspects of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance fulfil an important role in creating a feeling of solidarity within a large group such as the one at the forum. Through this solidarity the people of the former Aboriginal History Committee sought a support network that could help them establish a national body. The forum was held because the transformation process of a locally operating group into a national Aboriginal organisation demanded contact with people outside the Sydney region. To be able to receive the support they thought it was necessary for them to convince the Aboriginal audience of the Aboriginal identity of the Committee. If they would succeed in legitimising their claim on an Aboriginal identity they would be able to establish a national body strong enough to face and challenge Australian society.

But according to Hollinsworth the discourse of Aboriginality as resistance has the ability to include non-Aboriginal people (1992) as it can include all those who recognise past and contemporary oppression and are willing to change this. This does not stay limited to people who consider themselves to be Aborigine but also offers non-Aboriginal supporters the opportunity to include themselves. Even though they do not share the individual experiences of past oppression, these people share a belief in current forms of subtle control over Aboriginal people's lives and feel responsible to take part in actions to change that situation. So, it is also the forward-looking character of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance (what

has to be changed in the future) that is able to bind both Aboriginal people as well as their non-Aboriginal supporters. The question is whether, and if so how, Aboriginal people allow non-Aboriginal people to be part of that or share in that form of Aboriginality.

With the analysis of the case of the NAHHC it can be determined how this inclusive character of the interpretation of Aboriginality as resistance works in practice. Can non-Aboriginal members be included in an organisation without harming its image of its corporate Aboriginal identity? To answer these questions I will first give an overview of the actions of the Aboriginal History Committee - the predecessor of the NAHHC - from 1994 until 1999 to be followed by a short analysis of the role of non-Aboriginal members and non-Aboriginal supporters from outside the organisation in its struggle. I will then analyse the case of the *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum*, which was organised in Sydney in July 1996 and led to the establishment of the NAHHC. The forum provides an insight in the internal discussions concerning non-Aboriginal membership that played a role before, during and after the establishment of the NAHHC. It clarifies processes of boundary setting in the process of building an Aboriginal corporate identity.

6.1 The National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council

I have chosen to analyse the case of the Aboriginal History Committee that later turned into the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC) because it offers insight in the process of the establishment of an Aboriginal organisation and the issues one deals with during this process. Although at first sight the NAHHC seems to differ from other Aboriginal organisations I studied - its non-Aboriginal membership and the fact that it focuses around one-issue - it looks actually very much like other Aboriginal organisations when they were set up in the 1970s. The issues the NAHHC deals with are comparable with the issues other organisations have dealt with when they were set up. After all, organisations such as the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Housing Company, also started as one-issue organisations and depended upon non-Aboriginal support or were set up together with non-Aboriginal people (Lyons 1984: 141).

Apart from that, the current position of non-Aboriginal staff in Aboriginal organisations remains underexposed so the issue of non-

Aboriginal membership is also relevant for Aboriginal organisations today that have been set up a long time ago. Many organisations employ non-Aboriginal staff members (such as lawyers, doctors and accountants). Even though these staff members are only hired for their expertise it can be assumed that these staff members have more influence than is often claimed. All Aboriginal organisations have an Aboriginal Board, which takes the decisions concerning policies and programmes. It is likely that these Boards sometimes have to resort to their non-Aboriginal staff for their knowledge and expertise on particular issues. Lyons sheds some light on the delicate relation between Aboriginal councillors and the employed lawyers working for Aboriginal Legal Services: “While the lawyers readily state a preference for working within policy guidelines formulated by the [elected Aboriginal] councillors, they will inevitably be policy makers.” (1984: 142) The same can be expected for other organisations working with non-Aboriginal experts.

6.1.1 The Activities of the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council¹⁰³

In 1992 a non-Aboriginal woman, whom I will call Christine, heard that there were plans to demolish a building in Elizabeth Street, in Sydney’s city centre, that was owned by the Cyprus-Hellene Club. The building however contained the Australia Hall, which serviced as the Mandolin Cinema. The Australia Hall was the place where Aboriginal protesters had asked for civil rights in 1938 and this was considered to be an “event which set the agenda for the contemporary Aboriginal political movement” (Aboriginal History Committee 1996a). The Aboriginal protesters announced on January 26, 1938, that Australia Day was a Day of Mourning for Aboriginal people (see also section 3.1.2).¹⁰⁴ The woman thought that for this reason the building in Elizabeth Street had been important for Aboriginal history and should therefore be saved from demolition. She wanted to obtain a Permanent Conservation Order (PCO) for the Australia Hall in order to save the building and recognise its importance to Aboriginal and therefore also Australian history. She contacted the descendants from the Aboriginal

¹⁰³ For a detailed account on the activities of NAHHC and its struggle to save the Australia Hall I refer to Mesnage (1998).

¹⁰⁴ For more about the Day of Mourning see Clarke (1965: 97-104).

protesters from 1938 who came from the rural towns of Lightning Ridge, Bourke, Wollongong, Newcastle and Lithgow and they agreed with her but because they lived in the country they could not practically support her.

After two years of lobbying the woman found support from some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in her class at the University of Technology in Sydney. Together they set up the Aboriginal History Committee in October 1994 and were able to gather more Aboriginal support. As a Committee they were now also able to attract the support of official bodies such as the Australian Heritage Commission, the National Trust and the Sydney City Council. The Aboriginal History Committee even became a member of the History Council of NSW. In November 1994 the Committee organised its first rally. In 1995 a commission of inquiry was held to evaluate the significance of the building and seventeen groups which asked for a PCO were heard. The Aboriginal History Committee was one of them. The report of the commission of inquiry recognised and included the historic significance of the building to Aboriginal contemporary history as one of the reasons to recommend that a PCO should be placed on the building (Simpson 1995).

One of the Aboriginal students had taken over the bulk of the struggle of the non-Aboriginal woman and had become the anchorwoman of the Committee. But in early 1996 she passed away and the non-Aboriginal woman took the lead again. Although the Committee now had an Aboriginal chairman, secretary and treasurer she remained the one person to be occupied full-time by the campaign to save the building. The case received its first media attention in February 1996 when the Aboriginal History Committee had invited the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Craig Knowles, to discuss his prospective decision on a PCO for the building (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2-2-1996). If the Committee would succeed in obtaining a PCO for the Australia Hall it would be the first building in Australia to be recognised to be important to Aboriginal history. With the upcoming decision of the Minister on the building the Committee organised its second rally in March 1996 to raise public awareness about the history of the building and to find more supporters for the case. The Committee grew into an organisation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members who held fortnightly meetings.

Initially, the Committee was set up to save the building in Elizabeth Street but this was regarded as an example of the broader goals the Aboriginal History Committee wanted to achieve, namely: the recognition,

respect, preservation and promotion of Aboriginal history and heritage. For this purpose the Committee aimed for the establishment of a national body with full legal status to, for example, advise on Aboriginal history and heritage issues. Until that time the Aboriginal History Committee had been a voluntary organisation without official recognition because it had not been formally established, for example under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (Australia)*. In July 1996 the Aboriginal History Committee organised the *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum* to establish a national Aboriginal body which would replace the localised Aboriginal History Committee and take up the broader goals the Committee aimed at. The forum was attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the field of Aboriginal history and heritage. As a result of the forum the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC) was established. From that moment onwards the Aboriginal History Committee in Sydney was replaced by the NAHHC and functioned as the administration of the national body as well as the local Sydney branch. Other branches were to be set up in the rest of the country by people who had attended the forum.

Shortly after the forum in July 1996 the NAHHC placed an “Aboriginal PCO” on the building of the Australia Hall (*Sydney Morning Herald* 13-7-1996) to protest against the inaction of the state government to take a decision in the case. In September that year members of the NAHHC managed to lead the rally to commemorate the death of John Patt¹⁰⁵ along the Australia Hall and include its protest in the rally. When the march passed the building in question the protesters spontaneously sat down on busy Elizabeth Street. That same month six members protested against the demolition plans of the Australia Hall during question time at Parliament House. They disturbed the session by standing up and asking the question why the MP’s did not want to address the issue of the preservation of the building in Elizabeth Street. Three of them were removed by security when they started shouting for justice. Outside the people that were removed awaited a warm reception of media reporters who were eager to listen to

¹⁰⁵ Every year a rally is organised through the city centre of Sydney to commemorate the death of John Patt, who died in custody, and all the other Aboriginal deaths in custody of New South Wales. Apart from commemorating the victims the participants in the rally also protest against the ongoing police brutality and the lack of improvement in police and prison cells which still causes a lot of Aboriginal deaths in custody to occur.

their story. One of the security guards even offered to hand over the box with a petition signed by 2500 people to Minister Knowles for the activists.

Soon after the protest in Parliament House the NAHHC heard that Minister Knowles had decided to lift the Interim Conservation Order. This meant that the building was not going to receive a Permanent Conservation Order. The NAHHC heard that the Minister's compromise was to retain half of the Australia Hall and keep the façade of the building intact to commemorate the Day of Mourning protest of 1938. But the NAHHC did not accept this offer. It wanted the whole building to be saved or nothing at all. So its members sought an injunction by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (*Sydney Morning Herald* 23-9-1996). They complained that Minister Knowles' decision was racist, because in NSW 629 PCOs were given to buildings that were important to white Australian history and not one PCO had been given to a building with importance to Aboriginal history. And now that the opportunity was there to grant a PCO to a building to recognise its importance for Aboriginal history the Minister refused. In October the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission found that the Minister's decision did not violate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Wilson 1996). Although the Commission admitted they would have preferred to see the Government save the whole building they stood behind the compromise that the Government had offered the NAHHC about keeping the façade and saving part of the Australia Hall. After this reaction the NAHHC decided to look for barristers who could fight their case in court.

While the former actions of the NAHHC had regularly received media attention the NAHHC members were convinced that their protest in November 1996 was boycotted by the media under pressure of the NSW Government. The NAHHC planned to hold a protest demonstration outside the Parliament House of NSW on the day the Labor Premier Bob Carr would pass his Reconciliation Resolution in the presence of prominent Aboriginal people. One of the invited Aboriginal women condemned the plans of the NAHHC to protest on that particular day and in a personal phone call with one of the members she asked the NAHHC not to go on with the protest. The NAHHC refused to listen to the woman's arguments and went ahead as planned. The protest was announced on ABC-radio, the national public channel, and the SBS¹⁰⁶ television-broadcast called Indigenous Cultural Affairs Magazine. To the surprise of the NAHHC none

¹⁰⁶ A national channel focussing on ethnic issues.

of the media people present at the protest reported about it the next day. Neither did the ABC or SBS follow up on the event they had announced.

Their suspicions that the Government was behind the media boycott were confirmed by a reporter of the Sydney Morning Herald in December 1996. She told the NAHHC she had written an article about the NAHHC but she had been called into the Department of Planning and since then any article of hers concerning the issue of the Australia Hall was suppressed. She stated that the Sydney Morning Herald was under political pressure and was afraid to receive a suppression order to prevent the paper from publishing any more stories on this subject. The NAHHC suspected the same had happened with the ABC and SBS, the two non-commercial television channels which had both announced the protest and had formerly often reported about the NAHHC's actions, because they had not followed up on the protest they had announced.

In November 1996 it was announced that only the façade would be protected. For the rest of the building there was an exemption order given by Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Craig Knowles, meaning that the whole building except for the façade, was exempted from a PCO. The new development would include the building of a new "Australia Hall" that would be accessible to Aboriginal people. One of the NAHHC lawyers thought that the exemption was given wrongly because the Minister had not followed the correct procedures under the *Heritage Act 1977 (NSW)* to get the exemption order. The Minister had made the decision by himself and had not consulted the Heritage Council. Under the correct procedures the Heritage Council should have been consulted and should have made recommendations to the Minister before the Minister could make a decision but that did not happen. The Heritage Council had thus far always recommended that the whole building should be saved from demolition. But that same month the lawyers representing the NSW government approached the Heritage Council and within a week the Heritage Council agreed with the compromise the Government had suggested.

In reaction to this development the barristers of the NAHHC filed a case under the Land and Environment Court. It took a long time to prepare the case, which would appear in court in July 1997. In the mean time, May 1997, a development application was filed to build a 36-stories tower on the place of the Cyprus-Hellene Club. In official procedures there are three weeks in which people can file a submission against the development plans at the Sydney City Council and the Heritage Council. Within these three

weeks 200 individual submissions were filed against the development application. They came from all over the country.

In July 1997 the court case was officially filed by the NAHHC. The night before the Heritage Council had to decide what to do on the basis of the submissions it had received the NAHHC organised a vigil in front of the building. It was a cold winter's night and some of the descendants had come over to join the vigil. Apparently the Cyprus-Hellene Club had heard about the vigil and closed the building so the members of the NAHHC had to sleep on the streets. Around 15 people, including some of the more than 70-year old descendants of the protesters had a sleep-in that night. The lawyers of the NAHHC came around to bring coffee at night and porridge in the morning. The vigil had attention three days running in the media and appeared on radio and television and in newspapers. The following morning, according to the NAHHC under pressure from the media attention, the Heritage Council decided to refuse the development application.

In September 1997 the lawyers from the NSW government paid a visit to the NAHHC lawyers and said that they thought their own Government was probably going to lose the case in court that would appear in April 1998. They decided to have a review of the case in October 1997 to come to an arrangement instead of continuing with the court case in April 1998. The lawyers recommended that the exemption order should be revoked so the PCO would stand on the whole building. The NAHHC agreed and also agreed to minor exemptions being made to make repair of some parts of the building possible. The Heritage Council took over this advice in its recommendations to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning.

On the third of February 1998 an official document was signed which revoked the exemption order. But it was not Minister Knowles himself that signed but the then Minister for Police Whelan who signed on his behalf. The NAHHC heard that the official reason was that the Minister himself was not available at that time. But Minister Knowles got back only one week later so the NAHHC members were of the opinion that Knowles could easily have signed a week later because the case was not going to be on until April 1998. They suspected that Knowles did not want to sign it himself because then he would have to admit that he was wrong in the first place when giving the exemption order. Apart from that, Knowles refused to work together on some sort of gesture of reconciliation or celebrating that

the NAHHC had saved the building. He did not want to have anything to do with the NAHHC.

The NAHHC wanted to plan a media conference when the order would be gazetted (put into official government documents) but the Minister refused to inform the NAHHC when it would be gazetted. In the mean time the NAHHC had organised a media conference and all the media turned up for nothing when it turned out the order was not gazetted yet. From that moment onwards the case lost media interest. The members of the NAHHC had to visit the library every day to see if the order was gazetted yet and eventually it was. But not only had the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning let somebody else sign the document for him he had also gazetted the order under Miscellaneous Gazettes under the Minister for Police and not under the Gazettes of Urban Affairs and Planning where it belongs. According to the NAHHC this was done on purpose so nobody in the future can find Knowles' "mistake" in the records and apart from that it also makes it hard to track down the historic take-over of the building by the NAHHC.

In April 1998 the NAHHC wanted to have a party at Parliament House to celebrate their victory but that was too expensive. So they went to the Lord Mayor who had always been supportive of their case. They reminded the Lord Mayor that the original Day of Mourning protest of 1938 was supposed to be held at Town Hall but at that time the protesters were refused access to Town Hall. The NAHHC saw this victory as an opportunity for the Lord Mayor to make up for that mistake in 1938. The Lord Mayor was happy to have the party at Town Hall and it was a big success. At the party one of the NAHHC-members flaunted the scale model of the 36-storey tower that she had stolen from the permanent exhibition at the Sydney City Council representing a model of the City of Sydney including its new development plans. According to the NAHHC Minister Knowles was infuriated with the Lord Mayor's party and sent a representative to the party to ask the Lord Mayor why he celebrated this event.

In December 1998 the federal government came up with money to purchase the building from the Cyprus-Hellene Club and paid around 4.5 million dollars. The building was handed over to the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, which became the owner of the building in Elizabeth Street. The NAHHC became tenants of the building. The Land Council also employed Heritage Councillors who work in the building.

When I last spoke to one of the staff members of the Land Council in 1999 she told me that the Land Council had plans to renovate the building before the Day of Mourning, the 26th of January 2000. Other plans involved turning the Australia Hall into a museum of Aboriginal heroes - telling the Australian history from an Aboriginal perspective - and renting out office space to the Redfern All Blacks sports club and lawyers and barristers to pay the rent for the rest of the building.

6.1.2 Outside Influences

In the above account of the NAHHC it becomes clear that the organisation could never have reached its goal and obtained the building in Elizabeth Street if it was not for the support they received from the sidelines. At crucial moments in the organisation's struggle to save the building there were non-Aboriginal people supporting the case of the NAHHC. Although the one and only person in charge of the actual decision - the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning - seemed reluctant to grant a PCO to the building, numerous other people and institutions were prepared to help the NAHHC to try to influence the decision of the Minister.

The media have played a constant role in reporting about the activities of the NAHHC in the newspapers and in giving their struggle airplay both on the radio as well as on television. Apart from that, numerous unknown supporters attended the rallies that were held throughout the years, contributing their money and even writing submissions in favour of the cause to save the Australia Hall. This also included several barristers who offered their services for free. It is likely that also the media played a role in the growing number of supporters that the NAHHC was able to gather over the years. Apart from the anonymous supporters, official institutions such as the Australian Heritage Commission, the History Council of NSW, the National Trust and the Sydney City Council offered their support and were quick to recognise the importance of the issues that the NAHHC fought for. As I have already written in section 3.1.3 non-Aboriginal support is indispensable when wanting to achieve something as an Aboriginal organisation in Australian society. The case of the NAHHC confirms this again.

However, one should keep in mind that when outside parties become involved they can have their own motivations to support or join an Aboriginal initiative just as was demonstrated by Anderson (1993a & 1993b)

for the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company I described in section 2.2.4. Whereas in the case of Anderson's account all alternative motives of the parties involved seemed to help the Aboriginal cause, not all non-Aboriginal support is as harmless as it seems. The involvement of non-Aboriginal supporters can pose a threat to Aboriginal causes when using ulterior motives that are not in the direct interest of the Aboriginal people. Throughout Australian history social movements have "hijacked" Aboriginal issues for their own purposes. I myself witnessed Aboriginal protests where there were more people present from political splinter groups who mainly represented their own cause than Aboriginal people for whom the protests were organised. The three social movements that are most known for getting involved in Aboriginal issues or involving Aboriginal people in their own struggle are the socialist - or red - movement, the Green movement consisting of environmentalists, and the New Age movement.

The socialist movement, represented by particular political parties and trade unions, often backed up Aboriginal struggles, such as the Pilbara strike of 1946-1949 and later the Gurindji strike (Burgmann 1993: 63). In the 1970s the Builders' Labourers' Federation was very supportive of the black movement, as was also shown in section 2.2.4. A more recent example is the way in which the rally following Budget Eve, as mentioned in Chapter 5, was a joint initiative of trade unions and Aboriginal organisations together. Also, many of non-Aboriginal members joining the NAHHC were members of left-wing political groups. However, some Aboriginal people claim that they felt used by some political groups and said that ever since especially left-wing political parties recruited Aboriginal members, Aboriginal people have been identified with such parties ever since.

Next to the socialist movement the environmentalist lobby has often hooked up with Aboriginal struggles. Especially the land rights issue has appealed to groups concerned with protection of the natural environment. Rowse (1993a: 111-117) writes how Aboriginal people and their cause were used by the Green movement. Unfortunately it is often the case that especially aspects of "traditional" Aboriginal culture, such as living in harmony with nature, are used as tools to demonstrate the defects of western society. For example, environmentalists use Aboriginal foraging as an example of an ecologically sound way of living, while academic studies have demonstrated that "pre-colonial Aborigines were conservationists by default ... [because of] their relatively low numbers and limited tool kit"

(Sackett 1991: 239). Also the NAHHC received support from the Green movement in the personification of Greenbooks, the bookstore where they rented office space and which was invited to have their own stand at the forum.

While there is nothing wrong with trying to protect the natural environment, the danger of involving Aboriginal people in such an issue, is that Aboriginal people can be identified with it while it has nothing to do with them. This became clear in the hearings of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair (see also R. Tonkinson 1997). In this affair two groups fought each other over the plan to build a bridge which would allegedly disturb an area which contained a secret Aboriginal women's site. What made the affair so interesting was that the opposing groups both included Aboriginal people. On one side were Aboriginal people who claimed that the area contained a secret women's site. They were backed up by environmentalists. On the other side were Aboriginal people who claimed that such a site never existed and was made up to strengthen the case for the environmentalists' sake. At the end of the inquiry the commissioners found that the women's site was fabricated. If this decision was correct, this means that Aboriginal people hitching on the issues of the environmentalist movement, endanger the credibility of other Aboriginal people who sincerely want to protect their sacred sites. If this decision was incorrect, it means that Aboriginal people's concern for the protection of their cultural property was confused with a concern for the natural environment. In both cases, the interconnectedness of the two motives - cultural as well as environmentalist - has negative effects for Aboriginal people.

Finally, the New Age movement is known for its involvement in Aboriginal issues. Although, the interaction is more a one-sided process in which the movement borrows concepts from Aboriginal cultures to incorporate into its discourse. Again, especially the idea that Aboriginal people are "living in harmony with nature" is extremely popular in these circles. Also, the concept of "The Dreamtime" - which plays a key role in Aboriginal religions - stimulates the imagination of people from the New Age movement and meets a growing demand for inner spirituality. In this same respect playing the didgereedoo, a traditional wind instrument made of a hollow log, became a popular pastime, as it is believed that its vibrations have healing powers. The international dispersion of simplified images of Aboriginal people on such a large scale can sometimes harm Aboriginal people more than it can do good. Whereas it can indeed

contribute to a growing respect for Aboriginal people and the things Aboriginal cultures can offer the world, at the same time it reduces Aboriginal people to a simplified image that seems to be used solely for the purpose of demonstrating the defects of contemporary western society. These practices bare close resemblance to the former usage of the image of the “noble savage” (Sackett 1991: 241).

6.1.3 Being Non-Aboriginal in an Aboriginal Organisation

While non-Aboriginal support from outside an Aboriginal organisation is mostly welcomed there is a difference in attitude when it concerns non-Aboriginal support from within the organisation because it can endanger the image of a corporate Aboriginal identity. Because the cause of the Day of Mourning site was raised by a non-Aboriginal woman the issue of non-Aboriginal membership has always played a role throughout the existence of first the Aboriginal History Committee and later the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC).

To give an impression of what problems non-Aboriginal members in an Aboriginal organisation meet I will shortly describe the experiences of Christine, the driving force behind the organisation. She took the initiative to save the building in Elizabeth Street from being demolished because it contained the Australia Hall, which, in her eyes was important to Aboriginal history. After years of canvassing Christine managed to gather a small support group of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. When they set up the Aboriginal History Committee they gained a steadier support of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. Official positions of chairman, secretary and treasurer were taken by Aboriginal people and an Aboriginal woman became the anchorwoman of the Committee. When the anchorwoman passed away, Christine felt obliged to continue the fight but realised that she needed more Aboriginal supporters to continue her actions. In the process of seeking Aboriginal support she encountered a lot of, in her words, misunderstanding and reluctance from the side of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organisations because she was not Aboriginal herself. As became clear at the introduction of this chapter, the Aboriginal History Committee had occupied different venues with several Aboriginal organisations but, in the eyes of the Committee, were “kicked out” because of their non-Aboriginal members.

Despite its official positions being taken up by Aboriginal people the legwork was done by Christine and in its liaisons with the media and other outsiders Christine played an important role. For example, in order to inform people about the upcoming forum in July 1996 the Committee needed to promote the event and the Aboriginal History Committee and seek contact with other Aboriginal organisations, the media and the general public. This especially caused a lot of stress for Christine. During a meeting held one month before the forum Christine warned that Aboriginal people were distancing themselves from the Aboriginal History Committee because white people were involved. She told how she was constantly being rejected and people refused to talk to her over the telephone because of her whiteness revealed by her European accent. This upset her very much. Other members responded that the media, the History Council of NSW, and the public all wanted to see and hear Aboriginal people. One of the Aboriginal members raised the issue that it was vital to change the name of the Aboriginal History Committee if non-Aboriginal people continued to be included because the name implied Aboriginal membership only. At the end of the meeting the Committee decided that all media coverage would be dealt with by two Aboriginal members in order to save the non-Aboriginal members further embarrassment.

Apart from that, also within the organisation Christine had had several clashes with Aboriginal members. At the forum Aboriginal people had questioned the way the Aboriginal History Committee had handled the issue of non-Aboriginal membership and had judged Christine personally for sometimes taking decisions without first consulting with the Aboriginal members. They told her it was time to step aside and let Aboriginal people finish the job. Also, halfway through 1998 the Aboriginal secretary who had worked together with Christine for the last two years left the NAHHC. She said she got fed up with Christine blaming her for not knowing how to listen to what the Aboriginal people want. The case escalated when an Aboriginal woman asked for the help of the NAHHC in returning some sacred artefacts to its original owners. Christine asked the Aboriginal secretary's help as an Aboriginal person but she did not help the woman quickly enough in the eyes of Christine. Then Christine asked another Aboriginal executive member of the NAHHC to help the woman because the artefacts had to be returned to their rightful owners. When the secretary heard about that she accused Christine of passing her by and not knowing how to listen to Aboriginal people. According to Christine she said

something like: "It is typical of non-Aboriginal people, they think we are all idiots. Non-Aboriginal people just do not know how to take orders from Aboriginal people." Then she stepped out of the NAHHC.

Finally, when, the end of 1998, the building was handed over to the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Christine felt passed by and left the NAHHC. The Aboriginal chairwoman of the NAHHC, who has a position in the Land Council, had told the NAHHC that the Land Council was now the owner of the building and the NAHHC a tenant. Christine was deeply offended by that remark. She felt that the Land Council had passed the NAHHC by because it did not have any say in what would happen to the building from the moment it was taken over by the Land Council. The NAHHC was not involved in the Metropolitan Aboriginal Association that was set up for the purpose of managing the building, neither were they involved in choosing the Heritage Councillors nor the future plans concerning the building in Elizabeth Street. Christine considered this to be unfair because the NAHHC had struggled for six years to get the building saved. But while Christine thought the NAHHC had deserved to have a say in the decisions based on its actions over the last six years the chairwoman had a different approach to the issue. When I had a talk with her in 1999 she stated that the people at the NAHHC should understand that the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cooperation was a necessity to achieve the goal of saving that building. Now that the fight had been won the NAHHC should step back and accept that it is now under the control of Aboriginal people (17-3-1999).

The first problem Christine encountered was the difficulty she had to find support for her struggle. I consider two factors to have played a role in this: Christine's view of Aboriginal history and the priority given to the cause. For one, Christine promoted a very progressive interpretation of Aboriginal heritage by claiming that the salvage of a European building was an Aboriginal cause. She considered the colonial building to be an Aboriginal site as it played an important role in contemporary Aboriginal history. Her interpretation contested the existing notions that limited Aboriginal heritage to anything pre-colonial implying, according to Christine, that Aboriginal history had stopped when Australia was colonised. As a consequence people accused her of looking at heritage from a western point of view. She was laughed at and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people claimed that a building could never be an Aboriginal site. The Aboriginal descendants of the 1938 protesters, however, had been

supportive from the beginning seeing Christine's pursuit as recognition of their ancestors' political struggle.

The critics of Christine's point of view all based themselves on the popular division of Australian history in which the pre-contact period and its cultural expressions are part of Aboriginal history whereas all especially material remains of post contact period belong to European Australian history. This implies that all buildings are part of European Australian history and can not belong to Aboriginal history. The strict division has been kept alive, not only by European Australians but also by Aboriginal people themselves who never publicly questioned this division. As a consequence Aboriginal and Australian history were often regarded as separate niches. But since the first contact between the two groups both Aboriginal people and other Australians share a history, meaning that Aboriginal history did not stop after contact. It is only recently that people, at least in the area of education, have started to realise that this is the case (see also speech of Tucker at the NAHHC forum 10-7-1996).

Next to the difficulty people had with the presentation of the Australia Hall as a building being important to Aboriginal history another factor made it difficult to find support for the struggle: the priority people gave to the issue of Aboriginal history and heritage. It turned out that after the initial canvassing of especially Aboriginal members, it was extremely difficult to find Aboriginal people to do work for the NAHHC. According to the Aboriginal members of the Committee the problems of representation in combination with non-Aboriginal membership were caused by the fact that they did not have the time to fulfil all representative functions. They agreed that most Aboriginal people who had the skills to work on this Committee were too busy with their own work in their own community or organisation. Or, as an Aboriginal member once said: "The problem is that there is a lack of Aboriginal people with spare time." During a meeting after the forum the Aboriginal chairwoman tried to comfort Christine by telling her she appreciated more input from non-Aboriginal people like Christine and said that Christine should not feel guilty about what she had done so far because: "most Kooris were just too busy to do the things you did."

This lack of time seems to stem from the priority Aboriginal people seemed to give to this issue. The preservation of Aboriginal history and heritage is not a number one priority compared with other issues other Aboriginal organisations deal with. Aboriginal people able and willing to work for "the Aboriginal cause" most of the time are already consumed by

their work for Aboriginal organisations dealing with more urgent issues such as education, housing, health and legal issues. This is demonstrated by the fact that some of the Aboriginal members of the NAHHC were already residing on more than 15 Boards and Committees and worked in daily life in Aboriginal welfare. This choice of priorities is understandable when realising that legal, housing, health and educational problems are more urgent than the salvage of a building that has never been considered important to Aboriginal history before. Hence, it seems that the issue started off as a personal issue that only became an Aboriginal issue after a period of time. I am convinced that Christine's personal persuasion played an important role in this. By talking to Christine people could convince themselves of her sincere interest in the salvage of the building in order to receive recognition for contemporary Aboriginal history.

The second problem Christine was confronted with was her own position as non-Aboriginal member in what had become an Aboriginal organisation. At the forum she was accused by some auditors that she all took it too personally and should distance herself from it. For Christine it was impossible to depersonalise the issue of non-Aboriginal membership because her role in the Committee had had a great effect on her personal life. As she told me in a personal conversation working as a non-Aboriginal member for an Aboriginal organisation had made her feel "lost". The work had given a dual character to her life. She felt she was neither accepted by Aboriginal people nor by other Australians. Within the NAHHC she would always remain an outsider because she is not Aboriginal. Through her work with Aboriginal people, however, she strongly identified with Aboriginal people. This made her an outsider to a lot of non-Aboriginal people in her environment as well. Because of this lack of acceptance among other Australians she had a hard time feeling at ease with white Australians.

She was confronted with the dilemma concerning the combination of her influence in the Committee and her European identity all the time. And she had had several clashes with Aboriginal people about her rights as a non-Aboriginal member. She herself was insecure about what she should do when no Aboriginal members were available to consult about certain issues that needed immediate action and she struggled with people from outside the Committee refusing to speak to her because she was not Aboriginal. During the existence of the Committee measures were taken to solve those problems. Aboriginal members were put on representative tasks and at the forum Aboriginal members took on important tasks and an assistant was

found to help out Christine with the administrative work. Why then, did this not solve the problems for Christine?

The answer lies in the way Christine herself dealt with the situation. To explain her way of handling the issue of non-Aboriginal membership I first need to explain the general issues that play a role when both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members are united in one Aboriginal organisation. In a situation where this is the case there is automatically an unequal division of powers amongst the members of the organisation. But whereas normally power is distributed according to someone's place in a hierarchical structure or according to someone's specialities, in this case the power is distributed according to identification. In a mixed-membership organisation Aboriginal people are always more right than others. This is a fact in a society where an oppressed people have liberated themselves and demand control over the issues that concern them. This demand is legitimised by history and is therefore the accepted practice in Aboriginal organisations. Official institutions underline this demand for full control by only funding those organisations with Aboriginal board members only.

However, as a non-Aboriginal member, there are different ways to respond to this demand of full Aboriginal control. Most non-Aboriginal members understand and accept the demand for full control. They want to participate because they feel a responsibility being part of Australian society with its history of oppression. As one non-Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee explained: "I work on the Committee because I feel that if you are not active in the Aboriginal cause while living in this land you are supporting the genocide that is still going on." Another member claimed that: "by living in Australia you have the responsibility to do something for the Aboriginal cause." These people agree with Aboriginal people that there are still oppressive and discriminatory practices going on and they want to contribute to "the Aboriginal cause" and help change the current situation. To avoid any attempt of control or influence over Aboriginal people these members unconditionally accept the Aboriginal control over the organisation.

There is also another way of participating as a non-Aboriginal member in an Aboriginal organisation. Instead of accepting Aboriginal control unconditionally one can also choose to accept the Aboriginal control only under certain conditions. In my view, this is what Christine did. Because she had been involved in the struggle from the beginning, even when there were no Aboriginal supporters present, it was really "her" struggle even

though she never admitted that in so many words. The issue of saving the building and getting the new notions of Aboriginal history and heritage accepted seemed more important to her than the Aboriginal control over the cause. Throughout the whole process Christine did everything to keep some form of control over the struggle. This suggests that it was only because it concerned an Aboriginal issue that she needed Aboriginal support to achieve her goal. Otherwise Australian society would never have accepted her claims of knowing something about Aboriginal heritage.

Although Christine had always claimed she wanted to hand over the cause and the organisation to Aboriginal people I have the strong impression that she was never really prepared to do that. Or, at least, she had not realised the implications of handing over full control to Aboriginal people. During the talk I had with her in 1999 I confronted her with her stubbornness to continue to play a major part in the struggle even after officially handing over all control to Aboriginal people at the forum. She said that she was so stubborn because of a spiritual experience that she had which gave her the strength to continue the struggle. She continued that if she had listened to the "Aboriginal voice" in the first place the building would never have been saved because nobody supported her in the beginning.

It seems that she had only accepted Aboriginal control under particular conditions. The first condition was that the Aboriginal people shared the same goals as her. The second was that the Aboriginal members of the NAHHC were representatives of the Aboriginal community. The third condition involved that there should be consensus among the Aboriginal representatives. While the first condition was met after several years of canvassing and gathering a group of Aboriginal people who indeed shared the same goals as Christine did, the second and third condition involved particular assumptions about Aboriginal people that in practice turned out to be quite different.

Christine had an idealist view on "the Aboriginal community". She told me she had the feeling that the Aboriginal people themselves did not consult one another or spoke for the whole community. As the case discussed in Chapter 8 will demonstrate, within the Aboriginal community there are different opinions and conflicts of interests. Christine's view of the Aboriginal community also involved the existence of full consensus among the members of the Aboriginal community. She told me she found that the individual Aboriginal executives gave her tasks that opposed each other

and she did not know whom she should listen to. Because the Aboriginal executives did not answer to Christine's expectations of "Aboriginal representation" she had difficulty accepting that the legitimacy of their control over her was based on their Aboriginal identity. She was disappointed with the fact that Aboriginal people could order her around on the basis of their Aboriginal identity while she could never defend her actions because she is not Aboriginal. When considering this case the question remains whether it is permissible to accept Aboriginal control over Aboriginal issues only under certain conditions, as Christine did. While it would be politically correct to say that this is not permissible it is too easy to dismiss Christine's choices as wrong. After all, if it had not been for her self-willed choices the building in Elizabeth Street might never have been saved.

Concluding, one can say that the cause concerning the Australia Hall developed from a personal struggle, including Christine and the descendants of the protesters involved, into an Aboriginal struggle. This happened because more and more people, both Aboriginal as well as other Australians, took over Christine's point of view that a building could be important to Aboriginal history and because Aboriginal people started participating in the struggle. Thus, apparently for an issue to become an Aboriginal issue it has to be accepted as such by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and needs to be supported and promoted actively by especially Aboriginal people. One can also conclude that all parties involved have made use of one another to achieve their goals. While, on the one hand, Christine had used Aboriginal support to achieve that her struggle was recognised to be an "Aboriginal" struggle, on the other hand the Aboriginal people used Christine and her supporters to receive control over a historically important building in Sydney's city centre.

6.2 The National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum

The following case analysis focuses on two parts of the business session at the *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum*, held in Sydney in July 1996, concerning membership and name of the organisation. The forum was organised by the Aboriginal History Committee to "discuss the establishment, nature and structure of a national Aboriginal history and heritage body and to network with interested parties in the fields of Aboriginal history and heritage" (Aboriginal History Committee 1996b: 1). The members of the Committee wanted to transform their local one-issue

organisation, focused on saving the Day of Mourning site, into a nationally operating body concerning the recognition and preservation of Aboriginal history and heritage. The members of the Aboriginal History Committee also hoped to solve their problems concerning non-Aboriginal membership at the forum. All responsibilities would officially be handed over to Aboriginal people so the national body would be a genuine Aboriginal organisation. It would gain formal recognition by forming under the appropriate Act and the Committee members hoped to find Aboriginal people who were willing to take over the tasks of their non-Aboriginal members. If the forum would not succeed in setting up an Aboriginal organisation the Aboriginal History Committee would cease to exist. Because of the major input of non-Aboriginal people in setting up the Aboriginal History Committee and in organising the forum, some form of non-Aboriginal membership for this organisation would be desired.

During the first day of the forum Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal keynote speakers in the field of Aboriginal history and heritage gave lectures on a range of subjects, such as: intellectual property rights, what has been achieved since 1938, Aboriginal history education and heritage law. The elements of Aboriginality that were mostly emphasised during these speeches corresponded with what was said during the oral submission of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern in Chapter 5. Elements of Aboriginality as resistance were used again. Only in this case it did not so much create a division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal auditors but served as a unifying force. The second day of the forum started with four workshops in which the draft guidelines on incorporation were discussed. In the afternoon this was followed by a business session in which the establishment of a national Aboriginal history and heritage body was to become a fact.

6.2.1 The Legitimacy of Non-Aboriginal Membership ¹⁰⁷

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee and Aboriginal guest speaker: We suggest an open membership but the majority of the Board of Directors must be Aboriginal.

¹⁰⁷ I only disclose those parts of the business session that involved the issues of membership and the name of the organisation.

Aboriginal audience member: The whole of the executive should be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The full membership (with voting rights) should be available to Aboriginal people and associate membership (without voting rights) should be available to non-Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal guest speaker: Aboriginal people need help in the partnership with non-Aboriginal people to fight for basic human rights. I ask the audience not to exclude non-Aboriginal people from the group. Look at Nelson Mandela, who is now visiting the Queen of England. He has fought outside the black community with non-black people. Given the current political climate things can only get worse for Aboriginal people. And that is why we need the support of non-Aboriginal people. Our history is their history. And part of who we are is because of them.

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: Christine was the main establisher of the Aboriginal History Committee. Christine did it all. It was a voluntary job and everybody was very committed. We had to learn to work together. It was a hard conception and birth. But we did it. In the new national body the up-front staff needs to be done by Aboriginal people to keep faithful to our roots but we need an open membership. We should not forget about Eileen. We have to realise where our limits are and set ourselves within those limits. The control of the Committees should be with Aboriginal people but we should give non-Aboriginal people a say in it too.

Aboriginal audience member: White people need to be here to support us. But we have to do this ourselves. There is a younger generation out there that can help us and I think black people can do things too. The white people have to step back and let us walk by ourselves. We only have one Aboriginal doctor. White people who want to help us should be there to help us but they have to let go of our hands. We have to look to the future. So I am in favour of Aboriginal voters and if white people really want to help us they will be there anyway.

Aboriginal audience member: I have experienced that we lost all our rights to white people with the right ideas. They all wanted to help us. And they did so by writing academic papers about us but we own the Aboriginal history. It is time that we take our history back into our hands. And if we do not have full membership for Aboriginal people we exclude the ATSIC. They are the biggest funding body for Aboriginal organisations. And under this Government it may be our only funding.

Christine: I would like to thank the Aboriginal people who have spoken in favour of non-Aboriginal involvement. As a non-Aboriginal person in an Aboriginal organisation it is very hard because you are not accepted by the media and other Aboriginal people that get into contact with you. I do accept that Aboriginal people have the final decision and the right to vote but I feel that the non-Aboriginal people need some rights too. They need some responsibilities and guidelines to what they can do. What does a non-Aboriginal person have to do if there is

no Aboriginal person available at the time? Does this person have to skip opportunities because there is no Aboriginal person there to make a decision?

Aboriginal guest speaker: A non-Aboriginal person should always ask permission from an Aboriginal person before doing anything.

Christine: But in the past I was not always able to reach the Aboriginal people involved. I would like to know exactly what decisions I can make without Aboriginal people available.

Aboriginal guest speaker: Those Aboriginal executives are only a phone call away.

Christine: That is not always the case.

Aboriginal guest speaker: But what if you make the wrong decision?

Christine: That is what I am worried about.

Aboriginal chairwoman: Christine is always there at the office and she does everything. It is a matter of trust. We build that trust between ourselves. We would love to have 25 Aboriginal members. I begged everywhere to come to our meetings but I did not get any Aboriginal support. The issue is not us but the Aboriginal history. We need to get the history out.

Aboriginal audience member: It is about rights. We need to exercise those rights. But they [non-Aboriginal people] should be there to help us. I thought this conference was to broaden Aboriginal participation of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal audience member: You want more support so why draw on the past when everything is going to change? If you want us to cooperate you are going to have to accept some changes.

Aboriginal audience member: Get Aboriginal people from other States.

Aboriginal chairwoman: If we can have 25 Aboriginal members then there is no problem so lets move on to the next issue.

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: I suggest we vote about the incorporation now with Aboriginal people only.

Different audience members say that he can not do that because they were all invited to this conference so they should all have a say. He then puts forward the motion that the national body will be incorporated and will have full membership (with voting rights) for Aboriginal people and associate membership for non-Aboriginal people. The audience agrees and accepts the motion that option 3 is implemented unanimously. (10-7-1996)

At the business session the issue of membership is discussed. The issue is strongly connected with the so-called corporate identity of the organisation that is going to be established. During the session different arguments are voiced in favour of and against non-Aboriginal membership. I have distinguished two types of arguments voiced during the discussions: practical and moral arguments. First, there are practical arguments that

favour mixed membership. Those in favour emphasise the need for non-Aboriginal support. One speaker mentions Nelson Mandela to demonstrate the importance of “outsider” support. It is a practical argument in which outsider support is used as a strategy to achieve Aboriginal people’s goals. This practical argument is strengthened by the remark that: “The issue is not us but the Aboriginal history”, meaning that the end justifies the means. Another practical argument is the fact that the Aboriginal History Committee has had difficulty in the past to find enough Aboriginal people available to do the work. This left the Committee with no other solution than to resort to non-Aboriginal supporters who *did* have the time to work for the community.

Apart from the practical arguments a moral argument is also given why non-Aboriginal people should be included. It is especially the first guest speaker who points out that “Our history is their history. And part of who we are is because of them.” This remark recognises that Aboriginal identity and Aboriginal history are intrinsically connected with Australian identity and Australian history. The idea behind this argument is that what has been created together needs to be changed together as well. It also creates the opportunity for non-Aboriginal Australians to take part in the rehabilitation of Aboriginal history and heritage and thus to make up for things that have gone wrong in the past.

But there is still a lot of mistrust when it concerns the incorporation of non-Aboriginal people into the struggle of an Aboriginal group. When looking at the arguments against non-Aboriginal membership the moral arguments outnumber the practical ones. One of the practical arguments mentioned against non-Aboriginal membership is the fact that one can not lay a claim to ATSIC funding because it is based on the full Aboriginal membership of an Aboriginal organisation. During past discussions within the Aboriginal History Committee, however, it turned out that similar constructions with associate membership do appear in Australia. One example is the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. This would weaken the used practical argument. Other arguments against non-Aboriginal involvement used during the discussion mainly have a moral character. One of these arguments directly opposes the moral argument in favour of non-Aboriginal membership. While the first guest speaker said that “our history is their history” an audience member claims that “We [Aboriginal people] own the Aboriginal history”. This argument stems from the speaker’s bad experiences with non-Aboriginal “help” in the past when

he argues that: “we lost all our rights to white people with the right ideas.” Apparently it is still hard for many Aboriginal people to trust non-Aboriginal people to work solely for the benefit of Aboriginal people and not take over Aboriginal control. Other speakers confirm this distrust with remarks like: “The white people have to step back and let us walk by ourselves ... White people who want to help us should be there to help us but they have to let go of our hands.”

But at the same business session their distrust of white people taking over is partly confirmed by Christine’s personalised view on the subject, especially as to the struggle concerning the building in Elizabeth Street. She touches upon the practical difficulties concerning non-Aboriginal members without responsibilities when she gets into a short discussion with one of the guest speakers who argues that: “A non-Aboriginal person should always ask permission from an Aboriginal person before doing anything.”

The discussion that follows underlines the main problems that stand at the basis of non-Aboriginal membership: the issue of trust and rights. Although the importance of trust is recognised during the forum by some: “It is a matter of trust. We build that trust between ourselves”, others see trust as a personal issue that has nothing to do with setting up an Aboriginal organisation with mixed membership. The latter view it as a matter of rights. Aboriginal people have fought in the past to gain rights to self-determination and they do not want to endanger them by involving others. Despite several practical and moral arguments mentioned at the business session what it comes down to is if people trust non-Aboriginal people to contribute to an Aboriginal struggle in a way that Aboriginal people find acceptable and not a threat to their self-determination, then there should not be a problem. But trust is a very personal issue so there is no univocal answer to give on the question what position non-Aboriginal people should take in the organisation and what tasks, responsibilities etc. their role should entail.

6.2.2 What’s in a Name?

Aboriginal guest speaker: An Aboriginal name should be chosen from a local language.

Aboriginal audience member: Because it is a national body it should not have a local name. That is something the smaller committees could do in a later phase.

Aboriginal guest speaker: The name should include Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: We should go back to those men who protested in 1938. I want to honour their role, the role they played in Aboriginal history. I suggest something that is an amalgamation of their names.

Aboriginal audience member: I would like to say something about the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders. I feel that Aboriginal history and heritage is about the Aboriginal cultures. The Torres Strait Islander culture is well protected. They have their own bodies to take care of that. They have only been associated with us by white law. But we should keep it 'Aboriginal'. The Torres Strait is a very well preserved, very small area. They are able to preserve that themselves.

Aboriginal audience member: I agree that if it is a national body you should not focus on New South Wales.

Aboriginal audience member: Why not option 3? (National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council, see Aboriginal History Committee 1996c)

Aboriginal audience member: Network?

Aboriginal audience member: National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council?

Aboriginal audience member: Association for Aboriginal History and Heritage?

Aboriginal audience member: Doesn't the Australian Security Commission decide the name?

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: It does not matter what the name is. Under the ATSI Act it only needs 'Inc.' in the name.

Aboriginal audience member: Under the Watch Committee you need to synchronise with special requirements.

Aboriginal audience member: You have to be a non-profit organisation.

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: For ATSI it has to be an Aboriginal controlled organisation and the name does not matter.

Non-Aboriginal person from Greenbooks that has been displaying the books they sell on Aboriginal culture and history: It does not really matter, you can always change. We should find a catchy name.

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: Black Urban Militant? ... National, Aboriginal, History, and Heritage...

Aboriginal audience member: Mob.

Aboriginal audience member: Did we include Torres Strait Islander people?

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: I also have a problem with the word 'Aboriginal' I would prefer my nation's name.

Aboriginal audience member: You should include all the nations names then because it is a national body. And that is just not possible.

Aboriginal audience member: Australia's First Peoples?

Aboriginal member of the Aboriginal History Committee: That is used in the United States by the American Indians. I put a motion to call the new national body the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council.

The motion is accepted. Five people object. (10-7-1996)

Connected with the issue of membership is the name of the organisation because a name mirrors what an organisation stands for and whom it represents. During the business session the name of the new body turned out to be a complicated matter of inclusion and exclusion. Some of the people present suggested local names from Aboriginal languages or Aboriginal nations. One of the guest speakers present had actually once suggested to adapt a local name for all Aboriginal people in one of his books:

It is out of respect for the memories of the Eora, my ancestors and other surrounding tribes that I will use the word Koori and to identify fully as a Koori. I would also like to see this word become a term of national identification for all Kooris living in Australia today. (Miller 1985: vii)

The problem with Miller's wish to adapt the term *Koori* on a national scale involves the same problems as the usage of the term *Aboriginal*: it does not allow for a regional distinction and forces Aboriginal groups to identify with only one group who actually call themselves Koori. What Miller's suggestion does achieve is that it abandons the term that was introduced by western society and replaces it with a term original to at least one Aboriginal group. The suggestion to use local names was not accepted by the audience during the session either because the organisation to be established was to become a national body so its national character should come out in the name. Another suggestion that circumvented this problem was the suggestion of "First Peoples" but this term was seen to be claimed by American Indian groups and did not reflect the Australian character of the body to be established.

Of the remarks made about the name the one made about the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders is one of the most interesting. Since a couple of years the governments in Australia always include Torres Strait Islanders when talking about the indigenous people of Australia. Its use can be found in names of numerous institutions related to indigenous affairs, such as the ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), the AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), and NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee). But also indigenous people themselves have incorporated Torres Strait

Islanders in their names, such as FCAATSI (Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders) that no longer exists, and NAISDA (National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association).

The rejection of the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders is something I had heard people discuss before. At one of the meetings of the Aboriginal History Committee where the topics of the upcoming forum were discussed some people suggested to include the topic of Torres Strait Islander history. This idea was immediately rejected by two Aboriginal members with the reaction: "Why do they always have to come in? The Government only recently made up that category and put them in everywhere." The main reason for the rejection of the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders in the above fragment is "the Government's involvement". Categorising both Aboriginal people as well as Torres Strait Islanders under the category of indigenous Australians may be technically correct but as this categorising is done by the Government it is viewed as an attempt of the Government to force Aboriginal people into new categories. Because this has been done in the past Aboriginal people have expressed their need to categorise and define themselves. Apart from the government's involvement, it is because both indigenous peoples do not share the same contact history in the eyes of these Aboriginal people that the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders is regarded as undesirable. (see also section 4.2.2)

Eventually the majority at the business session agreed to use the word *Aboriginal* in the name. Although most people present felt uneasy with the term and do not like to use it, according to them it was the best option available to represent all Aboriginal people from Australia. After all, it turned out that the term *Aboriginal* suits the newly established organisation best. This illustrates how contemporary Aboriginal people identify with a concept that was originally created by non-Aboriginal Australians and that Aboriginality which is a construction of others is used for the purpose of creating a unity between people who identify as Aboriginal. This part of the session in which the name is discussed is a clear illustration of the acceptance of the term *Aboriginal* as a uniting element to make solidarity and collaboration on a national level possible. Although people reject the term itself and prefer to use their local names they are aware of its unifying capacity as opposed to the dividing character of local names.

Keeping up the legitimacy of an Aboriginal organisation with mixed membership remains a precarious activity because non-Aboriginal members do not add to the corporate Aboriginal identity of an organisation. On the basis of the case of the NAHHC one can conclude that in order to be accepted as an Aboriginal organisation in the first place, the organisation has to be concerned with an issue that is generally accepted to be an *Aboriginal* issue. When this is not the case the organisation lacks a solid basis of Aboriginal support one needs to enhance the credibility of the Aboriginal character of the organisation. With the NAHHC for example, it was demonstrated that an Aboriginal issue can be debatable and that an issue can become an Aboriginal issue even though it was not considered as such before. However, the Aboriginal support of the issue proved indispensable to the NAHHC's struggle.

Second, one needs to make sure that for the outside world it can be made clear that all control over decisions made within the organisation lies with Aboriginal executives. Aboriginal members of such organisations can give this guarantee either on the basis of the limits they have set for their non-Aboriginal members or on the basis of their trust in their non-Aboriginal members to take the same decisions and follow the same line of thought as themselves. How the organisations divide tasks or decisive control over their non-Aboriginal members within the organisation does not really matter, as this is a question of trust, which varies from person to person. What matters is that the Aboriginal executives can guarantee that their non-Aboriginal members do not endanger the Aboriginal right to self-determination.

The case of the NAHHC showed that the implication that non-Aboriginal members who play a prominent role, such as Christine, have some influence or control over the decisions of the organisation, can cause some problems in gaining recognition from both Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal outsiders. Even though within the organisation there might be a possibility to give non-Aboriginal members more leeway, as was done within the NAHHC, in liaison with outsiders it needs to be careful not to give the impression that non-Aboriginal membership undermines the Aboriginal right to self-determination. When confronted with this problem, the NAHHC tried to avoid this impression by allowing Aboriginal members only to represent the organisation to the outside world and thus reassuring them. It needs to be said here that this also poses problems for Aboriginal representatives who "do not look their part".

Third, the organisation needs to have a name and a structure that reflects the Aboriginal character of the organisation and that leaves no obscurities concerning non-Aboriginal membership and the rights of those members. For this reason the people participating in the business session at the forum granted voting rights to Aboriginal members only but left room for non-Aboriginal people as associate members without voting rights. In this way all control within the new organisation would lie within the hands of Aboriginal people, without excluding the supportive power of non-Aboriginal members.

Especially the second requirement to remain recognised as an Aboriginal organisation - control should lie with Aboriginal people only - can have its consequences for the people involved. In practice it means that there is always an unequal relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members within an Aboriginal organisation. Aboriginal members automatically have authority over other members on the basis of their identification as Aborigine. The inside story of Christine demonstrated that non-Aboriginal members can react in different ways to this dependent position in an Aboriginal organisation. Whereas most non-Aboriginal members unconditionally accept what Aboriginal executives ask of them, Christine did not. She did not accept directions purely on the basis of the identification of the person concerned but on her personal judgement on whether she thought those directions to be good for the cause or the organisation in general. This led to continuing problems between Christine and Aboriginal people, either within or outside the organisation.

So, if non-Aboriginal membership is such a complicated matter that can endanger the corporate Aboriginal identity of an organisation, why then are there still organisations around that accept non-Aboriginal members? As became clear after the initial description of the activities of the NAHHC non-Aboriginal membership also has its advantages. For example, by doing the legwork in an organisation, non-Aboriginal members can save the Aboriginal members time to spend on what the latter consider being more urgent issues. Also, non-Aboriginal members bring in their own network of non-Aboriginal people through which the support group of the organisation can grow. Finally, by working together for the same cause both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members recognise that they have a shared history, which they can change together. Also, despite these difficulties, the NAHHC has demonstrated by its achievements that it is possible as a mixed

membership organisation to be recognised as a legitimate Aboriginal organisation and reach the same goals.

Claims on Culture: Aboriginal Organisations and Their Clients

While outside the sun has turned Eveleigh Street into a tropical zone, inside a former storage building, the air-conditioning system makes the temperature bearable. Downstairs the building is occupied by Auntie Polly Smith Early Childhood Centre. Upstairs people are sweating in the fitness centre above. The room of the Centre is small and its walls are covered with posters about health issues, such as the healthy food pyramid. Some of the posters are especially made for Aboriginal people and use colourful Aboriginal paintings or the red, yellow, and black colours of the Aboriginal flag. In a small rack several informative leaflets are displayed. Some of them are made by the Aboriginal Medical Service while others are produced by state health institutions. The space is furnished with an old sofa, a desk, and some second-hand chairs. Children's toys are lying in a corner to keep the young clients of the organisation occupied.

Today the Young Mothers Programme organised by Mudgin-Gal in cooperation with Auntie Polly's is attended by several young Aboriginal mothers. Some of them are accompanied by their own mothers and their children. For today's session the instruction video *Women's Health Business: Birth Spacing*¹⁰⁸ is shown. The video is about family planning, birth control, and how too many babies in a short time span can affect the mother's health. In the video only Aboriginal people appear. It starts with a song by an Aboriginal band, singing: "Treat her right because she holds the key" (referring to the mother of the family). The people in the video say that Aboriginal people in traditional culture used to have special bush medicines that would make women infertile. There were also taboos, which regulated family planning. For example, men were forbidden to have sex with women while they were breast-feeding to make sure that there was enough space between the newborn and the next child. After the video the staff members and the participants talk about abortion and contraception. (26-9-1996)

¹⁰⁸ Instruction video about birth spacing produced by the Aboriginal Women's Resource Centre, Darwin.

The above case is an example of interaction between staff members of Aboriginal organisations and their clients. The use of specific informative material focused on Aboriginal clients, as described above, is one of the many ways in which staff members of Aboriginal organisations try to service their clients in an “Aboriginal” way and reflect their organisation’s view on Aboriginality.

In Chapter 5 I have demonstrated that Aboriginal organisations tried to legitimise their corporate Aboriginal identity through the emphasis on specific elements of Aboriginality when they were interacting with outsiders, people who are not affiliated with the organisation. The organisations emphasised the notion of Aboriginality as resistance over other notions of Aboriginality because of its capacity to unify all Aboriginal people in Australia and to distinguish them from non-Aboriginal Australians on the basis of shared experiences of oppression, dispossession, and survival through resistance.

In this chapter I will focus on how the Aboriginal organisations try to legitimise their Aboriginal identity towards their Aboriginal clientele. In order to receive (financial) support the organisations need to legitimise their own corporate Aboriginal identity because support is only given on the basis of their Aboriginal character. A crucial factor in the recognition of an individual’s Aboriginal identity in Australian society is the recognition of this identity by the Aboriginal community. The same goes for the Aboriginal organisations. So, in order to be recognised as Aboriginal organisations by financial institutions they need a confirmation of their corporate Aboriginal identity from the community they work for. Without the support of their clients the organisations would lose their credibility and their claim to the function of representatives, thus endangering their credibility with the general public and funding institutions. This can only be given by clients who come from the community(-ies) to be served by the organisations. So how do the organisations secure the support from their local community? Do they emphasise specific notions of Aboriginality, as they do in interaction with an outsider audience?

In each welfare organisation staff members have the responsibility to treat their clients well but in the case of Aboriginal organisations their treatment is expected to be a reflection of the corporate Aboriginal identity of the organisation as well. An Aboriginal organisation is expected to look, act and be Aboriginal from top to bottom. To look Aboriginal is a matter of having enough Aboriginal people working for and running the

organisation. This is a relatively simple matter which is also taken care of under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (Australia)* which only recognises organisations as Aboriginal under particular conditions, such as a full Aboriginal Board of Directors. The Aboriginal-look of organisations can be created through the employment of a majority of Aboriginal people and using symbols of Aboriginality, such as the Aboriginal flag etc.

But apart from looking Aboriginal, organisations also have to act in an Aboriginal way. This means that their policies and programmes should reflect Aboriginal values, and activities and service delivery should be dealt with in an Aboriginal manner. To be able to find out what the organisations consider as Aboriginal values I will present two cases of educational programmes. In these programmes a unique form of interaction takes place between organisation and clients which enables the organisation to carefully create a vision on Aboriginal values which it can then convey towards its audience without interference. Apart from such educational programmes, informative material that the organisations produce for their clients, such as leaflets, posters, and videos can fulfil the same role. As with educational programmes, written or taped material can be carefully created and is available to a relatively large audience. It depends on the way the Aboriginal organisations look and act if they are to be recognised as *being* legitimate Aboriginal organisations. But before I come to that I will first give a short description of the relation of Aboriginal organisations with the Aboriginal community where their clients come from.

7.1 Aboriginal Organisations and the Community

The Aboriginal organisations that are the subject of this study are called *community-based organisations*. The name that is used for the organisations is problematic as the term *community* implies that the organisations are dealing with a coherent unity when communicating with their clients/members. Since the introduction of the self-determination policy the term *community* has been used to denote separate Aboriginal groups defined by territorial boundaries, such as groups confined to a certain suburb, country town or former reserve.¹⁰⁹ The difficulty with the usage of this term is the assumption that communities are homogeneous entities,

¹⁰⁹ For an extensive account on the implications of the use of the concept *community* in Aboriginal Australia I refer to Smith (1989).

which are able to make decisions for that particular group (Cowlshaw 1988: 101). But most of these communities are composed of Aboriginal people with many different backgrounds.

The main feature of the organisations is that their services are available to the members of the community in which they are based. The size of the actual service area differs per organisation (Appendix 11). Some of the Aboriginal organisations only cater for the inner Sydney suburbs while others cover large areas of New South Wales. Sometimes it is hard to stay in touch with the community because many of the organisations operating in Redfern are at the same time head offices of services delivered all over the State or even the country. Organisations that collaborate with sister-organisations in formal networks have divided New South Wales into service areas in which they are operative. Normally these areas are much larger than those of organisations, which operate individually. Take for example the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern and the Aboriginal Children's Service: their service areas stretch far beyond the boundaries of metropolitan Sydney, covering thousands of square kilometres. This makes South Sydney, and Redfern even more, a very small proportion of the population that needs to be catered for.

But the term *community-based* suggests that the community plays a role in these organisations. As a staff member of one of the organisations said: "It grows out of the community and is controlled by people from the community". (23-3-1999) With the first part of her statement she refers to the fact that the organisations were set up by people from the Redfern Aboriginal community (Eggleston 1977, Fagan 1984, Faine 1993, Lippmann 1992, Lyons 1984). As I have written in Chapter 2 young Aboriginal people who had just moved to Redfern and saw their friends arrested sought the help of legal professionals which led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern. Mum Shirl, also a resident of Redfern, brought people together to discuss the setting up of the Aboriginal Medical Service. And the *goomies*, squatting in Redfern, were involved in setting up the Aboriginal Housing Company with support of others. Listening to the stories the people told me that were involved in setting up those organisations there is no doubt about who took the initiatives. Although many of the people involved in establishing the organisations are still involved, most of them no longer live in Redfern.

About the second part of her statement I can say that in order to assure continuing community involvement, structures were created to provide the

Aboriginal community with the possibilities to have an influence in the running of the organisations. Every organisation has its own Aboriginal Board, which is elected by the members of the organisation on a regular basis. Sometimes membership is free to every client who uses the organisation, other organisations ask for a membership fee. Fagan, who worked for the Aboriginal Medical Service for a long time, remarks that although the fee system “makes community control possible ... it can not ensure that it occurs” (1984: 19).

Although the system of elected Boards could work quite well, in practice, it does not always run smoothly. The *National Inquiry into Aboriginal Legal Aid* in 1986 found that some Aboriginal Legal Services failed to operate from a community base and instead were in the hands of a small group. In Redfern some Boards seem to have the same people on as twenty years ago, which in itself is not a bad thing. But I have heard people complain about the impenetrability of some Boards which are accused of only recruiting new members within the informal network. Also, the practice of family networking has its influence on the Boards because especially family networks are powerful in building a large support network. This could be an oppressing factor in allowing new faces to enter the scene.

Apart from an Aboriginal Board, all organisations employ Aboriginal staff members only, except in the cases where it is not possible to find Aboriginal people with specific skills. In that case, the non-Aboriginal staff members are only hired for their skills and do not have a say in policy directions, except when making use of their expertise on a particular subject. Examples are: the solicitors who work for the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern and the doctors at the Aboriginal Medical Service. Of the Aboriginal staff members most live in the South Sydney area but only few live in Redfern itself. I encountered four Aboriginal staff members who lived on the Block. Although I must emphasise here that the division between Redfern and other South Sydney suburbs is artificial.

Another way in which the Aboriginal organisations try to maintain their relationship with the community is through the Aboriginal field officers the organisations employ. They play an important role in maintaining the relationship between the organisations and the local community (Harkins 1986, Lyons 1984). The officer’s task is to keep the community informed of the services available and to stay in touch with the community. Not only does the field officer keep in touch with the

community but he also provides an important link between the organisations as service-providers and the Aboriginal client. As was discussed in Chapter 2 the field officer was first used by the Aboriginal Legal Service in order to bridge the gap between the services of the solicitor who normally doesn't have time to spend on TLC (Tender Loving Care) and often talks in difficult jargon while the client needs attention and needs to understand what is going on.

Aboriginal field officers are valuable because of their knowledge and communication skills. This became clear to me when I visited a 15-year old boy in a juvenile detention centre together with a solicitor and an Aboriginal field officer of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern. The field officer was invaluable in gaining trust from the boy and making him feel comfortable. He established contact with the boy by telling him that he knew some members of his family. Also, the field officer made sure that the boy's answers to the solicitor that took his statement were interpreted correctly because as an Aboriginal person he was familiar with the general problems Aboriginal people often cope with, such as reading and writing problems, homelessness and living with extended family members.

Despite the efforts to maintain a good relationship with their community, during my stay I noticed that people often complained about the organisations. One of their main criticisms involved the lack of time the organisations had for them. As a consequence people made all kinds of accusations, such as organisations being in the hands of certain families and only providing services to their own people. I seek the reasons for this lack of attention first and foremost in the lack of resources the Aboriginal organisations have. Especially the chronic lack of staff and funding forces the organisations to set priorities, which can result in either poor quality of services or the inability to serve every client. The effect of this is a growing dissatisfaction among clients who feel they are not helped properly or not helped at all. Dagmar found that "[the] inability [of Aboriginal organisations] to attend immediately and successfully to all the needs of community members turned the cooperatives [he worked with] into a scapegoat." (1990: 114)

Other reasons for the lack of attention are the size of the service areas and the number of other tasks the organisations fulfil. When an organisation caters for a large part of the New South Wales Aboriginal population it can give people the idea that they are not the organisation's first priority. Whereas organisations who only cater for the inner Sydney

population can focus all their attention on one community. Also the extra functions some organisations fulfil in the political arena can create a feeling of neglect. These time-consuming, but important, tasks do not come to the direct benefit of the local community but rather serve larger populations with long term results. The clients expect, however, fast and accurate response to their needs.

7.2 Sharing Culture: The Saturday and After School Programme

During the year 1996 the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) organised the Saturday and After School Programme. I have chosen this case for analysis because it highlights the elements frequently emphasised by Aboriginal staff in interaction with their clients in a simplified manner as the programme is focused on children. Besides, together with the other case to be analysed in this chapter, the Young Mothers Programme, these programmes give an overview of Aboriginal values as I have heard Aboriginal people - staff members and community members alike - discuss during my fieldwork. The cases complement one another in the usage of their notions of Aboriginality in their programmes.

The Saturday and After School Programme is organised weekly by the ADTR for Aboriginal children between 5 and 15 years of age. Although mainstream schools might offer some education on Aboriginal culture they are not offering the total package as it is offered by the ADTR.¹¹⁰ Most children live either in Redfern or a neighbouring suburb. The programme aims to familiarise children with their Aboriginal background in a playful manner. During the session described below the ADTR's studio is filled with about fifteen children. Before their classes start they run around, play, or practice dances in front of the big mirrors, which cover the walls. The programme consists of a cultural class in the morning, followed by: jazz class, creative repertory class, "tradmoves" (traditional movements) class, arts and crafts class in the afternoon. The culture class is arranged by two Aboriginal elders from the Indjibundji Tribal Cultural Dance School in Western Australia who travel through Australia to teach different

¹¹⁰ Although education on Aboriginal Studies is being offered in mainstream secondary schools it is not compulsory. Since 1994 however, high schools have to offer the students the choice to follow a course on Aboriginal Studies. The only schools in Sydney offering education to Aboriginal students only concern Preschools for very young children, such as Murawina, and higher education institutions such as Tranby and the Eora Centre.

Aboriginal children about their culture. The other classes are taught by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers working for the ADTR.¹¹¹

At the start of the cultural class, *nanny* and *poppy*¹¹² - this is what the children call their teachers - sit down and tell the children they all have to sit down with crossed legs. When one of the girls changes her sitting-position *poppy* asks her to cross her legs again. He says that she was showing parts of her to him that did not show any respect. You have to sit cross-legged to keep your own parts to yourself. They greet the children in a foreign language and the children repeat their words. They practice some sentences meaning: "Hello, How are you?", "I am fine." etc. *Poppy* explains that this is the Indjibundji language from the Indjibundji people in Robourne, Western Australia. He says that his father was a Wiradjuri from New South Wales but of course he speaks his mother's language because everything goes via the mother.

Then the teachers start with a prayer. *Poppy* says the prayer out loud and the children repeat after him. In the prayer he pays respect to the four seasons and the creators from the Dreamtime. *Poppy* and *nanny* explain to the children about caring and sharing and how it is a part of Aboriginal culture.¹¹³ After this, a non-Aboriginal teacher joins to do a special dance with the children so they can thank their teachers who are here for the last time. Everybody stands in a big circle. They walk towards the middle of the circle and shake their hands. Then they walk back. The movements honour the sun, the moon, the sea and the rocks. After that, everybody takes a step to the left. Now everybody is standing on his or her neighbour's spot. This is to show that they are friends, the teacher says. By letting other people stand on their spot they offer each other friendship. The dance is repeated several times so that everybody has moved several places from their original spot.

Next the children sing an Indjibundji song. It is about clapping your hands and stamping your feet to show that you are happy. Then the non-Aboriginal teacher teaches the children the *broлга*¹¹⁴ dance. They all form a circle and the children imitate her movements. They depict how the *broлга* digs for food, picks his food, and flies. While they do the dance *poppy* is imitating the sounds of the *broлга* with his didgeredoo. The dance is followed by a meditation session. I am asked to join in and together with the children I lie on the floor of the studio. We have to close our eyes and *nanny* tells about the bush by night and the kangaroos and other animals that are in the bush while *poppy* plays the didgeredoo again and imitates the sounds of the different animals. Then he walks around the children with the didgeredoo so its vibrations are felt when he walks by. I have been told before that these vibrations have a

¹¹¹ The fragment below consists of a compilation of two sessions.

¹¹² *Poppy* and *nanny* is Australian slang for grandfather and grandmother.

¹¹³ The reason why the teachers do not use the term *Koori* in their sessions is because they come from South Western Australia where Aboriginal people call themselves Nyoongar.

¹¹⁴ Grey cranebird living in the wetlands of Arnhem Land in North Australia.

relaxing effect. When the session is over, nanny tells the children that today they have shared information about their culture. (21-9-1996)

To teach the children about Aboriginal culture they learn the ideological value systems through the use of cultural expressions which are said to belong to Aboriginal culture: such as the use of a specific language and specific teaching methods, such as oral delivery, song and dance.¹¹⁵ During the programme the children are taught simple conversation in the Indjibundji language. The Indjibundji language was never spoken in the area around Sydney, and is thus a foreign language to Sydney Aboriginal people. But it does not matter which Aboriginal language is used, it matters that an *Aboriginal* language is used and not English, stressing that Aboriginal people share a different past and a different heritage - like the hundreds of different Aboriginal languages - than the rest of the Australians.

The use of Aboriginal languages from other regions in Aboriginal educational programmes is seen more often. For example, in Victorian schools - in Melbourne where no traditional language survived - the Bandjalang language that originates from the Lismore area (in northern New South Wales) was taught (Crick 1981: 52, Fesl 1979). This demonstrates that local knowledge can be shared in order to help other Aboriginal people. In this case the people in Melbourne were taught Bandjalang to be given a part of Aboriginal culture that they had lost. This project saw Bandjalang not as a local language restricted to one nation but as a symbol of shared Aboriginality between the Bandjalang people and the people from Melbourne. This is comparable with Hollinsworth's observation that particular "ways" or "rules", originating from specific groups, are generalised to be used in educational programmes (1992: 145, see my earlier reference in section 4.2.3).

Apart from the use of another language the teaching methods used during the culture class are said to reflect an Aboriginal way of teaching. According to the teachers in traditional Aboriginal society children were educated through song, dance, and story-telling. In the culture class the emphasis lies on passing down knowledge on Aboriginal heritage through oral tradition (story-telling and singing), illustrated with visual aids (dances which make use of certain movements and signs providing the visuals) and

¹¹⁵Keeffe writes about the importance of teaching traditional Aboriginal dances to Aboriginal students by learning them that they are Aboriginal (Keeffe 1988: 70)

creative interaction (meditation which makes use of the possibility to visualise in one's own mind and imitation of movement).

Nanny closes the cultural class by telling the children that she and poppy have shared information about their culture with them. Through emphasising this she stresses the importance that lies in the act of sharing information. Although she does not say it, her remark also means that sharing information is not something you just do with anybody. You have to make sure that you want to share the information and that the people you share it with will treat the information with respect. It shows how conscious the teachers are of their role in the enculturation process of these children.

What the children have learned during this programme are some elements which are important to Aboriginal heritage. I have distinguished them in three categories: the social environment, the spiritual environment and the ecological environment. Although these elements are difficult to separate because they are intrinsically interwoven I treat them separately for analytical purposes. They have learned that as Aboriginal children they possess a distinct heritage from other Australian children. By creating a family atmosphere and stressing the importance of caring and sharing the teachers taught that kin relations take an important place in the lives of Aboriginal people which is contained in mutual respect and care for one another. They were also taught about Aboriginal cosmology and the way Aboriginal people (used to) see the world. Apart from that the teachers also tried to let the children feel their spiritual connection to the land in order to explain to them that all flora, fauna, natural phenomena and humans are interconnected. Central during the programme is the way in which specific cultural elements belonging to the Indjibundji nation are used to convey a general message, which is also applicable to the Redfern children who come from different nations. The general message involves the existence of an Aboriginal heritage that distinguishes the Aboriginal children from other Australian children on the basis of these shared elements of the past. The combination of these forms of education and its contents make the classes unique.

7.2.1 Social Environment and Kin Relations

The first element important to Aboriginal heritage concerns the social environment. The teachers emphasise especially the importance of kin

relations. This can for example be seen in the way the children call their teachers *poppy* and *nanny*. The terms *poppy* and *nanny* are affectionate terms for grandfather and grandmother and serve as “indicators of affiliation and affection” (Schwab 1988: 80).¹¹⁶ The use of family names frequently occurs within Aboriginal organisations even though there is not a real family relation. Especially around children terms as *auntie* and *uncle* are used when referring to staff members of an organisation. What these terms do is to create a certain familiarity between the children and the adults. They also create a family atmosphere and reduce the distance between the teachers and pupils. By giving these people family names they are no longer strangers but become “part of the family”.

But also outside organisations Aboriginal people sometimes refer to people as *bro(ther)* or *sis(ter)* even though there is no actual kin connection with these people. By referring to good friends or colleagues in kin terms a possibility is created to extend the kin network although in a strictly biological sense they are not related (Schwab 1988). But not only do Aboriginal people refer to others or treat others as family even though they are not, when it comes to actual family no distinction seems to be made between the relation of, for example, two brothers or two distant cousins. I remember on my first visit to Australia that one of my Aboriginal friends found out that a stranger in a pub was one of his distant cousins he had never seen before but heard about. They greeted each other as if they were long lost brothers who had been intimately befriended for years.

These practices suggest that the important kin network stretches beyond the nuclear family and includes extended family members. This is confirmed by the size and composition of urban Aboriginal families. When the first Aboriginal people migrated to the city they lived there in large families (Lickiss 1971: 208, 224, Smith and Biddle 1975: 69-70). Also nowadays Aboriginal households tend to be bigger than the average Australian household. Many people live with extended family members or in larger family groups including, besides the nuclear family, also grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts. A large number of these families are matrifocal. Especially in the poorer suburbs of large cities there are a lot of single-parent families run by single mothers.

¹¹⁶ Because these names are used by other teachers as well I am not sure if the children use the terms by their own choice or if these terms are handed down to them by the teachers calling each other by such terms.

Aboriginal people in Redfern regard these family structures as part of their heritage that has been passed on for hundreds of years from generation to generation, thus as a continuity of the past when Aboriginal people used to live in groups consisting of a number of extended families. Some academics, however, seek the reason of this so-called continuation in the economic advantage. For example, Gale claims that the extended family is not so much an ethnic feature but one that is shared with different ethnic groups from the same social class (1977, cf. Eckermann 1988: 31). In situations of poverty sharing is a way to lower the costs, a way of survival. Bigger family groups are maintained by people of lower social classes for economic reasons. And so does a large part of the Aboriginal population living in the poorer suburbs of large cities, claims Gale.

Another way in which the importance of kin relations is taught to the pupils during the programme is the teachers' exercise in which they try to explain the importance of caring and sharing. First poppy and nanny try to explain what caring and sharing means and they illustrate their lesson with a dance. With the dance the importance of friendship among everybody is stressed as the children learn how to "offer their space" to their neighbours. This is to teach the children that they should share and be tolerant to one another. By including movements, which are said to honour the sun, moon, sea and rocks, it is made clear that people also have a responsibility to care for the natural environment.

Loyalty towards kin is a very important aspect of Aboriginal culture according to the Aboriginal organisations. While in pre-colonial times and in contemporary remote Aboriginal communities the "Aboriginal Law" prescribes specific rules concerning rights and duties towards kin, in the contemporary urban environment the principle of caring and sharing offers a guideline to maintain family relations. People are supposed to help their family members at all times, to care for them in times of trouble and to share with them in times of need. Examples of this were seen in the early days of migration to the cities when migrating families moved in with family members who were very important in familiarising the newcomers with their new environment, a life in the city and providing help (Pierson 1977a: 52, 1977b: 319, 1982: 199-200). Family should always come first. During my fieldwork people stressed that they shared everything (cf. Gale 1977: 331) and condemned those who did not. Other indigenous people are known to have similar principles. For instance, for the Maori people in New Zealand the principle of caring and sharing, which is also referred to as

manaaki, is a way to maintain kin relations or “love for kin”, called *aroha*, (van Meijl 1990: 77-86).

Caring and sharing does not only entail attention and support in times of need but a continuing interest in one another. Kin relations need to be maintained through regular and intimate contact. Regular contact with family members varies from having a quick yarn while passing each other on the street to a family visit in the country (or people from the country coming to Redfern). As the House of Representatives shows in a survey of Aboriginal people in Sydney’s southwest: “95 per cent of families maintain contact with other Aboriginal families, and families visit other members of their families slightly less than once per day” (1992: 212).

The intimacy of these relationships is reflected in the attention and support people offer each other. One way of expressing this is the attendance of someone’s funeral. By attending a funeral people do not only pay respect to the deceased but also offer mental (and sometimes practical) support to the people who are left behind.¹¹⁷ This intimacy is not just sought or expected from nuclear family members but stretches as far as people know or remember their kin.

This close relationship with the family and the importance of loyalty towards the family is often stressed in contrast with western family practices. When talking about their own family, people often condemn what they perceive as the western way. Many Aboriginal people argue that they take better care of their relatives than westerners do. The latter do not spend enough time with their family, place their work before their duties towards family members and even put elderly and handicapped people away in special institutions instead of taking care of them themselves. In Aboriginal perception, apart from the lack of care for their family western people also have difficulty sharing. Western culture is seen as an individualistic and greedy culture. Such contrasts were creatively stressed in the film *Baba Kiueria*¹¹⁸ in which Australian society was mocked by presenting Australia’s contact history through the use of inversions of both Aboriginal and western cultural elements.

¹¹⁷ This is also very important in Arnhem Land, see Borsboom (1994).

¹¹⁸ The short film *Baba Kiueria* depicts a reversed version of Australian contact history starting with Aboriginal people invading a land called Baba Kiueria (from *barbeque area*) inhabited by western people. The film was produced by Julian Pringle and released by ABC, Sydney 1986.

7.2.2 Spiritual Environment and the Dreamtime

Apart from the social environment the teachers also give some attention to what I call the spiritual environment. During the programme the importance of spirituality comes to the fore when the children are taught to pay respect to spiritual powers through a prayer. Through using a form (the prayer) and a subject (the four seasons) which are likely to be familiar to the children the teacher tries to convey respect for the spiritual world into a way that is understandable for children without a "traditional" background. The actual form and contents are not as important as the lessons the teacher is trying to get across. One of those is the appreciation for the creating powers that played a role in the Dreamtime. But another lesson is that the children have a heritage that is distinctly different from other Australians. As R. Tonkinson says: "the specific content of 'tradition' may be less important than desired outcomes relating to confidence-building and pride in an Aboriginal identity." (1999: 140)

To be able to understand what the teachers are trying to impart to their pupils I have to introduce some of the basics of "traditional" Aboriginal cosmology. The term *Dreamtime* or *the Dreaming* is a translation of the Aranda word *Altjiringa* from Central Australia. It turned out to be a mistranslation as the term emphasises time "as a period preceding the present day, human time, referring to the sacred period before humans came into existence" (Borsboom 1993: 11-12). In Aranda language however the concept means, "experiencing the eternal" referring not to "a category of time but a class of events" (ibid. 12). According to Charlesworth (1984) the term has different meanings. First, it refers to a mythological period before humans inhabited the earth and during which world was created through the travels of ancestor heroes. In the Dreamtime world-creative powers travelled the land and gave it shape through singing and through the adventures they encountered on their travels. Not only did these beings give the land its current shape, they also created or brought forth plants, animals, natural phenomena and human beings. Through their shared origin all plants, animals, humans and natural phenomena are related. The travels of the world-creative powers have related clans with specific places and spiritual powers belonging to that place and the animals living on it. Second, the Dreamtime refers to "the embodiment of the spiritual power of the ancestor heroes in the land, in certain sites, and in species of fauna and flora, so that this power is available to people today" (1984: 10). Third, the concept refers to the Aboriginal way of life according to "The Law" which

was founded in this mythological creation process. The last meaning of the word refers to the individual connection people can have with specific sites in the landscape that are connected with ancestor beings.

Maddock distinguishes the transcendental powers, which stand in the same relation to all people, from the totemic powers, which are associated with specific clans (1972: 112). This system can be compared with American Indian totemism. Totems are plants, animals or natural phenomena that have special meanings for the clans to which they are related.¹¹⁹ Through their more localised travels and adventures they shaped the natural environment and cultural environment for clans by creating special features in the landscape and laying down "The Law" and passing down rites and ceremonies. In Australia the totems are also called *dreamings*. Each group thus has/had its own dreamings. Some people in the city told me they still have a special connection with what they know is their dreaming. There are taboos surrounding people's personal or clan dreaming. For example, according to people I worked with, people can not eat their own dreaming because it is like eating family.

Although the Dreamtime and its dreamings still have a lot of relevance for those people who live on their own land it has another meaning for those people living in the city. In Sydney the Dreamtime is not so much an all-encompassing concept which plays a role in all aspects of life as it does for example in Arnhem Land. For them it functions more as a historical point of reference and can serve as a philosophy in which all living beings are related with one another and with the land they are living on. Through this connection with the natural world people are responsible to take care of it as if it were their relatives. The traditional Aboriginal Law does not necessarily have to be applied to live according to this philosophy. Instead people can translate it into a more spiritually susceptible and environmentally friendly way of life. Also, for Aboriginal people who are converted to Christianity or who do not practise any religion the Dreamtime can have this meaning.

Urban Aboriginal people regularly stress that they have the ability to maintain a connection with the spiritual world, referring both to spirits of ancestors or other deceased relatives, as well as spiritual powers from the natural world. Many times during my fieldwork I witnessed people sharing their spiritual experiences with one another. Whenever people talked about such experiences they treated the subject very seriously. People often had

¹¹⁹ For more information on totemism in Australia I refer to Stanner (1984).

predicting dreams or eerie feelings about the future, saw apparitions, were able to get in touch with spirits of their deceased relatives or had other spiritual revelations (cf. Barwick 1988, Bryant 1982: 75, Eckermann 1977: 301-309, Schwab 1988: 92).

Also the Dreamtime stories (creation stories about the adventures of the creator- beings) and Dreamtime-figures serve as powerful icons to convey the message of a distinct Aboriginal heritage. Both the figures starring in the stories, such as the mythological rainbow serpent and so-called mimi spirits, as well as clan dreamings serve as icons of Aboriginality. They are used in numerous forms of artistic expressions such as films, theatre productions, and dance performances. As illustrations they can be found on walls, print-work, such as logos or educational material, and paintings. The depiction of these figures is often accompanied by the use of traditional techniques (dot-painting, X-ray technique). People make use of traditional movements in dance, traditional ways of performance (such as story telling), or painting techniques as hand-printing or dot-painting.

Together the philosophy behind the Dreamtime as well as the numerous mythological symbols connected with it serve as powerful means to distinguish Aboriginal culture from western culture. On the one hand it places the Aboriginal culture historically in opposition to Australian culture. People claim it to be the “oldest surviving culture in the world” while the colonial history of Australia only dates back to 1788. On the other hand it places Aboriginal culture spiritually in opposition to Australian culture. Whereas Aboriginal people consider themselves to be spiritually connected to the natural environment surrounding them, it is generally believed that in western culture people consider the natural environment to be a resource to be exploited. According to Aboriginal people I spoke with these spiritual abilities are said to be an inherent part of being Aboriginal. Aboriginal people have been able to hold on to this ability because they stayed in touch with the spiritual world, as opposed to western people who are said to have lost that connection because it was suppressed by western culture. According to them, the reason why western people often ridicule spirituality, regarding it as superstition or folk-beliefs, is their own incapability to connect with the spiritual world.

7.2.3 Ecological Environment and the Importance of Land

Besides the social and spiritual environment the teachers also give some attention to the ecological environment. For example, by doing the brolga dance the children are taught how the brolga lives. Hence they are familiarised with an animal that has been important to Aboriginal culture and economy in the past and still is important to Aboriginal people living in remote areas where the brolga lives. In these areas Aboriginal children are still taught this knowledge in the same way to make them familiar with the animals surrounding them. These children learn from their parents by imitating their dances - often depicting certain animals - as well as imitating their parents' hunting and gathering practices (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 163, Grimshaw et al 1994: 15). By knowing how the animals live and behave people are able to catch them to serve as food. Although this purpose is no longer served when teaching such a dance to urban Aboriginal children who might never have seen a brolga, it *does* teach the children that they have a distinguished heritage from the Australians surrounding them. It shows them that animals were important to Aboriginal people in the past and are important today for Aboriginal people living elsewhere (e.g. the Northern Territory).

During the programme also the meditation practice is meant to teach the children the connection Aboriginal people have with their ecological environment. In this exercise the teachers stimulate the children to establish a spiritual link with the land and the animals living on it. With the brolga dance they tried to offer knowledge about the connection with land and living creatures while with the meditation session they tried to let the children establish a spiritual connection with the land and its inhabitants in their minds. Also the other dance which emphasised on offering space to friends included an element of the ecological environment. During that dance the children were honouring the sun, the moon, the sea and the rocks. Together these exercises (the dances and the meditation) teach children about the interconnectedness of people, animals and land through a spiritual connection.

In the past this interconnectedness gave people the feeling that they could not survive without their social, spiritual and ecological environment. The ecological environment was valuable to the people in different ways. First, economically the land provided the people with plants and animals

they could feed from.¹²⁰ Second, the land had a spiritual value with its places where the world-creative powers and dreamings had walked the land and after that became dormant in the landscape. Third, it provided the people with a sense of belonging. Through the Dreaming all Aboriginal groups were related to places, natural phenomena, flora and fauna. Their sense of identity strongly depended upon the ecological environment surrounding them. Especially in remote communities the land still plays an important role in providing Aboriginal people with their individual as well as their social identity (Borsboom & Hulsker 2000). As Trigger writes about contemporary Aboriginal identity in Northern Australia:

an aspect of the social identity and status of all individuals is entailed in their ascribed affiliation to country. To the extent that people engage in politicking, in managing this affiliation, their status through publicly acknowledged links to country is also an achieved status. (1992:113-114).

Indigenous people around the world share this affiliation with the ecological environment which is reflected in the issue of land rights being an international focal point of indigenous actions and movements. It is one of the most important themes in indigenous independence movements around the world (see for example Maddock 1991 and Peperkamp & Remie 1989).

In contemporary Sydney the land and its flora and fauna have a different meaning to Aboriginal people. Its economic value is no longer determined by the amount of edible plants and animals living on it but its real estate value on the contemporary capitalist market in Australia. When looking at the Local Aboriginal Land Councils operative in the Sydney area it can be seen that land is often claimed on the basis of this economic value. The Councils try to receive land rights over plots without particular cultural value for the purpose of obtaining economic assets. With these assets local Aboriginal communities can gain a level of economic independence. Sometimes the plots are used to build Aboriginal organisations on. One example of such urban land rights are all the houses that are owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company in Redfern and some of the other suburbs and the plots Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council bought to build

¹²⁰ Nowadays people in rural and remote areas try to re-establish this economic value of the land to them by pursuing hunting and gathering rights and the right to exploit the land in other "traditional" manners.

their own office on. On other occasions these Local Aboriginal Land Councils try to regain access to and land rights over areas with a cultural and historical importance. Especially when ancient Aboriginal sites and artefacts have been found in the area they try to get access to Aboriginal sites to be able to take care of them.¹²¹

The historical value of land is especially important to those people who are dispossessed of or have lost contact with the places they originated from because apart from the economic value also the connection to the land is different. It is not so much the actual spiritual connection to specific pieces of land as the dispossession of land - and the negative economic consequences for Aboriginal people because of that - that now provides people with a certain identity (landless). Even though a lot of Aboriginal people living in Sydney no longer maintain spiritual links with certain areas - apart from perhaps a nostalgic link with the place they grew up¹²² - they regard the land as very important to Aboriginal culture. Some of them even regard the loss of their link with the land as the main reason for their feelings of displacement, while living in the city. The city being a foreign place from which one can not flee home as there is no land to go home to. For urban Aboriginal people their acclaimed connection with the land can better be compared with the symbolic meaning of land to Aboriginal heritage.

Just as family relations and the Dreamtime, the relation with the ecological environment, or rather the connection with land, is also often used to stress the differences between Aboriginal and western culture. Western people are often thought to be incapable of understanding the importance of land the way Aboriginal people see it because they only regard the importance of land in terms of monetary value instead of, for

¹²¹ There are several reasons why it is hard for these councils to receive land rights over property in the Sydney area. First, to claim back land on the basis of a direct, family-related link with the land is nearly impossible because most of the Sydney tribes were eradicated and the contemporary Sydney Aboriginal people come from somewhere else. Second, only unalienated Crown Land can be claimed back. But there is not a lot of Crown Land left in the Sydney area because it was all claimed by urbanisation etc. Especially the Aboriginal sites that the Land Councils are interested in are difficult to access and nearly impossible to claim by law because most of these sites are either on private property or situated in a national park. In the last case the sites fall under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)* making them the property of the NSW government.

¹²² Although Keen claims that “[D]espite dispersal people remain attached to a general locality of origin” (1988: 8, see also Young 1982: 9).

example, spiritual value.¹²³ In the play *Pinjareb Pinjarra*¹²⁴ which I visited, the actors made an illustrative statement about this: “westerners put a fence around everything and then they think it belongs to them.” As opposed to western people it is thought that Aboriginal people do not own the land, the land owns them. So they have a responsibility to take care of the land. These notions of Aboriginal people’s or other indigenous people’s connection to land are often used by environmentalist groups in order to denounce the capitalist and exploitative nature of western society (see 6.2.2).

7.2.4 Authenticity and the Invention of Tradition

The themes described above are said to be part of what the Aboriginal people in Redfern call their Aboriginal heritage. Heritage is generally seen as a body of knowledge and cultural practices that has been passed on from generation to generation originating in a distant past. The themes as emphasised during the programme can, however, raise questions about their authenticity as they are often considered adaptations of “genuine” Aboriginal culture still being practised by remote Aboriginal communities. The question is to what extent those themes that are used by staff members of the organisations to depict an aspect of Aboriginal culture are (consciously) fabricated or are part of a cultural continuity. Are practices such as caring and sharing a continuance of past practices or are they constructed as a counterbalance against their surrounding western society?

This fabrication of traditions and the related idealisation of the past has been the subject of discussion for many years. In their book *The Invention of Tradition* Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) gave an overview of different traditions that were created and histories that were romanticised which had later formed the basis of new nation states. Hobsbawm defines what he has called invented tradition as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition”

¹²³ Harrison mentions a study of western farmers in New Zealand who claimed to have a spiritual connection to their land (Dominy 1990, 1995). The study was criticised by Maori people who felt that the farmers had “unjustly appropriate[d] Maori values, and plagiarise[d] the language of indigeneity and connectedness to the land” (1999: 242).

¹²⁴ The play concerned the historic Pinjarra massacre in Western Australia and was performed by Kelton Pell, Trevor Parfitt, Geoff Kelso and Phil Thomson. I viewed the play at the Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney (15-3-1996)

(1983: 1). Hobsbawm himself saw these traditions as a continuance of the past. But because the term *invention* refers to something new, never seen before, it is a contradiction to regard something that has continued from the past as an invention (van Meijl and van der Grijp 1993: 638). For this reason, the term invention *by* tradition is also used.

It seems that Hobsbawm and Ranger¹²⁵ wanted to uncover which traditions were authentic and which were not. But “authenticity” is not the issue because everything is interpreted and used by people.¹²⁶ Also van Meijl and van der Grijp remark that Hobsbawm “fails to acknowledge that all traditions in both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ societies are inseparable from their interpretations, and that they invariably serve ideological functions” (1993: 638). Heritage or tradition is not so much a static collection of age-old values, which can either be handed down properly or manipulated, but rather an ever-changing, ever-developing concept, of which the shape and contents are strongly dependent upon people giving it its shape and contents. As also van Meijl and van der Grijp say the past “is reviewed, reformed, and redefined according to present needs and desires” (1993: 639, cf. R. Tonkinson 1997: 12). Besides, in order to reconstruct the past people often depend on sources written by anthropologists and historians who also play a role in the construction and interpretation of traditions and histories (cf. Wagner 1981).

The staff of the Aboriginal organisations, as other ethnic minorities and indigenous people who have something to gain, are sometimes accused of shamelessly manipulating the past in order to fit their political goals. But the question is whether these accusations are valid. One can not judge other cultures for their authenticity because it is inherent to human societies to adapt their past and their traditions, either consciously or unconsciously, in

¹²⁵ After a storm of critique on the initial article of Hobsbawm and Ranger, Ranger has later formulated a reaction which he clarifies how the notion of invention of tradition should be used (Ranger 1993)

¹²⁶ Sometimes, however, the stakes can be high and questioning the authenticity of knowledge is unavoidable. A good example of the complexities involved with determining what is “authentic” traditional knowledge is given by the Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair as described by R. Tonkinson (1997). In this case, some Aboriginal women’s claim that there was a secret women’s site present which would be desecrated by the construction of the bridge. Other members from the same Aboriginal community, however, claimed that this was not true.

a way that it is beneficial or useful in the present (Sahlins 1993, see also Keesing 1989: 24).¹²⁷ As Sahlins points out:

When Europeans invent their traditions ... it is a genuine cultural rebirth, the beginnings of a progressive future. When other peoples do it, it is a sign of cultural decadence, a factitious recuperation, which can only bring forth the simulacra of a dead past. (1993: 8)

For the people in Redfern it is only logical that their culture is a continuation of what was in the pre-contact period, although they recognise the vast changes to their culture. The people I worked with regard change, and especially the ability to adapt, as an intrinsic aspect of their culture. As I wrote in section 3.2.4 Aboriginal people regard the resilience and flexibility that are inherent to Aboriginal cultures as one of the reasons why their cultures have survived. For them it is clear that change does not equal discontinuity of their culture.

Although I am aware of the strategic advantages of particular constructions of Aboriginal heritage I consider these constructions as valid expressions of a cultural continuity. As also van Meijl and van der Grijp note the “self-conscious, counterhegemonic reifications of tradition, however, should not simply be dismissed as inauthentic. ... More importantly, unmasking historical discontinuities of ‘invented’ traditions should not be seen as denying their continuity.” (1993: 640). Although in the urban context the emphasis on Aboriginal heritage has shifted towards a more practical adaptation of cultural elements still being used in remote Aboriginal communities there is still a continuity with urban Aboriginal people’s past that traces back to the time when they shared their lifestyles with those remote communities. Because people continue to adapt the same themes and cultural elements they have always used and adapted to the circumstances and needs of their time or as Sahlins says it: “Cultural continuity ... appears in and as the mode of cultural change” (1993: 19).

This brings me to my idea about the concept of culture. The way I see it culture is a construction of people. I therefore believe that the perceptions of people themselves about their culture are the key to understanding it. Their ideas are the basis of being able to analyse such a concept. Hence I am reluctant to judge them for their ideas as I am convinced that every

¹²⁷ R. Tonkinson notices amongst the south and south-eastern Australian Aboriginal people “a much higher level of self-consciousness and objectification of the past and of culture than in remote Aboriginal Australia” (1999: 137).

interpretation has an equal value. The value of my work as an anthropologist lies not so much in being able to give superior judgement but in being able to present more than one interpretation on the subject of people's culture.

Culture is the sum of things being done, said or thought by a group of people who consider themselves as a unity. Culture is thus not only what people are doing/saying/thinking in the present but also what people who identified as the same group have done/said and thought in the past. Contemporary cultural elements originate from the past but only those elements are used which are important to the people of the here and now. Thus the package of cultural elements constantly changes through the choices people make in their use. There remains, however, a cultural continuity because contemporary elements are adaptations from past elements. Thus changing culture does not exclude the existence of some sort of continuity in that culture.

For the reason that human societies have already existed and evolved for thousands of years the bodies of cultural elements have grown so complex that this complexity considered culture is often regarded as an intangible entity influencing every move people make. Although I am of the opinion that people are indeed influenced by, or can not even be disengaged from, their culture I am convinced that this culture is a creation of the many generations of peoples and societies that have succeeded one another. Culture is therefore a continuing process that is being shaped by individuals who are at the same time shaped by the process itself. For this reason I consider the process of group identification to be similar to the process called culture. For the process of self-identification, the situation is slightly different. Whereas culture is the sum of achievements of a group, self-identification is the sum of the cultural elements the individual has been equipped with through birth and those elements he or she has been able to incorporate in their personal narrative of a self-identity (Giddens 1991: 76). But even though people are brought up with a limited set of cultural elements, at the same time they possess, to a certain extent, the choice to choose which elements serve them best.

In my view people have a limited set of cultural elements at their disposal and out of this set they unconsciously use those elements that are strategically useful. In the same way people emphasise those elements of their heritage or culture that are best equipped to distinguish themselves from others. As Otto notes also: "The opposition between colonizer and

those colonized led to an awareness of commonalities between indigenous traditions and thus to generalization of 'our ways' as opposed to 'their ways'. (1993: 11)

In the case of the Saturday and After School Programme those characteristics of Aboriginal heritage are emphasised that oppose western culture. Because these elements do not only say something about what one person is, it also says something about what the other person is not. It explains why especially the themes discussed here are viewed as such important elements of Aboriginal culture. For all the themes I have already demonstrated their usefulness in opposing western cultural characteristics in the eyes of the people that use these elements.

7.3 Continuing Culture: The Young Mothers Programme

In 1996 Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Cooperation organised a Young Mothers Programme together with the Auntie Polly Smith Early Childhood Centre and the South Sydney City Council. Its aim was to discuss the problems young Aboriginal mothers are dealing with and to help them solve these problems. The value of this case lies in the input the clients had in the course of the Programme. Because Aboriginal grandmothers had joined their daughters who followed the Programme these women had a lot of input in the discussions evolving around different issues. So, while in the former case discussed there was a one-way direction of visions on Aboriginality, in this case there is a two-way direction in which both service providers and clients together create a joined image they have of Aboriginality.

The sessions were held twice a week in the morning and were meant for young Aboriginal mothers living in Redfern. The two Aboriginal women who organised the session below, Louise and Elsie, were joined by the Aboriginal liaison officer of the South Sydney City Council, Thomas, and a non-Aboriginal woman from the Effective Training Instructor's Association, Linda. The session was attended by several young Aboriginal mothers and their own mothers and children.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ The fragment of the Programme below consists of a compilation of issues that came to the fore during several sessions and is not the actual representation of one session.

One of the young mothers says she cried when she found out she was pregnant at 18. She thought she was too young and wanted an abortion. She used to drink a lot of alcohol. Her mother had difficulties with her daughter being pregnant at such a young age but she supported her daughter anyway. "Luckily my family has always been there for me," she concludes. One of the grandmothers replies: "I have two grandchildren living with me. Grandparents are the second parents of these children. We can help one another. We are all from one community. In Koori traditional family the grandmothers are considered the backbones of the family. The grandmother was the law in the house. Disciplining was done by the father. The same values should be inserted in the parents of today." Louise says that in these days the fathers are not around a lot of the times.

Linda asks the women what values they are talking about. One mother says she could not use dirty language or smoke when she was young. She would be punished for that. Another woman answers: "Children were not allowed to be around adults that were talking. You were not allowed to talk back to adults when they addressed you. First you have to find respect for yourself and then you can respect others. But it is hard to bring back those values. Because there are too many European ways now." Thomas says that according to Koori traditions the children were not supposed to be raised by the direct father but by his brothers. They had to punish the children. Thomas feels awkward punishing his own children because he knows his brothers are supposed to do that but because of colonisation and everything the family got split up. His brothers are not there to look after his kids so it is his responsibility. The women agree and those who have their sisters around are still handling according to those rules. Elsie says that she raises her sister's children as well. And when they say: "You can't do that. You are not my mum," she answers that she is their mum's oldest sister so she has every right to.

While everybody is discussing the Aboriginal way of raising children some real life parenting can be watched on the spot. I see how the mothers give their children a great deal of freedom. They let them run around, yell and scream, and play with their food and drinks. Suddenly, one grandmother slaps her grandchild faintly on her hand without any reason. When it starts crying she picks it up and comforts it. I am rather startled by this practice. Elsie explains that this is how many Aboriginal people express their affection for their children.

One grandmother says that her parents only hit her when she had done something really bad and she would never do it again. She can only recall one time that she was hit. Elsie nods her head in confirmation and says that strong physical violence wasn't part of Koori culture. Discipline was taught in the form of having respect. Nowadays many families cope with domestic violence problems. Elsie says: "Domestic violence is not original to Koori culture. It was introduced by the Europeans as many other bad things, like alcohol."

Another grandmother says that Kooris still have "open-house families" as they used to have in the past. There are always kids running around the house who belong to someone else. The other women assent to this. Louise remarks: "It is great to have family support. That is a

good thing with our families. But some people do not want their family to look after their kids because they are alcoholics. In such cases people can be very isolated." A young mother answers that Kooris can not live alone, they need companionship. Some women say that in the Redfern community there is a lot of companionship. There is always someone to take care of your kids. That is why a lot of Kooris come back to the Block. A young mother responds that that does not happen a lot anymore. There are too many drugs now. A grandmother says that this community used to be a good community where everybody took care of one another. The drugs used to be inside the house so you did not know who was using. Nowadays people use drugs in public in front of the children and the children are sucked into that life. One in every family is touched by drugs in the form of *jarnudi* (marihuana), pills, alcohol, or hard drugs. Therefore, Koori values should be brought back in. (9-1996)

7.3.1 Endangered Traditions

The people participating in the sessions on parenting all contributed to the assessment of proper Aboriginal parenting. Both the staff members of the organisations as well as their clients have their own view of what they call "the Aboriginal way". The staff members and some participants tell the others how Aboriginal people used to raise their children in the past and which practices come from early Aboriginal practices and which ones were introduced by the Europeans. Some grandmothers who sketch a positive image of current community involvement in their turn are confronted by the less optimistic picture given by their daughters. The way in which all of the participants talk about Aboriginal parenting reveals that they have clear ideas about how Aboriginal parents should raise their children. But it is hard to implement them because current parenting practices are constrained by the problems in Redfern, as suggested by both participants as well as the organisations, making initiatives such as the Young Mothers Programme necessary.

Whereas with the discussion of the case of the Saturday and After School Programme I have put the emphasis on the differences in Aboriginal and Australian heritage, with the analysis of this case I would like to focus on the continuity of Aboriginal culture. During the session, the participants seem to have an idealised image of the past and impute negative changes to the introduction of western culture that has corrupted, for example in this case, family values and Aboriginal ways of parenting. But despite the threat western culture formed and still forms for Aboriginal culture the

participants are convinced they have been able to continue the past practices of parenting that were handed down to them up until now.

For example, I noticed some differences in Aboriginal and western ways of parenting myself. The children who have joined their mothers at the Programme are given a great deal of freedom. Mothers do not constantly follow their toddlers around to see to it that they do not do anything they are not allowed to, as I am used to with other Australian parents. Instead the Aboriginal women let their children experience the consequences of their actions, as long as it is not too serious of course.¹²⁹ Also my observation of the woman slapping her grandchild softly on her hand and then picking it up and comforting it when it starts crying is another such example. This behaviour was also observed by Carter who describes it as a preparation "for life's vicissitudes" (1984: 88) and compares it with milder forms of teasing Aboriginal children as a parenting method (cf. Eckermann 1977: 300).

Also, during the programme some people claim that shared forms of parenting are still common practice. One of the grandmothers tells about the important role the family and community play in each other's lives. She mentions the sharing of children between family members and foster rearing. This is common practice in Aboriginal culture (Barwick 1978, 1988: 28, Birdsall 1988: 143). Despite the harmonious picture of a caring community sketched by some of the older people present younger participants stress that the current situation has changed due to, amongst others, the increasing use of drugs. And even though there are still past parenting practices being used some attempts to continue them fall on deaf ears from their own family members. Such as Elsie who told that her sister's children did not agree with her mingling in their upbringing. Also, not being able to act out these practices can make people feel uncomfortable. For example, Thomas feels awkward not being able to raise his children according to Aboriginal practices that dictate that his brother should discipline Thomas' children.

The main reasons for the difficulty to continue Aboriginal practices of parenting are sought outside their own culture. Loss of Aboriginal values, such as the lack of preponderance the elder family members have, is due to the introduction of European values, which differ from Aboriginal values. Also particular contemporary elements in Australian society are said to

¹²⁹ See for urban Aboriginal parenting: Barwick (1978), Eckermann (1977: 298-301), *Sydney Morning Herald* (2-7-1996).

threaten Aboriginal culture. They are all considered to be introduced by Europeans; such as physical violence as form of disciplining children, domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs (cf. Bropho 1983: 37). None of these problems are said to be inherent to Aboriginal culture. Although the British were undeniably responsible for the introduction of alcohol (and domestic violence is often an alcohol-related problem) and, according to literature, physical punishment is indeed rare in Aboriginal culture (Barwick 1978, Eckermann 1977: 299) the question is whether the Australians are solely responsible for the loss of particular values and the introduction of physical disciplining, as the participants suggest.

Literature about the incarceration period of reserves and missions points out that this process of the loss of cultural elements is more complex than suggested during the programme. While some elements of Aboriginal culture were deliberately undermined by western colonisation others were lost due to internal differences within Aboriginal communities. Cowlshaw mentions that “there has been no single simple rejection or retention of tradition, but a complex history of changes in the context of a political struggle for survival in which different and contradictory strategies were being adopted” (1988: 92).

As I have already written in Chapter 2 the removal of Aboriginal people from their land into reserves and missions had a deep impact on the observance of their cultural practices.¹³⁰ People living in reserves and missions were often forbidden to speak their own language or practice their rituals. Many Aboriginal people call this a period of cultural genocide and especially churches are blamed for relentless indoctrination resulting in a loss of cultural knowledge. Although the effects of this period were great, it should not be overlooked that in many instances people were able to continue parts of their culture by practising it in secret. I have heard stories of secret meetings on the missions with dogs and children standing on guard. As soon as a mission manager would come near people pretended to do something else.

But Rowley points out that it was not only because of changes imposed by the Europeans that some cultural practices changed or disappeared:

¹³⁰Creamer remarks that the further people were removed from their home grounds, the less knowledge they were able to remember about Aboriginal sites important to them. Aboriginal groups who were placed in reserves relatively close to their home grounds were able to preserve this knowledge because they were able to visit the places and maintain them. Sometimes knowledge survived without exactly knowing to which site it belonged because of the restricted access to such sites or changed lifestyles (1988: 52).

Aborigines in the state [of New South Wales] gradually ceased many cultural practices, which previously had been central to their lives. Rather than this being some automatic consequence of European interference or attempt at suppression, such transformations were partly at least the subject of decisions and disagreements within the Aboriginal community (1971:406).

While, on the one hand, the policies that were forced upon the Aboriginal people played a big role in the diminishing of Aboriginal tradition-oriented cultural practices, on the other hand, the Aboriginal people themselves played a role in this process as well. Aboriginal people reacted in different ways on the conditions that were created by the arrival and domination of the Europeans. In the reserves, for instance, Aboriginal people were divided on the issue of practising their culture. While some people thought it important to continue to perform their cultural practices such as dances and rituals, in order to distinguish themselves from non-Aboriginal people, others were ashamed of their Aboriginality and thought it was time to move on.

The concept of shame, which was mostly cultivated on the Christian missions, was adapted by Aboriginal people to judge each other. Morris writes about this: "shaming directed hostility to those who attempted to approximate European values. However, the notion of shame also embodied in its usage a seemingly contradictory aspect as it was also applied to 'old blackfella ways'." (1988b: 58)

These so-called blackfella ways involved, for instance, speaking an Aboriginal language, performing Aboriginal dances and cooking on an open fire. While some people made fun of these ways and especially younger people refused to learn it, the elder generation became more cautious of teaching their "old" ways to the younger generation (Beckett 1958, Cowlshaw 1988: 91, Hollinsworth 1992: 144, Morris 1988b: 58, Reay 1949: 111). So, many rituals were no longer performed or were performed in secret for a restricted audience. Current elements emphasised as being important to Aboriginal heritage are thus not only limited to those elements that "survived" the contact history but also to those elements Aboriginal people themselves continued to use in adapted forms or otherwise.

7.4 Cultural Continuity as Strategy of Identification

Apart from having to legitimise their corporate Aboriginal identity towards an audience of funding institutions the Aboriginal organisations also need to convince their own clientele of their Aboriginal identity. The organisations ask for recognition as a “community-based” organisation because they can only receive support when the clients feel that the organisations are there for them, the local, or rather, regional community. Therefore it is important to convince the Aboriginal clientele in Redfern, which identify themselves as Kooris, that the organisations are in fact “Koori” organisations.

Instead of emphasising the unity between all Aboriginal people the organisations need to express their engagement with their own clients. Hence, they need to create a collective identification with their clients in Redfern. Because the clients are from the same region, and most of them identify themselves as Kooris¹³¹, a regional form of identification would be most suitable to identify with the organisations’ clients. If the organisations would identify with a particular local Aboriginal nation they would endanger the support of their clients because the Redfern Aboriginal community consists of people coming from different nations from all over New South Wales and sometimes even outer state. Therefore, themes emphasised are either general - without specific reference to local groups - or more specific but referring to local groups from remote areas (such as the Indjibundji) as not to focus on one local group of New South Wales.

The way in which the organisations try to create an appealing corporate image involves the emphasis on heritage elements of Aboriginal culture in order to underline the presence of cultural continuity amongst urban Aboriginal people. The image of Aboriginality as cultural continuity thus presented bears close resemblance with what Keeffe has called Aboriginality as persistence which includes elements such as the principle of caring and sharing and a spiritual connection (1992: 50). Whereas the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) mainly tried to convey their vision of the ideological framework of Aboriginal culture towards their students, the participants of the Young Mothers Programme mainly discussed the practical problems they are facing trying to live according to those principles in the field of parenting, e.g. trying to continue their culture, considering it to be under threat from western culture.

¹³¹ A small minority in Redfern calls themselves Murri, as opposed to Koori.

As I said, Aboriginal organisations emphasise heritage elements to create an image of Aboriginality as cultural continuity in communication with their clients. They emphasise this image of Aboriginality towards their clients because this image is particularly appealing to clients for varying reasons. A reason why the emphasis on Aboriginality as resistance might not appeal to Aboriginal clients is given by Beckett who claims that: "An Aboriginality that is directed outward for political reasons may seem alienating for the ordinary people who on various grounds identify as Aboriginal." (1992: 167) The use of Aboriginality as cultural continuity can therefore be considered as a strategy to maintain the support of their clients. The strategic benefit of the concept of tradition is recognised by R. Tonkinson, who recognises that specific community members regard tradition as a useful resource (1993: 599, see also Sahlins (1993: 4)). Van Meijl and van der Grijp write in this context:

traditional concepts and customs become central in discourses of tradition only insofar as they play crucial roles in indigenous attempts to cope with rapid change in the struggle to maintain explicit connections with a past which is valued but perceived to be under threat. (1993: 640)

I have distinguished three main functions the emphasis on Aboriginality as cultural continuity by Aboriginal organisations can have. First, the elements of a distinct Aboriginal heritage create a division between European Australian culture and Aboriginal culture. This is important in an urban setting where not all Aboriginal people can easily be distinguished from other Australians. This is directly related to the second function. The use of the heritage elements namely fulfils a need for recognition as authentic Aboriginal people. This is especially relevant in the urban situation where Aboriginal people are often regarded as "cultureless remnants" (Hollinsworth 1992: 143). Through tracing their cultural practices back to pre-colonial times the urban Aboriginal people are linked with the remote Aboriginal communities that still maintain relatively traditional lifestyles. The third function is that through their collective need for recognition of authenticity the urban Aboriginal people, who call themselves Koori in the Sydney situation, feel united through the recognition of their own cultural adaptations as "truly" Aboriginal, or Koori in this case. This is especially beneficial for the organisations presenting this image of Aboriginality because they want to demonstrate that the organisations and clients are the same - that the Aboriginal organisations belong to "their" community.

The dividing capacity of Aboriginality as cultural continuity is recognised by R. Tonkinson who writes that especially for people such as the staff of the organisations:

Aboriginal 'tradition' has both intellectual and emotional appeal and, as an objectified concept as well as 'lived in' reality, is fully appreciated for its crucial role in underpinning individual and group identity, and for its political and economic potential as a resource. (1999: 137)

This role for individual and group identity has everything to do with the fact that Aboriginality as cultural continuity separates Aboriginal people from the ones that do not share that same heritage, in this case other Australians. For the individual children attending the Saturday and After School Programme for example, this means that it provides them with more self-confidence about their "being different" from their fellow pupils at their ordinary schools they attend during the week.¹³² On a group level it could strengthen the connection between Aboriginal organisations and their clients and weaken the relation between Aboriginal clients and mainstream organisations that are not able to understand or act according to Aboriginal culture. As Morris says about the Dhan-Gadi: "The metonymic connection of Dhan-gadi identity with a specialised body of knowledge in effect denies Europeans capacity to gain authentic access to, and understanding of, matters Aboriginal." (1988a: 76)

Aboriginality as cultural continuity also has the capacity to provide Aboriginal people with some form of authenticity. By recognising the urban expressions of Aboriginal culture as continuity of the culture their pre-colonial ancestors had, it authenticates urban Aboriginal people's identification as Aborigine. This need for recognition of the authenticity of urban Aboriginal culture stems from the fact that especially in New South Wales and the Sydney region people were mostly deprived of large segments of their culture or were denied a culture altogether.

Also in contemporary Australian society the claim of urban Aboriginal people that they are "genuine" is, in the eyes of the general public, debatable to say the least. Remote Aboriginal people remain the "touchstone of Aboriginality" as Beckett calls it (1988b: 207). Because a lot of urban residents have indeed lost a lot of knowledge concerning their

¹³² For advice on raising self-esteem with Aboriginal students see Hudspith and Williams (1994).

heritage and most of them, for instance, do not speak an Aboriginal language, for a long time it was generally thought that these people had “lost their culture” (M. Tonkinson 1990: 197). Especially in the early 1970s anthropologists studied urban Aboriginal communities demonstrating that they were no different than any other lower class group in society (Eckermann 1973: 39, Gale 1977). Apart from that, some people do not even “look” Aboriginal, especially light-skinned people from, for example, the stolen generations. There has always been a reluctance to accept that these people have a distinct Aboriginal culture because it is not as visible as with other Aboriginal groups in Australia. This has to do with a narrow definition of culture, reducing culture to a visible lifestyle and artefacts.¹³³ This divides Aboriginal people into groups who are either able or unable to demonstrate the “‘immediately observable’ attributes of language, religious skills in tracking, healing, the arts and manufacture of traditional artefacts” (Hollinsworth 1992: 143). As a consequence many urban Aboriginal people have a need to demonstrate their authenticity as Aboriginal people. This is recognised by R. Tonkinson:

Given their sensitivity to attacks by other Australians on their authenticity as Aborigines, many people of mixed descent can and do objectify their Aboriginality, which has been constructed, inevitably and significantly, substantially in opposition to racism and stereotyping of the kind that attacks them as ‘not real Aborigines’ and thus assaults the very core of their being. (1999: 140)

The Aboriginal organisations seem to supply this want by their emphasis on aspects of cultural continuity in communication with their clientele. It is especially this aspect of Aboriginality that is stressed by the organisations because the body of knowledge and practice the people call heritage can be used to stress the continuity with the past as a way to unify the people who share that heritage (Morris 1988a: 73). Hence, another capacity of Aboriginality as cultural continuity is that it can unify people on the level of the urban community serviced by the organisations as they generally share the same urban-specific elements of Aboriginal culture.

From the decreasing popularity of some Redfern organisations and complaints about Aboriginal organisations in general, it can be concluded that Aboriginal organisations do not always succeed in binding their clients from the local community to them. Although Anderson claims that the

¹³³ For a discussion of “lived-in” and “objectified” culture I refer to Otto (1993: 8).

organisations have indeed been able to provide a form of Redfern identification (1993a: 88). I seek the explanation for this lack of success not so much in a lack of interest in or recognition of the “corporate” image of Aboriginality the Aboriginal organisations are trying to present. It is especially the fact that a “corporate” identity is always propagated by individual staff members. And it is these people who have the task to do this who sometimes fail to uphold an image of the organisation they are working for. This has not necessarily to do with their lack of competence but with the “cultural luggage” people themselves bring into the organisations.

As I will demonstrate in the following chapter the staff members of the organisations are associated with the nations and families they come from. This can be unfavourable for the organisations that generally reckon people from many different nations among their clients. Besides that, the staff members are also judged upon their behaviour and their individual convictions about certain issues. Especially because the organisations in general are small scale they tend to be identified easily with the people in charge even though the corporate identity may stand for something else. The next chapter will further elaborate on this issue.

Minding the Messenger: Aboriginal Organisations and Their Staff Members

On a sunny day in March 1996 Pemulwuy Park in Redfern formed the setting for a protest organised by the Aboriginal Housing Coalition to "Save the Block", as it was announced on the flyers and posters. The purpose of the Coalition was to save the residents on the Block from relocation plans developed by the Aboriginal Housing Company. Before the protest started I sat down under a tree at the border of Pemulwuy Park, close to where most Aboriginal people were seated. While a small group of Aboriginal protesters had gathered on the lawn of the Park, they were surrounded by white people in suits and ties dragging cameras from one place to the other. What was striking is that most Aboriginal people present were sitting at the back of the park in the shade, close to the building of the Aboriginal Housing Company. They were relaxing, drinking, talking and watching what all those other people were doing.

When the actual protest started, I recognised some people from several Aboriginal organisations among the protesters. The speakers were the organisers of the protest and other Aboriginal people who had joined the Coalition. They claimed that the majority of the residents were against the relocation plans and preferred renovations instead. According to them, the people wanted to stay on the Block because it is their home. The protesters blamed the Company for failing to maintain the houses in Eveleigh Street in all these years and claimed that it was because of this negligence that the Company now wanted to get rid of the houses and make money out of it. They said that the Company had turned against their own people and reminded the audience of the early days of the Company when Aboriginal people worked together to set up the Aboriginal Housing Company and other organisations such as the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service. At the end of the protest when one of the speakers started accusing particular persons from the Company of using the white way of bureaucracy against their own people, some of the Aboriginal people sitting behind me finally responded. They were applauding and yelling "Jail 'em!" and "That's true!" Then the audience was invited to come up and say something. But nobody from the Aboriginal people present responded. Then the crowd dispersed and some people took the opportunity to interview the representatives of the Coalition. (13-3-1996)

The fragment above concerns an Aboriginal organisation that confronts another Aboriginal organisation with its future plans for the Block. Both organisations seem to have a different view on which policy direction is most suitable to benefit the Aboriginal community on the Block. By questioning the Aboriginal Housing Company's proposed policy direction through the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Coalition, some of the Company's own members had turned against their own organisation. This shows that organisations consist of individual staff members who all have a part to play in the maintenance of its organisation's corporate Aboriginal identity. In the former chapters I focused on how the Aboriginal organisations as a whole tried to establish and maintain an Aboriginal corporate identity in their dealings with clients and outsiders through the use of different notions of Aboriginality. A crucial role in the transmission of this corporate image is played by the staff members of the organisations. In their contact with others they function as representatives of their organisations. This chapter deals with the staff members' individual identification as Aborigine and its influence on the image of the Aboriginal organisations they work for.

Since this chapter deals with the issue of Aboriginal identification on an individual level it is relevant for all Aboriginal people in Redfern. In order to gain more insight in the process of establishing people's Aboriginality, thus strengthening or weakening an organisations' credibility when it concerns their staff members, I will describe one particular case of two organisations that confronted each other in Redfern during my one-year fieldwork period in 1996. It concerns the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Aboriginal Housing Coalition. Their case is of particular interest because, on the one hand, the issue they do not agree upon concerns the Block in Redfern, and on the other hand, the arguments they use in their struggle revolve around issues of Aboriginality. But before I come to that I will first shortly introduce the networks in which the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern operate.

8.1 Connections Between Redfern Aboriginal Organisations

The Aboriginal organisations I studied operate in a range of networks of other Aboriginal organisations. These networks operate on different levels. They range from informal networks based on personal relations to formal networks with a bureaucratic structure. I have distinguished three levels of

networks in which the organisations of Redfern operate: the family network, the (informal) Redfern network, and the (formal) bureaucratic networks.

The first network that I have distinguished within and between the organisations is the family network (Alexander & Pollard 1983, Martin & Finlayson 1996: 6). It is the most informal but very visible form of networking. Although the use of a family network for personal matters is fully accepted within the Aboriginal community the staff of the organisations were often reluctant to explain their family relations with other staff members or staff members of other organisations. I suspect this is so because in western society it is associated with “unprofessionalism”. Family networks can be considered to foster corruption because it could lead to a preference towards hiring family members or reluctance to fire a family member when his or her work does not live up to general standards. One staff member told me:

It is found that amongst Aboriginal people that they [staff members] are related in one way or another through the extended family or the community. Therefore, in Aboriginal agencies and organisations employees can be and will be related in one way or another. (1-1997)

The use of family networks within professional organisations is not unique to Aboriginal culture and is practised in many societies. For example, in western society candidates for vacancies are often sought within people’s own networks before looking outside. In fact, the use of tight-knit networks can also contribute a great deal to the success of an organisation (see section 3.2.3). The loyalty towards family members can stimulate the individual family members to work hard within organisations that are run by family members. In case problems arise on the work floor, such as work pressure and low wages, staff members might be prepared to cop more when working for family.

The urban Aboriginal people I spoke with seem to be ambiguous about this issue. On the one hand, people complain that the organisations only cater for their own families. Gilbert speaks for a lot of Aboriginal people when writing that “[m]ost Aboriginal organisations are the preserve of one man or woman who either runs them single-handed or else puts in a ‘safe’ staff.” (1973: 144). While on the other hand, complaints are heard when a family member working within an organisation does not do enough to involve the family in the organisation or to get something out of it for the

family. In such a case, staff members are accused of losing contact with the grassroots level or forgetting the community and the family they come from.

Apart from the family networks, I have distinguished a second level of networking. This network is used by staff members of a select group of organisations and is based on the history of the rise of the organisations in Redfern. It is an informal network which operates between Aboriginal organisations which were either set up by the first group of Redfern Aboriginal activists responsible for setting up the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Housing Company or which maintain personal relations with that group. Jopson mentions the existence of the Organisation for Aboriginal Unity, which bundled the Aboriginal Housing Company, Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, Aboriginal Medical Service, the Black Theatre (forerunner of the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern), and Murawina (Jopson 1980). This network shows strong resemblance with the network I describe above. Some organisations were set up by one and the same group of Aboriginal activists in the 1970s (Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern, Aboriginal Medical Service, Murawina), others were erected later by members of that same group (Aboriginal Children's Service), or have personal relations (Mudgin-Gal). It has happened that an organisation could no longer function within the network because its policies clashed with those of other organisations or because of personal clashes between staff members.

Organisations that were set up by government departments have a hard time connecting with this network of Redfern Aboriginal organisations. Some of these government organisations operate separately, such as Alleena (an Aboriginal unit of the HACS (Home And Community Services) programme), and Nââmoro (official job network). Others find an alignment through personal connections their staff members have with organisations within the network (Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Redfern Aboriginal Corporation).

This informal network is reflected in both the composition of staff as well as the Boards of Directors. Some staff members of different organisations are active in multiple organisations and reside on several Boards. Organisations, which operate within this network, organise activities together and give each other (material) support when needed. I myself saw how one organisation was prepared to give an advance

payment to another organisation so the latter could pay the wages of its staff until the delayed funding money would be received. In less rigorous cases organisations donate material (powdered milk for Auntie Polly's Early Childhood Centre, buckets for Murawina) or offer the use of their equipment (type writer and telephone use). Of course the interaction between organisations in Redfern also depends on the type of services the organisations offer. Organisations which offer similar services maintain regular contact, such as: the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern and the Eora Centre, and Murawina and Tranby which offer educational services (see Appendix 11).

The third level of networking involves the bureaucratic network of the parent-organisations operating in Redfern and their sister-organisations operating in Sydney suburbs or other areas of New South Wales (Aboriginal Children's Service, Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, Aboriginal Medical Service). This network is maintained through a few meetings a year. The head offices, also containing administration units, are situated in Redfern. Meetings mostly involve the discussion of policies and experiences, which are exchanged in order to inform each other about problems in the different offices. The Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, for example, used to organise yearly conferences to update their solicitors and other staff around the State on recent developments in the legal profession, political developments and their implications for the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern.

The parent-organisations, in their turn, fall under national bodies binding organisations from different states with the same area of expertise. These national umbrella-organisations represent their members on a national level, for example, in contact with the federal government. They organise meetings, such as conferences, on a regular basis for the purpose of informing their own members as well as outsiders on recent developments within their area of expertise. Examples are NAILSS (National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat)¹³⁴, SNAICC (Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care), and NAIHO (National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation).

Some organisations maintain international contacts with other indigenous organisations from around the world. The umbrella-organisations just mentioned sometimes play a role in the maintenance of these contacts. These contacts are mostly made on international conferences

¹³⁴ Since 1996 NAILSS also represents Aboriginal people on an international level, namely at the United Nations as only ngo representing the Aboriginal people of Australia.

and are, because of the distance, maintained on an infrequent basis. American-Indian and indigenous Canadian organisations have been known to visit organisations in Redfern, as well as black American public figures who show an interest in the situation of urban Aboriginal people, like rock artists such as Michael Jackson, and the Fugees, and American actor Danny Glover.

8.2 Rocking the Nest: The Aboriginal Housing Company

As I have written in Chapter 2 the Aboriginal Housing Company stood at the basis of the establishment of Aboriginal Redfern because it was this organisation that gained the first rights to buy a block of houses in Redfern in 1972 and rent them to Aboriginal people only. But the Block, as it is called, did not turn out to become the peaceful and harmonious residency as the architectural plans had foreseen, and as the parties who supported the idea of Aboriginal housing in Redfern had hoped for. Slowly the residency deteriorated and its residents were confronted with increasing drug-and alcohol abuse.

One of the underlying problems was thought to be high unemployment under the residents so the hopes were high when in 1991 the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) started running under the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation.¹³⁵ The first project that was run under CDEP Redfern was a rubbish-collecting service. Later a lawn mowing and handyman service followed. The participants started growing a vegetable garden and opened a shop from which they sold hand-made clothing. The CDEP workers assisted contractors of the South Sydney City Council to build Pemulwuy Park on the Block and helped building the playground next to Murawina Preschool. One of the people running the scheme said in 1992 that the crime rate had dropped by 40% since the scheme first started (ATSIC 1992: 14). The Redfern Aboriginal Corporation also ran courses to improve people's job skills. CDEP as well as Nââmoro, a job network, tried to offer the residents new opportunities through courses to improve chances on the job market.

In 1993 the Koori Kafe, a local cafe, was set up as well as a security service of people who surveyed the area to keep it safe. Around 1993

¹³⁵ The CDEP is a federal programme that lets Aboriginal people work in their own community while receiving wages, which are equivalent to their social security payment.

Pemulwuy Park was patched up; the streets were paved again, the wall dividing the park from the railway was painted, and some of the buildings in the area were repainted.¹³⁶ But all these efforts could not hinder the further deterioration of the Block. The usage of drugs and alcohol became more public and residents complained that many people came from the country to Redfern to use drugs.¹³⁷ The detox-programme run by the Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation, the Needle Exchange and the efforts of the Aboriginal Medical Service could not prevent the rise of public drug-abuse in Redfern.

8.2.1 The Company's Plan of Action

It was because of this worsening situation combined with the further deterioration of the houses (because of old age - the houses are more than 100 years old at the time of this study - and maintenance problems) that the Aboriginal Housing Company decided that action needed to be taken. Many of the houses had become derelict or otherwise inhabitable (through vermin and decay) and in 1994 the Company came up with a plan to renovate the houses. Its aim was to renovate 30 houses to accommodate 165 tenants on the Block. The remaining 70 tenants would receive assistance in accessing home ownership on the perimeter of the Block. It also provided for the building of a recreation centre to benefit the residents' health. This plan fitted the Building Better Cities strategy that was announced by the Australian Government in 1993. It was decided to ask money for it under the Housing Infrastructure and Priority Programme (HIPP)¹³⁸ and these plans were further elaborated in the HIPP report of January 1995 (Housing Infrastructure Priority Programme 1995). Later on it turned out that the HIPP refused to fund the plans of the Company (ATSIC files 1996¹³⁹).

At a meeting held in October 1995 Charles Perkins (see also section 3.1.2) advised the Company to investigate alternative options as opposed to

¹³⁶ About the improvements made in this period I refer to Vincent (1994).

¹³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 18-1-1997 and 22-2-1997

¹³⁸ The ATSIC Board established the HIPP (Health Infrastructure Priority Projects) in 1994 as a national pilot programme to target environmental health needs for indigenous people. (ATSIC 1997: 31-32).

¹³⁹ I am not allowed to mention the exact source of the material to which I refer as ATSIC files 1996 in the following sections. I gained access to these documents in June 1996 through a claim on the Freedom of Information Act.

the old plan to build 30 new houses and a recreation centre. A new plan was introduced that involved relocating all tenants to prepare the Block for economic development. From these discussions three options were drawn up: a) leave the Block as it is; b) renovate the houses; or c) build a cultural and employment centre.¹⁴⁰ In November 1995 the Company approached the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to ask for funding to demolish and rebuild the Block. The plans were rejected but the ATSIC was willing to listen to alternatives.

In December 1995 the Company voted for option c. It was decided that renovation was no longer a viable option. The *Sun Herald* wrote "X, formerly a staunch supporter of Aborigines remaining on the Block, said with drugs, sexual assault and unemployment endemic, relocating was now the only option." (3-3-1996). The houses at Eveleigh Street would have to be demolished to make place for the employment and cultural centre. Therefore the people living on the Block needed to be relocated to other houses the Company had bought in the surrounding suburbs, like Chippendale, Waterloo etc. These people would then live among other Australians, and no longer in a ghetto situation as in Redfern so they could "close the door" on their neighbours problems whenever they want to, as was said by a representative of the Company (18-9-1996). Another possibility for the residents was to obtain a mortgage for a house they had their eyes on and the Company would then purchase the house. The last step would be to make the property available for building a culture and job centre.

Subsequent to the meeting of December 1995 Ove Arup , a consultancy company, was engaged to develop a detailed plan for the implementation of the plans. In the ARUP report it was suggested to the Company to involve different groups of people in their presentation of the new development plans because they foresaw that more people expected to have a say in it than only the Company members themselves. As part of its study Arup held a survey of the Company tenants living in Eveleigh, Vine and Lewis Street on the Block that indicated that 48 out of 53 tenants wanted to leave while 5 tenants did not return their survey forms (ATSIC letter, 5-9-1996).

¹⁴⁰ The Company had made earlier attempts to rescue their organisation and the Block and has written proposals in the past to improve the situation on the Block (Sarkissian et al 1986, Technical Assistance Group & Sarkissian Associates Planners 1986). There were rumours of the Government wanting to scatter the population (see Sarkissian et al. 1986: 18) and also amongst the official proposals presented to the Company was the idea to sell the whole Block (ibid. 1986: 71-73).

Despite the numerous protests against the plans, that started with the one organised in November 1995 the ARUP report claims that “[Company] members and its tenants have all shown strong support for a proposal to relocate housing away from Redfern” (1996: 1).

One of the reasons that the Company had decided to introduce drastic changes in the Redfern Aboriginal community was the fact that, despite numerous efforts undertaken to improve the living conditions (such as the projects of the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation and the services provided by Aboriginal organisations in the Redfern area), the living conditions for the Aboriginal people had become worse (deteriorated and derelict houses and the increase of substance abuse, vandalism and criminal activities). The new plans of the Company would provide new employment opportunities to benefit the Aboriginal community. The idea behind it was that the people of Redfern were in more need of an opportunity to start a new life by obtaining a job so they would be able to stand on their own feet rather than a renovation of their houses in the same street with the same people and the same problems. As a representative of the Company stressed a number of times it was time for the Aboriginal people to stand on their own feet instead of living on government handouts.

But apart from the fact that the situation in Redfern had indeed grown worse for the Aboriginal community the Company itself could no longer cope with the situation it was in either. The Company had no money to repair or maintain the houses and was sometimes forced by police and others to demolish premises because they were a danger to the neighbourhood (because of broken glass, danger of collapse and its function as escape routes for criminals). The tenants blamed the state the houses were in on the lack of good management from the Company. Some people even claimed that the Company paid children who used drugs to beat up vacant premises the day after a family would move out. The Company in its turn blamed the tenants for not taking good care of the houses or even vandalising them. Auditors appointed by the ATSIC however, accused the Company of not having their business in order while in the eyes of the auditors the Company had been allowed enough time to get their business in order. Hence, not only were the new plans of the Company a rescue plan for the Aboriginal people living on the Block but at the same time it was a salvage operation to save the Company itself by creating new opportunities to make a profit. But by making a profit the Company would be able to

spend more money on the Aboriginal community thus benefiting the whole community.

What needs to be taken into account here is that the Aboriginal Housing Company is not an average company. It was set up to profit the Aboriginal community and to invest its profit for the benefit of the Aboriginal community. In the early 1970s the low rents attracted the poorest Aboriginal people in the area and gave the Company hardly any space to invest in new properties. Over the past decades it serviced the poorest group of Aboriginal people in the Sydney area who were in most cases in need of support in the form of service provision on different areas, such as medical support and legal aid. So, for this reason the Company had to make sure that it offered the necessary support to their special group of tenants when they were going to be moved to other Company properties. The Company needed to make sure that their tenants still have access to the services they need. The Company itself claimed that it was working on a programme to support their tenants when moving out of Redfern.

Apart from the special relation with their clients the Company is a unique company in another way as well. Legally it has every right to sell or redevelop their property and handle it individually (with its members) because it owns the land. The property that it owns, in the form of land and the premises built on it, has a special significance in Australian Aboriginal history because it was the first case where land rights came into the hands of Aboriginal people. As I have written in Chapter 2 the Block was a milestone in the Aboriginal struggle for land rights and self-determination and the Company and the Block became symbols of what could be achieved by Aboriginal people. Nowadays, not much has been left from that great achievement because the area has deteriorated so much but that does not necessarily change the symbolic value of the land to Aboriginal people.

8.2.2 Their View on the Block

In order to give an impression of the motives behind the plans of the Aboriginal Housing Company I will discuss parts of an interview - of which I present a shortened version - I had with one representative of the

Aboriginal Housing Company.¹⁴¹ He was appointed by the ATSIC to maintain contact with the residents of Redfern about the issue of relocation.

The first bit of land rights started here in Redfern when the Aboriginal Housing Company received the Block out of the hands of the Labor Government. The people in general think that the problems on the Block are Aboriginal problems but they are not. This neighbourhood has always been poor. The Housing Company has run off the same rents as twenty years ago, but the costs are rising. This Company was set up to fail. That is why we have to leave a house unrepaired sometimes and it will eventually deteriorate because it can no longer be maintained.

The Aboriginal movement has not moved that far in twenty years because of the Government. It is okay to resist or to be proud of your history but if resistance means exclusion and government handouts it is called pacification. That's what I call it. The Labor Government was more like a mother who fed us. The Liberals say: 'You are big boys now. You have to grow up and stand on your own feet.' In the past we were physically in chains and our minds roamed free. Now it is the other way round. We are physically free but our minds are chained. Now we have to stand on our own two feet because at the moment all Aboriginal people receive money from the Government in one way or another. Some people receive welfare payments, others work for the community-based organisations that are funded by the Government. People work in the CDEP, which is run by the Government, or people work within Government bureaucracies. They call it 'the Aboriginal industry'. They created a monster.

The Government put us together in missions, in concentrated areas like the Block and other suburbs like Campbelltown and so on. But the people here need to understand this [Redfern] was never a mission. This is different than a mission. There are no traditional people around here. They all died out. The Block has only been around for twenty years so we will never take people away from their tribal land because it is not tribal Aboriginal land. They can choose their own home now. Yes, caring and sharing is a part of our culture but how about providing? That was also a part of our culture. And you don't see that anymore. Some of the people on the Block are not even real Kooris. There has never been a sense of community here. There are no families out there [he points towards the Block]. The community is lost. The family is lost. The Block is like a beer garden for other Aboriginal people from around the State. They come here and use Redfern to get rid of their dirt. They use drugs and drink.

We need an economic base. We need to stand on our own feet. The opportunities are there but Aboriginal people do not make use of them. We try to create an economic base here [with the new development plans], a genuine base. But change is a frightening thing. A small

¹⁴¹ Although this viewpoint was expressed in an interview with one person only, in my view it suffices to analyse statements of those who are appointed by the organisations in question to represent them.

minority [which opposes the Housing Company's plans] uses the media to get what they want. And then there are some whitefellas coming here to support that small minority. But out of the 55 tenants 50 agreed with our plans and are willing to move. People can choose a house and we will purchase it for them.

The Government gave us a grant a couple of years ago. We are even now but now we have to get ready for the future. We want to start helping our people. We want to set up businesses run by Aboriginal people. From the profits we will be able to purchase new houses every year. We are pro-active here [with the new development plans]. If it does not work out we will still have the land. We do not sell the land! It belongs to Aboriginal persons in the past and in the future. We have to change *with* the area, not *because* of it! The next generation does not deserve this. Change is going to happen so lets do something now. Or we will have to wait for another twenty years. My good friend died last year, you know. He came to the Block innocent, but he learned about drugs etc. and it killed him. As it kills many people. Redfern is an identity of the past and the future. Because of the riots and so on. In the year 2000 this [the redeveloped Block] will be a celebration for all Aboriginal people. We have to do it because of the figures and our ideology. We are rocking the nest here but that is necessary because Redfern is a gateway to Aboriginal contemporary Australia. (18-9-1996)

The Company representative claims that the problems in Redfern are not Aboriginal problems but problems that belong to the area, which has always been a poor area. Hence he regards the current situation in Redfern as a class problem. Apart from that he imputes them to the way these problems were handled over the years by various Labor governments. He describes the Labor government as a mother that fed the Aboriginal people. He blames this sort of government involvement for failing to set Aboriginal people free from their colonisers and become independent. Labor is responsible for the creation of the Aboriginal industry upon which the majority of Aboriginal people is now depending. And as far as the Company itself goes, it was also established under a Labor government in 1972. He concludes from this that the problems the Company is coping with stem from the way in which the Company was set up. He claims that "it was set up to fail" because it could not make enough profit out of the low rents to pay for the necessary repairs.¹⁴²

¹⁴² While this is a valid claim it should also be taken into account that over the past ten years the Company has been accused of mismanagement leading to Board members leaving the Company. An audit in order of the ATSIAC proved that there was indeed mismanagement of funds.

He places the “mother role” of Labor opposite a “father role” of the Liberal party that just came back into power in 1996 (half a year before this interview). He supports the Liberal point of view that Aboriginal people have to learn to stand on their own two feet. This is the basic idea from which the Company has decided to go ahead with relocation and the building of a business centre. Because this is a form of empowerment which can make Aboriginal people independent from the Government. The emphasis in the relocation plans is put on self-determination and becoming self-sufficient and independent from government handouts or the “Aboriginal industry”.

Apart from the economic profits the representative stresses that the Aboriginal community in Sydney will gain something else when accepting this redevelopment project. Redfern will become an area, which will establish and reflect the success of Aboriginal people. It will transform the image of Redfern as being poor and dependent into a successful project which will show that Aboriginal people are independent and capable of looking after themselves. Here the speaker says that Redfern belongs to Aboriginal people in the past and in the future and therefore the contemporary generation has the responsibility towards the coming generations to make something out of it to be proud of. With this remark the speaker consolidates the importance of the area of Redfern to Aboriginal people. He concludes by saying that the changes are necessary now because of the upcoming Sydney Olympics in the year 2000 and that the Aboriginal people will have the opportunity to show the world that they have created something to be proud of.

The representative’s statement not only clarifies which ideologies lie at the basis of the relocation plans they also shed a light on his view of the ideologies of the other party (the Aboriginal Housing Coalition). He argues that their objections against the relocation plans are invalid because of two reasons. One, there is no danger of disrupting the connection between a piece of land and its people because there is no traditional connection between Redfern and the contemporary Redfern residents. Two, there is no danger of dispersing/disrupting an Aboriginal community because the residents of Redfern are not an Aboriginal community.

In regard to the first objection, one of the arguments used against the Company’s plans for relocation is that it would break people’s connection with the Aboriginal land they have lived on. By the reasoning of the Aboriginal Housing Coalition the Block is considered to be a reclaimed

piece of Aboriginal land because it has once belonged to Aboriginal people who did not survive, the Eora people. In this line of arguing the fact that the land has no traditional connection to the Aboriginal people who migrated there is not relevant. But the Company representative considers this connection to be relevant because he makes a distinction between people who live on their traditional land or the land they come from and people who have moved to other places than their own. In the eyes of the speaker, because the Redfern residents are not the original inhabitants to this area, they have no right to claim this area as their own. Apart from that, the Block was only set up twenty years ago. The representative's view on this particular issue is linked with the problems I discussed in Chapter 6 where the question was raised whether post-colonial buildings or places can be a part of Aboriginal heritage. So, because there is no traditional connection between the land and the actual people living on it relocation is a viable option and the objection used by the Coalition is invalid. He does, however, recognise some sort of connection between the land and Aboriginal people in general, further down the interview, but does not consider this to be an obstacle for the relocation plans.

The second objection concerns the perceived disruption of an Aboriginal community. As I have described in section 4.2.4 and in Chapter 7 the Aboriginal residents of Redfern are often described as a close community. Also the Coalition firmly believes in the coherent forces between the residents and speaks of the Redfern Aboriginal community. The relocation plans are perceived as a threat to the community as it involves the dispersion of its residents. As a community elder, who has been living on the Block for twenty years, put it: "We have our strength now because we are together. But if they are going to split us up we will be weak." (11-12-1996) The Company representative opposes the idea that the plans would break up the Aboriginal community because he wonders if such a community exists.

First, he says that there is doubt to whether all residents are indeed Aboriginal. Not only have the original people died out but the people who populate the area nowadays are in many cases not even "real Kooris", thus making their claim on the area even more illegitimate in the eyes of the speaker. Second, he claims that there is no Aboriginal community on the Block. The fact that Aboriginal people have always been put in confined areas by the Government, as is the case on the Block, does not automatically

make Redfern a community. Apart from that, families have fallen apart and all there is left are visitors from the country using drugs and alcohol.

The representative comes to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a Redfern Aboriginal community and there is certainly no special connection that binds its residents to the area of Redfern. Therefore the objections of the Coalition are invalid and people should not have a problem with the new plans to remove people from the Redfern area to other suburbs to make place for an enterprise that will provide job opportunities and the opportunity to finally become independent of the Government.

8.3 Renovation, Not Relocation: The Aboriginal Housing Coalition

In November 1995 the Aboriginal pastor and community leader, who had been the second president of the Company in 1973 (see section 2.2.4), organised a rally against the redevelopment plans in which seventy people marched to Parliament House in anticipation of the upcoming meeting in December 1995 when the final decision would be made on what to do with the Block (*Sun Herald* 12-11-1995). And in December 1995 some people in the Redfern Aboriginal community informed the Aboriginal Housing Company that they had established the Aboriginal Housing Coalition to counteract the plans of the Company because they were convinced that the first consultation process was not conducted properly and that the majority of the residents actually wanted to stay (ATSIC files 1996). The Coalition accused the Company of misleading and threatening tenants to sign the survey in the Company's favour and it aimed to "ensure a say for all Aboriginal people on the Block in the management of housing" (ATSIC file 1996).

The Coalition approached a lawyer in December 1995 who was willing to help them on a voluntary basis and was supported by various student organisations and social movements as well as support groups such as the Manly-Warringah Pittwater Aboriginal Support Group and the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. The Coalition itself consisted of community members, Company tenants, community elders as well as staff members of various Aboriginal organisations of whom many were or had been (Board) members of the Company in earlier years.

8.3.1 The Coalition's Plans of Action

In February 1996 the Coalition organised its first rally. In March 1996 the Aboriginal Housing Coalition held a public appearance and organised a rally to "Save the Block" in Pemulwuy Park in Redfern. From the protest that was held in March onwards the Coalition organised fortnightly meetings at the premises of the Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation in Holden Street. In the beginning of the year these meetings were visited by generally more than twenty people, most of whom were residents on the Block. All meetings were attended by the lawyer and his assistant(s) as well as three leading figures in Redfern who came from different organisations. Throughout the year the Coalition developed three methods to achieve their aims, namely: pushing Coalition members to become Company members, getting access to information concerning the redevelopment plans and pushing for a new consultation process.

First, the Coalition wanted to give the Company tenants who were not on the Company membership list the opportunity to become a member so they could have some influence on what was going to happen to their houses. At an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Company in May 1996 all people who wanted to become members were accepted but one. The Company refused to grant membership to one woman on the grounds that she was not Aboriginal. Apart from that the Company promised to reconsult the community on the relocation plans. At the first Board meeting of the Aboriginal Housing Company that followed after the General Extraordinary Meeting one of the leading figures of the Coalition was officially accepted as Board member.

At a Coalition meeting following the Extraordinary General Meeting one woman said that in the beginning the Company wanted to refuse all new members because they questioned everybody's Aboriginality but now they only refused one woman for this reason. Company staff members had claimed that one of the Coalition leaders had only 2% Aboriginal blood (26-4-1996). The woman who was refused membership asked the Coalition at that meeting: "Why do they want to buy me a house but not want to make me a member of the Company?" At that meeting the Coalition started a petition and wrote a letter to the Company in which the Coalition members claimed that they knew the woman in question was Aboriginal so she should be accepted as Company member. One woman present did not agree with the words of the petition and insisted that the words: "We think (X) is an Aboriginal person" should be replaced by "We know (X) is an

Aboriginal person” because: “It is an insult to say we *think* she is an Aboriginal”. The petition was signed by all twenty Aboriginal persons present (21-6-1996).

Now that the Company had accepted the new members and one Board member, originating from the Coalition, the situation changed. While before the Coalition was an independent body opposing the Company, now the Coalition had partly *become* the Company by the fact that people in their midst had gained a position within the Company. For the Company this meant that the Coalition had ceased to exist. After the Extraordinary General Meeting in May one of the Company Board members informed the ATSIC personally that the Coalition had dissolved itself at the meeting. But the Coalition members claimed that it would not cease to exist before they would be confident that their needs were met. The consequence of the official cooperation with the Company was that change could now only be achieved through voting at Company meetings. The Coalition’s problem was that they were not recognised by the Company (and consequently no longer recognised by the ATSIC, as I will show later) and that they were still a minority within the Company. It was around this time that the number of people attending the Coalition meetings was slowly decreasing and people within the Coalition started questioning each other’s approach to the issue.

Second, the Coalition tried to get access to information concerning the redevelopment plans because the Coalition was convinced that the Company held back information as to the exact nature of the plans, its planning and its finances. On a number of occasions Coalition members visited the Company to gain access to such information and the lawyers of the Coalition tried to get the Company to give access to some of its documents. Having a member on the Board of Directors that was active in the Coalition and getting people to become members was also expected to facilitate access to more information concerning the plans, although Coalition members regularly had the idea that they were thwarted in their plans. The new Board member, for example, claimed he was not always invited or invited too late for meetings and he did not always receive the information about the plans that other Board members received.

The lawyer representing the Coalition was able to gain access to ATSIC files under the *Freedom of Information Act 1989 (NSW)* and his assistants visited the ATSIC Regional Office in Sydney in June 1996 to read through the files concerning the Company, which had always been funded by the ATSIC. I was allowed to join them. We went through the paperwork that

we were allowed to go through under the watchful eye of one ATSI representative. After the research, she started talking and made some contradictory remarks. On the one hand she stated that the Company members were a good representation of the community because the members who were not actual tenants worked for community-based organisations around the area and they had the right to have a say in it too. On the other hand she claimed that the people of the Coalition had a double agenda because there were people in the Coalition of different organisations who just wanted to maintain the Block so they would not lose their funding that is allocated on the basis of the number of clients. At that same meeting she said she did not believe that the issues were not resolved yet, implying that our visit by order of the Coalition was invalid.

Third, the Coalition pushed for a new consultation process because it was not satisfied with the one that was carried out by order of the Company in December 1995. The Coalition thought that the consultation that was carried out by the Company at the end of 1995 - showing that only five residents wanted to stay - was not properly conducted. It claimed that people were forced to agree with the plans and sign in favour of moving out. A survey carried out by the Coalition showed that the majority of people wanted to stay. Therefore a new consultation process was demanded. At a Coalition meeting one woman stated that she had signed the paper which stated that she wanted to move out because she thought the only other option was to be kicked out. "Freddy said that I had to sign or I would be on my own." (28-6-1996). There were more people on the Block who told the Coalition they felt they were forced into signing or were told that they had no other option to chose from.

In order to push for a new consultation process the Coalition sought contact with important outsiders. In April 1996 a delegation of the Coalition went to the NSW Parliament House to meet Elizabeth Kirkby (Australian Democrats), a Member of the NSW Legislative Council.¹⁴³ The delegation was allowed to prepare a meeting with Craig Knowles, Minister for Housing, Andrew Refshauge, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and a representative from the South Sydney City Council. In September the Coalition also called upon Olympics Minister Michael Knight that no state government funding would be made available for redevelopment until after

¹⁴³ But because she was engaged they talked with Simon Disney to discuss the situation in Redfern and the Coalition's concerns.

the completion of an independent survey of residents' views and community discussion of all redevelopment options.

The Coalition succeeded in getting one Coalition member on the Steering Committee that was going to manage the consultation process. The Steering Committee was headed by representatives of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs of NSW and also included the Department of Housing, the South Sydney City Council, ATSIC and the Company. At one of the first Steering Committee meetings a representative of the Company said there was no need for the Coalition to be separately represented in the Steering Committee. To demonstrate how determined the Company was not to work with the Coalition anymore two Board members present left the meeting. The Coalition member present agreed to no longer be present as a Coalition member but as a member of the Company. When eventually the new consultation process was held the questions seemed to put too much emphasis on relocation and mentioned possibilities that could not be realised financially by the Company, such as relocation to other areas and buying other houses. The results of the survey showed that twelve tenants wanted to stay.

From December 1996 onwards only one Coalition member, the one on the Steering Committee, was active. In December the lawyer made known that he could no longer help the Coalition because, as the lawyer stated: "We can no longer say we represent a community view any longer." (11-12-1996) In 1999 I found out that one of the community elders and one of the founding members of the Coalition still continue the struggle to keep the Block from being demolished and to give the residents that have stayed a say in the redevelopment plans. In 1998 the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council purchased property on the corner of Holden and Eveleigh Street, obtaining the right to be included in the discussions concerning the Block as owners of the property on the Block. At that time one part of the Block was emptied out, the other half (on the side of Louis Street) was still partly inhabited. Some of the houses were being squatted. As a representative of the Company told me the Company has relocated the former tenants to places like Grafton, Bowra, Taree and areas in the West of Sydney, such as Rooty Hill as well as to inner city areas, mainly Waterloo (18-3-1999). The relocation was done with a state government contribution from the Department of Housing. The twelve tenants that wanted to stay would be incorporated in the new development plans.

8.3.2 Their View on the Block

For the purpose of pushing for a new consultation process a meeting was organised by the Coalition on the 12th of July 1996. This communal meeting was attended by the Coalition members and its lawyer, tenants and other residents from the Block and representatives from the ATSIC and the DAA (Department of Aboriginal Affairs) of NSW. The Aboriginal Housing Company was also invited but did not show up. It is interesting to see that in this meeting the ATSIC Regional Manager seemed to represent the Company's view on the issue by constantly defending them and speaking for them. The representative from the DAA acted as an independent observer and was therefore not heard much during the meeting. She only made suggestions concerning a new consultation process. All the other people present were supporting the Coalition. During the meeting several issues came to the fore upon which the Company and the Coalition disagreed. The main issues involved: policy direction and implementation, representation, and funding.

In the first place the Coalition made clear during the meeting that its members did not agree with the direction the plans of the Company were going to take: namely relocation instead of renovation. Their main objections involved their emotional attachment to their neighbourhood and the break up of the Aboriginal community living in the neighbourhood. The ATSIC Regional Manager acknowledged the emotional aspects but considered them to be less relevant than the abominable living conditions: "issues of this nature have the capacity to become emotional because of the attachments. I can understand that but it must be set off against the living conditions." One resident responded:

I lived here for 20 years and never has there been done anything on the houses. We have our hope here [points to her heart] and when the Housing Company said what they were gonna do it shattered our hope. That is why we jump up and down. You say we are emotional about it. But we are community people coming together and fighting for our rights and kids. We never burst into aggressiveness or made threats. We are ordinary people coming up for our rights. (12-7-1996)

Also, the way of implementing the development plans caused the Coalition to worry, stemming from the way in which the Company handled the process of consulting and informing the people concerned. It was also pointed out that the person responsible at the Company to keep in touch

with the community and the tenants - paid by the ATSIC to do so - did not fulfil his obligations. There had been no further consultation nor had the Company informed the Coalition about the existence of the ARUP report in which the new development plans were revealed. The Coalition lawyer pointed out that in his view there was no dialogue. Since his involvement he had not seen "the slightest hint of evidence of consultation". His point was supported by the fact that the Company had never attended any Coalition meetings even though they had been invited a number of times, like today. During the meeting the member of the DAA suggested that an independent consultation process should be carried out and the DAA was willing to facilitate and accompany this process. The ATSIC representative agreed with that but added: "if the Aboriginal Housing Company has a change of heart about cooperating I will have a talk but I have no authority over them." People from the Coalition emphasised that both the Company, the Coalition and the DAA should be part of the Steering Committee that would manage the consultation process.

Second, the representation was also an issue of discussion at the meeting. On the one hand the question of representation focused on who was supposed to be represented. Which parties were allowed a role in the future of Redfern? On the other hand the question focused on the representatives, in this case the Aboriginal Housing Company, because it was the only organisation considered to be representing the Aboriginal people of Redfern in this issue in the eyes of the ATSIC representative.

The Coalition members felt people had been left out while they should have been involved in the process of consultation and representation. In pushing for Company membership of people who were no members but had a right to be, the Coalition had already attempted to solve this problem. The ATSIC Regional Manager, however, mentioned that since the Company accepted many Coalition members as Company members at the Extraordinary General Meeting in May 1996 it no longer recognised the Coalition. The Coalition members, however, said that they never agreed on that and instead claimed that the Coalition would only cease to exist when there was no longer a reason for it to exist. That the Coalition was still necessary was supported by people's claims that they were still told to move out even though the development plans were not final yet and it was not certain that the Company could go ahead with their plans.

The ATSIC Regional Manager seemed to approve of the Company's position towards the Coalition as he defended the Company by saying that:

They [the Housing Company] are not confronted with their tenants now but with a Coalition. But they are not the same thing to me. The Coalition does not only consist of tenants but concerned community members that do not live on the Block. (12-7-1996)

He was of the opinion that the Company only had "a responsibility to its tenants, not to the community" and regarded it as a body that represented its tenants adequately. He thought that all tenants of the Company were regularly well informed about what was going on but was told by the Coalition that tenants had often been refused admittance to tenant meetings because they were not Company members. One person pointed out that many members of the Company did not live in Redfern, nor were they tenants of the Company. When confronted with this fact the Regional Manager claimed that some of the members were concerned community members and for that reason had every right to be a member of the Company. But as can be read above on the same basis he rejected the Coalition as it was also admitting members that were not actually tenants on the Block, but "merely" concerned community members.

The division between tenants and "the rest of the community" was questioned by the residents present at the meeting because they thought it was not fair to exclude community members who were not tenants because it is their neighbourhood too that is going to change drastically. A Coalition member pointed out that it did not only concern the tenants but the whole community. One of the residents called out: "Forget about the Coalition. We are people. We live here. We are the grass roots people."

Apart from that the residents and Coalition members not only questioned the division the ATSIC representative made in tenants and others, they also questioned the status the Aboriginal Housing Company apparently had as representative of the tenants on the Block. One tenant pointed out that: "X should not be up there. He went in and took over. They never came before a committee to be chosen." Not only were the people in charge of changing the future of Redfern never chosen, they also acted in a way the people present at the meeting did not agree with. As one Coalition member pointed out: "The Housing Company does not own the community. The community owns the Housing Company." But the way the Company acted now did not reflect that, as a resident remarked:

Who are these people? Redfern is where land rights have birthed from. How do they dare to come in here and expect us to play dead? How can these people pay for new houses that they have to move in? They try to move us out in a sophisticated way. But

they only work for the people. They are not the Kings and Queens of Redfern. (12-7-1996)

By claiming that the people present at the meeting were “the voice of the people” the Coalition members undermined the Company’s position as the representatives of the Aboriginal tenants on the Block. They claimed that the director of the Company came from outside the community and took over. He was not chosen by the community and should therefore not be able to represent the community. Apart from that, ever since their arrival the community had been split in two. These were serious accusations made by the community members. They felt as though the control over what happened to their neighbourhood had been taken away from them and fallen into the hands of people from outside the community. This feeling of lost control was endorsed by numerous members who had been taken from the members list without their consent.

The third issue of concern was the funding of the development plans. The fact that, until this meeting, the ATSIC Regional Manager had regarded the Company as a body that adequately represented and informed its tenants frightened the people present as they feared the ATSIC would (financially) support the relocation plans. But the Regional Manager reassured their doubts by stating that funding would only become available when all the issues would be resolved. He mentioned as well that the funding could also be used for renovation.

It is clear that with their power to reserve 6 million dollars for this project the ATSIC had a substantial influence in what would happen with the Block. It was therefore of the utmost importance to gain the support of the ATSIC. While the Company obviously had that support it was crucial for the Coalition to point out that there were also other views on the relocation plans under the tenants. By informing the ATSIC about what they conceived as missteps from the Company the Coalition could push for an adequate consultation and information process which would benefit all Redfern Aboriginal residents. At the end of the meeting it was decided that two people from the Coalition should be put on the Steering Committee which was going to run the new consultation process.

8.4 Descent as Strategy of Identification

Although the descriptions of the networks as described in section 8.1 give the impression that the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern work together in perfect harmony, the case of the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Coalition makes clear that many of them struggle with internal disputes. Internal struggles are not specific to Aboriginal organisations. Many organisations cope with internal problems of some sort.¹⁴⁴ Bax points out that most conflicts are due to different operational aims within the organisation (like policy implementation) or the striving for informal aims (private aims of individuals) (1991: 20). The same can be seen within Aboriginal organisations where most struggles concern issues of representation, policy direction and implementation, and the division of funding. In his article on Aboriginal power and self-determination Pierson, however, concludes that such disputes can be beneficial:

differences in approach by ... organizations and differences in individual philosophies tend to function in complementary ways through various programmes which reach more people and subsequently expand the variety of resources and opportunities available to local Aborigines. (1982: 209)

Apart from that, Duncan claims that factionalism “generates effective leadership and is responsible for proliferating Aboriginal protest into ever wider areas” (1975: 56, see also Wheeldon 1969: 176-177). From the start the dispute revolving around the development plans on the Block had been depicted as an Aboriginal struggle in the media. But the participants in the struggle kept stressing that it concerned a dispute between tenants and landlord, not different Aboriginal groups. Despite the fact that the tenancy was one of the issues of the struggle, in my view the fight soon became an Aboriginal struggle. The arguments of both parties that evolved around representation, policy direction, and access to funding all involved the issue of Aboriginality.

People accused each other of not acting or being Aboriginal. For this reason the struggle going on in Redfern was relevant to people outside the dispute as well. Both funding institutions as well as society in general are

¹⁴⁴ Constantino-David writes that NGOs often cope with problems of rivalry, often caused by their battle for resources, personality conflicts, and their identification with political factions (1992: 140).

concerned with the Aboriginality of organisations before they get access to funding or the power to implement particular policies. Also, the local Aboriginal community is concerned with the Aboriginality of their organisations before making use of their services. Hence, also for these groups, it would be important to know whether one of the parties involved in the struggle would turn out not to be a proper Aboriginal organisation.

Within the organisations the Aboriginality of individual staff members is important to be able to claim their status as representative, their power in policy direction and implementation and their access to funding. The access to these three resources (representation, policy direction, funding) makes a position in an Aboriginal organisation a valuable position. Therefore, people within these organisations are watched closely and judged on their ability to fulfil such a powerful position. At the same time it offers the opportunity during times of disputes to verify or reject an organisation's corporate Aboriginal identity through attacking individual staff members. This is also what happened in Redfern.

8.4.1 Things to Fight Over

The argument between the Aboriginal Housing Coalition and the Aboriginal Housing Company evolved around the three issues: policy, representation and funding. The issue which lies at the basis of the different views that existed on who should have a say in the process and the direction to take in the future, is the presence of different interpretations of the Aboriginal community on the Block. While the Company saw no reason to involve the whole Aboriginal community in the discussion - as they did not recognise the existence of a community - the ATSIC seemed to think that the community was adequately represented by the Company members and thus the community was involved. Only the Coalition believed that the community was not adequately represented. Therefore, it had taken on the role of representative of part of the Redfern Aboriginal community not represented by the Company.

The Company seemed to divide the residents on the Block in two groups: a) Company tenants who were the victims of criminal behaviour and drug abuse in the area b) other people on the Block who used drugs and alcohol or were involved in criminal activities. They made a distinction between the people working for the Company and the residents living down the street, witnessing the remark a Company representative made to

an Aboriginal elder: "We have done our best for you people on the Block". Especially the use of the words "you people" suggests that the Company members considered themselves to be different from the people on the Block. This raises questions about the validity of the representative function of the Company because especially the ATSIC assumed that they represented the residents on the Block. The Company disputed the Aboriginality of people on the Block and had refused people membership on the basis of their Aboriginality. The Company representative said in his interview that there was no Aboriginal community anymore. This explains why the Company saw no role for the community to play in their plans.¹⁴⁵

The Coalition, on the other hand, saw the Aboriginal people living on the Block as a community, an entity under threat of the new plans. The community did not only consist of the actual tenants of the Company premises but also included the floating population and the Aboriginal organisations servicing the community. The people who were involved in substance abuse or criminal activities were regarded as members who needed help in the form of special programmes and support from the community. The Coalition regarded the residents making up the community as victims of secrecy and intimidation from the side of the Company. Because the people that should be included were excluded by the Company the Coalition had taken on the role to represent those who were inadequately represented by the Company.

An interesting point is that in different discussions the Coalition placed the Company members (and especially the director and the Board of Directors) outside the Redfern Aboriginal community. On numerous occasions it was stressed that the director and his family came from outside Redfern to "take over", as one of the Coalition members elucidates:

The Housing Company is used by some families. They have a systematic approach to advance the deterioration of the Block. Be very careful with it. They have a self-serving agenda. On the Block there is a series of family groups. Freddy has always been there. But the whole family has been there only for the last ten years. (1-5-1996)

¹⁴⁵ In a newspaper article the Company representative's attitude towards the community on the Block and their right to have a say in the affairs became clear when he was asked if the residents should be allowed to vote on the issue if need be. He answered: "Er, no. I don't think so. People don't want change." (Sun Herald 12-11-1995).

It is interesting to see why people did not accept a whole family as part of their community. After all, all Aboriginal people from Redfern moved there once from another place, most likely a country town such as where the Company members came from. One of the Coalition members who had made such accusations himself even came from the same region as the people from the Company being from the same nation. Another member of the Coalition once said about the family running the Company:

The North Coast people are Freddy's people. We grew up with them. The Bandjalang people. When only the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri were there it was beautiful. But it is this religious thing, these people from the North Coast, when it turned nasty on the Block. Before that we had community gardens. But they have a mission mentality. They do not ask questions, they obey authority. (1-5-1996)

I seek the answer for this in the fact that the Company members distinguished themselves from the Redfern community. Thus the reason for not accepting the Company people as community members was not their (lack of) Aboriginal descent but their "refusal" to associate themselves with the Redfern community. Because they were from "outside", residents claimed they were less able to represent the Aboriginal community of Redfern, nor were they authorised to decide what was going to happen to Redfern and its residents. They saw the Coalition as the true representatives of the Redfern Aboriginal community and therefore they demanded that the Coalition members should have a say in the discussion.

Not only did the two organisations differ in their opinions on who should be represented, they also disputed each other's authority to represent the Redfern residents. From the beginning of the dispute the Company was convinced that the Coalition represented a minority of people who wanted to save their own Aboriginal organisations and who involved the media in their struggle and were supported by white people who knew nothing about it. And when they had accepted new members on their membership list at the meeting in May 1996 they did not recognise the Coalition at all. The Coalition members, in their turn, did not recognise the Company in a sense that they saw it as inadequately representing the Company tenants and regarded its staff members as outsiders taking over.

Apart from the issues of policy direction and representation there was yet another issue of concern that played a role in the struggle: who could gain access to the funding that could be claimed from the ATSIC for the purpose of reconstructing the Block? With ATSIC's support and approval

one could gain control over resources that were necessary to reshape Redfern's future. Both parties needed to convince the ATSIC that they represented a substantial part of the Redfern community. Along with the Company, the ATSIC failed to recognise the Coalition on numerous occasions. In the first instance the ATSIC regarded the Coalition as a small minority that wanted to undermine the Company. The ATSIC Regional Manager accused some Coalition members of not acting in the best interest of the community but of their own organisation. In an official letter he suggested that particular Coalition members were only afraid for their own organisation. It seemed he had overlooked that also the Company was concerned about its own well-being as the development plans were also made to generate more financial security for the Company. Just as it was a valid reason for the Company to worry about their future prospects, so it was for other Aboriginal organisations. Besides, the organisations were also concerned about the future prospects of their clients. They were concerned about how their clients would manage when they would no longer live in the vicinity of the facilities they used on a regular basis.

When the ATSIC had accepted that there was a disagreement within the community concerning the Company's plans, it tried to bring both parties together. The ATSIC thought the issue was resolved when a number of Coalition members were accepted as Company members and the Coalition became involved in the Steering Committee organising a new consultation survey. As a result of that survey the ATSIC agreed with renewed development plans made by the Company that provided for the renovation of part of the Block and reconstruction into a business and cultural centre for the rest of the Block.

8.4.2 Kin, Style and Skin: How to Gain and Maintain Recognition

All the points upon which the both parties seemed to disagree with one another stemmed from a different attitude towards Aboriginality. Because of their different visions they both developed different plans for the Block and they both had different ideas about who should be represented or involved in the discussions surrounding the development plans. Both parties accused each other of lack of Aboriginality, not only in the approach to the problems and the policy directions taken by the different organisations but also on a personal level.

People's Aboriginal identifications were judged on the basis of their descent and their behaviour. On the one hand, the Company attacked particular persons about their Aboriginality. They accused people of not having enough Aboriginal blood. Also the way in which particular community members behaved was a reason for the Company to no longer regard the people on the Block as an Aboriginal community. On the other hand, the Coalition refused to accept the Company as representing Aborigines adequately. Whereas they could not accuse the Company staff members of not being Aboriginal - because they came from a known Aboriginal family - they accused them of not acting properly Aboriginal. In the first place the Company displayed a lack of care for the community in wanting to disperse the community, according to the Coalition. Apart from that the Company did not respect the Aboriginal elders living on the Block who had stated that they wanted to stay.¹⁴⁶ Hence, Aboriginality was used by both Company and Coalition members as a tool, a strategy to undermine the opposite party in the struggle.

The different ways in which Aboriginality is used in this struggle can be explained by Schwab's model of individual Aboriginal identification. He claims that an Aboriginal individual's identity is perceived in terms of five conceptual categories of which only one fits the person in question: 1) kin; 2) persons from home; 3) known persons; 4) recognised persons; 5) unknown persons (1988: 81). He points out that while the first three categories involve people who belong to identifiable Aboriginal families which are known, the category of recognised person involves people who have established themselves as Aboriginal people and are recognised as being legitimate. Schwab claims that unknown Aboriginal people can gain/obtain acceptance and a status of recognised person by the usage of proper Aboriginal style but recognition can not be demanded if there is no kinship basis in the community.¹⁴⁷ If there is people can (ibid. 1988: 92).

In Redfern the community is a heterogeneous group consisting of migrated people with different backgrounds. Consequently a relatively large number of people are perceived as recognised persons. The reason

¹⁴⁶ When describing coloured voluntary associations in Central Africa Wheeldon notes that participants in such organisations in criticising their enemies often "invoke vaguely-defined norms derived from the interpretation of 'how we do things', which is current in the effective section of their networks." (1969: 175)

¹⁴⁷ I would like to add that in Redfern I have seen cases in which unknown people were accepted as Koori members of the community even though people knew the people in question were in fact Torres Strait Islanders.

why the Company could accuse individual Coalition members of a lack of Aboriginality is connected with the fact that these people fall under the category of recognised persons. Although their Aboriginal identity was accepted by - at least a large part of - the Aboriginal community they did not belong to an identifiable family. Such a person is vulnerable to recategorisation when new community members enter the stage who view the person in question as an unknown person. But while the Company could attack individual community members on the basis of their descent, the Coalition could not attack the Company members on the same grounds as the main family running the Company fell under the category known persons.

The main means to determine whether an unknown person's Aboriginal identification is legitimate is based on a notion of Aboriginality as descent. As I described in Chapter 4 the combination of family and place name provides people with a recognised Aboriginal identity. As can be seen from the case described in this chapter the acceptance on the basis of family and place name or a nation affiliation are not always enough to be accepted by other Aboriginal people. Whenever someone's Aboriginal identity can not be established on the basis of kinship ties people are judged on their behaviour.

Schwab describes how people use style to find acceptance in a community where they can not be accepted on the basis of their family background. As a resident of Bushtown, quoted by Carter said: "You can always tell a Koori by the way they walk, talk and dress." (1988: 68) Style is a personal way to express Aboriginality and find or support an individual connection with an Aboriginal collective:

It is this flexibility in style and the possibility of its manipulation which provide an avenue for movement toward recognition in the Adelaide community, movement from the status of unknown person to recognised person ... style sometimes provides a means by which persons can overcome the perceived ambiguity of their identities. (Schwab 1988: 83)

Schwab distinguishes the following components of "Aboriginal style": 1) the Lingo¹⁴⁸; 2) style or colour of clothing and accessories; 3) identification with particular types of music; and 4) deportment (standing and walking), body language, and etiquette (1988: 83-85).

¹⁴⁸ Aboriginal slang spoken in Adelaide.

As I wrote in section 4.2.3 in Redfern the residents use their own slang. Studies have shown that Aboriginal people who do not speak an official Aboriginal language can still have their own style of speech (Eades 1988) or vocabulary (Eckermann 1977: 307-308). The importance of language as an expression of a distinct group identity is widely accepted.¹⁴⁹ The Redfern Kooris also seem to have a preference for particular clothing and music. With regard to speech, dress, and preference in music Barwick claims that some of these expressions are not only an adapted extension of traditional norms but also characteristic of migratory workers (1988: 29). This makes sense, as many Aboriginal people originating from rural towns were migratory workers.

About deportment, body language and etiquette¹⁵⁰ Schwab writes that this also involves:

the ability to recognise powerful people, to avoid stepping on wrong toes, to see the divisions between community factions, and to be aware of local political issues ... in short, to recognise, respect and abide by the local version of common-sense. (1988: 85)

According to Carter "Aboriginality is ... an ideology of both behaviour and cognition" (1984: 128). In her study on the Aboriginal people from what she called Bushtown she described how in Aboriginal people's daily lives: "Aboriginality as an ideology maps patterns of normative behaviour as kin-based and group-oriented, together with details of role (what makes a 'good Aboriginal' *mother*; or how a 'good Aboriginal' *child* behaves towards his siblings." (1984: 127) The conception that people have to act according to the patterns of Aboriginal normative behaviour at the same time implies that it is not acceptable to act in ways that are described as "western" patterns of behaviour. One of the worst crimes is not to follow the behavioural code of the Aboriginal community but that of western society. In that case people accuse each other of acting like or being *gubbahs* (Beckett 1964: 35; Bryant 1982: 77; Fink 1957), accusations that were also being made in the case I

¹⁴⁹ Povinelli argues that "The struggle of the Belyuen Aborigines to produce themselves and their identities in the contemporary nation state centres in the community on talk." (1993: 34) He claims that by watching closely who talks to whom the Belyuen Aborigines understand each other's social group identity. Talking the wrong language in a particular area can have nasty results (1993: 34).

¹⁵⁰ Trigger gives some nice examples of differences between "whitefella" and "blackfella" etiquette and discusses amongst others the indirectness of Aboriginal general facial expression and gesture (1992: 91-96).

described. People working in welfare organisations depending on the Government or other representative functions are often accused of selling out their own people, losing contact with what is called “the grassroots”, or pretending to be white. Accused of disloyalty these people are often called coconuts (Cowlshaw 1988: 103). The word *coconut* refers to being black on the outside but white on the inside.

This brings me to the last issue that plays a role in the acceptance of an individual’s identification as Aborigine. As Schwab mentions, in case a person is not identified through family and place name acceptance by the Aboriginal community can be gained through the use of proper style. However, there is one important obstacle in this process of gaining acceptance through style, namely skin colour. As was said by an Aboriginal man quoted in Schwab: “It’s easier to be black if you’re black.” (1988: 95). While it is generally not admitted in public skin colour can in practice indeed play a role in the acceptance of unknown Aboriginal people (M. Tonkinson 1990: 207).

Schwab describes a case in which a young boy in a shelter for homeless Aboriginal boys tries to establish his Aboriginal identity because there is doubt to whether he is Aboriginal among the boys in the house because he is not known to the local community and is very light skinned. His attempt to gain recognition through using Aboriginal style, such as the Adelaide Aboriginal lingo is not taken seriously and he is even ridiculed for that. In another case Schwab describes how another boy in the same house looked very much like an Aboriginal but because he was raised by white parents he was not accustomed to Aboriginal style and practices. The other boys accepted him immediately and were willing to help him learn their Nunga ways (1988: 88-91).

I also have seen cases in which people’s skin colour made others question their claim to Aboriginal identity. Such as the argument between two people from the stolen generations where a man confronted a woman whose skin colour was much lighter than his. The white looking woman was accused by a coloured Aboriginal man of being white. He said she could not be an Aboriginal because she had never lived the black way. The woman was very upset and told him that being Aboriginal is about feeling and that she felt Aboriginal inside. The man seemed not to be bothered so much by the colour itself but more by the consequences of having that particular skin colour in Australian society. He claimed that because his skin was darker he was treated worse by western people while the woman

with the light skin could have passed for being a non-Aboriginal person therefore protecting herself from racist experiences. The issue surrounding skin colour remains especially relevant for people from the stolen generation who often have no other way of legitimising their Aboriginal identification.¹⁵¹

8.4.3 The Importance of Individual Recognition

In the former chapter I showed that the educational programmes offered by the organisations form an excellent opportunity to propagate the organisations' view or interpretation of Aboriginality. This view is translated in policies by the staff members. The organisation's corporate identity, its policies and programmes are all created and shaped by the staff members. The staff members *are* the organisations. They translate to others what Aboriginal identity entails according to their organisations. What values the organisations regard as Aboriginal values and how they incorporate these in their policies and their programmes. Through the personal interaction between the Aboriginal staff members and their clients or spokespersons from institutions the former serve as "business-cards" of the organisations. In this face-to-face interaction the staff members need to maintain the Aboriginal corporate identity of the organisation through their personal behaviour. Also, when they are not Aboriginal themselves staff members should at least be able to act according to what is expected from them under the corporate identity, such as understanding Aboriginal manners etc. When staff members fail to answer to the expectations of clients, representatives of institutions, colleagues or other Aboriginal people, the latter can lose faith in the organisation. Therefore, organisations depend on their staff's behaviour.

For staff members of organisations in general it is thus crucial to be a recognised person in the Aboriginal community, which the organisation serves. This is difficult because they take on the role of brokers or middlemen (Köbben 1983, Pierson 1982) between the Aboriginal

¹⁵¹ Normally Aboriginal children are prepared for confrontations about their colour in adult life by their parents who use "black" as epithet in teasing their children in the same way whites sometimes do (Eckermann 1977: 300). People from the stolen generations however have learned something else and have never been prepared for possible confrontations about their skin colour. I have heard from people that when they grew up in the institutions they were taught that blacks were dirty and lazy and that they themselves were not black.

community and Australian society and are therefore especially vulnerable to accusations questioning their Aboriginality.¹⁵² The House of Representatives recognises that problems for Aboriginal organisations' staff members are created by their multifunctional roles as both representatives and as liaisons between organisation and government (1988: 10-11). While on the one hand they should conform to the western rules set to receive funding and acceptance by Australian society, on the other hand the staff should be able to maintain the connection with their clients in the community. This double role can arouse suspicions.

Not only the double role people play makes them subject to suspicion but also the importance of the position they are fulfilling. Staff members of organisations, as well as people working in political (government) positions have access to power resources. They are considered as representatives of a larger group, have the power to influence policy directions and implementations and can even have access to funding to reach their goals. Because of the value of such positions people holding them are constantly monitored by others to see to it that these people are capable and authorised to fulfil such a position and do not abuse it for their individual goals. As a consequence staff members' individual Aboriginal identification as well as their behaviour are judged by clients, funding institutions, and their own colleagues and other organisations operating around them as we have seen in the above case.

The most important requirement to be allowed to take such a position is the staff member's Aboriginality. They are judged on the basis of what has been called Aboriginality as descent. When that does not suffice to establish someone's Aboriginality, one looks at their behaviour or style, and sometimes their skin colour. So, why do people on a personal level emphasise especially notions of Aboriginality as descent? To answer this question one has to look at the capacity of this notion. Through their descent, their direct link with their family, people are offered a way in which they fit in a family group or nation connecting their body to other people via biological descent. As Lattas argues: "People can make

¹⁵² Especially field officers often have to cop the complaints about what is wrong with the Aboriginal organisations (Harkins 1986: 57). Others that are vulnerable are people who act as representatives in government institutions, such as the ATSIC commissioners, or play other roles in Australian politics. Some Aboriginal people regard them as "black pets that the Government has trained" or "black managers" (referring to managers on the reserves). Gilbert writes that anyone taking on a role in the Government becomes automatically a suspect (1973: 138).

themselves part of each other's bodies through the shared embodied space created by ancestry and the past." (1992: 163) This offers the individual the means to develop a self-identity that fits in with existing group identities and incorporate elements of the group identity into an integrated narrative of a self-identity (Giddens 1991). People believe that family is connected through blood. It is through these bloodlines that Aboriginality is inherited resulting in the general view that "Aboriginality is in the blood" (Keeffe 1992, M. Tonkinson 1990). Apart from the capacity to provide a link between the individual and a group, the notion of descent also offers a link with ancestors that occupied the Australian continent before the arrival of the British. As I have written in section 4.2.2 it is on the basis of this link with pre-colonial ancestors that Aboriginal people claim a unique status as first inhabitants of the Australian continent. This is used as an argument to demand exclusive rights such as land rights and self-determination.

Especially its capacity to create a direct link between the individual and the family group makes it attractive to emphasise Aboriginality as descent in individual interactions. On the one hand it can be used as a tool to place unknown people in recognisable categories as described by Schwab. On the other hand it can divide people into small groups with strong emotional ties. During the struggle between the Company and the Coalition competition over different issues drove people to question each other's identification as Aborigine. Another consequence of the competition was the division of the Redfern community into factions. These factions, when following the accusations made during the dispute, separated along the lines of family groups. The reason for this is the strong emotional link these groups provide with their individual members. With the mixture of family backgrounds such as present in the Redfern community suburban communities based on residence are vulnerable to such split-ups. Local identification with a community based on residence has proven to be less strong than identifications on the basis of descent.

In this chapter individual interests played a major role as people differed in their opinion on what should be done to redevelop the Block. In this respect the case of the Company and the Coalition differs from earlier cases discussed in this thesis in which group interests were the subject of analysis as Aboriginal organisations conveyed their corporate Aboriginal identity through emphasising Aboriginality as resistance and Aboriginality as cultural continuity in particular situations. In this case it is no longer the interest of the organisation which is the basis for the emphasis of certain

elements of Aboriginality but the personal interest of people working within the Aboriginal organisations: their interest in representation, the direction of policies and the division of funding.

These individual interests can form a threat to the corporate image Aboriginal organisations are trying to uphold. The reason for this is that out of a difference in interests people examine each other's claim to Aboriginal identity. When a person loses his or her credibility as an Aboriginal person this can have serious consequences for the organisation he or she works for. The strategy in which the notion of Aboriginality as descent is emphasised to judge people's individual Aboriginal identification can thus endanger the corporate Aboriginal identities of the Aboriginal organisations. Because organisations are associated with the people that work for them these people have to behave immaculately towards anyone not working for the organisation. But because they are in a position that stands in the public eye they are watched extra carefully to make sure that they do not abuse their power, which they have in such a position. Consequently, in cases of disagreement or dispute over resources personal identification is used as a strategy to attack someone's capability or authority in order to gain access to particular resources. There is, however, also a positive aspect to the monitoring of people working for Aboriginal organisations. By constantly watching over the capability and authority of people who occupy powerful positions people might be able to influence who holds which position, making sure the organisations remain Aboriginal *community-based* organisations.

The Beginning of Understanding: Concluding Remarks

The truth is out there
-The X-files

9.1 Summarising the Argument

In this final chapter I would like to recapitulate the argument of this thesis and come to a final discussion of its key concepts. After having introduced the working conditions in the field in the first chapter of this thesis, in the second chapter I wrote about Redfern, the Sydney suburb where the establishment of the first Aboriginal community-based organisations originated. Both the historical and social background of Redfern and its Aboriginal residents made clear that in the 1960s, 1970s, around the time these organisations were set up, the living standards for Aboriginal people in general were bad and they were poorly served by mainstream organisations and institutions. Specific events and a desperate need for change in certain areas of welfare saw the establishment of organisations as the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern, the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Housing Company. The present-day necessity for these organisations appeared from the account I gave of Redfern's current condition in which people still cope with problems of poverty, substance abuse, criminal activities and racism.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the Aboriginal organisations that were set up as a reaction to the existing situations in the 1960s and 1970s have specific features and functions with which they distinguish themselves from mainstream welfare organisations. In order to serve their exclusively Aboriginal clientele in the best possible way the staff members of the organisations claim they deliver their services in an "Aboriginal way". I

distinguished four characteristics that attribute to a way of service delivery they call Aboriginal, namely: the special role of women in the organisations, the equality between staff members, the loyalty towards the organisation, and the informality at the workplace. Apart from their way of service delivery, the organisations also distinguish themselves from others by specific functions that can only be fulfilled by these organisations. In order to distinguish these specific functions from functions that generally belong to welfare organisations I differentiated between direct and indirect functions. The first group offers direct remedies and results to the clients concerned and involves functions that are generally also offered by mainstream welfare organisations, such as the remedial and preventative function. The indirect functions are generally effective over a longer period of time for a larger group of people than was actually served, such as the buffer function, the political function and the psychological function. Especially with these indirect functions the organisations managed to fill gaps of service delivery, which existed before, and to reduce the mistakes that were made by mainstream welfare organisations in the past.

Having described the setting in which the organisations operate and the way the organisations look and function I came to describing the Aboriginal clientele in Chapter 4. Who are those people in Sydney who call themselves Aboriginal? In this chapter it became clear that the notions of Aboriginal identity have changed over the years and in contemporary Sydney Aboriginal people participate in a complex process of displaying different interpretations of the concept of Aboriginality, as well as vary in their own identification as Aborigine. Depending on the social environment people in Sydney can identify as indigenous Australian, as Koori or as member of an Aboriginal nation or local family group. The chapter showed how complicated it can be to receive recognition for one's personal identification as Aborigine.

As the organisations' right to existence is based on their Aboriginal character, their specific way of service delivery to Aboriginal people, it is important for the organisations to be recognised as *Aboriginal* organisations. Chapter 4 showed that Aboriginal identification is a fluid and constantly changing process depending on situations and the social environment. It is within this climate that the Aboriginal organisations have to operate. In order to be able to reach their aims and be able to deliver their specific services to their Aboriginal clientele they need to be recognised by institutions that (financially) support them so they are able to carry out their

tasks. But they also need to be recognised by their own clientele, as their support attributes to the credibility of the organisations Aboriginal identity. As a consequence the Aboriginal organisations need to convince all the parties they communicate with of their Aboriginal character. For the organisations it is crucial that during interaction with others they provide an image of Aboriginality that is accepted by the other party. This means that the organisations have to reshape their notions of Aboriginality every time they encounter others. And there are many ways to construct an Aboriginal image.

To investigate how the organisations convey their “corporate” Aboriginal identity towards different groups in Australian society I used Hollinsworth’s (1992) distinction of what he calls “discourses on Aboriginality” as an analytical tool. He distinguishes three discourses: Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity, and Aboriginality as descent. The cases I describe in this thesis indicate that Aboriginal organisations deal with their recognition of their corporate Aboriginal identity in a particular way. They emphasise specific aspects of Aboriginal identity depending on the group with which they communicate. In communication with non-Aboriginal outsiders (such as government institutions) the emphasis lies mainly on the notion of Aboriginality as resistance. In communication with insiders, such as their own Aboriginal clientele, the emphasis shifts more towards a notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity. However, on an internal level, involving own staff members or members of other organisations, a third notion of Aboriginality as descent plays the main role.

9.1.1 Aboriginality as Resistance

In chapter 5 I analysed the case of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) to study the interaction between Aboriginal organisations and a non-Aboriginal audience, in particular government officials. It involved the oral submission the ALSR made to the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1996. The ALSR used explicit ways to submit their evidence to the Commission, which can be linked to an attitude of resistance. The submission involved the usage of coarse language and aggressive behaviour to try to confront, challenge and change the perception of the Government on the issue of the stolen generations, which

was the subject of the inquiry. During this submission the ALSR tried to link its organisation to Aboriginal people by referring to shared experiences of past and present forms of oppression. The Service thus created a division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people present, regarding its own organisation as Aboriginal and the Commission as non-Aboriginal. With this connection with other Aboriginal people the ALSR tried to legitimise its representative function at the hearing.

I argue that the ALSR emphasised aspects of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance over other notions for several reasons. To convince its audience of their credibility as representatives of Aboriginal people at the hearing the ALSR had to link itself with other Aboriginal people and distance itself from the Commission. Aboriginality as resistance provides the opportunity to divide people on the basis of their experiences of oppression and consequently divide the audience in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Through acts of resistance (to which the manner in which the submission was delivered refers) the notion offers the opportunity to demand change which is exactly what the ALSR wanted. The ALSR's message was that it was there to serve the Aboriginal population by confronting, challenging and trying to change the current situation and that it was the most suitable organisation to do so as it is an Aboriginal organisation.

From this case it is possible to distract some of the general capacities of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance. First, the message that an organisation wants to bring across to another group it interacts with when emphasising this notion is: You and I are different. It creates a division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people mainly on the basis of (historical) experiences of oppression. Through this form of distinction it is relatively easy to create solidarity on a large scale - such as a national level - because, no matter where in Australia Aboriginal people live, what Aboriginal family they are from, or what skin colour they have, all these people distinguish themselves from other Australians by their specific history of colonisation. Therefore the notion of Aboriginality as resistance always has a place in large-scale Aboriginal events that involve Aboriginal people from different local or regional groups, such as national conferences, protests or demonstrations. Because of its capacity to unify Aboriginal people on a large scale it also has a capacity to compel change as it empowers the Aboriginal cause in being able to raise a louder voice.

These capacities make the usage of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance a useful tool in a strategy to legitimise an organisation's corporate

Aboriginal identity towards a non-Aboriginal audience. Apart from wanting to let the other party know that the organisation is different from them its staff members also want to say that because of this difference they have different views. The audience, then, is told what it *needs* to hear according to the organisation, namely the Aboriginal representation of a history and contemporary situation of oppression and dispossession and Aboriginal people's special needs when it comes to ways of solving these problems. And for this purpose of solving these problems the Aboriginal organisations need to be able to continue to operate and be able to have a say in all the issues that involve Aboriginal people. This means that organisations need to be granted the financial and political means in order to achieve these goals. These means are generally only available through non-Aboriginal controlled (government) institutions. An organisation's legitimisation as representative of the people who identify themselves as Aborigine is also important to be able to show the support one has from its fellow people. This support is most easily received by emphasising the shared past and sometimes present forms of oppression and inequality.

Of course the division between the three discourses as described by Hollinsworth is purely analytical. In its use one sees that the notion of Aboriginality as resistance also bears elements of the other two notions. In implying that people in Australia can be divided on the basis of the history of colonisation, it implies that people who identify as Aboriginal nowadays have descended from those people that were confronted with the first effects of colonisation more than two hundred years ago. It also implies that through their experiences of oppression in the past and in the present some cultural traits have been lost but others survived, referring to the notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity. Some people even speak of a culture of resistance that commenced when the first colonists set foot on the continent and has continued to be passed on ever since.

The question is whether the usage of the notion of Aboriginality as resistance has the desired effect. The answer is two-sided. When only speaking for the case discussed in Chapter 5, one can say that it did not result in the desired effect because the Government has refused up until this moment to officially apologise for the effects the assimilation policy has had on the people of the stolen generations and refused to bear the consequences. Even the organisation that delivered the submission, the ALSR, was closed down that same year. On the other hand, public opinion on the subject has changed drastically and since the publishing of the report

Bringing Them Home (1997) public outcry against the Government's refusal has been great. Looking in a broader perspective one can say that the Aboriginal organisations and the events, activities and demonstrations they organised against Government decisions have resulted in many positive changes both in the area of Aboriginal welfare as in other areas concerning Aboriginal people. Departments have taken over ways of service delivery as introduced by Aboriginal organisations, are involving Aboriginal organisations in decisions that concern them, and consult them when advise is needed.

However, in chapter 6 I showed that the situation is different when non-Aboriginal people become part of the Aboriginal organisation. In this chapter I discussed the issue of non-Aboriginal membership in the newly established National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC). Even though non-Aboriginal support from the outside is generally welcomed non-Aboriginal support from the inside turned out to have negative implications for both the organisation as well as the non-Aboriginal members involved. Whereas the Aboriginal character of the organisation increased the credibility of the (Aboriginal) struggle a non-Aboriginal woman had been fighting even before she found Aboriginal support, her involvement actually endangered the credibility of the organisation as people from outside questioned the possible influence or control the non-Aboriginal members could have over the organisation. For the people involved in the organisation it turned out to be an issue of trusting the non-Aboriginal members in respecting the Aboriginal members' right to self-determination: the right to have full Aboriginal control over the organisation. When legitimising its role as representative of Aboriginal people to the outside, non-Aboriginal members posed a threat to the organisation's credibility as they did not contribute to the Aboriginal character of the organisation.

The question is whether a person that has not shared in the experiences of oppression is able to work with those who do or: Can Aboriginality as resistance also be used when the Aboriginal organisation concerned includes non-Aboriginal members? Both a positive as well as a negative answer can be argued for. On the one hand, it can be used including non-Aboriginal members because this notion of Aboriginality has a universal character (see Hollinsworth 1992: 150) and is used all over the world by (previously) oppressed to distinguish themselves from oppressors. The notion of Aboriginality as resistance has the capacity to include non-

Aboriginal supporters when allowing descendants from oppressors to help fight current forms of oppression. On the other hand, it can not be used including non-Aboriginal members when resistance against the (former) oppressor is not accepted from members of that (formerly) oppressive group. In this line of argument, history has divided Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians on the basis of oppression and being a member of Australian society one is forced into this division and one can not be separated as individual from that dual system of the (former) oppressor and the (former) oppressed.

9.1.2 Aboriginality as Cultural Continuity

Chapter 7 focussed on two educational programmes to study the interaction between Aboriginal organisations and their Aboriginal clientele: the Saturday and After School Programme organised by the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) and the Young Mothers Programme of Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Cooperation. During the first programme the ADTR taught its pupils that their Aboriginal heritage distinguished them from other Australians. The themes that were emphasised during this programme as belonging to Aboriginal heritage were Aboriginal people's special connections with kin, the spiritual world and land. During the Young Mothers Programme staff members and participants agreed that Aboriginal people still behave in accordance with specific Aboriginal cultural practices, such as parenting skills, but they are under threat by problems introduced by western society. In interaction with its own clients both organisations thus mainly emphasised notions of Aboriginality as cultural continuity.

I argue that the reason why they mainly focused on this particular notion of Aboriginality is its capacity to create a connection with the organisations' Aboriginal clientele. The elements stressed during these interactions are used to distinguish the local clientele from the total Aboriginal population on the basis of general divisions based on their urban lifestyles. By presenting the organisation's image of Aboriginal identity as a specifically urban Aboriginal heritage, which has a cultural continuity, they try to establish a link with their Koori clientele. Because both the organisations and urban Aboriginal people struggle with outside recognition of the authenticity of their cultural expressions, Aboriginality as cultural continuity is a powerful tool to connect the Aboriginal clientele with the organisations. When it is used in an urban environment the notion

of Aboriginality as cultural continuity has an advantage over other notions as it has the capacity to provide urban Aboriginal culture with authenticity. With the connection the organisations try to make with their clientele they try to strengthen their support on the grass roots level as this will increase the organisations' credibility as Aboriginal organisations and legitimise their existence towards the outside world. I argued that, despite the emphasis non-Aboriginal people still put on the authenticity of Aboriginal cultural expressions, the authenticity of urban Aboriginal culture is not the issue because culture and cultural elements are always changing. Even more so, the changing of cultures does not endanger their continuity, it is a way to keep it intact.

Coming to a general description of the notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity it can be said that the general message that is conveyed by emphasising it is: You and I are the same. As opposed to the notion of resistance, which is used to create a division between the organisation and the group it is interacting with, this notion is used to establish a link between the organisation and its audience. Because this link needs to be firm, organisations focus especially on the community they serve. It is thus not only important to convince the clientele of the organisation's Aboriginal character but also its specific connection with the local community. It is important to make the clients feel that the organisation is there especially for them, the community, and not the general Aboriginal population. In the case of Redfern this means that an organisation has to focus on the Koori population, as the majority of the clients identifies as Koori. Would the organisation have focused on their connections with local Aboriginal nations it would have alienated all those clients who identify with other nations. In this case it is thus important to connect the organisation with its clientele through something that binds Koori people in an urban setting. This connection is found in the strong need for recognition of authenticity, as especially people in the urban environment are questioned about their Aboriginal identity as they do not always possess the visible markers that makes recognition easy for outsiders (skin colour, language, rituals). When telling the clients what they want to hear, the organisation increases the chance to receive their support. As a consequence, organisations emphasise the notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity as it proves to be a useful tool in presenting urban Aboriginal culture as a cultural continuity of pre-colonial cultures. Thus, the notion provides contemporary cultural

expressions of urban Aboriginal people with the authenticity they want to see recognised.

The support of its clients is very important to the Aboriginal organisations. The client population legitimises its right to existence. Client support increases the credibility of the organisation towards the outside world, as an organisation belonging to and acting in the interest of this group of people. Anything that increases the credibility of the corporate Aboriginal identity of the organisation is good as it can make a difference in receiving the (financial and political) support it needs to reach its goals in serving the Aboriginal population.

As with the notion of Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity can not be regarded as separated from other notions of Aboriginality. Also this notion has elements that are connected with the other notions. For example, the emphasis on particular themes which are said to belong to Aboriginal heritage are also often used to create an opposition to western culture. As I wrote in Chapter 7 especially the Aboriginal connection with kin, the spiritual world and land serve as excellent examples to emphasise the difference between Aboriginal and western culture and are in a way used to criticise the negative elements of western culture. Also, as the notion of Aboriginality as descent, the concept of cultural continuity implies the passing on of cultural elements from generation to generation, linking today's urban Aboriginal population to the groups that inhabited the Australian continent before colonisation began. It is this link with the past that connects urban Aboriginal people with their "traditional" counterparts in more remote areas.

Now remains the question of whether the emphasis on the notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity has the desired effects: a supportive clientele. Again, as with the notion of resistance, the answer is twofold. One could say that it has positive effects as currently more than a thousand Aboriginal organisations are recognised and financed by government institutions and supported by the Aboriginal groups they serve. Also, most Aboriginal people still choose Aboriginal organisations over mainstream services when in need of advice or assistance. That the organisations do not always succeed in gaining or maintaining the support of their clientele became clear in Chapter 5 that described the closure of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern. The question is if the emphasis on Aboriginality as cultural continuity is enough to *maintain* the support of their clientele as other factors also play a role in this process. Client support does not only depend

on the image of Aboriginal identity organisations present in interaction with their clients, it also depends on the recognition of the organisations' individual staff members (as Chapter 8 demonstrated).

9.1.3 Aboriginality as Descent

Whereas the chapters discussed above concerned images of Aboriginal identity that the organisations presented to others, Chapter 8 discussed the internal influences staff members have when using the notion of Aboriginality as descent to judge each other's Aboriginal identity. I discussed the case of the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Aboriginal Housing Coalition to show that the recognition of the Aboriginal identity of staff members plays a role in maintaining the organisation's corporate Aboriginal identity. This particular case showed how Aboriginality as descent was used to undermine the organisations' statuses as Aboriginal organisations. The Company and the Coalition had different views on the direction of the future development of the Block originating from the different views they had on what entailed Aboriginality.

In order to get their way both organisations needed to prove that their ideas were better than the other party's ideas. As a consequence, both parties focused on why the other was not authorised to take part in developing future plans for the Block because it was not adequately representing the people concerned. And without authorisation the ideas were not legitimate. This resulted in personal attacks towards each other's staff members, in which people accused one another of either not being or not acting properly Aboriginal. The notion of Aboriginality as descent played a major role in this process because the most important way of verifying people's Aboriginal identification in an urban setting is through establishing someone's biological descent through family and place name. Another way concerns judging people on style. In this case the notion that was emphasised by the individual staff members did not so much benefit the organisations involved, it benefited the people serviced by the organisations. It offered them the opportunity to sort out who is most suitable to represent the Aboriginal people in a case that concerned all the people who were connected with the Block.

Whereas the organisations convey messages of division (You and I are different) and of solidarity (You and I are the same), the people working in or with the organisations judge each other on the basis of a question: Who

are you? The notion of Aboriginality as descent is especially useful in answering this question as it provides people with a tool to establish a person's individual Aboriginal identity. Especially members of Aboriginal organisations are vulnerable to questions concerning their Aboriginal identification because they are working in relatively powerful positions having access to the (financial and political) means to improve the situation for their people. It is thus important that such representative positions are only occupied by those people who are considered to be properly representing their clients/community. The answer to the question always involves a family and a place name, dividing people in smaller factions based upon this direct form of identification. So, apart from establishing whether someone is Aboriginal or not, the notion also has the capacity to divide the Aboriginal population in the smallest factions possible which provide their members with a strong emotional tie (as all its members are related through blood). It is thus a useful notion in a situation where people have to compete over access to (financial and political) means necessary to reach their goals, as there is not enough power and money to go around. So, with this notion people within organisations can not only check whether their colleagues are authorised to occupy their positions, in cases where people disagree on issues such as: policy direction, implementation and funding divisions, they can also generate a support group on the basis of local (family) groups.

Again, there is some comparison with the other notions of Aboriginality, described above. Also Aboriginality as descent has elements of resistance. Whereas in the past racist ideologies were used by western societies to "breed out" Aboriginal phenotypic characteristics by exposing the Aboriginal people to mixed relations - under the conviction that white phenotypic characteristics would dominate and eventually eradicate Aboriginal characteristics - presently Aboriginal people are known to reverse these ideologies of the past to their advantage. They added the conviction that their "blood genes" are stronger and harder to breed out than European genes because they lived isolated for so long on the Australian continent (Keeffe 1992: 49). As one of the people Keeffe worked with said: "So even if you've only got one drop of Aboriginal blood, you're Aboriginal all the way through." (1992: 48) This would mean that through mixed relations more people would become Aboriginal at the cost of white

people.¹⁵³ In contemporary Australia this latest view seems to be substantiated by the ever-increasing number of people identifying as Aborigine since the early 1970s.

The notion of Aboriginality as descent also shows resemblance with Aboriginality as cultural continuity. As I already mentioned in the former section, just as descent forms a biological link with the past, Aboriginal heritage is believed to be passed on from generation to generation providing a link with pre-colonial ancestors which distinguishes Aboriginal people from other Australians. In this aspect both the notions of Aboriginality as descent as well as Aboriginality as cultural continuity follow a similar line of argument. Whereas one notion makes use of racial lines of argumentation, the other focuses on cultural lines.¹⁵⁴

When looking at the results of this way of judgement on the basis of Aboriginality as descent, what are the effects of this process? In the case of the Company and the Coalition, it resulted in a neutrally executed consultation process giving people with different opinions a fair change to reflect on the future of the Block. So this was a positive result for the Aboriginal client community. On the whole, the ordeal resulted in a negative image of the organisations involved as they were arguing in public. This meant that the organisations did not succeed in properly representing the community members. When looking at it from a more general point of view, the internal use of the notion of Aboriginality as descent - and the factionalism it can cause - may seem like a threat to the organisations. After all, if an organisation fails to maintain its corporate Aboriginal identity due to the lack of credibility its staff members have, it may indeed lose client support resulting in a lack of credibility. But it can also be regarded as a safety device to guarantee that only the most suitable people are authorised to occupy powerful positions in Aboriginal organisations. Through constantly verifying each other's Aboriginal

¹⁵³ According to Linnekin categorial inclusiveness could both be a cultural precedent, often seen with other "Polynesian modes of ascription in general as opposed to European", and a historical necessity, a "functional strategy for the social and cultural survival of indigenous peoples who have become minorities in their own lands" (1990: 157).

¹⁵⁴ With this in mind it is understandable why, for instance, Keeffe separated Aboriginality in only two notions, namely of resistance and persistence (1992). In his definition Aboriginality as persistence includes what Hollinsworth has described as separate notions of Aboriginality as cultural continuity and as descent. In my thesis I have used Hollinsworth's separation as I found a close resemblance between his categories and the "daily use" of notions of Aboriginality in Redfern.

identification it is made sure that these people are Aboriginal in the eyes of the group concerned and are capable of representing them in the “proper” way. Despite these positive effects, factionalism within the Aboriginal community and internal disputes within or between Aboriginal organisations almost always result in a negative image others have of the people and organisations involved. I think this is related to the way in which most non-Aboriginal outsiders perceive of Aboriginal people and their organisations. Aboriginal people are often considered to be *one* people and local communities are often regarded as harmonious entities. Also Aboriginal culture in general is associated with concepts as harmony, equality, consensus etc. In reality, Aboriginal people are a heterogeneous group of individuals with shifting loyalties, who can disagree on issues with one another just as any other human being.

9.2 Conclusion

In describing the three notions of Aboriginal identity urban Aboriginal people from Sydney use I have shown that each of these notions has specific capacities and can fulfil specific functions when used in particular situations. What has to be taken into consideration is the fact that only these notions together present an image of what the Aboriginal organisations perceive of Aboriginality and what they consider as their own corporate Aboriginal identity.

I have tried to clarify the process of conveying an Aboriginal corporate identity by Aboriginal organisations because often problems arise when organisations fail to communicate an image of their corporate Aboriginal identity that is expected or accepted by the recipient. People who are interacting with Aboriginal organisations can become confused when the aspects emphasised by the organisations seem to oppose other notions of Aboriginal identity. People can have trouble accepting the emphasis on unity at Aboriginal protests when at the same time there are fights between organisations over resources and policies. Although the emphasised notions of Aboriginality might differ from one another or even oppose each other, I argued that all of them have their own value. By accepting the specific relevance of each of these notions, particular situations which are hard to understand at first sight because the used notions seem to exclude one another can be understood.

Besides the fact that the sometimes opposing or excluding characters of different notions of Aboriginality can cause confusion, not all the notions of Aboriginality as presented in this thesis have the same status or recognition among non-Aboriginal people. For instance, the relevance of a contemporary resistance discourse is not always recognised, as claims of contemporary forms of oppression and inequality are disputed. The notion of Aboriginality as cultural continuity seems to receive more recognition but not in urban areas where people often question the authenticity of contemporary Aboriginal cultural expressions. Finally, the notion of Aboriginality as descent is fully recognised but often confused with skin colour instead of the legally recognised combination of both biological descent, as well as self-identification and recognition by the community.

Not only do these notions of Aboriginality have different statuses among outsiders in general, also within literature on discourses of Aboriginality people often - unknowingly - attach a judgement to specific notions of Aboriginality. Hollinsworth also states his preference for the notion of Aboriginality as resistance, closing his article on urban Aboriginal discourses with an explanation why he is favouring this notion. For this purpose he describes five positive attributes of Aboriginality as resistance (1992: 149-150). Whereas I recognise the capacities summed up by Hollinsworth as they were also found in the cases I described, I do not agree with his explicit preference of one notion over the others. If Hollinsworth meant to emphasise the positive capacities of the notion of resistance because of its political potential and its capacity to empower Aboriginal people in achieving equality, I fully agree with him. I just would like to stress that there is no point in emphasising one notion with the politically useful capacities when all notions as described by Hollinsworth have their own capacities even though they operate on different levels.

Next to the positive attention for the notion of Aboriginality as resistance, the attention for Aboriginality as cultural continuity by Hollinsworth contains specific terms which imply Hollinsworth's preference for another notion than that of cultural continuity. When he claims that attempts of Aboriginal groups to demonstrate that they possess the features as described in so-called checklists of Aboriginal culture can lead to "a 'trivialisation' of such values when, for example, the complex intricacies of specific kinship reciprocities are expressed as an essentialist and generalised 'caring and sharing'" (1992: 145). Maybe Hollinsworth

could better have used the word simplification rather than trivialisation because the latter has a negative connotation.

The notion that is least popular of the three discussed by Hollinsworth concerns Aboriginality as descent. It is especially the usage of racial terms that has made some scholars wary of this particular notion of Aboriginality.¹⁵⁵ Keeffe (1992) and Hollinsworth (1992) criticise essentialism because it does not provide enough political advantages according to them. Hollinsworth claims that “definitions of Aboriginality based on genetic or biological distinctiveness are politically dangerous as well as theoretically suspect” (1992: 142). Cowlshaw explains that this fear for essentialism comes from its adaptation in scientific racism but she stresses that “essentialist thinking is not a fixed political phenomenon and is not the sole *cause* of oppressive racist politics” (1993: 187). She is of the opinion that there is no theory, which can guarantee political correctness, so there is no reason to try to be politically correct by condemning theories which are adaptable to politically incorrect adaptation/use (1993: 188).

In another example, Keeffe - who makes a slightly different distinction than Hollinsworth and uses Aboriginality as resistance and Aboriginality as persistence - favours one notion over the other and calls Aboriginality as resistance “more active, conscious, dynamic, modern and political” than Aboriginality as persistence which he views as “problematic” (1992: 58-59).

What seems to be the case with these presentations of notions of Aboriginality is that the authors concerned seem to have the urge to evaluate the political usefulness of these notions. I agree with Lattas who criticises preferring one variation of Aboriginality over the other and consequently offering advice to Aborigines “about what sort of identity they should be producing” (1993: 244). I argue that there is no use for such preferences. What also the authors with preferences know - because they mention it themselves - is that these notions complement each other. What follows from this insight is that one notion can not exist without the others. The fact that so many notions are available means that they each serve their own purpose. The main tendency is that the authors above mainly look at the political advantages of the notions.

¹⁵⁵ Thiele shows how Aboriginality and the black and white identity are all part of a racial discourse. These categories have only become acceptable because of the racial climate. He states that “individuals can be sociologically identified as blacks or whites only if, and to the extent that, they are caught up in processes of racial identification and in practices of racial discrimination” (1991: 190). Therefore he views the notion of Aboriginality as descent is racist.

In this thesis however, I have argued that in each context different notions of Aboriginality are emphasised because they serve specific goals in specific contexts. The seeming preoccupation with political advantages of Aboriginal discourses mentioned above focusses more on the context in which Aboriginal people are facing non-Aboriginal authorities. This situation is pre-eminently a situation in which notions of Aboriginality as resistance serve as good strategies to face the other party. But this is no reason to prefer one notion over the other. There are more social environments in which Aboriginal people operate and in which other notions of Aboriginality are emphasised. I have demonstrated that each notion of Aboriginality as discussed in this thesis offers particular advantages that are used in the Aboriginal organisations' strategies to legitimise their Aboriginal identity towards others. Let us value those notions of Aboriginality as the Aboriginal people who use them do.

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Sydney Morning Herald 15-3-1999 Mann, S. 1999 UN Slams Assault on Wik
De Volkskrant 12-8-2000: 'Donker Australië Zal Opstaan Tijdens de Olympische Spelen' Politie Sydney Wekt Woede Aborigines.
De Volkskrant 26-8-2000: Volkers, J. 2000 De Ware Status van de Aborigine.
De Volkskrant 30-8-2000: Australië Sluit de Deur voor VN-commissies.
Vrij Nederland 9-9-2000: Willemsen, A. 2000 Aborigines: Een Bom Onder de Spelen: 32-35.

Appendices

Appendix 1

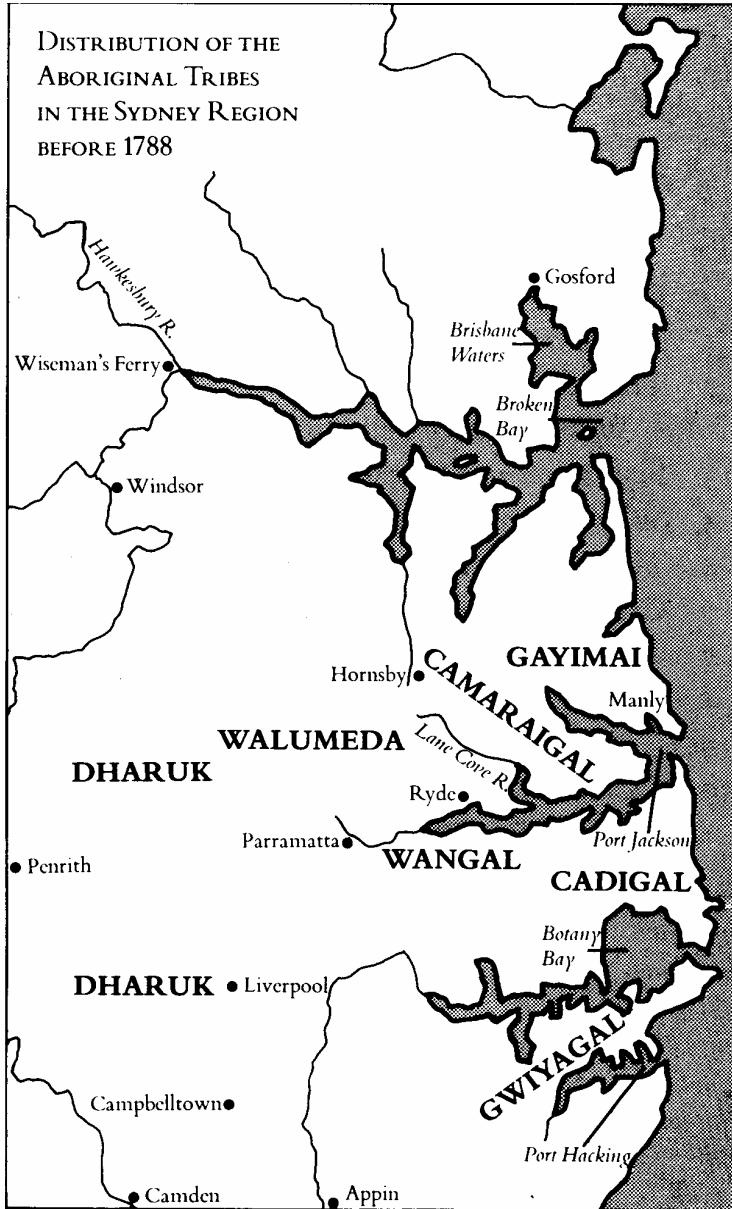
Research Requirements set by the Aboriginal Medical Service's Research Priorities Committee

- that the proposed research must advance the scientific knowledge so as to result in demonstrated additional benefit to the Aboriginal communities
- that there be Aboriginal community control over all aspects of the proposed research including research design, ownership of data, data interpretation and publication of research findings
- that the research to be conducted in a manner sensitive to the cultural principles of Aboriginal society
- that Aboriginal communities and organisations be reimbursed for all costs arising from their participation in the research process
- that Aboriginal communities and organisations should be able to benefit from transfer of skills and knowledge arising from the research project

(letter, 13-2-1996)

Appendix 2

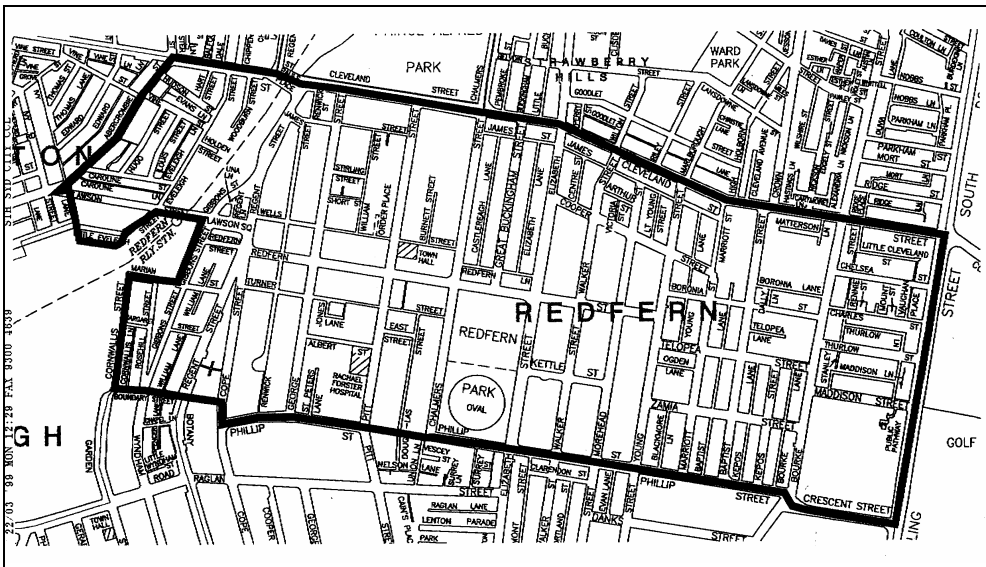
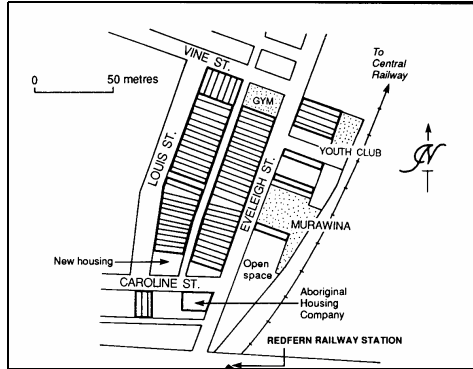
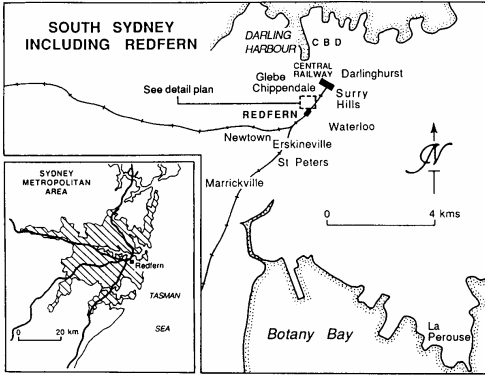
Distribution of indigenous groups in the Sydney region before 1788



(Willey 1979:8)

Appendix 3

Redfern



(Anderson 1993b: 315; South Sydney City Council 1999)

Appendix 4

Population and employment statistics for Eveleigh Street

| | IL040301 South Sydney (CF) Eveleigh St 102 SELECTED PERSON CHARACTERISTICS BY INDIGENOUS ORIGIN BY SEX All persons (excluding overseas visitors) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--------|---------|--|----------------|--------|---------|--|------------|--------|---------|--|-------|--------|---------|
| | INDIGENOUS | | | | NON-INDIGENOUS | | | | NOT STATED | | | | TOTAL | | |
| | Male | Female | Persons | | Male | Female | Persons | | Male | Female | Persons | | Male | Female | Persons |
| Total persons | 106 | 131 | 237 | | 230 | 188 | 418 | | 14 | 14 | 28 | | 350 | 333 | 683 |
| 0-14 years | 42 | 59 | 101 | | 16 | 17 | 33 | | 3 | 4 | 7 | | 61 | 80 | 141 |
| 15-44 years | 53 | 61 | 114 | | 180 | 138 | 318 | | 8 | 7 | 15 | | 241 | 206 | 447 |
| 45-64 years | 8 | 11 | 19 | | 28 | 22 | 50 | | 3 | 0 | 3 | | 39 | 33 | 72 |
| 65 years and over | 3 | 0 | 3 | | 6 | 11 | 17 | | 0 | 3 | 3 | | 9 | 14 | 23 |
| Median Age | 18 | 17 | 18 | | 31 | 28 | 30 | | 31 | 21 | 25 | | 29 | 25 | 27 |
| Dependency ratio (a) | 0,74 | 0,82 | 0,78 | | 0,11 | 0,18 | 0,14 | | 0,27 | 1,00 | 0,56 | | 0,25 | 0,39 | 0,32 |
| In the labour force | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Employed: CDEP (b) | 9 | 9 | 17 | | 152 | 109 | 261 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 161 | 117 | 278 |
| Employed: Other (c) | 6 | 7 | 15 | | 21 | 12 | 33 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 23 | 19 | 46 |
| Unemployed | 17 | 15 | 32 | | 173 | 121 | 294 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 190 | 136 | 326 |
| Total | 36 | 46 | 82 | | 33 | 45 | 84 | | 3 | 3 | 6 | | 78 | 94 | 172 |
| Not in the labour force | 0,47 | 0,47 | 0,47 | | 0,12 | 0,10 | 0,11 | | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 | | 0,15 | 0,14 | 0,15 |
| Unemployment rate (d) | 0,47 | 0,47 | 0,47 | | 0,12 | 0,10 | 0,11 | | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 | | 0,15 | 0,14 | 0,15 |
| Unemployment rate (e) | 0,52 | 0,55 | 0,58 | | 0,52 | 0,43 | 0,78 | | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 | | 0,15 | 0,14 | 0,15 |
| Median individual income (f) | 153 | 158 | 156 | | 457 | 315 | 369 | | 180 | 180 | 180 | | 334 | 195 | 231 |

(a) The dependency ratio is the number of persons aged 0-14 and 65 years and over divided by the number of persons aged 15-64.
 (b) Stated to be employed under the Community Development Employment Projects scheme. CDEP data were collected in the Census for the first time in 1996.
 (c) These data should be interpreted cautiously as their reliability is variable.
 (d) Includes other employed persons.
 (e) Number of persons in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the labour force.
 (f) Median individual income is calculated excluding persons who did not state their labour force status.
 (g) The participation rate is calculated excluding persons who did not state their labour force status.
 (h) Median individual income is calculated excluding persons who did not state their income.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Indigenous Profiles, 1996 Census Community Profile Series, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, catalogue number 2020.0.)

Appendix 5

Population and employment statistics for Redfern

| IA0003 South Sydney (C): Redfern 102. SELECTED PERSON CHARACTERISTICS BY INDIGENOUS ORIGIN BY SEX (All persons (excluding overseas visitors)) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------|----------------|--------|------------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|---------|---------|
| | INDIGENOUS | | NON-INDIGENOUS | | NOT STATED | | TOTAL | | | | | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Persons | Persons |
| Total persons | 174 | 219 | 2893 | 2721 | 470 | 421 | 3437 | 3361 | 6698 | | | |
| 0-14 years | 59 | 80 | 200 | 233 | 83 | 82 | 362 | 366 | 787 | | | |
| 15-44 years | 90 | 108 | 1618 | 1335 | 191 | 184 | 1899 | 1627 | 3526 | | | |
| 45-64 years | 21 | 28 | 583 | 575 | 116 | 88 | 720 | 671 | 1391 | | | |
| 65 years and over | 4 | 3 | 402 | 578 | 80 | 87 | 486 | 688 | 1154 | | | |
| Median Age | 22 | 23 | 35 | 38 | 37 | 36 | 35 | 37 | 35 | | | |
| D-dependency ratio (a) | 0,57 | 0,61 | 0,30 | 0,42 | 0,53 | 0,67 | 0,34 | 0,46 | 0,38 | | | |
| In the labour force | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Employed, CDEP (b) | 27 | 29 | 1412 | 1008 | 8 | 4 | 1447 | 164 | 2488 | | | |
| Employed, Other (c) | 17 | 11 | 205 | 140 | 0 | 3 | 222 | 164 | 376 | | | |
| Unemployed | 44 | 40 | 1617 | 1148 | 8 | 7 | 1669 | 1195 | 2864 | | | |
| Total | 56 | 84 | 946 | 1314 | 87 | 116 | 1088 | 1514 | 2602 | | | |
| Not in the labour force | 0,38 | 0,28 | 0,15 | 0,12 | 0,00 | 0,43 | 0,13 | 0,13 | 0,13 | | | |
| Unemployment rate (d) | 0,44 | 0,32 | 0,65 | 0,47 | 0,08 | 0,06 | 0,61 | 0,44 | 0,52 | | | |
| Participation rate (e) | 167 | 179 | 292 | 194 | 165 | 180 | 281 | 192 | 222 | | | |
| Median individual income (f) | | | | | | | | | | | | |

(a) The dependency ratio is the number of persons aged 0-14 and 65 years and over divided by the number of persons aged 15-64.
(b) Stated to be employed under the Community Development Employment Projects scheme. CDEP data were collected in the Census for the first time in 1996.
(c) These data should be interpreted cautiously as their reliability is variable.
(d) Includes all other employed persons.
(e) Number of unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force.
(f) Number of persons in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over. The participation rate is calculated excluding persons who did not state their labour force status.
(g) Median individual income is calculated excluding persons who did not state their income.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 *Indigenous Profiles, 1996 Census Community Profile Series*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, catalogue number 2020.0.)

Appendix 6

Household statistics for Redfern

| IA0403 South Sydney (C): Redfern | | | |
|--|------------|-------|-------|
| I19 FAMILY TYPE BY INDIGENOUS OR OTHER FAMILIES | | | |
| All families | | | |
| | FAMILIES | | |
| | Indigenous | Other | Total |
| Couple family | | | |
| with children under 15 and non-dependent children | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| with children under 15 without non-dependent children | 8 | 163 | 171 |
| with dependent students (15-24) and non-dependent children | 0 | 13 | 13 |
| with dependent students (15-24) without non-dependent children | 0 | 26 | 26 |
| with children under 15 & dependent students & non-dependent children | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| with children under 15 & dependent students without non-dependent children | 3 | 11 | 14 |
| with non-dependent children | 3 | 63 | 66 |
| without children | 8 | 545 | 553 |
| Total | 29 | 832 | 861 |
| One parent family | | | |
| with children under 15 and non-dependent children | 6 | 11 | 17 |
| with children under 15 without non-dependent children | 43 | 148 | 191 |
| with dependent students (15-24) and non-dependent children | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| with dependent students (15-24) without non-dependent children | 0 | 36 | 36 |
| with children under 15 & dependent students & non-dependent children | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| with children under 15 & dependent students without non-dependent children | 0 | 15 | 15 |
| with non-dependent children | 7 | 107 | 114 |
| Total | 56 | 320 | 376 |
| Other family | 4 | 71 | 75 |
| Total | 89 | 1223 | 1312 |

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 *Indigenous Profiles, 1996 Census Community Profile Series*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, catalogue number 2020.0.)

Appendix 7

Education statistics for Redfern

| | INDIGENOUS | | NON-INDIGENOUS | | NOT STATED | | TOTAL | |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------|----------------|---------|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| | Persons | Persons | Persons | Persons | Persons | Persons | Persons | Persons |
| Business & administration | 0 | 0 | 142 | 183 | 0 | 0 | 142 | 183 |
| Health | 0 | 3 | 17 | 106 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 109 |
| Education | 0 | 0 | 57 | 295 | 0 | 0 | 57 | 295 |
| Arts and culture | 6 | 3 | 255 | 580 | 4 | 3 | 265 | 587 |
| Natural and physical sciences | 0 | 0 | 88 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 88 | 50 |
| Engineering | 3 | 0 | 256 | 46 | 3 | 3 | 262 | 49 |
| Architecture & building | 0 | 0 | 86 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 86 | 4 |
| Agriculture & related fields | 0 | 0 | 13 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 6 |
| Miscellaneous fields | 0 | 3 | 66 | 48 | 0 | 3 | 66 | 54 |
| Inadequately described | 0 | 0 | 28 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 38 |
| Not qualified(a) | 87 | 95 | 1332 | 1343 | 11 | 15 | 1430 | 1453 |
| Not stated | 16 | 31 | 236 | 279 | 368 | 317 | 620 | 627 |
| Total | 112 | 135 | 2603 | 2488 | 386 | 341 | 3101 | 2964 |

(a) Includes persons with a qualification outside the scope of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Classification of Qualifications.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 *Indigenous Profiles*, 1996 *Census Community Profile Series*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, catalogue number 2020.0.)

Appendix 8

Major Police Incursions into Redfern 1981-1990

| year | police | arrest | official complaints |
|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| May 1981 | 20 vehicles | 5 | unknown |
| December 1981 | Rescue Squad | not available | unknown |
| January 1982 | Special Crime Squad | 13 | yes |
| November 1983 | 80 police | 34 | yes |
| December 1987 | Tactical Response Group | not available | unknown |
| August 1988 | Tactical Response Group | not available | unknown |
| July 1989 | 6 South Region Crime Squad | 0 | yes |
| October 1989 | 10 (Redfern and others) | 3 | yes |
| January 1990 | Operation Beatham | 14 | yes |
| February 1990 | 135 (TRG and others) | 8 | yes |

(Curneen 1990)

Appendix 9

Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern files: statement Feb. 1996

I (17 years) was at Surry Hills and it was just past midnight. Two police officers (one female, one male) drove up in a Rodeo and stopped beside me and asked my name. They asked if I had any warrants. I replied: "I don't remember having any warrants." The police woman made a call and said: "You do have outstanding warrants." I said: "No, what's the warrant for?" I could not remember so I said 'no' and ran off across the park and into a lane way to ask my mum what to do. The male officer chased after me.

I jumped a fence into a back yard. I tried to go out of the yard but I couldn't. The police officer jumped into the yard and I was about to jump on to an old car in the yard when a male officer grabbed me from behind grabbing my Tee-shirt and handcuffed¹⁵⁶ me behind. The officer said: "You are under arrest for resist arrest." or words to that effect. I said: "What am I arrested for?" He replied in words I could not understand. At this time I saw two undercover-police officers on the roof of the shed in the yard of the house.

While the officer who handcuffed me was holding me the two officers on the roof leant out from the roof and dragged me up onto the roof by my shirt and arms. I heard some conversation but I could not understand what they were saying. When I was on the roof of the shed one of the officers held my arms back by the cuffs. The other officer punched me several times in my chest and abdomen. The officers then dragged me to the side of the roof of the shed and then I was thrown off the roof to land on the gravel in the lane way on my right side. I was winded and I could not move my body. I was losing breath. My shoulder hurt.

Three different male police officers came to me. One of the officers picked me up by my shirt and shoulder. When I was standing another took my other arm and took me to the bull wagon. A third police opened the door and I was pushed into the bull wagon. While I was in the wagon I swore at the police and kept asking what I was in here for. One officer came up to me and said to shut up. I was taken to Surry Hills Police Station's charge room and I believe I was charged with resist arrest.

I was put in a room. I laid down and asked for some help from the ALS and the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. I was not offered any medical assistance and I did not ask for a doctor. I saw the male and female officers that first stopped me. When I asked for help they just asked for a statement. I did not really make a statement. I did not receive any medical treatment. I told police officers at the Police Station I was thrown off the roof but nothing was done about it. I was taken from the dock to a room where they charged me. I was

¹⁵⁶ Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody published its report and recommendations it is illegal to handcuff juveniles.

charged and given bail. I was then taken to Mincla [Juvenile Detention Centre] to do my warrants.

This case had an interesting follow up because two police officers contacted the ALSR and asked them if they could convince the boy to make a statement. The police officers in question wanted three of their colleagues to be investigated by Internal Affairs. That is why they needed the statement from the boy. The boy himself had never filed a complaint because he was too scared of repercussions. The fact that this case only came to light because two officers thought their colleagues were wrong shows that more cases could have happened but were never reported because the Aboriginal children fear possible retaliation. It also shows that to change the Aboriginal-police relations change also has to come from within the police force.

Appendix 10

Features of Aboriginal organisations in 1996

| Features of Aboriginal organisations in 1996 | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| organisation | residence | founded | number of employees | Aboriginal Staff | female Staff | paid or voluntary | type of services |
| Aboriginal Children's Service | Redfern | 1975 | 10 | all | more than half | all paid | specialised |
| Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation | Redfern | 1980 | 2 | all | half | all voluntary | multifunctional |
| Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern | Redfern | 1979 | 9 | most | half | all paid | specialised |
| Aboriginal Housing Coalition | Redfern | 1985 | 2 | all | half | all voluntary | specialised |
| Aboriginal Housing Company | Redfern | 1974 | 7 | most | n.a. | all paid | specialised |
| Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern | Redfern | 1970 | 23 | more than half | less than half | all paid | specialised |
| Aboriginal Medical Service | Redfern | 1971 | 60 | most | n.a. | voluntary + paid | specialised |
| Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council | Liverpool | 1983 | 8 | all | half | voluntary + paid | multifunctional |
| Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council | Redfern | 1983 | 4 | all | half | all paid | specialised |
| Mudjin-Gai Aboriginal Cooperation | Chippendale | 1982 | 6 | all | all | all paid | specialised |
| Murawina Preschool | Redfern | 1972 | 10 | most | all | all paid | specialised |
| Naamoro | Redfern | 1990 | 4 | all | most | all paid | specialised |
| National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council | Sydney | 1984 | 4 | most | most | all voluntary | specialised |
| Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (executes CDEP) | Redfern | 1990 | 65 | most | less than half | 3 paid, rest not | multifunctional |
| Settlement, the | Redfern | n.a. | 3 | all | less than half | n.a. | multifunctional |
| Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College | Glebe | 1968 | 67 | more than half | n.a. | majority paid | specialised |
| Urimbirra Aboriginal Corporation | Bonnyrigg | 1988 | 7 | all | most | all paid | multifunctional |

Appendix 11

Features of Aboriginal organisations in 1996 (continued)

| Features of Aboriginal organisations in 1996 (continued) | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---------------|---|------------------|
| organisation | sister organisations | work with | clients | service costs | funding | ATSIC registered |
| Aboriginal Children's Service | St. Marys, Wagga Wagga, Cowra, falls under SNAICC | ALSR, AMS, Mudgin-Gal, Murawina Gullama (DOCS), SSCC, schools, land councils, children's services | Aboriginal people in Sydney region, North Coast, South Coast, Lismore | none | Alternate Care Department, ATSIC, DOCS | yes |
| Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation | no | Aboriginal Housing Coalition, Redfern Aboriginal Corporation | Aboriginal people on the Block | none | n.a. | yes |
| Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern | no, falls under Federation of Aboriginal Independent Education Providers | Eora Centre, AMS, NAISDA | Aboriginal people from 5 to 25 years | none | TAFE, ATSIC, Commonwealth Education Department, Australian Arts Council | yes |
| Aboriginal Housing Coalition | no | | no clients | no services | no funding | no |
| Aboriginal Housing Company | no | Naamoro | Aboriginal people | reduction | ATSIC | yes |
| Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern | Armidale, Cowra, Kempsey, Wagga Wagga, Canberra, Grafton, Walgett, Moree, Lismore, Newcastle, falls under NALSS | ACS, Metropolitan Land Council, Mudgin-Gal | Aboriginal people in Sydney metropolitan area, North Coast | none | ATSIC | yes |
| Aboriginal Medical Service | all over Australia, falls under NAIHO | Murawina, ADTR, DSS, State Health Department, legal services, children's services, hospitals | Aboriginal people in Sydney region | none | Department of Human Services and Health | yes |
| Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council | falls under NSW Aboriginal Land Council | Uimbirra, DEETYA, TAFE, Police and Corrective Services, Department of Health, Department of Housing | Aboriginal people in Liverpool | none | DOCS, Land Tax Levy | yes |
| Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council | falls under NSW Aboriginal Land Council | Aboriginal Housing Coalition, ACS, ALSR, Mudgin-Gal | Aboriginal people in Sydney metropolitan area | none | Land Tax Levy | yes |
| Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Cooperation | no | Redfern Aboriginal Corporation, ACS, ALSR, AMS, Alleena Centre, SSCC, Auntie Polly's Early Childcare Centre | Aboriginal women | none | DOCS | yes |
| Murawina Preschool | all over NSW | ACS, Naamoro | Aboriginal people in Sydney metropolitan area | reduction | IHCS, DOCS, DEETYA, DSS | yes |
| Naamoro | falls under Skillshare | Eora Centre, Skillshare, Murawina, Auntie Polly's, Gadigal Koori Radio, AHC, SSCC | unemployed Aboriginal people | none | DEETYA, SCEETA | yes |
| National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council | member of History Council of NSW | Metropolitan Land Council, Perleeka Television | Australians | none | Legal Aid | no |
| Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (executes CDEP) | falls under CDEP | Aboriginal Housing Coalition, SSCC, AHC, Aboriginal Christian Youth Organisation | Aboriginal people in Redfern | none | CDEP, ATSIC, DSS | yes |
| Settlement, the | no | Redfern Aboriginal Corporation, Koori Radio | Aboriginal people in Redfern | none | n.a. | no |
| Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College | no, falls under Federation of Aboriginal Independent Education Providers | Murawina, National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations, Federation of Land Councils, universities | Australians | none | DEETYA, TAFE, ATSIC, Friends of Tranby | yes |
| Uimbirra Aboriginal Corporation | no | Gandangara, DOCS, Department of Housing, DSS, other government and non-governmental organisations | Aboriginal people in Liverpool | none | DEETYA, DOCS, ATSIC, Office of Juvenile Justice, Department of Planning | yes |

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| AAL | Australian Aborigines League |
| AAPA | Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association |
| ABC | Australian Broadcasting Corporation |
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ADTR | Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern |
| AECG | Aboriginal Education Consultative Group |
| AHC | Aboriginal Housing Company |
| AIATSIS | Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies |
| ALSR | Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern |
| AMS | Aboriginal Medical Service |
| APA | Aborigines Progressive Association |
| ATSIC | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission |
| CDEP | Community Development Employment Projects |
| DAA | Department of Aboriginal Affairs |
| DEETYA | Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs |
| DOCS | Department of Community Services |
| DSS | Department of Social Services |
| FCAA | Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines |
| FCAATSI | Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders |
| HACS | Home and Community Services |
| HHCS | Health, Housing and Community Services |
| HIPP | Housing Infrastructure and Priority Programme |
| HREOC | Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission |
| NT | Northern Territory |
| NAC | National Aboriginal Conference |
| NACC | National Aboriginal Consultative Committee |
| NAHHC | National Aboriginal History and Heritage Committee |
| NAIDOC | National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee |
| NAIHO | National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation |
| NAILSS | National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat |
| NAISDA | National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association |
| NGOs | non-governmental organisation |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| PCO | Permanent Conservation Order |
| SBS | State Broadcasting Services |
| SCEETA | Skillshare Centre for Employment, Education and Training Australia |
| SNAICC | Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care |
| SSCC | South Sydney City Council |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| TRG | Tactical Response Group |

List of Aboriginal Words

| | |
|-------------|---|
| ba/baba | sister |
| Bandjalang | Aboriginal nation in the North of New South Wales |
| black gin | black woman (offensive language) |
| black jack | black man (offensive language) |
| bro | brother |
| brolga | grey crane bird |
| Dhan Gadi | Aboriginal nation |
| djardjuns | kids |
| doobaj | girlfriend |
| Eora | original Aboriginal nation of the Sydney area |
| Goom | Aboriginal word for spirit, later methylated spirits |
| Gooris | slang for Aboriginal people from the North Coast of New South Wales |
| gubbah | white man |
| gummies | alcoholists (literally spirits (as in ghosts)) |
| gunjeballs | police officers |
| gunjis | police officers (short for gunjeballs) |
| Indjibundji | Aboriginal language from Western Australia |
| jackyjacky | Aboriginal person who serves white people (named after Jack the Aboriginal tracker who helped white people explore the Blue Mountains) |
| jarndi | marihuana |
| Kamilaroi | Aboriginal nation from New South Wales |
| Kooris | slang for Aboriginal people from New South Wales / Victoria |
| ma | Do what you want. / Go ahead. |
| miglus | white men |
| mob | the people a person belongs to |
| Mudgin Gal | black woman |
| Murawina | black mother |
| Murris | slang for Aboriginal people from Queensland |
| Nââmoro | a place of learning (in Eora) / happy face (in Dharuk) |
| Nungars | slang for Aboriginal people from South Australia |
| Nyoongahs | slang for Aboriginal people from West Australia |
| Palawas | slang for Aboriginal people from Tasmania |
| Pinjarra | Aboriginal nation from the Northern Territory |
| saba | You know what I mean? / Do you understand? |
| Sherbie | someone from the Cherbourg mission |
| sis | sister |
| Tharawal | Aboriginal nation from the Sydney area |
| Tiwi | Aboriginal nation from the Tiwi Islands |
| Urimbirra | to protect / to keep safe |
| Wadi Wadi | Aboriginal nation from the Wollongong area |
| wadjimen | white men |
| Wiradjuri | biggest Aboriginal nation from New South Wales |
| yarn | (to have a) yarn: to have a very informal talk to catch up |
| Yolngu | Aboriginal nation from the Northern Territory |
| yothu yindi | mother and child |

Summary

In the introduction of the thesis I describe the field where I conducted my research: the Sydney suburb of Redfern. This place is hard to enter for several reasons and it influenced my methodology in pursuit of reliable and valid data. I spend a lot of time gaining confidence of the Aboriginal people and organisations I wanted to work with. Maintaining that working relationship asked for a constant effort throughout the process of gathering data and writing the thesis. In the second part of the introduction I introduce the main argument of thesis. First, I shortly describe the key concepts of this argument, namely: Redfern, Aboriginal organisations, and urban Aboriginal identity. In order to clarify the process of identifying as Aborigine in an urban environment you need to analyse the way in which Aboriginal organisations convey their so-called corporate Aboriginal identity towards different groups they deal with in Australian society. I argue that Aboriginal organisations make use of different strategies to convince different groups in Australian society of their corporate Aboriginal identity in order to legitimise their existence. For this purpose I use Hollinsworth's distinction between three discourses of urban Aboriginal identity, namely: Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity and Aboriginality as descent (1992).

In Chapter 2 I give an account of the historical and social backgrounds of the suburb of Redfern and its Aboriginal residents in order to place the thesis in a social and historical context. In the first part of the chapter I explain how the relation between the first indigenous inhabitants of especially the Sydney region and the European settlers has developed over the last two hundred years. After this historical account, I focus on the unique events that lead to the creation of Aboriginal Redfern. I describe how the migration of Aboriginal people started and how a complex structure of entangled interests of different groups in Australian society led to the establishment of the first Aboriginal organisations, such as the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern and the Aboriginal Housing Company. These and other initiatives played a major part in shaping Redfern and its Aboriginal community of today. Then I turn to contemporary life in Redfern with special attention to different features of contemporary racism. I explain how racial theories have dominated the social relations in Australia in the

past and how racism is still a prevalent problem in Australian society even though its form has changed over the years. Because especially urban Aboriginal people are often associated with crime, I discuss Aboriginal people's position within the Australian justice system and present some suggestions as to why Aboriginal people are over-represented in the Australian criminal justice system. Then I turn to the Aboriginal-police relations in Redfern. I conclude this chapter with a short reflection on how the media can play a role in continuing or denouncing negative images people can have of Aboriginal people.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the features and functions, which are specific for Aboriginal organisations. I show how the rise of the organisations was triggered by both motivations from within the Aboriginal community as from outside. The lack of (culturally) appropriate services offered by existing welfare organisations drove Aboriginal people, ranging from rural areas to inner city suburbs, to find solutions for the problems they were coping with on a local level. Apart from that, developments on an international scale both inspired the Aboriginal people in their actions as well as influenced the general public in Australia to become more susceptible to the problems of Aboriginal people. By describing the most remarkable features of the organisations I studied in Sydney I demonstrate that the Aboriginal organisations differ from mainstream welfare services. I distinguish four characteristics of the Aboriginal organisations, namely: the special role of women in Aboriginal organisations, the equality between staff members, the loyalty towards the organisation, and the informality at the workplace. I then turn to the functions the organisations fulfil. With the direct functions, which offer immediate help to clients, the organisations achieved to fill gaps of service delivery, which existed before, and to reduce the mistakes that were made by mainstream welfare organisations in the past. The so-called indirect functions serve the Aboriginal clients as well as the general Aboriginal, or even Australian, population. Many organisations have played a pioneer role in introducing new policies and methods of service delivery, which were later taken over by government departments.

After the introduction of Redfern and the Aboriginal organisations, I focus on contemporary forms of urban Aboriginal identification in Chapter 4. First, I give a short historical account of past forms of Aboriginal identification that existed in a period in which British settlers and later European Australians played the main role in the construction of the concept of Aboriginal identity. I demonstrate that Aboriginal people were

not the passive receivers of a newly ascribed identity that was forced upon them by outsiders but the active players in the formation of different forms of self-identification. In order to introduce some of the main contemporary forms of urban Aboriginal identification in Sydney, I present a case of an Aboriginal protest in Sydney. The case illustrates that identifying as Aborigine is a relational and situational process in which different forms of Aboriginal identification alternate. What can be seen at the protest is that the speakers and musicians, as well as the Aboriginal people in the audience participate in a complex process of displaying different interpretations of the concept of Aboriginality, as well as varying their own identification as Aborigine. As the identification on the basis of "indigenusness" is mainly based on the shared history, it provides the people at the protest with the opportunity to form a united front against the Australian government. Also, the identification as Koori proves to be useful in emphasising the cultural as well as historical differentiation between Australian Aboriginal people, thus taking control over what Aboriginality entails according to the Aboriginal protesters as opposed to the Australian authorities. Finally, the identification along the lines of local affiliations offers the opportunity to legitimise the Aboriginality of the individual participants, ensuring that nobody is able to pretend to be Aboriginal to gain from it. At the end of this chapter I introduce the analytical tools which I will use in the following chapters to substantiate the argument of the thesis. These concern the concepts of Aboriginality as resistance, Aboriginality as cultural continuity, and Aboriginality as descent, which are discussed in a summarising article of Hollinsworth (1992).

In Chapter 5 I present the case of the Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) to give an insight in the interaction between Aboriginal organisations and a non-Aboriginal audience, in particular government officials. I first demonstrate that the relation between Aboriginal organisations and their governmental funding institutions is one of cooperation and (financial) dependency. In the second part I give an overview of the events that lead to the closure of the ALSR in 1996 after 25 years of service. I distinguish three main factors which played a role in its closure: the political role the ALSR had played throughout its existence, the diminishing support base of the service within the Aboriginal community and the newly elected Federal Liberal government coming into power in 1996. After this description I analyse the oral submission the ALSR made at the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Children from Their Families of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1996. In this case the Service tried to legitimise its own Aboriginal identity in front of the Commission which acted by order of the federal government. The ALSR tried to legitimise its representative function by connecting itself with other Aboriginal people and presenting their interpretation of an Aboriginal identity. This link was based on past and current experiences of oppression. The Service thus created a division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and made the Government into the important other in its submission. The notion of Aboriginality as resistance was emphasised over the other notions of Aboriginality for its capacity to unite and divide people on the basis of their experiences, thus securing the ALSR's representative position, and its capacity to invoke change, which was the purpose of the inquiry. But as was the case with the ALSR, sometimes the chosen strategy to legitimise an organisation's corporate Aboriginal identity can have an inverse effect. The ALSR did not seem to be able to convince the Government of its Aboriginal identity based on resistance. Still, it was worth the try because in the past it often had had the desired effect.

Connected with what is discussed in Chapter 5, in Chapter 6 I turn to the issue of non-Aboriginal support for Aboriginal organisations. The notion of Aboriginality as resistance has the capacity to include non-Aboriginal supporters. I study the consequences of this ability for Aboriginal organisations and its members. For this purpose I focus on the National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC). With an account of the activities employed by the NAHHC over the years I first demonstrate that non-Aboriginal support has proven to be indispensable to achieve change as an Aboriginal organisation in Australian society. But whereas non-Aboriginal support from the outside is generally welcomed, non-Aboriginal support from the inside turns out to be a more complicated issue. To show what implications this mixed membership can have for non-Aboriginal participants I tell the story of Christine, a non-Aboriginal woman who was the founding and driving force behind the NAHHC. The personal side of the story shows that she has been confronted with two main problems. First, she had a hard time finding Aboriginal support because the cause she was fighting for was not generally accepted as an Aboriginal cause. Second, she had difficulties with the unequal relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members in an Aboriginal organisation. In my analysis of the business session held at the *National*

Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum held in 1996 I focus on the way the participants handled the issue of mixed membership in the process of setting up an official national Aboriginal organisation. During this session practical and moral arguments were used in favour of and against non-Aboriginal membership. At the basis of the arguments stood the issue of trust. Whereas some people trusted in the sincerity of non-Aboriginal members wanting to contribute to the Aboriginal cause, others were afraid the non-Aboriginal members would, consciously or not, endanger their right to self-determination: the right to have full Aboriginal control over the organisation. Although the issue of non-Aboriginal membership can be solved internally by the trust that members put in one another, externally there remains the outside world that demands Aboriginal spokespersons for Aboriginal organisations. Non-Aboriginal membership poses a threat to an organisation's legitimacy as an *Aboriginal* organisation because it has to legitimise its role as representative of Aboriginal people by demonstrating its Aboriginality. This is harder for mixed membership Aboriginal organisations because non-Aboriginal members do not contribute to the Aboriginality of an organisation; rather, they endanger the legitimisation of the claim to an corporate Aboriginal identity.

In Chapter 7 I introduce two educational programmes organised by the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) and Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Cooperation. During the Saturday and After School Programme the ADTR taught its pupils that Aboriginal people have a distinct Aboriginal heritage that makes them special and distinguishes them from other Australians. In the Young Mothers Programme of Mudgin-gal the staff members and the participants made it clear that the cultural continuity of their cultural practices, such as particular parenting skills, is seriously threatened by problems introduced by western society. Still, they were convinced of the survival of their heritage and the possibility to restore what they call Koori values into the younger generations. The themes that received special attention during the Saturday and After School Programme concerned the connections with kin, the spiritual world and land. Whereas the urban expressions of these cultural elements are sometimes questioned for their authenticity I argue that authenticity itself is not the issue because the process of describing the past and determining what is a people's heritage always entails the interpretation of people working with these notions. Hence culture and cultural elements are always in a process of change and this development does not endanger the cultural continuity of societies but

is a way to keep it intact. In my discussion of the Young Mothers Programme I show that the current elements that are said to belong to Aboriginal heritage are not the remains of past colonial invasion and dispossession alone but also of the debates and internal discussions Aboriginal people themselves had about the continuance of their cultural practices. The cases demonstrate that particular interpretations of Aboriginal heritage can have strategic benefits, as is also the case with the Aboriginal organisations. I argue that this does not invalidate the meaning of those concepts being used, as they are part of all those elements, either adapted consciously or unconsciously, that make up culture. The elements the organisations stress in communication with their clientele are used to distinguish the local clientele from the total Aboriginal population on the basis of general divisions based on urban lifestyles. By expressing what the organisations conceive of as Aboriginal heritage, elements that express a cultural continuity, they try to establish a link with their Koori clientele. The advantage of these particular elements is the fact that they are particularly suitable to connect the urban Aboriginal community with the organisations because of its capacity to provide urban Aboriginal culture with authenticity. This recognition of authenticity is very important to the clientele because especially the urban Aboriginal people were deprived of their “traditional” cultural practices and have been forced to take on the western ways of life.

Because the staff members play a crucial role in maintaining the image of the organisation’s corporate Aboriginal identity, in Chapter 8 I describe how a staff member’s identification as Aborigine is sometimes questioned by others. While the organisations have taken their measures to convey their corporate identities, expressed in official documents, such as leaflets, brochures and reports, in reality they are represented by Aboriginal individuals who themselves have to legitimise their Aboriginal identity towards anybody they interact with. In the case of the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Aboriginal Housing Coalition I demonstrate that Aboriginality as descent is used as a strategy to undermine the other organisation’s status as an Aboriginal organisation. Although the dispute itself evolved around general problems such as policy direction, representation, and funding, the struggle was distinctly Aboriginal, as Aboriginal identity played an eminent role in attacking the other party. The two groups had different views on Aboriginal identity, which they both incorporated in their future plans for the Block and the policy direction of

their organisation. Apart from that, group members on both sides made personal attacks by accusing each other of a lack of Aboriginality. The most important way of testing people's Aboriginality is through establishing someone's actual biological descent through family and place name. When that does not suffice one looks at style and sometimes at skin colour. It is especially the circumstances of competition and the value of a position as staff member of an organisation that people are declined to judge each other's Aboriginality. The notion of Aboriginality as descent is especially useful in this process as it provides people with a tool to establish a person's individual Aboriginal identity and in cases of disagreement and factionalism it provides people with a strong emotional link to a small group of family members. In the case of the Aboriginal Housing Company and the Coalition two groups competed over the future of their living environment involving political power and large amounts of money. Because the people within the community could not agree which direction to take in the development plans of the Block the community separated into factions. Whereas the judgement of individual claims to identification as Aborigine can form a threat for the organisations' corporate Aboriginal identity it offers people the opportunity to see to it that only the most suitable people are put in powerful positions in organisations.

I end the thesis with a recapitulation of the argument and the conclusions that follow from the preceding chapters. The descriptions of the cases in which Aboriginal organisations communicate with others show that towards different audiences, different messages are conveyed. In the case of government institutions the message is: You and I are different, whereas, in contact with clients the message is: You and I are the same. However, the people working in or with the organisations judge each other on the basis of a question: Who are you? The organisations try to convey these messages by emphasising particular notions of urban Aboriginal identity. In interaction with government institutions, notions of resistance play an important role. With clients, however, the organisations emphasise especially notions of Aboriginality as cultural continuity. The staff members themselves judge one another on the basis of notions of Aboriginality as descent and appropriate behaviour. The cases show that each of these notions has specific capacities and can fulfil specific functions when used in particular situations. As a consequence, all of these notions have their own value. This is an important establishment, as some notions of Aboriginal identity are accepted more easily than others; one of the main reasons why especially

forms of urban Aboriginal identification are often disputed. Together these notions present an image of what the Aboriginal organisations perceive of urban Aboriginal identity and what they consider as their own corporate Aboriginal identity. At the same time it clarifies how sometimes seemingly contradicting notions of Aboriginal identity can exist next to one another and all have their own value.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift begint met een introductie van het onderzoeksveld. Ik leg hierin uit dat de wijk Redfern in Sydney slecht toegankelijk is en dat dit mijn onderzoeksmethodologie heeft beïnvloed. Zo was ik veel tijd kwijt aan het winnen van vertrouwen van de Aborigines en de organisaties waarmee ik wilde werken. Daarnaast vroeg het instandhouden van de werkrelatie veel aandacht tijdens het verzamelen van de onderzoeksgegevens en het schrijven van het proefschrift. In het tweede gedeelte van dit hoofdstuk beschrijf ik de sleutelbegrippen van het onderzoek, namelijk: Redfern, Aboriginal organisaties en urbane Aboriginal identiteit. Vervolgens introduceer ik de stelling van dit proefschrift. Om het proces van identificatie als Aboriginal in een urbane omgeving te verhelderen, zal ik de manier analyseren waarop Aboriginal organisaties hun zogenaamde “corporate Aboriginal identity” naar buiten brengen tegenover verschillende groepen in de Australische samenleving. Ik stel namelijk dat Aboriginal organisaties gebruik maken van verschillende strategieën om andere groepen te overtuigen van hun Aboriginal identiteit om hun bestaan te legitimeren. Voor dit doel gebruik ik Hollinsworth’s onderscheid tussen drie opvattingen van urbane Aboriginal identiteit, namelijk: Aboriginaliteit als verzet, Aboriginaliteit als culturele continuïteit en Aboriginaliteit als afkomst.

In het tweede hoofdstuk schrijf ik over de historische en sociale achtergrond van de wijk Redfern en haar Aboriginal inwoners om het onderzoeksmateriaal in een context te kunnen plaatsen. In het eerste gedeelte leg ik uit hoe de relatie tussen de eerste bewoners van het huidige Sydney en de Europese immigranten zich ontwikkelde over de afgelopen tweehonderd jaar. Na dit historisch relaas richt ik mij op de unieke gebeurtenissen die leidden tot het ontstaan van Aboriginal Redfern. Ik beschrijf hoe de migratie van Aborigines op gang kwam en hoe een complexe structuur van verstrengelde belangen van verschillende groepen in de Australische samenleving leidde tot het opzetten van de eerste Aboriginal organisaties, zoals de Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern en de Aboriginal Housing Company. Deze en andere initiatieven speelden een grote rol in het ontstaan van het huidige Redfern en haar Aboriginal gemeenschap. Vervolgens vertel ik over het dagelijks leven in Redfern met

speciale aandacht voor verschillende uitingen van hedendaags racisme. Ik verklaar hoe raciale theorieën de sociale relaties in Australië lange tijd domineerden en hoe het komt dat racisme ook nu een belangrijk probleem is in de Australische samenleving - ook al zijn haar uitingsvormen de afgelopen jaren veranderd. Omdat vooral urbane Aborigines vaak geassocieerd worden met criminaliteit bespreek ik de positie van Aborigines in het Australische rechtssysteem, de relaties tussen Aborigines en de politie en de rol van de media in de beeldvorming over Aborigines.

Hoofdstuk drie geeft een overzicht van de kenmerken en functies van Aboriginal organisaties. Ik laat zien hoe het ontstaan van de organisaties in gang werd gezet door zowel motivaties vanuit de Aboriginal gemeenschap zelf als ook daarbuiten. Het gebrek aan cultuur-specifieke diensten aangeboden door de bestaande welzijnsinstellingen bracht Aborigines binnen en buiten de stad ertoe oplossingen te vinden voor de problemen waar ze op lokaal niveau mee te kampen hadden. Daarnaast waren ook internationale ontwikkelingen gaande die zowel de Aborigines tot hun acties bewogen alsook de rest van het Australische publiek ontvankelijker maakte voor de problemen van de Aborigines. Door de meest in het oog springende kenmerken van de organisaties in Sydney te beschrijven heb ik willen aantonen dat de Aboriginal organisaties verschillen van andere Australische welzijnsinstellingen. Ik onderscheid vier typische kenmerken van Aboriginal organisaties, namelijk: de speciale rol van vrouwen, de gelijkheid tussen stafleden, de loyaliteit ten opzichte van de organisatie en de informele sfeer op de werkvloer. Na deze beschrijving volgt een overzicht van de verschillende functies van de organisaties. Door het aanbieden van directe diensten, die zich richten op individuele hulp aan cliënten, is het de organisaties gelukt de gebreken van de vroegere dienstverlening te verhelpen of te verminderen. Door het vervullen van zogenaamde indirecte functies spelen de organisaties een voortrekkersrol in het ontwikkelen van nieuw beleid en nieuwe dienstverleningsmethodes die in het verleden al regelmatig werden overgenomen door de overheid. Deze functies komen niet alleen ten goede aan individuele klanten maar aan de gehele Aboriginal gemeenschap en soms ook de rest van de Australische bevolking.

Na de introductie van Redfern en de Aboriginal organisaties richt ik mij in het vierde hoofdstuk op huidige vormen van Aboriginal identificatie. Eerst geef ik een historisch overzicht van oude vormen van Aboriginal identificatie die voorkwamen in de periode dat de Britse immigranten, later

de Europese Australiërs, een belangrijke rol speelden in de constructie van het begrip Aboriginal identiteit. Ik vertel dat Aborigines geen passieve ontvangers waren van een nieuw omschreven identiteit die hen werd opgedrongen door buitenstaanders maar dat zij actieve spelers waren in de formering van verschillende vormen van zelfidentificatie. Vervolgens laat ik aan de hand van een protest in Sydney zien wat de belangrijkste vormen van huidige urbane Aboriginal identificatie zijn. Dit protest illustreert dat het identificeren als Aboriginal een relationeel en omgevingsgebonden proces is waarin verschillende vormen van Aboriginal identificatie elkaar afwisselen. Tijdens het protest participeerden muzikanten, sprekers en het Aboriginal publiek in een complex proces van het tentoonstellen van verschillende interpretaties van het concept Aboriginaliteit en het variëren van hun eigen identificatie als Aboriginal. Zo was de identificatie op basis van "inheemsheid" voornamelijk gebaseerd op een gedeelde historie en bood het mensen bij het protest de gelegenheid een verenigd front te vormen tegen de Australische regering. Daarnaast bleek de identificatie als Koori nuttig voor het benadrukken van zowel culturele als historische verschillen tussen de Aborigines onderling en legde het de controle over wat Aboriginaliteit inhoudt bij de Aboriginal demonstranten en niet bij de Australische autoriteiten. Tot slot bood de identificatie die langs lokale lijnen loopt mensen de gelegenheid de Aboriginaliteit van de individuele participanten te beoordelen om te voorkomen dat iemand zich zou voordoen als Aboriginal om daarvan te kunnen profiteren. Aan het eind van dit hoofdstuk introduceer ik de analytische begrippen die in de volgende hoofdstukken worden gebruikt om de stelling van dit proefschrift te onderbouwen. Het betreft drie concepten die werden besproken in een overzichtartikel van Hollinsworth (1992), namelijk: Aboriginaliteit als verzet, Aboriginaliteit als culturele continuïteit en Aboriginaliteit als afkomst.

In hoofdstuk vijf beschrijf ik het voorbeeld van de Aboriginal Legal Service Redfern (ALSR) om inzicht te geven in de interactie tussen Aboriginal organisaties en een niet-Aboriginal publiek, met name de overheid. Eerst laat ik zien dat de relatie tussen Aboriginal organisaties en de overheid er één is van samenwerking en (financiële) afhankelijkheid. In het tweede deel geef ik een overzicht van de gebeurtenissen die leidden tot de sluiting van de ALSR in 1996 na 25 jaar dienst. Ik onderscheid drie factoren die hebben bijgedragen tot deze sluiting: de politieke rol die de ALSR altijd heeft gespeeld, de afnemende steun voor de ALSR vanuit de

Aboriginal gemeenschap en de nieuw gekozen liberale federale regering die aan de macht was gekomen in 1996. Na deze beschrijving analyseer ik de mondelinge bijdrage die de ALSR heeft geleverd tijdens een hoorzitting van het *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* van de Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1996. Tijdens de hoorzitting probeerde de ALSR haar Aboriginal identiteit te legitimeren tegenover de commissie die in opdracht van de federale regering handelde. De ALSR probeerde haar representatieve functie te legitimeren door een link te leggen tussen de ALSR en andere Aborigines en hun interpretatie te geven van Aboriginal identiteit. Deze link was gebaseerd op vroegere en huidige ervaringen van onderdrukking. De ALSR creëerde op deze manier een scheiding tussen Aborigines en niet-Aborigines en maakte van de regering de tegenpartij tijdens de hoorzitting. Het begrip Aboriginaliteit als verzet werd benadrukt vanwege haar mogelijkheid om mensen samen te brengen en te verdelen op basis van ervaringen. Op deze manier werd de representatieve functie van de ALSR veilig gesteld. Het begrip biedt ook de mogelijkheid veranderingen te bewerkstelligen en dit was nu juist de bedoeling van het nationale onderzoek. Maar, zoals ook het geval was met de ALSR, soms heeft de gekozen strategie om een organisatie's "corporate Aboriginal identity" te legitimeren een tegengesteld effect. De ALSR leek er niet in te zijn geslaagd de regering te overtuigen van haar Aboriginal identiteit gebaseerd op verzet. Het was echter het proberen waard want in het verleden had het vaak wel een positief effect gehad.

Inhakend op wat werd verteld in het vorige hoofdstuk, vertel ik in het zesde hoofdstuk over niet-Aboriginal steun voor Aboriginal organisaties. Het begrip Aboriginaliteit als verzet heeft namelijk de mogelijkheid om niet-Aboriginal supporters bij Aboriginaliteit te betrekken. Ik bestudeer de consequenties die deze mogelijkheid kan hebben voor Aboriginal organisaties en haar leden. Voor dit doel richt ik mij op de National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC). Met een overzicht van de activiteiten die in het verleden door de NAHHC zijn ontplooid laat ik zien dat niet-Aboriginal steun onmisbaar is om veranderingen teweeg te brengen als Aboriginal organisatie in de Australische samenleving. Maar terwijl niet-Aboriginal steun van buitenaf over het algemeen wordt verwelkomd, vormt niet-Aboriginal steun van binnenuit een gecompliceerd probleem. Om te laten zien welke gevolgen gemengd lidmaatschap kan hebben voor niet-Aboriginal leden van een Aboriginal organisatie vertel ik

het verhaal van Christine, een niet-Aboriginal vrouw die de oprichtster en drijvende kracht was achter de NAHHC. Haar persoonlijke kant van het verhaal toonde aan dat ze werd geconfronteerd met twee problemen. Ten eerste had ze veel moeite gehad Aboriginal steun te vinden voor een zaak die niet direct als Aboriginal zaak werd geaccepteerd. Ten tweede had ze het moeilijk gevonden om de ongelijke relatie tussen Aboriginal en niet-Aboriginal leden in een Aboriginal organisatie te accepteren. In mijn analyse van de oprichtingsvergadering gehouden op het *National Aboriginal History and Heritage Forum* in 1996 richt ik mij op de manier waarop de deelnemers omgingen met het gemengde lidmaatschap. Tijdens de vergadering werden praktische en morele argumenten aangevoerd voor en tegen gemengd lidmaatschap. Aan de basis van deze argumenten stond de kwestie van vertrouwen. Terwijl sommige mensen vertrouwden in de oprechtheid van niet-Aboriginal leden om een bijdrage te leveren aan de Aboriginal zaak, waren anderen bang dat niet-Aboriginal leden, bewust of onbewust, het Aboriginal recht op zelfbeschikking in gevaar zouden brengen; het recht op volledige Aboriginal controle over de organisatie. Hoewel het probleem van gemengd lidmaatschap intern kan worden opgelost door het vertrouwen dat de leden onderling in elkaar uitspreken, blijft buiten de organisatie een wereld bestaan die een Aboriginal vertegenwoordiger eist voor een Aboriginal organisatie. Niet-Aboriginal lidmaatschap vormt een bedreiging voor de legitimiteit van een organisatie als Aboriginal organisatie omdat het haar rol als vertegenwoordiger van Aborigines moet verantwoorden door haar Aboriginaliteit aan te tonen. Dit is moeilijker voor gemengde Aboriginal organisaties omdat niet-Aboriginal leden niet bijdragen tot de Aboriginaliteit van een organisatie, maar de claim op een "corporate Aboriginal identity" in gevaar brengen.

In hoofdstuk zeven introduceer ik twee educatieve programma's die werden georganiseerd door het Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern (ADTR) en Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Cooperation. Tijdens het Saturday and After School Programme leerde het ADTR haar leerlingen dat Aborigines een eigen traditie hebben die hen bijzonder maakt en hen onderscheidt van andere Australiërs. Tijdens het Young Mothers Programme van Mudgin-gal maakten de deelnemers en organisatoren kenbaar dat de continuïteit van hun culturele gewoonten, zoals opvoedingspraktijken, in gevaar werd gebracht door problemen die door de Westerse maatschappij waren geïntroduceerd. Zij waren er echter van overtuigd dat hun traditie alle problemen had overleefd en dat het nog steeds mogelijk was Koori normen

en waarden over te brengen op de jongere generaties. De thema's die speciale aandacht kregen tijdens het Saturday and After School Programme betroffen de speciale banden die Aborigines hebben met familie, de spirituele wereld en het land. Terwijl aan de authenticiteit van de urbane uitingvormen van deze culturele elementen soms getwijfeld wordt beweert ik dat de authenticiteit zelf hier niet aan de orde is omdat het proces van het beschrijven van het verleden en het bepalen wat behoort tot de traditie van een volk altijd een kwestie is van interpretatie van de mensen die met deze begrippen werken. Dus cultuur en culturele elementen bevinden zich altijd in een proces van verandering en deze ontwikkeling bedreigt niet de culturele continuïteit van samenlevingen maar is een manier om deze in stand te houden. In mijn bespreking van het Young Mothers Programme laat ik zien dat de culturele elementen waarvan werd gezegd dat zij tot de Aboriginal traditie behoren geen overblijfselen zijn van de koloniale invasie en onteigening alleen, maar ook van discussies tussen Aborigines onderling over de continuïteit van hun culturele praktijken. De educatieve programma's laten zien dat bepaalde interpretaties van Aboriginal traditie strategische voordelen kunnen hebben. Ik beweert dat dit de betekenis van de begrippen die daarbinnen gebruikt worden, of zij nu bewust of onbewust worden aangepast, niet ongeldig maakt omdat zij onderdeel zijn van alle verschillende elementen waaruit cultuur bestaat. De elementen die door de organisaties worden benadrukt en in communicatie met hun klanten worden gebruikt om onderscheid te maken tussen de lokale klanten en de totale Aboriginal bevolking op basis van algemene verschillen gebaseerd op urbane leefstijlen. Door uiting te geven aan wat de organisaties verstaan onder Aboriginal traditie, elementen die uiting geven aan een culturele continuïteit, proberen zij een link te leggen met hun lokale klantenkring. Het voordeel van deze elementen is het feit dat zij vooral geschikt zijn om een verbinding te leggen tussen de urbane Aboriginal gemeenschap en de organisaties vanwege hun mogelijkheid urbane Aboriginal cultuur te voorzien van authenticiteit. De erkenning van authenticiteit is zeer belangrijk voor deze klanten omdat vooral de urbane Aborigines hun "traditionele" culturele praktijken werden ontnomen en werden gedwongen zich een westerse levensstijl aan te meten.

Omdat de staf van een organisatie een cruciale rol speelt in het in stand houden van het beeld van de "corporate Aboriginal identity" van de organisatie beschrijf ik in hoofdstuk acht hoe de identificatie van stafleden als Aboriginal soms in twijfel wordt getrokken door anderen. Terwijl de

organisaties maatregelen hebben getroffen om hun “corporate identity” over te brengen in officiële documenten, zoals folders, brochures en rapporten, worden zij in werkelijkheid vertegenwoordigd door Aboriginal individuen die hun eigen Aboriginal identiteit moeten verantwoorden tegenover iedereen met wie zij omgaan. In het geval van de Aboriginal Housing Company en de Aboriginal Housing Coalition laat ik zien dat Aboriginaliteit als afkomst wordt gebruikt als strategie om de status van een andere organisatie als Aboriginal organisatie te ondermijnen. Alhoewel de ruzie zelf ging om problemen zoals de richting van het beleid, vertegenwoordiging en subsidie, had de ruzie een Aboriginal karakter omdat Aboriginal identiteit een belangrijke rol speelde in het bestrijden van de andere partij. De twee groepen hadden elk een andere visie op Aboriginal identiteit die zij beiden incorporeerden in hun toekomstplannen voor een gedeelte van de wijk en in de richting van het beleid van hun organisatie. Daarnaast deden leden van beide kanten persoonlijke aanvallen door elkaar te beschuldigen van een gebrek aan Aboriginaliteit. De belangrijkste manier om de Aboriginaliteit van mensen te testen is door middel van het vaststellen van iemands biologische afkomst door te vragen naar geboorteplaats en familienaam. Als dit niet genoeg informatie oplevert, kijkt men naar iemands stijl en soms huidskleur. Het zijn vooral de competitieve omstandigheden en de waarde van een positie als staf lid van een Aboriginal organisatie die mensen ertoe dwingen elkaars Aboriginaliteit te beoordelen. Het begrip Aboriginaliteit als afkomst is nuttig in dit proces omdat het mensen de gelegenheid biedt iemands persoonlijke Aboriginal identiteit te bepalen. In het geval van onenigheid en onderlinge verdeeldheid biedt het de mensen een sterke emotionele band met een kleine groep familieleden. In het geval van de Aboriginal Housing Company en de Aboriginal Housing Coalition streden twee groepen om de toekomst van hun leefomgeving waarbij politieke macht en grote sommen geld waren betrokken. Omdat de mensen binnen de gemeenschap het niet eens konden worden over de richting van de toekomstplannen raakte de gemeenschap onderling verdeeld. Terwijl de veroordeling van individuele claims op identificatie als Aboriginal een bedreiging kan vormen voor de “corporate Aboriginal identity” van de organisaties, biedt het de mensen tegelijkertijd de gelegenheid er op toe te zien dat alleen de meest geschikte mensen op machtige plekken binnen een organisatie terecht kunnen komen.

Ik sluit het proefschrift af met een herhaling van de stelling en de conclusies van de verschillende hoofdstukken. De voorbeelden waarin

Aboriginal organisaties communiceren met anderen laten zien dat ten opzichte van verschillende toehoorders verschillende boodschappen worden overgedragen. In het geval van de overheidsinstellingen luidt de boodschap: Jij en ik zijn verschillend. Terwijl in het contact met de klanten de boodschap juist is: Jij en ik zijn hetzelfde. Maar de mensen die binnen of met organisaties werken beoordelen elkaar op basis van een andere vraag, namelijk: Wie ben jij? De organisaties proberen deze boodschappen over te brengen door bepaalde opvattingen over urbane Aboriginal identiteit te benadrukken. In interactie met overheidsinstellingen spelen opvattingen van Aboriginaliteit als verzet een belangrijke rol. In interactie met klanten benadrukken de organisaties vooral Aboriginaliteit als culturele continuïteit. De stafleden zelf beoordelen elkaar op basis van opvattingen van Aboriginaliteit als afkomst en correct gedrag. De voorbeelden laten zien dat elk van deze opvattingen specifieke mogelijkheden biedt en specifieke functies vervult als zij in bepaalde situaties worden gebruikt. Dit heeft tot gevolg dat elk van deze opvattingen haar eigen waarde kent. Dit is een belangrijke constatering omdat sommige van deze opvattingen makkelijker worden geaccepteerd dan anderen; een van de redenen waarom juist vormen van urbane Aboriginal identificatie vaak in twijfel worden getrokken. Samen vormen deze opvattingen een beeld van wat Aboriginal organisaties beschouwen als urbane Aboriginal identiteit en wat zij beschouwen als hun "corporate Aboriginal identity". Tegelijkertijd verduidelijkt het hoe soms tegengesteld lijkende opvattingen van Aboriginal identiteit naast elkaar kunnen bestaan en hun eigen waarde kunnen behouden.

Curriculum Vitae

Janneke Hulsker was born in Vlaardingen in 1970. She studied Cultural Anthropology at the University of Nijmegen from 1989 to 1993. In 1992 she visited Redfern in Sydney, Australia for the first time to study the local Aboriginal organisations. She graduated with honours (cum laude) in 1993. In 1994 she worked voluntarily as a researcher for the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) in The Hague. That same year she carried out a pilot research in Australia which was sponsored by the Fonds Catharine van Tussenbroek. The research consisted of a literature study at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra and interviews with the staff of the Aboriginal organisations she had visited before. In 1995 she was granted a PhD scholarship by WOTRO (NWO) to further investigate the topic of Aboriginal organisations and their use of Aboriginal identity. From 1995 to 1999 she was working on her PhD at the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Nijmegen. During her PhD she was a member of Swaiio (Sociaal Wetenschappelijk AiO Overleg) of the Faculty of Social Sciences, a member of the PhD Committee of CERES (Research School for Resource Studies for Development) in Utrecht, editor of AiOpener (a magazine for PhD students from Nijmegen), and board member of the Werkgroep Oceanië. In 2000 and 2001 she combined finishing her PhD thesis with a research she carried out for the UAF (University Assistance Fund) in Utrecht. The research focussed on the reasons why refugee students who are clients of the UAF drop out of their studies sooner than other students. She concluded her work for the UAF with a report titled: "Uitval is Geen Toeval: Een Onderzoek naar de Uitval onder Vluchtelingstudenten". Janneke Hulsker is currently working as a consultant at Osmose, a multicultural consultancy agency in Arnhem.

In Redfern Aboriginal organisations offer specific help to improve their Aboriginal clients' position in Australian society. Their existence depends on their recognition and acceptance as Aboriginal organisations. Therefore, it is important to convince everyone of their Aboriginal character. In a metropolitan environment where Aboriginal people can not always be recognised as such, it is not easy to do so. Janneke Hulsker argues that Aboriginal organisations make use of different strategies to convince different groups in Australian society of their corporate Aboriginal identity in order to legitimise their existence. How they manage this and whether the organisations succeed in regulating their recognition can be read in this thesis.

Janneke Hulsker graduated in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in 1993. During various periods between 1992 and 1999 she carried out fieldwork in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern, where she studied Aboriginal organisations. "Regulating Recognition in Redfern" is a result of these years of fieldwork.