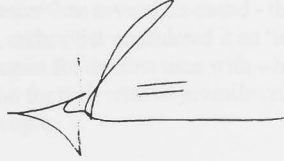


ABORIGINAL YOUTH AND OUTBACK JUSTICE

Local knowledge of difference



This thesis is my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judy Putt'. The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping loop on the left side and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Judy Putt

It has been submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Australian National University, Canberra, 3 November, 1999.

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how well oppositional paradigms explain the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in juvenile justice statistics once the cultural complexities, internal politics and multiple subjectivities of a particular setting are factored into an account. It focuses on the town of Laverton, situated on the north-east rim of the West Australian Goldfields and on the edge of the Western Desert. Despite its small size - the district's population has never been greater than several thousand - the town has had a reputation for trouble. In years gone by, authorities considered it an 'intercepting point' where traditional Aborigines had contact for the first time with white people. More recently, the district has had a reputation for high rates of juvenile crime perpetrated almost solely by Aboriginal young people.

The issue of Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system was brought to the fore during and after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Explanations for the over-representation have been influenced by broader analyses of the legacies of colonialism, including the effects of discrimination and structural disadvantage. These accounts concentrate on unequal race relations. Various approaches have emerged which endeavour to incorporate the agency and subjectivities of the marginalised and subordinated. In particular Australian writers have referred to cultural factors although these often remain unexamined. In some instances this phrase appears to refer to practices and beliefs defined as 'Aboriginal' while others use it to refer to an oppositional culture to explain certain kinds of disorderly behaviour, modes of drinking, and criminal activities.

To provide a rich and detailed account of the inter-cultural setting and the justice apparatus, the thesis takes an interactionist perspective by examining different collectivities within the town - young people, local Aboriginal residents, and justice practitioners. Various contexts shape the perspectives and experiences of these different groups, and the local administration of juvenile justice. These include historical antecedents, wider socio-political changes, and town life in its broadest sense. It is argued that oppositional paradigms are inadequate for a sociological understanding of the high involvement of local Aboriginal youth with the juvenile justice system. This is because they fail to adequately take into account important structural, social, cultural and historical factors that are central to the high rates of Aboriginal juvenile crime in a racially divided context.

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PREFACE

A sense of place

For the outside observer or tourist the town of Laverton is likely to be associated with remoteness and discomfort, because of its location on the edge of desert and on the fringe of an outback mining region, the Goldfields. Perusing a map would reveal that the town is 960 kilometres from Perth, and that having departed from Perth and having reached Kalgoorlie, there is another 360 kilometres with only a few small towns before you reach Laverton (see Figure 1). Should you want to continue your journey there is a dirt road that goes over the Northern Territory border before the road again becomes bitumen near Uluru. The dirt road goes through the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and a number of small Aboriginal settlements, although you have to cover 400 kilometres from Laverton before reaching the first settlement, Warburton (see Figure 2). You might also note that a permit is required to enter the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and that the map may contain a warning that plenty of water should be carried in a vehicle when travelling in the area beyond Laverton. Having made some inquiries before undertaking the journey, you may expect climactic extremes in the summer and winter, and a desolate landscape.

Overhearing a discussion about travelling amongst Goldfields Aborigines, Wongis¹, would reveal a different orientation and signposting of places. The major road and towns might be mentioned but there would also be references to the web of narrow dirt roads that criss-cross the region, various Aboriginal settlements off the main routes, and to the places, unnamed on the map, where events important to Wongi occurred. Towns and settlements in the Goldfields and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands are more likely to be named with accompanying references to people, either as temporary, current or nominal residents. This socialised landscape is evoked in narratives of past events and personal experiences but unless there is a very specific reason to do so, there will be no mention of sacred sites.

There is a temptation to exaggerate and caricature the contrast between Wongi and western renditions of location and landscape. Where there is a mutuality of perspective across these two polarities is where persons regard themselves as locals. After a period of reasonably long residence in the region there may be commonalities in the recognition and identification of places and an appreciation of country beyond the superficial. Those that stay for a while in Laverton, or who are frequent visitors, are more likely to see the town itself and its immediate environs as a socialised landscape.

Over the years, however, very few white residents have considered the town as home. This has important implications for the conduct of local politics and social relations, and in representations of the place. To people who have not lived in or visited

¹Goldfields Aborigines identify themselves in everyday conversation as Wongis. Morgan (1985:preface) claims the word 'wongi' was coined by Aboriginal teenagers at Mount Margaret mission, as affectionate slang for 'wongutha', which means one people. Morgan uses the older spelling for 'wongutha' - nowadays it is more commonly spelt 'wongatha'.

Laverton, it may seem an exotic location, outback in the desert. To others it appears a remote, small, unimportant and unappealing mining town.

*

I arrived in the town for the first time in 1987 after being offered the job of welfare officer with the then Department of Community Services (DCS). Having flown east from Perth and after an early morning stopover in Kalgoorlie, I climbed aboard a small aeroplane for the hour-long flight north to Laverton. The plane buzzed over the rust red flat scape below - no sign of water or habitation - just the glittering white blotches of the salt pans. It would be easy to miss the town, a splash of green on the seemingly infinite plain. I was met at the airstrip and drove into town in a smart government car. The place was so small, so scruffily suburban, and so quiet. A few Aboriginal people sat under trees in the open area at the centre of town. A ring road encircled the town that took five minutes to drive around.

Introduced around town as the new DCS officer, the reactions from white people ranged from disinterest to downright hostility. I was told my predecessor had alienated the locals but that she at least had stayed in town for a year which, I was informed, was an unusually long period of residence for welfare workers. I felt full of foreboding.

In the end I stayed until 1989, and returned in 1992 for another two years as a student carrying out the research for this thesis. My attachment to Laverton is a grudging affection for a place very alien to my ideal. I would call it a 'hard' town in the Wongi sense of the word. Familiarity did not result in acceptance. This is my account and despite trying to be fair, I am sure much of the emotional and moral tone to the thesis reflects my experiences and is thus, my story and my story of others' lives.

*

I wish to acknowledge the help I received from residents in Laverton who took the time to explain things to me. Various people helped me access information, mostly government employees, and as a member of the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society I was able to examine interesting historical material. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies provided a grant that enabled me to have a vehicle for a year and to employ an assistant for a short period of time.

Thanks to my supervisor, Dr Nic Peterson, for his unflagging support. I would never have finished without the moral support of friends and family. I owe them a huge debt, particularly those that looked after my son - Ann, my parents and my partner, Gary.

This work is dedicated to the young man called Lee in the thesis.

Figure 1: Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia.

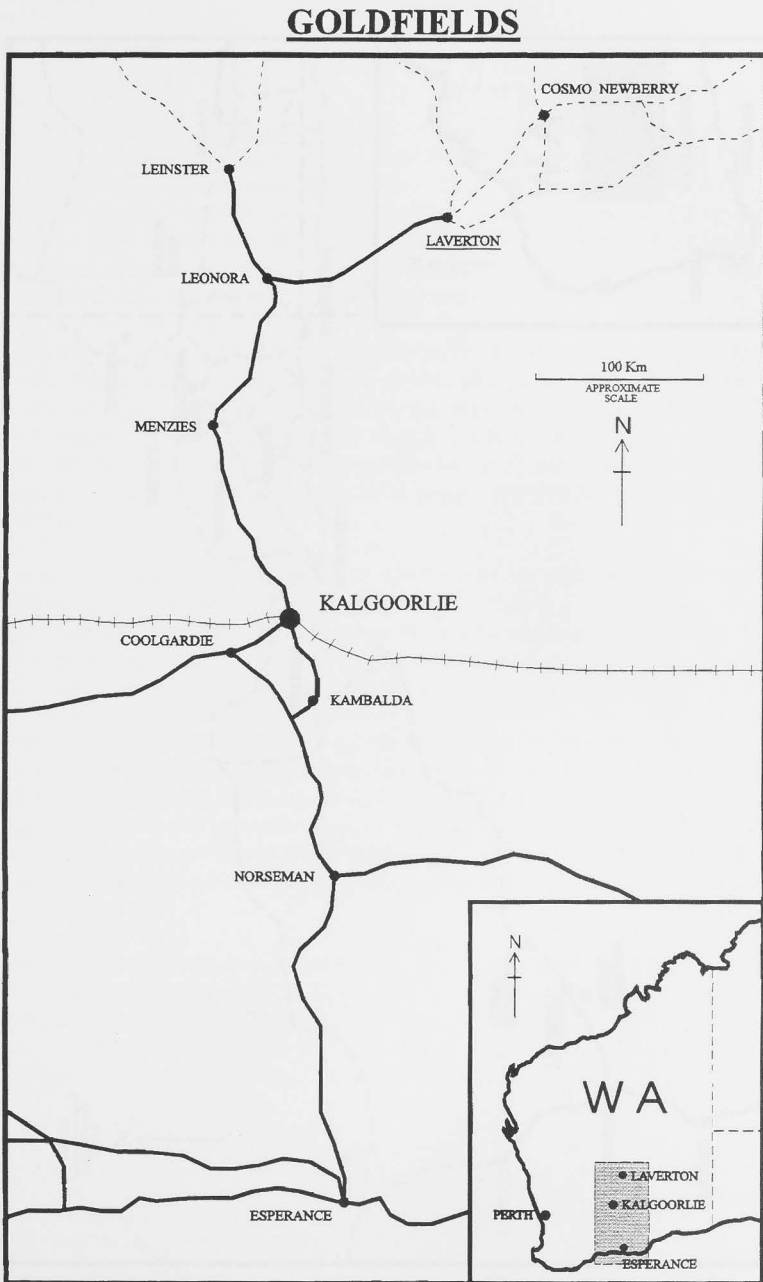
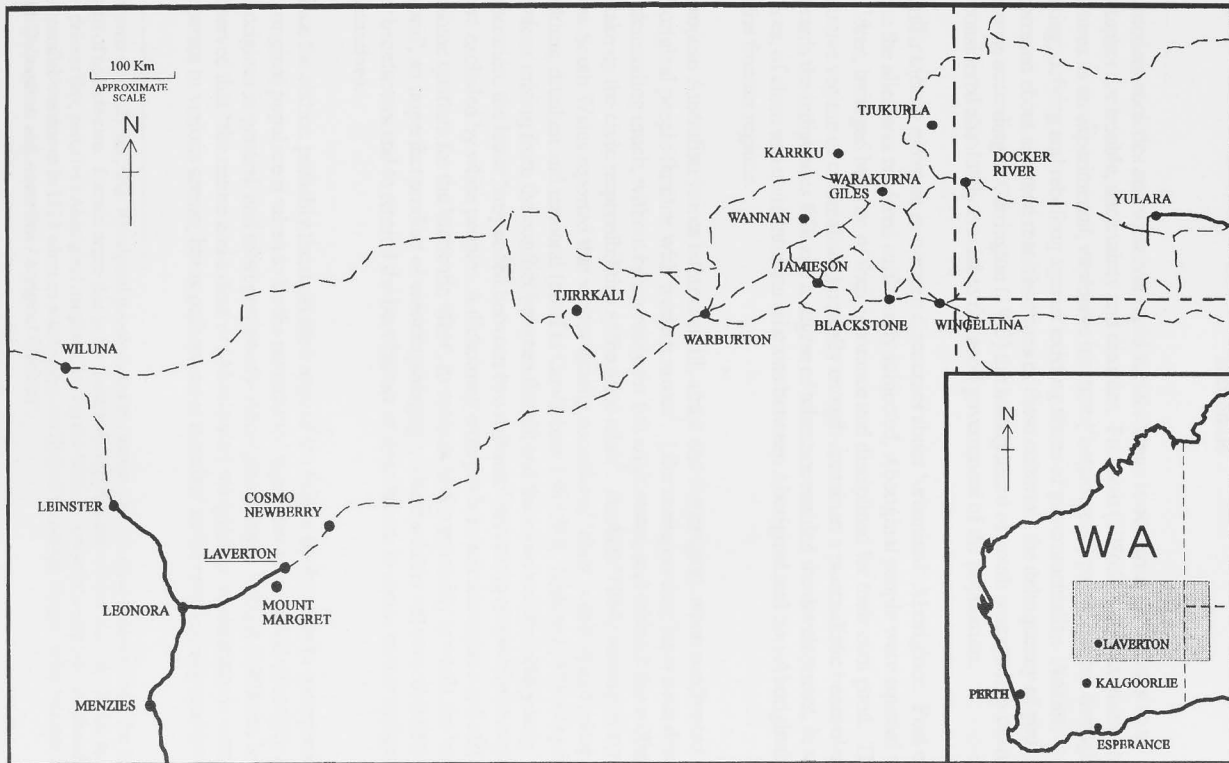


Figure 2: Central-Eastern region of Western Australia.



CHAPTER ONE

Rationale

In modern societies and wherever rapid social change is occurring, youth acts as a metaphor for trouble, uncertainty and disorder. Foucault (1986:24) characterises youth cultures as an experimental, explosive juncture ('heterotopia') partly created through the testing, defying and rebelling against existing forms of governmentality. Anxiety is expressed about assumed manifestations of these cultures - the delinquency of youth - because according to Carrington (1993) the management of youth passage into citizenship is considered absolutely crucial to the good government of the population.

Similar themes circulate in western discourses about 'urbanised' Aborigines. Post contact, once the alien was rendered sufficiently subjected, Aboriginal people were equated with children, indulged because of their ignorance and disciplined for their own good. This coercive regime of colonialism ironically enough contained a paternalistic benevolence towards the indigenous folk and a degree of tolerance enabled the development, in some places, of close and quite intimate relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the frontier regions.

European Australian voices became shrill, afraid and disparaging, when confronted by Aboriginal people familiar with western mores¹. Like teenagers they have been described as demanding much, without being ready for full adult status, and without the willingness to take up the civic responsibilities of the ideal adult². Beckett (1964) writing of country New South Wales reported that whites usually considered 'abos' a delinquent group - dirty, feckless, drunken and immoral (cited in Cowlishaw 1988:90). Biskup (1973:34) portrays tensions arising from the conflict between the old and the more acculturated young generation, the latter "suspended between two cultures" becoming dissatisfied because they were excluded by white people. A dichotomy emerges between the respect and affection in some quarters for the 'authentic other', in contrast to the animosity towards the 'corrupted hybrid', an imperfect product of western pedagogy, with the latent capacity to betray his or her benefactors and to remind the benefactors of their failure to create mirror images of themselves.

Since the sixties, probably the most stark sign of the failure by the state to incorporate the Aboriginal populace is taken to be the persistently high rates of recorded offending for Aborigines in general, and most pertinently, Aboriginal youth. Sackett (1988:66) has observed that "the nature and extent of [Aboriginal] marginality [to hegemonic control] is apparent in various arenas, but is perhaps most manifest in the realm of imposed law - the

¹ Morris (1989:2) describes Aboriginal people in the pre-sixties era as 'colonial wards', with the liminal status of non-citizens. I would argue that in the Goldfields region many whites, from the fifties through to the present day, perceived Aboriginal people as having the 'liminal' status of emerging 'adulthood'.

² A parallel was drawn in 1913 when an article appeared in the *Psychology Review* titled 'Mental Tests with Delinquents and Australian Aboriginal Children'.

prime interface between Blacks and the state". To assert that the criminal law is the prime interface between Aborigines and the state is perhaps too strong a claim, but it certainly remains a critical site for the state to impose coercive measures on indigenous peoples.

Published in 1976, Eggleston's ground-breaking book *Fear, Favour or Affection* concentrated on the administration of the criminal law as it affected Aboriginal people in three States, including Western Australia (WA). The book was based on official data and fieldwork from 1965 to 1967, which revealed consistent rates of over-representation of Aboriginal people and youth in the criminal justice system. Having concluded that the over-representation was primarily a product of discrimination, rather than a criminal propensity amongst the Indigenous populace, she called for legislative reform, especially in relation to the myriad special provisions encoded in civil and criminal law that applied solely to Aboriginal people, and advocated addressing the widespread prejudice in non-Aboriginal communities and the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people.

Many of the themes found in Eggleston (1976) were repeated and elaborated upon in the series of publications in the early nineties related to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and still apply today. Of special note are issues that tend to be more pronounced in rural locations and small towns where the visibility of Aboriginal people, especially when drunk in public places, has contributed to the large numbers of Aboriginal people who have contact with and become embroiled in criminal justice processes. The response of the police and local justices of the peace to public 'incivilities' in small rural communities has caused disquiet amongst many commentators since Eggleston, and despite some fundamental reforms such as the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, remains an enduring concern.

Around the same time that Eggleston published her book in the mid-seventies, an event that signalled the changing nature of governance of race relations in Western Australia was the Skull Creek Royal Commission. The incident which precipitated the Commission occurred in Laverton - the location for this thesis's fieldwork - and appears to have centred on an inappropriate over-reaction from police who were brought up from the regional centre of Kalgoorlie to deal with a large group of desert visitors from the Central Reserves (as it was then called) (Clarkson 1976). There were several noteworthy features of the investigations conducted as part of the Commission. In the formal arena of the Commissioner's inquiry, for the first time the testimony of Aboriginal people were considered as being of equal merit to that of non-Aboriginal witnesses (Woenne 1980). Further contextual information was provided by the Laverton Study Group, a small group of 'experts' that included a local Aboriginal man, and its report had an appended anthropological report. The Group's report concentrated on the social characteristics and problems of the town, which had undergone a rapid transformation in the preceding few years from a tiny administrative centre to a mining community of over 1000 non-Aboriginal people (Syddall 1975). The anthropological appendix sought to explain and interpret Aboriginal traditions, since the desert visitors at the time of the incident were engaged in Law business.

In a published account of her life, a local Aboriginal woman calls Laverton a 'wild place' and refers to the events that led to the 1976 Royal Commission:

"That Skull Creek where I was born used to be a wild place too a few years ago. That's where all the wongais used to go and drink, then they'd fight, and the police would come along and put them in gaol. Even not long ago it was a wild place. Only a few years back, a couple of trucks loaded with aborigines from Warburton Mission were stopped on the edge of town near Skull Creek by the police who didn't want them to come into Laverton. There was a little war between the Warburton mob and the Police that day... Oh yes, Skull Creek was a wild place years ago and it still is - my creek where I was born" (Pukungka and Muir 1990:22).

Laverton is a frontier town in more than one way. Surrounded by marginal pastoral country and subject to mining cycles of boom and bust, the economic life of the town represents the reach and extent of substantial capitalist incursion into the hinterland. Beyond Laverton, heading east, the country was explored, surveyed, prospected and even intermittently mined³ yet there was never sustained economic development.

Except at the turn of the century and the past 20 years, the size of the non-Aboriginal population has always been small. Even in the eighties, when it was at its highest, the district's population numbered no more than 2000 people of whom at least several hundred were Aboriginal. The huge distances and the sparse distribution of small settlements has and continues to be part of the non-Aboriginal conception of the country - the vastness of the local government area, the length of the police patrols, the sense of isolation.

From 1901 to 1959 a railway line operated from Kalgoorlie terminating at Laverton. Nowadays the bitumen road ends there. Permits are required for travel through the Ngaanyatjarra Lands on the graded dirt road that continues on north-east and over the border.

The terrain and climate are viewed as harsh. Being on the fringes of the Gibson and the Great Victoria Deserts, the summers are intensely hot and rainfall meagre. The land is old and the landscape looks arid, flat, weathered and antique to the European eye. The impact on the environment of the economic activities of the non-Aboriginal population have been too subtle for the untrained eye, but nevertheless profound⁴.

Over the years the majority of the town's residents have been temporary. People from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands visit periodically, mining employees usually left after a few years. A community adviser⁵ to one of the Ngaanyatjarra communities called Laverton "nobody's

³ In the fifties and sixties there was small-scale mining activity at Blackstone, Wingellina, and Warburton.
⁴ Many changes have occurred because of the often inadvertent introduction of alien flora and fauna (for example feral goats and cats) and commercial activities such as the gathering of sandalwood, the keeping of livestock and mining ventures.

⁵ Community 'advisers' are managers of discreet settlements who were meant to give practical effect to the wishes of Councils and settlement residents. During the eighties and the nineties, to the best of my knowledge, all these positions in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were held by non-Aboriginal people.

town" and an article on the town in a New Zealand newspaper dubbed it "the gateway to hell" (Gosling 1987).

Historically, government authorities and missionaries concerned about race relations have portrayed Laverton as a crucial 'meeting point' on the edge of the desert between the white and black worlds. The mission of Mount Margaret, near Laverton, was established by Rod Schenk in the 1920s after the then Chief Protector, Neville, suggested the Eastern Goldfields as an area that desperately needed missionary assistance (Biskup 1973). Originally Schenk had applied to start a mission at Moola Bulla in the north because, at the time, missionaries in Western Australia preferred the challenge of the 'untamed north', or as second choice, the 'demoralised south'. Neville had argued that "it is the semi-civilized natives that are in much greater need of missionary help. The uncivilized natives have a code of their own which is in a way superior to ours but which seems to disintegrate as soon as they get in touch with civilization" (Biskup 1973:122).

Over the years the welfare authorities continued to view the Laverton district as a major concern because of its location between the 'traditional' people of the Central Reserves and the 'settled' areas of Western Australia.

"Cosmo Newbery (sic) is situated ideally as a feeding depot. It is 58 miles north-east of Laverton and right in the path of natives coming into civilization. It is an intercepting point, as it were" (AR 1941:9, my emphasis)⁶.

"Laverton has been and continues to be an area of major concern for the Department. Much of these concerns are a consequence of Laverton being the first European town having most contact with the tribally oriented Aboriginal people of the Central Reserves. There is in the area a high level of Aboriginal adults and children coming before the Courts. Laverton is also a traditional meeting area for Aboriginal people of the Goldfields coming together for cultural pursuits. At certain times of the year several hundred Aboriginal people will camp on the fringe of Laverton before moving on in their traditional patterns" (AR 1981:20, my emphasis).

As a remote locale⁷, Laverton district has been favoured on several occasions as a site for containing non-local troublesome Aborigines in their 'natural' but unfamiliar environment. In the fifties Cosmo Newbery was a prison farm for urban Aboriginal criminals with the perceived advantage of not requiring secure facilities as the country

⁶ AR denotes Annual Report of the key state department responsible for administering Aboriginal affairs up until 1973. The name of the department changed over the years, but the main ones were Native Affairs and subsequently Native Welfare. In 1973 Native Welfare and Child Welfare departments were merged to create a department for Community Welfare. This department has undergone several changes to its title including Community Services, Community Development, and recently, Family and Children's Services. References to annual reports, which are dated after 1972, are those for the general community welfare department.

⁷ Frontier places have also been viewed as useful sites for 'dangerous' physical waste. There have been intermittent discussions over the years of using the Goldfields as a place to dump nuclear waste, and the trajectories of the rocket tests in the 1960s were over country to the north-east assessed as thinly populated and uneconomic.

and the local Aboriginal people were thought to be sufficient deterrents to escape. In 1995, a 'work camp' for young offenders was set up near Laverton⁸.

Annual reports of the welfare department reveal that offending by local Aboriginal youth was an increasing worry for the authorities from the early 1970s onwards. By the late eighties Laverton had a reputation, at least amongst juvenile justice workers, as a place with a high incidence of juvenile crime. Data from the Department of Community Service's client records information system for all the country districts in WA indicated that in 1989/1990 Laverton had the:

- third highest percentage of 10 to 17 year old population that was Aboriginal (based on the ABS 1986 census)
- fifth highest in relation to juvenile offenders as a proportion of youth population (114 per 1000 persons)
- third highest in relation to total offences per 100,000 population (total number of offences for Laverton was 223)
- second highest in relation to the percentage of juvenile offences that were against the person (8% of 223 offences were against the person while 48% were property offences)
- highest in relation to proportion of juvenile offenders defined as recidivists (who were defined as those with six or more appearances in court)

During 1989/1990 there were 88 outcomes in the Laverton Children's Court, of which 26% were community service orders, 6% were probation orders, 7% were conditional release orders and 14% were detention orders or terms of imprisonment. In comparison to other WA country districts this meant that Laverton was ranked as fourth highest for community service orders, and the district with the highest proportion of outcomes that were conditional release orders, detention or prison. In an analysis of this information it was concluded that Laverton was one of the seven districts which had the highest juvenile offender workload in the state.

As a welfare officer in Laverton from 1987 to 1989 much of my time was taken up with working with Aboriginal youth, predominantly boys, who were considered at risk of being involved or were already involved in the juvenile justice system. Many of these youths were from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities who were brought before the Laverton court for petrol sniffing related offences. When I left Laverton in 1989 I was keen to return one day to explore more fully both desert⁹ and local youths' worldviews, and to document the socio-cultural milieu and its impact on justice practitioners.

⁸ The work camp was originally promoted during an election as a way of dealing with serious young offenders (in their late teens), and it was expected to have large number of Aboriginal participants. However, when it started operating intake criteria resulted in inmates who were first time offenders, who had not committed violent offences and who consented to participate. Numbers were always low and the camp has been closed (Atkinson 1995, Beresford and Omaji 1993:113-115).

⁹ In my second year as a welfare officer I undertook 'patrols' to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. There was some resistance to this as it had always been viewed as a 'man's job' - arguments for this bias included that the driving involved long distances, that it was unsafe for (white) women, and it was more appropriate for

In the late eighties, it was discernible that a sea change was underway in the administration of juvenile justice, and in a redefining of the image and role of the welfare department. Juvenile justice matters were increasingly conceived of as falling within a justice, rather than a welfare, paradigm and the department was restyling itself as a professional service staffed by social workers which catered for all members of the community.

Back then, in rural and remote places non-professionals still played a critical role in the administration of justice, with local justices of the peace presiding over adult and juvenile court¹⁰, and welfare workers, without necessarily any social work qualifications, acting as district officers. As a departmental representative the welfare officer was involved in child protection, substitute care, financial assistance, community development as well as juvenile justice. In the latter field, an officer still had an integral part to play as legal adviser, as 'overseer' of the court's general functioning, and in providing sentencing options.

Indicative of the shift away from welfare to justice principles were stricter procedures in the conduct of the juvenile court. In the past there had been widespread use of indeterminate sentences because the most significant piece of legislation, the *Child Welfare Act 1947*, had failed to clearly distinguish between children in need of care and protection and offending children. Under the Act the court could place a child under the control of the department until for example the age of 18, irrespective of whether the child was found to be in need of care and protection, uncontrollable, or guilty of an offence punishable with imprisonment (Beresford and Omaji 1996:96). The applicable sections of the Act were repealed by the *Young Offenders Act 1994* but the sentence of being placed under the control of the department had effectively ceased to be used for criminal matters around the time I started work in 1987.

Through the eighties and into the early nineties there was a steady diminution in the power exercised by the welfare department in the realm of juvenile justice. The primary aim of the *Children's Court Act 1988* was to separate the children's court from the welfare department (the then Department of Community Services) and in mid-1993, the welfare department lost the last of its administrative authority in relation to juvenile justice which was taken over by a newly created bureaucracy, the Justice Department.

General policy trends in juvenile justice during this period reflected tough crime control approaches towards serious offenders (and where deemed appropriate their 'irresponsible' parents or guardians). Legislative changes reflected these trends, the most notorious being the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act 1992*

male workers to deal with male leaders. Female caregivers of petrol sniffing youth, and the fact that many petrol sniffers were girls, had up to this point been largely ignored.

¹⁰ Subsequently, the power of the justices was restricted to less serious offences and, by the time I returned to Laverton in 1992, all juvenile court matters were determined by the circuit magistrate, and not the justices of the peace.

which operated for two years. A consolidation of these policy trends occurred with the introduction of the *Young Offenders Act 1994* which came into effect in March 1995. Underpinning these policy trends and bureaucratic and legislative changes was an emphasis on 'just desserts' (that a penalty should match the offence) with the proviso that a 'series of gateways' would screen out minor from the more serious offenders. Gateways include diversionary schemes such as cautioning and referrals to juvenile justice teams. A philosophical tenet informing the changes was a belief that individual responsibility for conduct should be encouraged and that parental responsibility should be supported or where it was lacking, reasserted through the threat of penalties¹¹.

By the time I returned to Laverton to undertake fieldwork in 1992, juvenile justice was a contentious political subject within Western Australia. More generally, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) had increased public awareness of Aboriginal involvement in the criminal justice system, notably the report on underlying issues in Western Australia (Dodson 1991), and there was a rapidly expanding body of Australian literature on juvenile justice, race relations, and social justice for Aboriginal people.

The rest of this chapter considers this body of literature, first by examining explanations for black over-representation in the criminal justice system and second, by focusing on material relevant to the setting. Because the setting is a rural mining town, which is located on the edge of desert with ties to the Ngaanyatjarra settlements, pertinent material included commentaries on small communities in Australia, both rural towns and Aboriginal settlements.

The location of the thesis has typically been considered peripheral by European Australians, and the subject of this thesis, Aboriginal young offenders, as a marginalised group. This suggests that the locus of power and status lie elsewhere, and that external forces and structures have conspired to create their position on the fringe to, or as unformed or misshapen versions of, a superior and dominant entity. There is a dual but complementary line of inquiry underlying this thesis: one phenomenological, in that there is an exploration of what it might be like to experience the externally imposed condition of marginality and whether it is recognised as such by people who hold this status, and two, there is an interest in how these positionings are sustained and reproduced within a particular (in terms of both time and place) local context.

Explanations for Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system is well documented, most notably in figures for adult and juvenile incarceration rates. As research since the

¹¹ An illustration of this was a stated reason provided by the then Attorney General for the changes in 1993 to the *Bail Act 1982*. He said that one aim of the changes was to "...give support to parents in regaining disciplinary control over their children... [and] reinforce to juvenile offenders and those adults responsible for their well-being, that a release to bail is a process in law that must be viewed very seriously and treated with respect" (quoted in Beresford and Omaji 1993:101).

RCIADIC has demonstrated, the large number of Aboriginal people dying in custody reflects the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in police custody and prison (McDonald and Cunneen 1997). For example, the rate of Aboriginal imprisonment is over 18 times that of non-Aboriginal imprisonment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996) the rate of detention of Aboriginal children aged 10 to 17 years of age is over 21 times that of non-Aboriginal children (Atkinson 1996). Rates of over-representation also occur at other stages in the justice system, most significantly at the point of police apprehension. In Western Australia, in 1993, 15.6% of the Aboriginal population was arrested compared with only 1.7% of the non-Aboriginal population (Harding et al 1995).

The over-representation of black people in the official statistics for the justice system internationally has attracted considerable attention, notably in the United States and Britain, and criminological research has endeavoured to investigate whether this may be due to greater criminality (in that black people commit more or worse offences) or discrimination and bias in the legal system. After a comprehensive review of British research on race and the criminal justice system Reiner (1988:17) concludes that both factors contribute to the over-representation in a "vicious circle of amplification". Underlying Reiner's analysis, and much of the literature on the topic, is the assumption that black people commit more crime because they are poor and belong to the underclass, and experience endemic racism. Thus, as a social collectivity they suffer from a structural disadvantage that is then exacerbated by more specific manifestations of disadvantage evident in discriminatory principles and practices within the criminal justice system.

International literature on indigenous minorities and the state tends to offer similar explanations, with more emphasis on the oppression and dispossession of the indigenous peoples and the conflict and misunderstanding of cultural values. With the Australian literature, there has been a general bifurcation between the substantive issues identified for more 'traditional' indigenous people, with an emphasis on a conflict of values and customary law (Crawford 1988, Maddock 1977, Williams 1987 and 1988), and the relevant issues for Aboriginal people in rural and urban settings where the effects of everyday racism are given more weight (Cunneen and Libesmann 1995, Hanks and Keon-Cohen 1984, Hazlehurst 1987). With the latter, for instance, D'Souza (1990) believes that the factors that have a significant impact on the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth are - poverty (both in terms of material poverty and the loss of cultural continuity and identity), racism particularly in the institutions of law, and the resistance to this oppression by Aboriginal children.

Other writers have taken issue with explanatory discourses of the dominant white majority - amongst academics, practitioners and politicians - that concentrate on certain kinds of offending and lifestyle. For example, Cunneen (1990:37) claims that "the law and order discourse is a racist doctrine which identifies Aborigines as a cause of the crime problem...Crime and disorder become the problem rather than the social, economic and political conditions of inequality". According to Smandych, Lincoln and

Wilson (1995), contemporary explanations on the over-representation of indigenous peoples in the Canadian and Australian criminal justice systems have centred on racist bias, visibility, cultural factors¹², legal and extra-legal considerations and over-policing.

Despite the considerable interest in Aboriginal over-representation, there is a limited amount of Australian research on the reasons for the high number of Aboriginal youth who have contact with the criminal justice system. In one of the few detailed empirical studies, Gale et al (1990) analysed South Australian statistics from 1972 to 1986 by comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal appearances with the stated aim of examining the reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal youth. They found that Aboriginal youth were charged with a higher number of charges and more serious property crime. However, when they endeavoured to explore whether racial discrimination was a significant factor they had considerable methodological problems. It was difficult to create a matched sample of Aborigines and non-Aborigines for one year of appearances in Adelaide courts, when they were matched for four legal and ten socio-economic variables. In essence, they were trying to compare markedly different groups. Nevertheless, they conclude that though they found no evidence of racial discrimination, there was a class bias in police decisions to arrest. Police assessed unemployed youths, and those living in single parent households and fostering situations or with relatives as less likely to appear and therefore preferred to arrest such youths rather than summons them to court. The decision to arrest had a compounding effect at the next level of the system, as it influenced whether a teenager was referred to a panel or to a court. In their final conclusion they state that certain groups of people who were economically and socially disadvantaged were being further disadvantaged because they did not conform to the norms of mainstream society¹³.

The research highlights the difficulties of trying to quantify discrimination and disadvantage, and suggests that it is crucial to investigate how groups of offending youth are 'differentiated' by the justice practitioners, and how this might influence the everyday administration of juvenile justice. The authors make passing reference to how those youth perceived of as in need were given special status by the police and welfare workers. Thus, they record that welfare professionals were tempted to regard those from low socio-economic groups and non-nuclear families as deprived and in need of help. They note that the police often admitted to arresting youths for 'their own sakes' and to get them off the street.

Carrington (1993) states her interest as being in the administration of juvenile justice and she examines the complexity of government of youth by discussing Aboriginal girls, schools, families and youth culture, as well as the actual justice system in New South Wales. Since she analyses official documents from the seventies her primary data is

¹² Despite mention that cultural factors are significant what they might constitute other than misunderstandings in interpersonal communication tends to be left unexamined.

¹³ A follow-up study found statistical support for the proposition that their 'race' did increase the risk of arrest for Aboriginal youth in Adelaide. However, as Harding et al (1995:8) note, 'Aboriginality' may have acted for police as a shorthand predictor of high risk factors such as truancy, unemployment, substance abuse and so on.

dated, but her intention is to use the material to illustrate her theoretical arguments based on Foucault rather than to capture the specificities of the administration in the seventies. Her main purpose is to counteract the essentialising tendencies of much of feminist and neo-Marxist theory which she asserts, impose a unity of interests within designated social groups such as 'women', 'blacks', 'workers', and which attribute Aboriginal over-representation to reified concepts such as over-policing and racism. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the contribution of feminist theories in critiquing the almost complete neglect of girls in studies of working-class youth sub-cultures emanating from such significant sites as the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Despite her telling identification of many 'deficits' in criminological theorising, she does not present any compensatory picture of Aboriginal girls' subjective experiences. Instead, she develops an analytical framework suited to disentangling the multiplicity of sites of government and their interconnectedness. Arguing against the reduction of 'social control' to a single logic or form of sovereign power (be it class or patriarchal for example), she calls for recognition of the multiplicity of discourses, norms and practices that constitute the workings of a range of welfare and justice institutions. Having presented the framework, she again stops short of providing rich, descriptive material to flesh out the framework.

A study in Western Australia of the reasons for offending by Aboriginal youth in that state focuses on the macro-sociological forces that foster marginalisation, by an appraisal of family life, education, policing, courts and the youths' 'subculture'. Beresford and Omaji (1996:16) state their aim as "to highlight the forces that disadvantage, marginalise, stereotype and, hence, predispose a significant number of Aboriginal young people to a life of crime and hostility to society". Their work is clearly intended to influence government policies and the final chapter argues for a fundamental reorientation premised on early intervention, prevention and increased Aboriginal control of aspects of the justice system. They draw on the information available though predominantly Western Australian government reports and inquiries, as well as the perspectives provided by a survey of 97 young people¹⁴ and discussions with relevant agency workers. A large part of the book is taken up with accounts of Aboriginal interactions with police, courts, and the education system, but it is their observations on family life and youth lifestyles that I wish to dwell on.

Beresford and Omaji (1996) refer to overseas research which shows a link between family violence and neglect and the probability of children becoming involved in crime, and quote Australian statistics which show higher reported rates of child abuse and neglect for the Aboriginal sub-population. They found that many Aboriginal adults they encountered expressed feelings of "lack of authority and control over their children"

¹⁴ Interviews comprising a structured questionnaire and informal discussions were conducted by a high-profile footballer, and held in detention centres (50 youths) in the metropolitan community (27 youths) and a regional town (20 youths). The sampling was designed to access the most socially disadvantaged youths. The youths were from 'urban and semi-urban' backgrounds as the researchers had insufficient resources to visit more remote parts of the state.

(p.33), and the authors continuously stress the need to see how young people have been affected by their parents' experiences:

"The cumulative effects of cultural dispossession, exclusion from the labour market and removal from families has left many of today's parents with limited abilities to transmit to children all-important social knowledge and skills to 'get on' in mainstream society....Acknowledging these shortcomings in the socialisation process of many urbanised Aboriginal children is not to overlook valuable parts of their upbringing such as the importance placed upon family ties and the sharing of resources. However, children are at a disadvantage in the acquisition of goal-orientated skills and broad social knowledge essential to a modern, industrial society" (Beresford and Omaji 1996:46-47).

'Cultural' dimensions of the 'forces' that predispose Aboriginal youth to a life of crime surface throughout the book, for example in relation to socialisation and to learning styles. However, the emphasis is on historical and contemporary discrimination and structural disadvantage so that the youths' subcultural lifestyles are largely characterised as a product of their experiences as 'an underclass'. The term subculture is deployed, largely it seems, because of the importance of the group of peers, and because the youths' lives are characterised by substance abuse and crime. There is no mention of the significance of gender or age, and there is surprisingly little information provided on the youth survey - on either the composition of the sample or the results. As a result, the 'voices' of young people are not really heard in the book.

The authors' views on the subcultural lifestyle of many Aboriginal youth is summed up in the following quote:

"A sizeable pool of Aboriginal youth has been alienated by the interaction of family poverty and dysfunction, educational failure and labour market exclusion. Many have sought refuge in a subcultural lifestyle focused on crime and drug abuse....While Aboriginal youth are not the only group of young people with similar oppositional lifestyles, the range and depth of their marginalisation is far greater" (Beresford and Omaji 1996:121, my emphasis).

Understanding place: country towns

The previous research examined Aboriginal over-representation at a generalised macro-level of sociological analysis, employing aggregate statistics available for a jurisdiction within Australia or national data. Here and in America and Britain, criminological research has concentrated almost exclusively on urban settings, where neighbourhoods of urban poor are tacitly assumed to produce the most crime, the worst criminals, and the most tense race relations between police and the populace. Conversely rural settings are typified as places of low crime, expectations which are influenced by notions of bounded, caring and cohesive 'communities' (Carrington and Hogg 1997). *(not in ethnography)*

Within Australia there has been one study which has examined crime in a single country 'community', and the results certainly conformed to pre-conceptions about a less criminogenic environment. O'Connor and Gray (1989) looked at a small town of 1700 people in the New England plateau in New South Wales (NSW). The crime rate was on par with the national average but there was little evidence of serious crime, and local

inhabitants did not perceive crime as much of a problem in their community, with concern primarily expressed about 'external' threats, for example drug use, to their familiar way of life. Nearly all of the inhabitants (95%) were of Anglo-Celt descent, and many were related and had forebears going back several generations that had settled in the region. According to the researchers, the residents' local experience and knowledge, including familiarity with their fellow residents seemed to shape people's sense of security and well-being and generated a pervading informal and intimate form of social control.

Within Australia however, there are indicators that show rural settings have disproportionately high rates for certain kinds of reported offences (Gale et al 1990, Ferrante et al 1996). In the main, it seems that these differences are ascribed to Aboriginal offending in rural settings. For example, many areas in NSW with relatively high rates of assault, break and enter and recorded public order offences also have high Aboriginal populations (Carrington et al 1996).

However, Hogg and Carrington (1997) stress that many country towns in New South Wales with large Aboriginal populations have below or average crime rates, and argue that there is a need to examine the specificities of rural localities¹⁵. More specifically located studies in rural town contexts are few, and mostly within New South Wales. Cunneen and Robb (1987) collected empirical data to show the manifestations of law and order campaigns waged in north-west New South Wales in the mid-80s. They focus on the whites' racism in country towns. Anthropological authors have concentrated instead on the active role of Aboriginal people in responding to racism. Morris (1989) gives a historical account of Aboriginal people's resistance to domination in a rural region of NSW, whilst Cowlshaw (1988) writes of race relations, depicting and analysing the contours of the divide at a particular moment of history in rural New South Wales towns. She devotes more attention to the constitutive elements of the white domain but shares with Morris a desire to stress the agency of Aboriginal people.

Morris (1989) seeks to describe how the Dhan-gadi 'resisted' the process of incorporation by the state, including the hegemonic cultural logic of the autonomous sovereign individual and instrumental rationality. He defines resistance thus:

"Resistance in this sense refers to the indirect ways in which oppressed groups gain some degree of relative autonomy by limiting or frustrating the controls those in authority exercise over their lives. Such resistances are defensive strategies which do not change the relations of oppression, but contain them and remain contained by them...The forms of struggle are not necessarily expressed in terms of an overt political consciousness or actions but more specifically as a culture of resistance: that is as cultural practices which develop as a 'way of life' in opposition to the specific structures of domination" (Morris 1989:4).

¹⁵ Broadhurst (1997) attempts to analyse regional differences in reported Aboriginal offending and victimisation. In an examination of several national databases he found that the more remote and 'frontier' northern and north-western regions exhibited the highest rate of reported offending. He attributes the higher rates to characteristics of these areas, such as 'cultural strength' which he argues attracts punitive responses from the state, and socio-economic stresses. The whole notion of interpreting differences in terms of broad geographic regions seems misguided in the first instance.

According to Morris (1989:213) the resistance of Aboriginal people in the past, manifest in practices like illegal drinking and gambling, was related to individual and collective forms of praxis in everyday life, which have been superseded by the more self-conscious articulation and politicisation of community identity that lays symbolic emphasis on particular cultural forms. To illustrate these forms, Morris singles out the notions of 'togetherness' and 'sharing' which are used to signify membership.

Cowlshaw (1988) states her interest in understanding how racial division is recreated over the years in country towns of western New South Wales - by describing a place she calls Brindleton. Having outlined the structural inequalities which create a clear divide between white and black, she examines the political subtleties of the process of differentiation by describing various ideological groupings within the white and black communities. Whites are discussed in terms of taking hard or soft lines in their appreciation of Aboriginal 'problems', and the problematic status of 'do-gooders' and 'stirrers', in the eyes of both the dominant elite and Aboriginal people is outlined.

She claims that for the black community different material circumstances were one basis for a distinctive way of life, but that these circumstances were affected by an adherence to generalised reciprocity and status equality expected across kin relations. Her key argument in relation to the Aboriginal populace is that there was a prevailing 'oppositional culture', which legitimated values anti-thetical to the white hegemony, what she calls a "rebellious display of disreputable behaviour" (p.92):

"Thus it is in opposition that the ongoing re-creation of a distinct cultural heritage occurs. This culture has its distinctive vocabulary, family form, patterns of interpersonal interaction and even its own economy" (Cowlshaw 1988:243).

The 'culture' was most manifest to the whites through behaviours which offended their sense of propriety such as public drunkenness and fighting, and in Brindleton was mostly practised by people from the Aboriginal end of town or the reserve. She underlines that many Aborigines were passive and some opposed the opposition but all understood the significance of acts of defiance or resistance. Those she claims who were 'disloyal' to the oppositional stance experienced some social isolation or joined with the "interstitial group which is composed of those who try to identify with both black and white communities" (p.242).

'Oppositional' practices and values identified by Cowlshaw include the acceptance and tolerance of certain behaviours in public such as drinking, swearing, the overt expression of emotion, and by parents of children's misdemeanours.

An anthropological inquiry that has examined juvenile justice in a rural community was conducted by Hutchings (1993), who spent 1986 and 1987 undertaking fieldwork in Port Augusta in South Australia, by hanging around with Aboriginal youth. Her interest was in their encounters with the juvenile justice system, and in an article titled the 'Great shoe robbery' she presents the central argument of her thesis. She wishes to demonstrate how legal and welfare agents normalised Aboriginal juvenile crime, seeing it as

produced by their social environments, although she argues the Aboriginal youths' actions should be interpreted as a form of defiance aimed at capturing some control over their lives. She tries to show that the youths' illegal activities were a form of resistance by stressing that vandalism and theft were against non-Aboriginal property. Using the example of the shoe store robbery, she claims the crime had disrupted a non-Aboriginal business and in doing so "had challenged the covert racial hierarchy" (p.355). She goes on to argue that 'patterns of resistance' in Aboriginal juvenile illicit activity were more than just specific crimes against defined targets, "the style.. of activity specifically defiles many values of the wider non-Aboriginal community" (p.354).

Assumptions about the caring and less crime prone character of rural communities is challenged by Hogg and Carrington (1997), who primarily refer to the work of Elias (1998) and Putnam (1993). They point out that civility and cultural inclusiveness may be more marked in urban settings and that small group solidarities or hierarchical social relations within a local community may create high intolerance of strangers, outsiders and non-members. They note that "tightly knit moral groups may readily co-exist with violence and repression, which may serve as a tool of dispute resolution or for enforcing hierarchical relations of authority amongst members" (p.5). Based on their experiences of certain rural towns in New South Wales, they observe that there can be a higher threshold of tolerance for various kinds of interpersonal violence and incivility (sexual, domestic, intra-male, homophobic and racial) in rural communities, and that limited penetration of the institutions of the nation state fosters ambiguous attitudes to government and a preference for 'self-help', of which an extreme example is vigilantism.

Community studies of country towns are no longer fashionable though indicators of socio-economic stress and political extremism in rural Australia may re-ignite interest in research of this nature. Most studies were undertaken in the seventies and bore a Weberian stamp with their interest in class, status and power. The most famous of these, *Bradstow*, depicted the town's dominant elite and status stratification as essentially unchanged despite the blurring of class boundaries because of technological change, bureaucratisation and suburbanisation (Wild 1974). A more recent study based on 17 years of research, *Smalltown*, presents a more complex picture of social inequality in a Victorian country town (Dempsey 1990). The author highlights the marginalisation of certain 'unacceptable' social groups - no hopers, 'blockies', 'deviant' women, 'radical' transients - and of non-deviant but resource poor groups, the elderly and certain categories of transients. Although he stresses that gender and class structure social inequality, he is interested in social cohesion and drawing on the work of Cohen (1985) ^{not in} on the symbolic construction of community, he analyses the sense of belonging and ^{solidarity} community attributes articulated by residents that transcends their differences.

Both these studies occurred in towns that were relatively ethnically homogenous with a strong farming tradition in the locality. There has been a study of a mining town in rural Australia that concentrates on relations between the company, the union and the workers, and on relations within working class marriages (Williams 1981). Because of the almost

exclusive interest in industrial relations and on how the men's occupation affected domestic relations there is a selective presentation of the place and social life. The populace was brought together for a specific purpose, to work in an open-cut mine, but there are few insights into what might constitute the 'community' in the new township nor of how its geographic location might affect community life.

At one extreme, there are studies of rural towns where Aboriginal people are conspicuous for their absence, and at the other extreme, ethnographies of Aboriginal settlements where a small number of white people are vague figures in the background. Cowlshaw (1988) has commented on the low status in academia of ethnographic research in 'settled' Australia, and that which has been undertaken has focused on race relations in contrast to the more dominant interest in Aboriginal responses to settlement life. Anthropological writings on settlement life, nonetheless, provide valuable insights for the concerns of this thesis, and the accounts set out below - with the exception of Martin's work on the Wik (1993) - relate to the Western Desert, shedding light on fighting, disorder by young people and intergenerational tensions.

Understanding difference: Aboriginal settlements

A study in Yalata, Brady and Morice (1982), is interesting because it was concerned with youth offending, and the explanatory thrust concentrates on race relations and an early version of the oppositional thesis¹⁶. The authors found that the whites perceived the local youth to be disadvantaged and deprived. In the 1970s and 1980s youth workers provided recreational expeditions and activities. Whites often took children away at weekends and over holidays as Yalata was deemed an unsuitable and unsavoury place. Worried by petrol sniffing, a police constable said he became 'wild' when he found kids not eating. Whites assumed youth offending was caused by profound cultural breakdown.

Brady and Morice criticise the whites for their lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture with their misplaced emphasis on hard work, cleanliness and above all, parental supervision. In contrast, the authors actually found that the adult Aborigines were disinclined to intervene and to punish children and they never went to court because it was seen as white business and white law. They comment on how the Aborigines responded in a rigid and ritualised fashion to welfare workers by providing information on what they believed whites required. The authors refer to the relative dependency of adult Aborigines on whites in areas of child and adolescent responsibility and an inherent permissiveness (from a white perspective) in traditional child rearing practices. In the conclusion, which excludes cultural dimensions discussed earlier in their report, the authors state that the problem was not one of youth offending but manifestly one of black-white relations, and the issues of self-determination and self-esteem.

¹⁶ In her later book on petrol sniffing, Brady (1992) refers to an 'oppositional culture' but associates it specifically with a sub-group of the Aboriginal youth population - adolescent 'gangs' in Arnhem Land.

They found that offending was normal behaviour for boys and not girls, and that patterns of offending by young males seemed to change once they were *wati*, men. The reported offending by youths was against white property, for example the illegal use of motor vehicles. Other offences may have occurred in the camp but the adult Aborigines said they dealt with such matters. The authors explanation for girls lack of offending related to girls becoming married quite early to older men whilst young men tended to live together in groups. Their explanation for the targeting of white property was that it could be interpreted as a positive action to gain some power in order to combat a vaguely perceived sense of alienation and powerlessness.

Tonkinson (1988), in contrast, stresses how social changes evident at Jigalong had empowered youth. He describes the youth as being wooed by and schooled in a host of western elements, and therefore being in a position to 'abandon Aboriginal culture'. He concentrates on the cultural priorities of adults, who he argues, fear more the loss of younger people to the Aboriginal Law than damage to property, and they did not want open rebellion over the issues of sexual partners. Tonkinson (1988) claims that the adults did see children as problematic because they were perceived as becoming laws unto themselves, and of being worried by the onus placed on them by whites to apprehend and punish offenders. The lack of effective action in 'controlling' children, Tonkinson sees as stemming from the adults' sense of priorities, as mentioned previously, and three other major sources. The first was a conceptual dichotomy between 'whitefella' and Aboriginal business because of Aboriginal understandings about power (locus external to self because it originates from the spiritual realm), the second was the legacy of missionary paternalism which fostered an acceptance that the disciplining of children was 'whitefella' business, and third, traditional attitudes to children whose previously non-problematic status was transformed by the settlement situation.

Myers (1986) has little to say about white-black relations and the notion of 'race' is conspicuously absent from his account of the Pintupi. His very influential ethnography in large part revolves around the relationship between the cultural self and social (dis)order, of Pintupi worldview and social action, by concentrating on the pre-eminence of emotional meanings in cultural constructions of self and social behaviour. He links the Pintupi fragile and continually renegotiated polity to the tensions between 'relatedness' and 'differentiation' (as expressed in conflict and violence). Pintupi 'relatedness' he portrays as emphasising affective relationships amongst those who were relatives, with the discourse of daily life heavily nuanced with expressions and demonstrations of such emotions as 'compassion', 'melancholy', 'grief', 'happiness' and 'shame' (p.103).

According to Myers, Pintupi public expressions of anger, sorrow and grief constituted social sentiments. In addition, a sense of parity or equivalence was important and the resolution of grievances depended on feelings of emotional satisfaction. His interpretations link violence to expressions of feeling and of autonomy, and to excitement. Although he states that both men and women were proud of their fighting prowess and

spoke of fights with animation, he explains the fighting in terms of 'differentiation' as "these are not warrior people, fighting represents not so much an attempt at dominance as an assertion of autonomy" (p.161). He hints that fighting had become more disorderly because the state of intoxication subsumed aspects of relatedness - thus at one point he states "one motive for drinking alcohol in the contemporary settlement society is the excitement of the violent engagements that follow" (p.160), and observes elsewhere that drunkenness like great anger "may excuse violence because the person is presumed to be 'ignorant' of the identity of the other" (p.119).

Drawing on Myers work, Martin (1993) characterises the unresolved tension between personal autonomy and relatedness as a fundamental dynamic to the Wik way of life. He identifies a trend towards increasing individuation and sundering of the control of the means of social reproduction which had lain essentially with senior generations. Over the decades, he portrays a shift in social relations imbued by 'doxa' where social practices and beliefs were self-evident, natural and unquestioned to one where there was conscious non-compliance and dissent amongst the younger generations. At Aurukun children are described as ignoring adult Wik and European staff efforts to control their behaviour. He observes that those nominally in authority (Council, police, older kin) seemed powerless to prevent frequent, nightly rampages by kids, mostly boys, who were responsible for high levels of break-ins to houses and cars and vandalism. Martin (1993) further asserts that older men increasingly had little direct involvement in the social reproduction of younger ones and that new forms of masculinity were being generated within peer groups, a trend that was enabled by the indulgent nurturing of female kin.

Sackett (1988) writing of Wiluna, also cites Myers (1986) but concentrates on personal autonomy. He describes individual acts of aggressively assertive drunkenness, directed against other Aborigines or whites, as viewed as involuntary and non-culpable transgressions not subject to social censure. Both black and white communities accepted the diminution in drunks' responsibility for their behaviour. However, according to Sackett, whilst the whites justified further interventions on the basis of drunken disorder, the Aboriginal people continued to defend and accentuate the gap between their lifestyle and that promoted by whites with such behaviour, thereby demonstrating their resistance to efforts to curtail their freedom of action¹⁷. Sackett appears to be arguing that whereas in the past these activities were clearly 'oppositional' in that they were illegal for Aborigines to engage in, in more recent times the nature of the resistance has to be re-interpreted as creating other forms of practices, ways of drinking, and as emerging from, post mission, less clear cut manifestations of social control.

Merlan (1998) refers to a divide in the anthropological literature between writers that examine traditional forms of social relations to place, dependency on countryside, and connections to each other, and those writers who focus on expressions of Aboriginal resistance to convey distinctiveness because the traditional has been submerged. With the former, she claims that though many writers suggest Aborigines have associations with

¹⁷ A question not fully addressed in Sackett's paper (1988) is whether expressions of personal autonomy coalesce into collective modes of resistance.

wider society, these interactions are problematised without any hint that these interactions might fundamentally alter forms of social action.

Merlan's (1998) work is quite exceptional in that the focus is on the town life of Katherine, not an Aboriginal settlement, with an explicit goal of producing an ethnographically informed analysis of the intercultural character of changing relations to place¹⁸. To side-step the constricting dichotomy of persistence and change underlying much of anthropological and other writing on Aboriginal social life, she explores changes in socio-spatial orientation towards the hinterland and socio-territorial identity, as well as contestation over uses and definitions of space within the town. An intellectual debt to Lebrevre (1991) is acknowledged and his theorising influenced the framing of different perspectives from a spatial perspective. Another strand to the writing highlights the mimetic quality to much of recent public thinking and policy in relation to Indigenous people and land, and how this relates to alterations in local interactions and practices. Although she believes there are shared dimensions to the objectification of culture, this process is premised upon inherent inequalities in the process of defining and accepting the evaluated differences. Because of its interest in town life, and how new meanings develop and become reproduced for space and time as Aborigines live in different ways, the account transcends some of the old intellectual compartmentalisations between politicised and traditional social organisation, town and country, ideology and practice.

Some Western Australian rural communities have attracted anthropologists (for example Birdsall 1988, Dagmar 1982, Howard 1982). However, there are many communities which do not easily fit in to the categories of urban, rural or remote Aboriginal settlement, for example Roebourne (Edmunds 1989) and Wiluna (Sackett 1988). At the heart of Laverton's appeal was its very hybridity - its ambiguous character. Older local Aboriginal people had experienced mission upbringings while many of the younger generation were familiar with contemporary settlement and urban life. There was a significant presence and ties with 'traditional' people who mainly stayed for short periods of time. It was a country mining town without any significant rural elite that had emerged from long term residence. Local whites included small numbers of pastoralists and business people but their local significance was overshadowed by the corporate power of mining companies.

Analysing domination, resistance and accommodation

Although it is often neglected in debates about black or indigenous over-representation there is a need to distinguish between the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems, as it is in the latter field that the notion of disciplinary power has more apparent application, focusing our attention on normative concepts of the social and civic maturity and of key socialising agents - family, peers, school, local community.

¹⁸ An antecedent was the book by Sansom (1980) *The Camp at Wallaby Cross*. However, Sansom's account of the fringe-dwellers' social life has predominantly been referred to in subsequent writings on drinking and disorder.

At a symbolic and at a practical level the juvenile justice system operates as a site of power. It has been characterised as:

- directed against and oppressive of young people
- expressive of white power against black people.
- a form of insidious social control, of disciplinary power (not sovereign or juridical)
- reproducing inequality (functional role) - black and white, young and old, symbolically and ritually.
- differentiating between good and bad, perpetuating the moral divides.

In the previous section the research canvassed began with criminology and moved towards anthropology, which was also a movement from aggregate data analysis to local studies, from the system to community, from race to identity. Threaded throughout these accounts however is the central image of conflict - and of a dominant group subjecting the minority indigenous population. Where they part company is how they align themselves in contemporary debates about theorising power and social relations, and ways of ascertaining and representing the participants in the process of domination.

As a theorist on power Marx has perhaps been unmatched in his influence, by spawning derivatives or by creating resistance and critiques of his canon. The theorising of power by Foucault (1977, 1978, 1991) is often juxtaposed to that of Marxist inspired theorising and the impact of Foucault is certainly evident in the work of Carrington (1993) and Morris (1989), although he also pays tribute to the influence of the cultural Marxists on his writing and thinking. Clearly there are pronounced differences in focus as Marxism prefers to locate power with specific agents, structures and social classes whilst Foucault is concerned with how truth (powerful knowledge) is brought into being, by an analysis of the 'rituals of power', rather than arguing for the intentional or functional domination of one class over another. According to Wetherall and Potter (1992:82), "Foucault develops his theses on power through a contrast with what he describes as sovereign, juridical or repressive conceptions of power". He challenges orthodox conceptions of power as located and directed, preferring instead to describe a dispersal of 'productive' power through discursive formations and in his more recent works, as ensembles of practices or fields of force relations. Modernity, in Foucauldian terms, is characterised by disciplinary power and bio-power, and the production of docile bodies within the whole social body.

Sercombe (1992) argues that it is counterproductive to oppose Foucault to Marx, claiming that it is possible to link diffuse discourses and practices to wider social structures and processes. Despite seeing Foucault's work as having much to contribute to youth studies, he notes that Foucault omits to sketch the contours of inequality - of power as an unequal relation, and of structures which operate to concentrate power. On the other hand Foucault-derived perspectives have more to say about the exercise rather than the 'origins' of powers as his erstwhile student Donzelot (1979) amply demonstrated with his influential book on the administration of juvenile justice. As it is, Wetherall and Potter (1992:85) argue there is overlap between Foucault's and more recent Marxist analyses, and single out Althusser's 'ideological state apparatuses' to illustrate this point.

A crude Marxism imbues many conflict-oriented accounts of the criminal justice system, in western democratic and capitalist societies where it is assumed that the system reflects wider social relations and structures. The system is portrayed as integral to the apparatus of domination, and hence, acting on behalf of vested class interests and operating as a coercive mechanism to control the poor and 'different' subject populations. Thus, the criminal justice system is often characterised as an institutional and coercive dimension to social control, which contributes to and represents one of the most blatant aspects to the subordination and marginalisation of certain groups within capitalist, liberal states. Less structuralist perspectives highlight the social process of criminalisation which is represented as a directed exercise of power against those who are criminalised, who need to be controlled for being 'different' 'rebellious' or 'unincorporated'. Within neo-colonial contexts it is perhaps most often implicitly characterised as the blunt and forceful instrument used to assert supremacy by penalising those marked as different or renegade without completely reneging on hopes of future 'rehabilitation'.

Race and class are prevalent motifs in criminological accounts of indigenous or black over-representation in the criminal justice system. There are increasingly references to gender, but not much sustained commentary on its significance. Domination of subordinate groups is conceptualised and predicated upon equating social relations with race and class relation, with structural inequalities reproduced through discriminatory practices and racist discourses. A major criticism of these representations is that they ignore the agency and active participation of dominated groups. For example, Holdaway (1991) argues that there are inherent pitfalls in using the notion of 'race' in research. He claims there is an undertheorising of race in empirical research, with race taken for granted as an explanatory 'entity' without further analysis. He also identifies limitations to 'radical' British writers who concentrate on the wider structural processes that create and sustain common notions of race. He contrasts the work of Jefferson (1993) who focuses on the political economy as the driving force that underpins systemic injustices to the work of Gilroy (1987) who is concerned with racialised discourses that generate the criminalised 'Other' without seeking to frame these discourses within a causal paradigm. Holdaway (1997:391) claims that all these analyses of racism within criminology assume a pliable audience with the social world objectified as "more acting upon than enacted by people in their everyday life".

It is commonplace to find objectifications of the oppressed that continue to be characterised as victims of the coercive state, as acculturated and incorporated within the prevailing hegemony. Post-structuralist critiques argue that 'race', like 'oppression', glosses over the multiple nature of differentiation, and the multiple identities embodied in a person. According to Tyler (1999), in a paper on Aborigines, space and crime, the 'post modern condition' involves rejecting meta-narratives, seeing the individual subject as an unstable construct, and acknowledging localised 'hyper' differentiation and a counter homogenising effect of global processes and consumerism.

Efforts, however, to address or subvert meta-narratives and essentialising images of 'them' being subjugated by the colonising or dominant forces have concentrated on inserting

agency and cultural meaning of dominated groups into accounts of colonialism and contemporary marginality of minority groups, notably in various schools of 'resistance' studies including the work of the cultural Marxists. The influence of the latter, especially the Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is particularly strong in writings on race and crime.

Scott (1985) argued that those who emphasise hegemony, if regarded in the relatively deep culturally internalised sense would fail to uncover 'hidden transcripts' and non-obvious acts and moments of resistance. However, in relation to Aboriginal people, very obvious actions have attracted comment and interpretation. Certain kinds of behaviour (heavy drinking, inter-personal violence, property crime by young people) are rather superficially portrayed as a historical product of dispossession and alienation. They have also been read as the failure of the hegemonic enterprise, as evidence of the lack of incorporation. To avoid characterising Aboriginal people as passive victims of the historical process, writers have deployed oppositional paradigms to interpret apparently destructive and 'unproductive' behaviours.

The notion of an 'oppositional culture' is central to Cowlshaw's argument. Her thesis is that the salient feature which creates and reproduces a 'cultural' identity for Aborigines in Brindleton is the process of resisting domination. Hutchings (1993) prefers to refer to a 'sub-culture of opposition' where Aboriginal young people have distinct meaning structures for criminal events and the justice system. She portrays the kids as developing "forms of resistance" and "tactics of opposition to official domination" which challenge the welfare interpretation of events. She argues that Aboriginal children and agents of legal/welfare system construct "alternative, but complementary, definitions of the system" (Hutchings 1993:346).

Morris (1989) acknowledges his intellectual debt to cultural Marxists for their work on the genesis of cultural forms which assume the character of resistance in the struggle against the coercive structuring of the wider society. In relation to specific 'oppositional practices' Morris (1989:149) depicts drinking, fighting and gambling as collective activities which "constituted a structural opposition to the attempted hegemony of the wider state" in that they are opposed to relationships based on individual rights and property and to the values of sobriety, industry and self-discipline. Again in relation to such practices, Sackett (1988:76) claims that "through drink Aborigines express their antipathy to the idea and practice of others administering their lives" and calls the drinking and disorder a 'drunken rejoinder' to the values and practices of intervention of the wider society.

Martin (1993) takes issue with notions of simplistic causality that explain the current lifestyles Aboriginal people solely in terms of power relations, of white oppression of black people, as such statements gloss over the active role of Aboriginal people, as enculturated social actors. He strongly states that it would be incorrect to typify Wik culture as essentially oppositional as Cowlshaw did for Brindleton Aboriginal people. He writes of an intersection of meanings and practices constituted by an historically situated dialectic between indigenous forms and those of dominant society. For the Wik, he argues, internal

dynamics were the paramount concern and alcohol had the capacity to transform relative power within this domain. The power of alcohol, he believes, related to core cultural themes such as the expression of emotions and the tension between autonomy and relatedness. And although fighting could destroy social capital, he describes it as also acting to confirm or establish others, and contributed at an ideological level to the reproduction of structures of relatedness. Merlan (1998) agrees with Martin that though oppression and alienation are not irrelevant, there is not any simple and direct causal relation to contemporary modes of drinking.

Localised complexities

Ortner (1995) pleads for enriched resistance studies that would reveal the ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance itself. Her critique of past resistance studies is that they are "ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on subjectivity - the intentions, desires, fears, projects - of the actors engaged in these dramas" (1995:190). The following section takes each of these kinds of 'thinness' and relates them to the already mentioned contemporary accounts of Aboriginal life

Ortner (1995:175-177) underlines that subaltern groups are internally divided by age, gender, status and other forms of difference and that there exist "local categories of friction and tension". She claims there is a lack of an adequate sense of prior and ongoing politics among subalterns, and she singles out gender politics as the most glaring example of an arena which is glossed over.

Cowlishaw (1988), in her writings on 'oppositional culture', acknowledges the diversity of opinion within the Aboriginal community, yet it seems to be side-lined without further development. There is a growing reference in Australian criminological literature to the 'unreported' crime between Aboriginal people and reported violence against women (see Beresford and Omaji 1996, Hazlehurst 1995, Smandych, Lincoln and Wilson 1993). Hutchings (1993:354) also acknowledges that "other forms of vandalism and theft by Aboriginal children also go on in the Aboriginal settlement. This behaviour generally goes unreported by the victims however, and the police show little interest in the surveillance of offences of this nature". Such a statement not only weakens the argument that illegal activity is a form of resistance because it is directed at white property, it also raises many questions - why are the kids committing crime against other Aboriginal people? Are informal sanctions imposed on the kids by the Aboriginal adults? When are the police notified of offences where Aboriginal people are the victims and perpetrators?

Another arena, which is tackled 'thinly' and ambivalently, is conflict between generations. In some accounts the older and young generations are depicted as conjoined in opposition, and adult, especially parental, acceptance or indulgence or approval of the kids' illegal activities is integral to the argument that there are certain sub-cultural practices and values that are being recreated across the generations (Brady and Morice 1982, Cowlishaw 1988, Hutchings 1993).

For instance, Hutchings (1983) stresses how the recounting of the saga of the shoe store robbery was appreciated by Aboriginal youths not previously in contact with the legal system and that the activity was sanctioned by *some* parents of the kids involved (my emphasis). She writes "they laughed about it and did not believe their children would suffer any severe legal recriminations as a result of their involvement" (p.355). Once again, questions arise as to who these parents might be, how did the other non-amused parents respond, in what contexts was the humour of the saga enjoyed, did others such as white young people perhaps laugh at and celebrate the event but in a different context?

It is noteworthy that other writers have indicated that adults feel they have lost control (Beresford and Omaji 1996, Martin 1993) and Tonkinson (1988) refers to benign non-intervention because of cultural priorities and the legacy of welfare dependency. Trigger (1992:5) states that the Doomadgee people were not united in an 'articulated' opposition with some of the older people more likely to complain about the behaviour of the young generation. The significance of these inter-generational tensions remains unexplored, along with other internal divisions and disruptions, in analyses that depend on the oppositional paradigm, because parental support for children's misdemeanours is highlighted at the expense of these other issues.

Ortner (1995) draws attention to the complexity of power and resistance, which she characterises as shifting loyalties, alliances and categories. In a relationship of power, she argues, the dominant often has something to offer which creates everyday forms of collaboration. This point is demonstrated by reference to an article on post-revolutionary Vietnam that contains examples of varying alliances between sectors with different interests. Whilst on this topic, Willis (1977) is praised for illustrating how the subculture of the working-class lads embodies both 'penetrations' of the dominant culture and limitations on those penetrations - limitations deriving from the lads' own subcultural perspectives on gender.

It would seem vital to distinguish conceptually between 'strategic alliances' and 'penetrations' although this may not always be feasible. The very cultural richness, which Ortner wants included, may comprise nuanced and fluid politicking internally and inter-culturally that can blur the distinction. Nevertheless, a complaint about post-colonial interpretations anchored in the notion of resistance or oppositional culture is that they have a comparatively weak capacity to explain accommodation to the dominant society (Sutton 1993). At Doomadgee, Trigger (1992) reports that a wide range of Aboriginal residents expressed in both their reflective and unelicited discourse, an unambiguous agreement with key aspects of white *ideology*. For him the issue of ideological incorporation of Aboriginal thinking was an important area of investigation.

Trigger (1992) observes that actual social relations between Aborigines and whites were typically strained with little apparent intimacy and a great deal of evident social distance. He acknowledges that Aboriginal residents were not completely powerless, and is inclined to interpret the social distance as a form of Aboriginal resistance against administrative

intrusiveness, so that practices of coercion and resistance and aspects of ideological incorporation are intertwined. Beckett (1993) sounds like he is saying something similar when he asserts that the culture of the colonised comes to exist relative to the culture of the colonisers and argues that colonised alternate between embracing and contesting the attributed otherness. However, Keen (1993) in his review of Trigger's book, asks whether social closure was as much a matter of perception of difference as of resistance to penetration? How much of the closure was due to whitefella exclusionary practices, than to do with acceptance of white values and practices? Morton (1998) argues, too, that there is a form of essentialism inherent in positively framing identity as arising from oppositional culture. Although he partly agrees that 'atomized and individualised resistances' to police and white culture occurs, he claims that adherents to the resistance model err on the side of romanticism. He believes resistance is not incompatible with accommodation or affirmation of tradition, and that contemporary identities are simply too complex to gloss as oppositional culture.

There is a need to attempt to represent the projects that subjects construct and enact, how they become, sustain and transform who they are. Comaroff and Comaroff (1989) comment that the colonising process itself is rarely a simple dialectic of domination and resistance and they refer to the debate about what can be properly called resistance. They point out that characterising people's reaction is very murky where they do not express some awareness of firstly, domination and secondly, their responses to their subordinate position. They argue that what has been construed as indirect or tacit resistance can be read as an effort to fashion an awareness and gain conceptual mastery over a changing world "a practical means of *producing* historical consciousness" (p259, their italics). This process produces forms of experimental practice that seek "techniques of empowerment and sources of new knowledge" (p.261).

Hutchings (1993) seeks to illustrate her claim of alternative definitions of the system between Aboriginal kids and statutory agents by citing the different explanations provided by the kids and by the welfare/legal personnel for the shoe store robbery. However, they are different types of explanations with the kids giving practical reasons for their actions, whilst the welfare professionals (and to lesser extent the police) referring to underlying causes. An example of an informant's rendition of the robbery is provided, which is meant to show that the children were aware they were subverting the system. However, an alternative reading could be that the informant is revealing pleasure and excitement in a flagrant communal act of naughtiness/wrongness, rather than in the more politicised sense of an attack on a 'system'. Also, the informant mentions that white kids helped themselves to the shoes as well, which might imply that it was enjoyed as an expression of a not specifically Aboriginal form of 'youthful rebellion'.

Hutchings (1993) indicates that she is drawing heavily on Willis's argument (1977) that the strategies of resistance of working class lads have the general support of the parents, and that these strategies not only validate working class life which exist as part of the dominant structure, but re-create social divisions of dominance and dependence. Her way of imbuing the kids' actions with agency is to focus on the intentionality underlying the

crimes. Her core thesis is that Aboriginal children devise procedures to manipulate the system to their advantage, thereby defining and insulating their own identity and meaning systems in opposition to the dominant structures.

In contrast, she asserts, the welfare and legal professionals assumed such criminal acts were primarily 'spontaneous' and emerging from 'peer pressure'. She claims that the 'misalignment in meaning structures' between the offenders and the bureaucratic agents, and the kids and their families' responses to intervention, can result in further bureaucratic control and therefore incorporation into the system. This seems to be a slightly different argument to that put forward by Willis, who is indicating how class and social divisions are reproduced over time, through the actions of the working class lads (not specifically criminal acts), and this is at a macro-level of social relationship of dominance and dependence. Whether it has equal merit when applied to Aboriginal people and their relationship to the state, to Aboriginal youth and the juvenile justice system is more problematic.

Martin (1993) only partly agrees that vandalism and other property crimes by young men should be construed as political action, as attacks on the material symbols of dominant society and an active denial of the hegemonic enterprise of the dominant society. He found that young men gave reasons for their behaviour as being excitement, stimulation, being sent away because they were disenchanted with life in Aurukun. Because many Wik, especially young men, expressed contempt for the values and institutions of the white world, Martin (1993) believes they did feel powerful in relation to it at all.

This thesis centres on the administration of juvenile justice in a local setting. It is an exploration to see whether local knowledge challenges and weakens the bleak Manichean model of the powerless and powerful. In part it takes up the challenge posed by Ortner to enrich resistance studies by endeavouring to provide ethnographic material that recognises internal politics, the cultural complexity of subordinate groups, and grapples with multiple subjectivities and agency. The thesis is also designed to bear testimony to the difficulties in interpreting practices that apparently differentiate between colonised and colonisers, which is an issue insufficiently acknowledged in at least ethnographically inclined accounts of the subaltern. The very processes of domination, in this instance examined via an interest in juvenile justice, consist of underlying fluid, interactive dynamics, which are affected by ambivalencies within the dominant domain and aspects of accommodation and resistance within the 'other' domain.

Increasingly there are signs that there is shift away from reified notions of a mechanistic criminal justice system that processes a homogenous collectivity labelled 'disadvantaged young offenders'. Instead, the call is for a more detailed scrutiny of the interactions between and across categories of practice and people. For instance, Holdaway (1997) calls for the study of radicalised relations by ascertaining how 'race' is constructed and sustained in interactions between majority and minority groups, and by the investigation of social processes within the everyday world of criminal justice organisations and personnel. Marenin (1992:340) echoes these sentiments by arguing that explanations should focus on

the interactive dynamics between dominant and dominated groups (cited in Smandych, Lincoln and Wilson 1993).

Such calls would find resonance in some anthropological writings. As indicated earlier, Merlan (1998) endeavours to bridge the conceptual dichotomy between the dominant and subordinate groups, by invoking inter-cultural processes. It is noteworthy that Martin (1993) admits that a fuller analysis than his would take into account conflicts between the two sectors and attempts to air grievances, and to define and restructure relations but his concern is with the Wik domain, and he concludes with the observation that endemic fighting ultimately perpetuates relations of domination.

The location of this ethnography is a mining town in 'remote' Australia, neither an Aboriginal settlement nor a rural community. It is a place inhabited by a transient population with a small group of black and white longer-term residents. In the literature there are few descriptions that provide analogies to this place, yet it, like many other mining towns in Australia, have high rates of recorded crime by Aboriginal youth and reputations for racism and intolerance.

Even a relatively short period of residence in such a place by individuals occupied in the administration of juvenile justice, appears to have an impact on them - which is recognised in their self-reports of changes in attitude and practice. Local knowledge and experience appear to have a special significance in a place that is small and peripheral. Although they are members of the dominant group, and statutory representatives of the state, they seem to struggle continuously for a sense of control over their field of work, and to obtain recognition from locals of their personhood.

Processes of contest and differentiation are perhaps more 'audible' and 'visible' in a smaller communities. There were signs of tension, of political allegiances and dissolutions, everywhere - amongst young people, justice practitioners, amongst Aboriginal families and on committees. These microprocesses of enactment and discursive practice constituted the mundane, daily social life of the inhabitants, and are the primary subject of this thesis. The framework is a raft of historical and contemporary 'structuring structures' that are less to the fore but which informed the discussion and representations of events and context.

A wider more conflict oriented perspective can be usefully employed to interpret the historical and structural context. Thus I concur with Wetherall and Potter (1991:86) when they advocate a mode of analysis that "moves backwards and forwards between what could be described as 'established' and 'constitutive' aspects of discourse...In analysing the establishment it is possible to talk of directions of domination, of past campaigns which author present campaigns, of interests which are served, of power which is located and possessed, and to invoke some of the functional apparatus and articulations of practices, so well described in Marxist theory".

Outline of chapters

The next chapter provides an account of how the research was conducted, and sources of information.

The third chapter considers historical antecedents to the themes pursued in subsequent chapters. The focus is on localised race relations and the significance of a history of dispossession, exclusion and missionisation. It looks at the emergence of juvenile crime as a problem, responses to it, and the correspondence between levels of recorded juvenile crime with changes in economic activities, social relations in the locality, and wider socio-political changes.

The fourth chapter on the town concentrates on the town 'community'. It describes the place in terms of its economic base, social relations, sense of community and concerns about youth and crime. An enduring characteristic is the racial divide - evident in work and play - and some of the factors that sustain this divide are considered, along with a description of those that work across it.

The fifth chapter focuses on the local Wongi people, looking at the objective and subjective dimensions of being culturally 'other'. It seeks to show how practices and interactions contribute to the perpetuation of the racial divide and examines how racism is understood and experienced. Underlying this chapter is an interest in whether there are practices and meanings informing local identities which affect levels of reported crime.

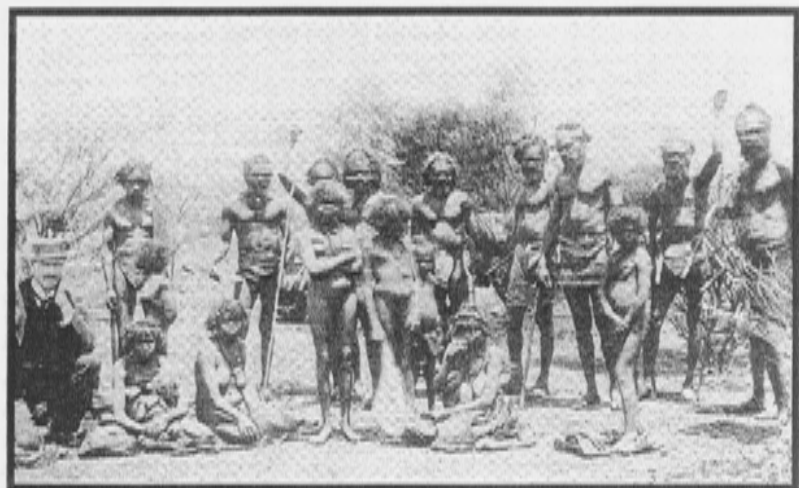
The sixth chapter concentrates on a social group, usually characterised as marginal: (black and white) young people. The perspectives of adolescents and young adults, who were local in the sense that they had lived in the town for a considerable number of years as teenagers, are framed by a description of their presence and position within the town domain. Their perspectives on growing up in the town and on their experiences of school, offending and the justice system are presented to indicate variations within the youth population and evolving identifications with the locale, racial distinctions and with 'global pop youth culture'.

The seventh chapter explores the contours of juvenile offending from the way juvenile crime was recorded by the police and other administrative data on court proceedings and determinations. This data is complemented by extracts from my observations of these proceedings. The underlying purpose is to look at how offences and offenders were conceptualised and dealt with by those involved in the local administration of justice, to identify significant players and to identify the crucial factors that influence this process.

The eighth chapter explores the administration of justice from the point of view of local practitioners. This includes a description of key practices, of ideological and practical tensions between practitioners, and of how their subjective experiences of Laverton affected their understanding of local differences and the exercise of discretion. Practices

and explanations for local juvenile crime were shaped by experience and the question is posed as to whether there was a local sub-culture of justice practice.

The final chapter returns to the issue of Aboriginal over-representation in criminal justice statistics, and indicates what has been gained in understanding juvenile justice issues from a detailed account of a particular setting.



CHAPTER TWO

Method

I was driving back into the Goldfields after an absence of several years. I drew up at a petrol station in the early hours of the morning in Coolgardie. My notes record that:

The attendant with long hair, a beard and weathered face, was curious about the Commonwealth number plates. He asked which department I worked for and I replied that I was 'an anthropologist, engaged in research...'. His eyes were uncertain when he hesitantly said 'oh yes, plants and things'. 'No' I replied 'juvenile justice, offending kids'. He declaimed 'the parents got heaps of money and spoil them, give them everything they want.. and there's nothing for them to do'. He paused 'they need more drugs'.

As indicated earlier, I lived in Laverton on two occasions - from 1987 to 1989 when I was employed in the town as a welfare officer with the then Department of Community Services; and from 1992 to 1994 when I undertook research for this thesis. Over the years, from 1987 to 1994, there were several significant changes to the town, not least being the gradual winding down of Western Mining's operations. Until the formal withdrawal of the company in 1994, with the sale of the Windarra nickel project, the town since the seventies had, in many respects, been a company town.

There were advantages to going back to Laverton for a second period of residence, in that I already knew some people, mostly Aboriginal people, and was less likely to be regarded as a short-term visitor. However, because the majority of the town's residents are 'temporary' inhabitants, many of my earlier acquaintances and colleagues had moved away. For example there were only a few people who I had known before still working in the service sectors - health, welfare, police and so on. The most apparent advantage to returning to Laverton was the sense of perspective engendered by having contact with the place over seven years. I witnessed how changes in the mining industry and to the wider socio-political environment had an impact on a community. For instance, native title was beginning to emerge as a practical issue for many in the community by 1994, and broader policy shifts in juvenile justice and Aboriginal affairs evident in the eighties really started to affect daily practices and local administration in the nineties. Local politics, in both the Aboriginal and white domains and the connections between the two domains, had undergone noticeable transformations when I returned in 1992 - not so much in terms of processes or in the institutional configurations of power, but in the identity of individuals dominating the domains, which contributed to a blurring in the distinction between them. Perhaps most important of all was the opportunity to know young people, again mostly Aboriginal youth, as they 'grew up' from their childhood and early teens, to their late adolescence and young adulthood.

A difficult and basically unresolved issue was whether my previous employment as a welfare officer would have a detrimental effect on my efforts to practice research. Certainly, I was conscious of knowing information about individuals and families because of prior access to files and the role I played in particular events as a welfare

officer. Much of this information was and is sensitive and confidential, relating to matters such as substitute care arrangements, child protection notifications, and the outcomes of juvenile court proceedings. I never referred to this body of knowledge unless someone took the initiative and wanted to discuss a particular incident that affected him or her, but it should be accepted that it no doubt effected how I interacted with others, both in terms of their perceptions and expectations of me and my perceptions and expectations of them. The experience of being a welfare officer has undoubtedly, as well, coloured the whole research project, influencing the emphasis in content and the interpretive endeavour.

A critical question is how one is 'positioned in the field' - during my second period of residence was I regarded by a significant proportion of the community as a *defacto*, albeit unemployed, welfare officer? There is no unequivocal answer. Many assumed I was there to 'help' Aboriginal people just because I was a white woman with a stated interest in juvenile justice, many assumed I had a hidden agenda because of widespread hostility and suspicion to 'research' and because I was not 'publicly' attached to a known agency. In the town of Laverton it is rare to encounter white adults who are not there because of their own or their partner's employment. To be a seemingly unemployed 'research student' made it difficult for people to assign me a functional status within the town's grid of occupational positions and status hierarchies.

On a number of occasions I found that I was mistakenly remembered as someone else - as one of the white women who had worked as a welfare officer after me or as the recreation officer when the position was first created. For example I was told by someone while in Warburton that people had been talking about me, as having on a previous visit carried around a pen and notebook and of having patently kept notes of conversations, without permission. I indicated that I had never done such a thing but as I only had infrequent contact with many in the Warburton community there was not the opportunity to properly address wrong impressions.

When embarking on the research I had originally proposed to stay in Laverton for a while, before moving onto Warburton for at least six months. When it became clear, after almost a year of residence in Laverton, that I would be denied permission to live in Warburton, I chose to stay on for another year in Laverton. During the second year I became more 'accepted' by certain sections of the community because of my participation in the local labourforce, firstly as a cleaner at the Windarra nickel project and secondly, as a youth employment officer. My access to the working world of mining, in many respects a separate social and physical domain unto itself, was vicariously through my partner who was employed by Western Mining and was enhanced by the stint as a cleaner. The part-time paid work as a youth employment officer was, in effect, an extension of previous involvement with youth - as a volunteer at the youth centre and from 'hanging around' with young people around town.

There were three spheres of activity where I tried to create opportunities for sustained involvement with local youth, justice practitioners and Aboriginal residents. These were

around the activities of young people and those involved in 'doing good' for young people considered at a disadvantage; around the activities of those involved in the local administration of juvenile justice; and lastly, in the activities of several Aboriginal households, whose members were related and who held considerable influence in the Aboriginal political domain as local long-term residents, in addition to having younger members who regularly appeared in court on criminal charges. These spheres of activity were singled out because there was an underlying intent to my presence (which I hasten to add I attempted to explain from the outset) to foster social relationships and therefore produce 'data' relevant to the research topic. There were, however, many hours in any one day when I would be engaged in activities in a multiplicity of sites which tended to be taken for granted as the usual practices of a white female adult - such as classes at the Art and Craft club, shopping, swimming at the pool, drinking at the pub and club - which would be considered unremarkable by a white or black resident observing me.

Permission, access, acceptance, and support are not necessarily sequential steps, as any researcher knows, nor are they always clearly and consistently achieved and manifest. Formal approaches were made in number of quarters for each of the three spheres of activities. With those involved in assisting young people, I arranged meetings with key local gatekeepers like the school principal, the recreation officer and representatives of the youth centre committee. The former's informal support was required before discussions could occur, on school premises, with high school students and their teachers. Similarly, committee representatives for the youth centre were keen to indicate how they should be formally approached for their views on, and involvement in the research. A letter was sent and I attended a meeting to answer questions, before the youth centre manager agreed to me helping out as a volunteer at the centre. I subsequently became a committee member and became embroiled in a factional dispute between committee members, one of the pitfalls (or joys!) of 'participation'. The young people I approached individually, but later had group discussions with high school students and tried to do something similar with several Aboriginal young men while they were involved in a job skills programme.

Before going back to Laverton I wrote to the Ministers for Police and for Community Development, and had meetings with a senior police officer and the head of the children's court in Western Australia. All concerned responded favourably, but this did not translate into unconditional access at the local level. The circuit magistrate and his subsequent replacement gave their approval for me to observe juvenile court proceedings¹⁹ but other justice practitioners were less than happy with my presence in court. Various local representatives for the Department of Community Development (DCD) (and later the Justice department once it became operationally responsible for juvenile justice in 1993), the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) and the police tended to be quite guarded in their responses to my initial overtures, although most agreed after some time to at least one taped interview and were quite happy to discuss matters in an informal context. Because

¹⁹ Held once a month, I attended one juvenile court session in Warburton and twelve juvenile court sessions in Laverton during the two years of my research. Permission to attend juvenile court proceedings was required from the magistrate, as these matters are held *in camera*, with the general public prevented from observing the proceedings and the media banned from reporting the names of convicted juveniles.

they wished to protect client confidentiality, the DCD officers in particular were reluctant to be seen talking with an 'outsider' and made it clear that they could not discuss specific aspects of their work. After about the year, the police became more open and helpful, and I was able to peruse police briefs and accompany some officers on patrol to Warburton. Most of the officers also agreed to taped interviews, and seemed to become reconciled to my presence in the station and around town.

Although I knew the white manager and the committee members²⁰ of the local Aboriginal organisation, Wongatha Wonganarra, from my previous sojourn in the town, I submitted a letter to the committee outlining the purpose of the research and seeking the members' views on the subject matter and advice on how they would like me to proceed. I was told that my help with the women's art group would be appreciated, especially as I had a vehicle²¹ that could be used for trips out into the bush to collect materials. Over time I attempted to repay the assistance given to me by several older women and their families, by a range of means including the paying for language classes, by acting as a broker in the local retail of artefacts, by recording and transcribing the life history of one woman, and by taking photos and video footage of local events such as the performances of the band 'LA Beat'. The older women advised me on whom to approach for research assistance and their approval of whoever was chosen was needed before we could proceed. The young woman, Robyn, who did the work had lived in Laverton as a child and was able to talk with younger Aboriginal people in a way I would have found impossible. Two of her younger cousins (one male and one female) also helped on occasions. The main interest of Robyn was in creating video footage of the current lives of local Aboriginal people, having been inspired by a Roebourne documentary and by a 1983 documentary on the dispossession of the Goldfields' Wongis. As Robyn was frequently out of town and a number of disputes ended up creating considerable tension between certain individuals, progress on the video was slow and eventually abandoned.

I have already alluded to varying degrees of resistance I encountered to the research project. Most frustrating and disappointing were the negative reactions from the 'gatekeepers' to the nearby Aboriginal settlements of Cosmo Newberry and Mount Margaret, and the denial of permission to stay at Warburton from the Ngaanyatjarra Council. People who lived in these places for most of the year seemed happy for me to visit, and in the case of Warburton stay, when I talked to them in Laverton about the research. I can only speculate on the possible reasons for the hostility and in the case of Warburton, apparent disinterest in and tardiness in responding to my request. One explanation given by a manager was that Aborigines were deeply suspicious of whitefellas 'studying them'. With the two nearby settlements, the managers were brought up at Mount

²⁰ During my earlier stay the manager had held a different job and the composition of the committee had differed, reflecting various political struggles and the movement of people from and back to the town which had occurred in the intervening years.

²¹ This four-wheel drive vehicle was made available to me through an Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies grant. The government plates meant that some doubted my claims to not represent a government agency, and initially at least, there were many requests for lifts. Once several older women and their families had regularly gone out bush in the vehicle, therefore in a sense publicising their 'rights' to the vehicle, these requests from other people dropped off.

Margaret where most of the missionaries over the years had profoundly distrusted anthropologists. Moreover, my expressed interest in people's personal histories may have caused disquiet, as there may be 'shameful' activities and episodes that could reflect poorly on various authority figures in the past and present.

This is not the occasion to recount the drawn out process of establishing whether I could live at Warburton and once I received the Council's letter, of the mixed messages I received about the reasons for the refusal. Perhaps it was personal - perhaps I was distrusted or my case poorly put together or that it was considered an improper subject for a white woman to be interested in. Certainly past experiences with anthropologists and journalists have created a climate of suspicion and even contempt amongst many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the region. For instance I was told that anthropologists²² who had worked in the Lands in the past had betrayed secrets, and the few remaining pastoralists in the Laverton area did not conceal their animosity towards anthropologists.

Juvenile justice and petrol sniffing were and are very sensitive issues, and there was a widespread practice of limiting and influencing media portrayals of the issues. Again I was told of incidents where journalists in the past had betrayed the trust of the Ngaanyatjarra people and at least once, the trust of the Laverton police. Having learnt from these experiences, the Council and local justice practitioners are very careful about allowing journalists to enter the Lands, on the one hand, and to grant interviews on the other, without first being reassured that there will be sympathetic coverage. For instance, during 1993 very 'positive' portrayals of police camps for Ngaanyatjarra youths including petrol sniffers (the Breakaway Camps)²³ and the work of the Laverton DCD hostel, appeared on regional television and in the *West Australian* newspaper.

There were subtler and often probably unintended means of resisting or redirecting the intrusive eye or query of the researcher. Aspects of some Aborigines' activities were very 'visible' in that they occurred in the open and not behind the sanctuary of house or office walls. However, what the white (and a few black) people involved in the administration of juvenile justice had to say was uttered in the belief that it would easily 'intelligible' to me, and they would frequently enter into long explanations of their behaviour. With many of these informants, they appeared more than willing to communicate their impressions of for example the effects of alcohol on the Aboriginal populace or the causes of petrol sniffing - topics they thought should be given primacy and rendered explicable because of their local knowledge and breadth of perspective. The discursive practices of many of the adult whites, especially where they felt they were being asked for their views because of their

²² The most famous incident was precipitated by Gould in the late sixties. However, only on a single occasion did someone specifically refer to this incident. In the main, people conveyed a distrust of anthropologists in general.

²³ The Breakaway camps were instigated and run by the Laverton police, with the assistance of State Emergency Services volunteers. The local youth worker and hostel staff also helped on occasions. Funding for the camps was from the Ngaanyatjarra Council. Groups of Ngaanyatjarra males, youths and young men, participated in the camps, which were held in the bush near Laverton, for no longer than a week.

occupation, had an inherent positioning where they gave accounts of a spectacle to which they were an impartial observer²⁴.

In marked contrast, many of the Wongis would say very little when a direct question was posed to them by a white person, myself included, and when talking together or to me, tended to focus on the actions and events in which they personally had participated. For example, when we went for drives out in the bush, Mavis would point out features in the landscape that reminded her of events in the past. For instance, I was told where she and others had camped and where she had rounded up sheep when working as a musterer. But when I pressed her for more information about life on the station, my questions went unanswered. The actions, attitudes, and feelings of other people were rarely referred to, either in a descriptive or speculative fashion. Such personalised narratives tended to not incorporate structural explanations or impersonal descriptions of situations. Interestingly, these observations resonate with some of Myers' (1986:294) observations about the Pintupi. He notes that the Pintupi place great emphasis on personal experience and hesitate to present information analytically or schematically. He also remarks on the constant references to where events happened in narratives stating that "geography is the great punctuator of Pintupi storytelling... places serve as mnemonics for significant events" (Myers 1986:54).

The selective presentation (in style and content) of information may partly arise from an inculcated sense of caution when dealing with whites or when dealing with specific subjects. I remember an Aboriginal woman who had moved from elsewhere in the state after marrying a local man, telling me that she had learnt to be careful because permission was required before speaking out or representing verbally or pictorially certain matters. The reluctance to speak on certain subjects and the emphasis instead on what might be called the traditional, may be also partly due to the kind of inquiries conducted by recognised categories of *wadjullahs* or *walypala* in days gone by. Labelled as an anthropologist and known as having been a welfare worker, it was perhaps assumed that my principal interest lay with traditional beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, there was a pronounced sense of propriety in their endeavours to focus my inquiry on the traditional and on the material. It appeared to be somehow unseemly to dwell on such matters as their relations to particular missionaries or the behaviour at school of their kin. Moreover, bush foods stories and artwork were frequently discussed in terms of their viability as commercial commodities. There seemed to be an assumption that I was there to develop and assist with the management of 'resources' and to provide a link to the economic world of markets.

Aboriginal perspectives on relations with non-Aboriginal people were hard to elicit, which could be attributed to a reluctance to speak out on particular individuals or relationships to

²⁴ In a critique of social psychology theorising on racism, Wetherall and Potter (1992) argue that social identity theorists assume that social categories and groups, along with individuals are taken for granted. Their concept of a person aligning himself or herself to a particular group during the course of interpersonal interaction assumes "people's main mode of interaction is structured mainly by gaze and not discourse". Underlying the theory is the notion of a person as a "solitary observer, recorder and evaluator of a social spectacle laid out for her benefit" (p.48).

a non-Aboriginal person. Comments nevertheless suggest, firstly, a widespread indifference to the majority of non-Aboriginal people and their limited relevance to the more significant aspects of an Aboriginal person's life, and, secondly, many local Aboriginal people had fond memories of certain non-Aboriginal individuals such as missionaries, pastoral people, government employees, with whom they had prolonged and personal relationships (see Sansom 1980). These kinds of relationships depend on many years of contact and were unlikely to occur in more recent times. Merlan (1998:70,27) makes a similar observation when she states that in the early days of Katherine the few local outsiders were known as individuals despite generally gross inequalities between outsiders and Aborigines, but that nowadays the local Aboriginal people no longer have many intense relationships with whites.

Given the generalised climate of distrust towards research in general and more particularly to investigations by journalists or anthropologists, I tried to 'give something (tangible) back' to the community. I have already referred to the small services I performed for certain individuals and their families. In addition, if an interviewee wanted a copy, I would hand over a copy of her or his transcript, and with the archival material I gathered on Laverton, I gave copies to the Laverton Shire. These kind of acts are standard research practice and I found it much harder to address the bigger concern expressed by some (mostly police) that the enterprise would serve no purpose.

My work is related to contemporary practices which impinge on or are part of juvenile justice. My analysis of these practices relies heavily on observed 'speech acts' in court, informal interactions, and interviews of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people whose jobs in the fields of law or welfare result in an 'engagement' with the daily lives of local Aboriginal people. In addition, I wanted to provide an inkling of the worldviews of the 'locals', both black and white, but especially those of the young people who had spent many of their formative years in the town. As a result, the thesis contains many excerpts from notes and taped conversations. These were transcribed or recorded as faithfully as possible but have not been subject to the rigours of formal discourse analysis. The excerpts are designed to communicate a sense of persons, of their subjectivities, and were chosen for their relevance to the subject matter, and/or to convey the style of talk when in particular situations (for example, teenagers talk about grog, talk in court).

In an effort not to betray informants' trust, the town is identified but individuals' names have been changed. No doubt someone familiar with the town during the years I was there may still recognise some of the people referred to. It is par for the course in the relatively small community for speakers to assume the listener knows who is being talked about. Much of the conversations contained commentaries or asides about individuals and wherever possible in the text, I have endeavoured to convey this 'flavour' of a known social universe by assigning the same pseudonyms consistently to individuals wherever they might be named throughout the narrative.

With the young people I knew over the years from 1987 to 1994 it was difficult to capture the changes as they matured, as well as different epochs in the local 'youth

scene'. Over the years the composition and dynamics of groupings of young people changed, but in the main, they remained small and followed the racial and class divisions evident in the community. Gender, kinship, length of residence and age were also significant variables. I endeavoured to foster relations with a range of young people across a spectrum that covered differences in age, race, gender and class.

A part of the material I collected included extensive family trees but these are not referred to in the thesis as there were aspects to individuals' past and current relationships which they may not want revealed.

Inserted into the text is contextual information provided by statistics on the community (socio-demographic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census), and by locally obtained statistics on attendances at school and the youth centre, and on police apprehensions and court appearances for juvenile crime.

One whole chapter is 'contextual' in that it is an overview of the area's history. Limited historical material is available on the Laverton area. An official perspective on the district is provided by the Annual Reports of the Aborigines Department, and subsequent departments, but not even all of the Reports survive. Other archival material, not all of it accessible, consists of departmental files stored at the State Archives in Perth. Two significant government inquiries - the 1957 Select Committee of Inquiry and the 1975 Skull Creek Royal Commission - also provide interesting viewpoints on the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

There are several oral histories, recording the memories of non-Aboriginal people, kept at the State Archives and I complemented them with interviews of long-term residents in the Laverton area. Because so many people who have lived in the area have not stayed long, there are only a few surviving residents who call themselves locals. Although I recorded some oral histories of Aboriginal long-term residents in Laverton, and one elderly woman in particular recounted her life over many meetings, I hesitated to insert their narratives into a conventional western history and they are sparingly included. These personal histories suggest a parochial and culturally different way of representing the past and deserve a more comprehensive coverage than is possible in this thesis²⁵. Merlan (1998:49) captures the rhythm and tenor of these histories of the past when she refers to narratives that tell of shifts in networks of interrelations between person and place, that were more important than abstract chronology and unlike whitefella oral history with its narrative of development or progress (Merlan 1998:49,54-56)²⁶.

²⁵ In the nineties there was a notable increase amongst local Aboriginal people in publishing recollections of the past. For example, Vera wanted her life story to be published and I heard a rumour in 1994 that former Mount Margaret residents were intending to compile a collection of their memories of the mission.

²⁶ A chord of recognition was also struck when Merlan comments that a particular woman (Julie)'s story contained no specific comment on different social positioning, although in general Merlan found that whites were less peripheral in Aboriginal stories than Aborigines were in whitefella stories which she views as reflecting the asymmetrical nature of relations (Merlan 1998:51,54-56).

There are several tomes of published material, including one self-published by an Aboriginal woman and her prospector husband, and the history of Mount Margaret written by the founder's daughter, Margaret Morgan, as well as newspaper and journal articles, in particular the missionaries' newsletters, and the writings of anthropologists. With the writings of anthropologists, most visited the area for relatively short periods of time (for example Bates 1985, Berndt 1957, Elkin 1931, Woenne 1980), one resided at Mount Margaret in the early seventies (Stanton 1975, 1980, 1984), and one at Warburton in the sixties (Gould 1967, 1968, 1972, 1977). It says something about the place - the district of Laverton - that the short visits were usually precipitated by government responses to public outcries over 'troubled' race relations (Berndt 1957, Elkin 1931 and Woenne for the Laverton Royal Commission in the mid-seventies).



CHAPTER THREE

Historical antecedents

As part of a distinctively West Australian tradition the Goldfields²⁷ conjure up images of battlers and the lure of instantaneous wealth - of the tough and independent (male) prospectors, of an inhospitable terrain, and of quick riches made through gold. As with the rest of the Goldfields, the pastoral industry was the economic mainstay after the initial gold boom at the turn of the century and up until the 1970s. The marginal sheep country extends just to the east of Laverton, and the town itself has always been the last settlement beyond which is the desert country of the Great Victoria and Gibson Deserts. Located so far from the metropolitan centre, with a small European population, Laverton was considered a frontier town for most of this century.

After the 1920s, once mining decreased and patterns of European settlement and economic activities were established, interest in the district declined. The inquisitive and intrusive Western gaze, eager to explore and record, shifted elsewhere to apparently more exotic and romantic locales. As the region has only excited western curiosity intermittently, systematic research and documentation (in the canons of western knowledge) of the country, of its flora and fauna, was rather haphazard.

European knowledge of the local Aboriginal people was often superficial and the district's Aboriginal peoples rarely rate a mention in the writings produced by the modern explosion in social histories²⁸. Western Desert groups, for the first half of the century, characteristically moved out of the Desert with some settling on pastoral stations, on the edges of towns and at missions, whilst others maintained a more nomadic existence with the occasional visit to European settlements. From the 1950s on, these people travelled and settled further afield, to other towns in the Goldfields and in the 1970s, the outstation movement created a repopulating of the desert country and the constellation of Aboriginal settlements in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. As a result, the personal histories of Laverton's Aboriginal residents were linked, for the older people, to the district's missions at Mount Margaret, Cosmo Newberry and Warburton and employment on the stations; and for the younger people, to life in mining towns and Aboriginal settlements, and income support from social security.

The chapter begins with a description of how Aboriginal people in the Laverton district were affected by, and responded to, the invasion of Europeans and the patterns of race relations which emerged over time. The focus is on the nature of relations within the district, although these were influenced by broader state policies and regulations. Thus, from the 1920s to the 1960s the closest contact between whites and Aborigines was likely to have been between local prospectors, pastoralists and missionaries on the one hand, and Aboriginal people who lived on missions or worked on stations, on the other hand. Significant changes occurred from the 1950s onwards, with a greater number of white people taking up residence in the district, the repealing of all sorts of restrictive

²⁷ They are commonly referred to as the Eastern Goldfields which shows a Western Australian orientation, as the Goldfields are located to the east of the state's capital, Perth.

²⁸ A prime example is the centenary history of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, a massive tome of nearly 1000 pages where only two pages explicitly focus on the local Aboriginal populace (Webb and Webb 1993).

laws and regulations which affected Aboriginal people, the demise of missions, and of the pastoral sector as an employer of Aboriginal labour. From the first days of European incursion into the hinterland, there were complaints by whites of petty theft and begging by Aboriginal people but it was not until the late sixties that there were concerns expressed by government officials of an increasing juvenile crime problem.

Early days

In the classical colonial tradition, European explorers mapped, named, and investigated the economic potential of the desert interior. Between 1872 and 1876 a series of expeditions by Egerton-Warburton, Giles, Gosse and the Forrests passed through the Laverton district in search of overland stock routes and grazing country. The explorers named topographical features such as the deserts, the hills and the salt lakes as they travelled through the country with Forrest, for example, leaving his mark by naming Mount Leonora and Mount Margaret (Stanton 1984:87-89). Another spate of expeditions, undertaken by Mills, Carnegie, Wells, Lindsay and Hann between 1883 and 1903, aimed to discover signs of mineral wealth as well as assess the feasibility of stock routes.

An invasion occurred when the gold lured thousands of non-Aboriginal people from overseas and other parts of Australia to the Goldfields. There were huge influxes of people with the discovery of gold, first at Coolgardie in 1892 and then at Kalgoorlie in 1893, and by 1896 there was an estimated 65,000 people living on the Goldfields. In such alien environment, which was not properly mapped and lacking in infrastructure, hardships and risks were experienced by explorers, prospectors and pioneer settlers (Mason 1909:38).

The diggers ventured north following the auriferous belt up to the Murchison and in 1894, there was a rush to the Lake Carey district, which became the north-eastern rim of the Goldfields. In 1897, 440 males and 13 females lived at Mount Margaret, and by 1902 an estimated 2700 people lived at Laverton (Morgan 1985:32). By 1903 the Goldfields, including mines on the desert fringe, like at Wiluna, Laverton, and Leonora, produced half of Australia's output. Laverton became the major administrative centre for the north-east district in 1899, when, due to the flooding of the mines at Mount Margaret, the post and telegraph office, the Mining Registration Office, and the Warden's Court, were moved from Mount Margaret to Laverton (Stanton 1984:93). Named after Dr Laver, a medical doctor and the co-owner and promoter amongst British investors of the nearby Craiggimore Gold Mine, the town flourished for over a decade.

A major legacy of the gold boom was improved infrastructure. Throughout the back country in the Goldfields the government had sunk a chain of wells approximately 160 kilometres apart so that prospectors would never be far from water (Morgan 1985:34). Opened in 1903, a rail line operated from Kalgoorlie to Laverton until the closure in 1957 of the Leonora to Laverton section. In the same year, 1903, the telegraph line reached Laverton, and, established in either 1902 or 1903²⁹, the 10-stamp state battery

²⁹ This is an example of differing dates, depending on the historical document consulted. There are noticeable discrepancies between dates found in departmental annual reports and those recorded in Morgan's history of the Mount Margaret mission.

at Laverton was used until the present day to process the ore from the small mining 'shows' of the district.

During the boom, towns were rapidly established and some equally quickly degenerated into ghost towns except where there was sufficient mining and pastoral activity to keep the town alive. Laverton became the service town and administrative centre for the what had become the principal economic activity, the pastoral industry, and there remained small mining ventures and sandalwood pulling in the district. By the early 1900s there was some sheep farming on the desert fringe and the majority of pastoral leases became sheep stations, with several cattle stations being established further north in the Carnegie Salient. Further east the unpalatability of the plant cover prevented pastoral development (Beard 1974:3).

By the early 1920s, the non-Aboriginal population of Laverton had declined from the thousands to about 500 (Morgan 1985:5). In the surrounding district, the thinly spread European population lived on stations, in camps and small mining communities. Each big mine in the district - Laverton, Beria, Ida H, Burtville and Morgans - had a small village of hastily constructed dwellings for miners, with several solid homes for managers and men of influence (Morgan 1985:16,18). The fortunes of the major mine close to Laverton fluctuated - the Lancefield mine (the name was changed to Beria in 1904 but later reverted to Lancefield) closed around 1910, opened between 1915 and 1920, reopened 1933 or 34 and closed in 1940. Up until the 1920s a woodline of 200 men had supplied wood to the Beria mine, but when the mine closed they were no longer needed.

By the 1920s non-Aboriginal patterns of land tenure were imposed on the district - pastoral leases, mining tenements, local government, state boundaries and administrative districts (Howitt 1990:18). Pastoral leases did not extend far east beyond Laverton, the nearby White Cliffs pastoral station was considered the 'last outpost of civilisation' and until the Warburton mission was established in the thirties (Morgan 1986:187).

After World War 1 and before the thirties, it was only individual prospectors, sandalwood teams, and doggers who ventured into the 'unsettled' and 'uncharted' country east of Laverton. A large portion of this country, near the border, had been declared an Aboriginal reserve earlier in the century, when under pressure from philanthropists, state and federal governments reluctantly agreed to create a sanctuary for the 'full-blood' tribal people in Central Australia. One of the first states to respond, Western Australia created the western part of the Central Reserves in 1918, which totalled over 14 million acres.

The Berndts (1976:70) conclude that the Aborigines were devastated during the early history of contact in the Goldfields, due to an "unhappy early record for shootings, exploitation of Aboriginal labour and sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women". They attribute the virtual extinction of local Aboriginal groups³⁰ to the size of the European

³⁰ Various names were given to these local Aboriginal groups. Daisy Bates (1910) in her note books lists the Boonyoo and Yoloyyn of Laverton, the Turada of north-east Laverton, and claimed the native name of the tribes in the district was Barduwonga. The Mount Margaret area, according to Tindale, was originally occupied by a group of people calling themselves Waljen but many inhabitants died from

population which arrived during the first rush to the Goldfields. In 1896 a travelling inspector was appointed to the Goldfields, and in 1903 the inspector reported that he could see no Aboriginal children among the Goldfields tribes, and in 1908 the district police officer at Coolgardie prophesied that in a few years time the Goldfields Aborigines would be "as extinct as the dodo" (Biskup 1973:24,28). Having seen very few children during his explorations in the district, Mason (1909:56,57) expected the 'Australian blacks' to be no more within a few decades. In 1916 the travelling inspector reported "in some districts the full blooded natives are fast diminishing... At Laverton, where another large camp was inspected, there were only three children but the percentage of old and infirm natives in all camps was very marked, as also was the large number of young men and women not in employment"(AR 1916)³¹. The missionary, Rod Schenk, in 1921 found about 500 Aborigines in the Laverton district, with the people around Laverton calling themselves Wongutha (Morgan 1986:7,12).

Although Aboriginal boys' or men often accompanied expeditions, explorers usually had only fleeting contact with the desert Aborigines (Gould 1972:19-20). During his expedition, Tietkins (1890:39) reported that "burnt country" was the solitary sign of 'natives'. During the 1890s, thousands of prospectors were roaming in all directions in the auriferous country north of Kalgoorlie, prompted by rumours of strikes. Viewed as essential for their own survival, practices by the prospectors such as using and spoiling water holes and shooting game, had severe consequences on the environment and disturbed the fragile resources vital to the well-being of the indigenous people. Moreover, though it is hard to establish the level of conflict, many violent incidents appear to have occurred, with the spearing of Europeans by Aboriginal people and the shooting of Aboriginal people by the prospectors.

The explorer Forrest was attacked at Weld Springs in the 1870s and two prospectors were speared at Lake Darlot in 1894 (Mason 1909:2). The principal dry creek bed that runs alongside the town of Laverton - Skull Creek - was so named reputedly because of

disease (Stanton 1983:163). Stanton (1983:161) claims by the 1920s there were only remnants of the Mankulkatjarra, Nyanganyatjarra and other local territorial groups in the district. According to Morgan (1985:43,61) in the twenties most people spoke two or three dialects and the Mount Margaret missionaries distinguished between two tribes - those on the Laverton side of Mount Margaret and the Linden people to the south of the Mission and asserted that no sacred site linked the two although there was intermarriage and constant fighting. In 1931, Elkin (1931:46) refers to the increased migration into white settlement due to the drought over the previous 10 years, and how reports at Ooldea suggested people were moving west from far west South Australia and were most likely to be found at Mount Margaret and Laverton. Of the over 200 people at Mount Margaret, Elkin (1931:49) believed only one belonged to the original local tribe as all the rest were from the east and north-east - the Kagara hordes from South Australia and the Mandjindja tribe from Warburton Ranges. He reports that the languages were similar to Ooldea districts (Mula, Wongaii, Ngalia) and that there were similar kinship and totemic systems and mythology though some beliefs and social rules were akin to those found in central Western Australia. Tindale (1936b:169) states that in 1935, because of the drift of people to Laverton, the north-east of Minnie Creek was virtually abandoned. While in Warburton Ranges for two weeks he located 98 Aboriginal people and asserts there were Ngadajara people at Warburton and Julbara people at Laverton.³¹ Seemingly contradictory information is provided by the district's local protectors in the Annual Reports from 1913 to 1915. A Burtville in 1913 there was "no disease or deaths" and at Morgans the birth rate was exceeding death rate. In 1914 the Aboriginal people at Burtville were "in general healthy" with six deaths from old age, and no deaths were reported at Morgans. The following year at Morgans, the population's health was "sati-factory" with a "few cases of VD".

the remains found there of murdered Aboriginal people³². Aspinall (n.d.:54), a young New Zealand prospector, records in his diary that by 1895 the 'blacks' had learnt to keep away from several camps. As a few white men were speared at the beginning of the rush, Aspinall reveals that every digger carried firearms and notes that he knew "scores of men" who had "unprincipled opinions" and would as "soon shoot a blackfellow as a kangaroo". He had heard that a "lot of niggers" were massacred at Redcastle (near Mount Margaret) at the beginning of the rush after a white man was speared (p.107).

Aspinall (n.d.) reports that the Aboriginal people in the north-east Goldfields, through which he journeyed, had a reputation for being dangerous. He refers to "wild", "savage", "natives of cannibalistic habits", and that the district was "bad country for blacks", and there were "dangerous niggers at the next soak" (p.62,103). Mason (1909:2,42,45) emphasises the treacherous acts of "wild blacks" and asserts that "murder [was] nothing much to a black", and they would persistently follow travellers in the interior and steal water, food, camp firewood, "all the most brutal murders in my time have been perpetrated on those who have shown the greatest kindness and consideration". Back then, according to Morgan (1985:5,9), the local Aboriginal people had a reputation amongst the non-Aboriginal population as the "wildest and laziest tribe in WA" and the townspeople of Laverton considered them the worst in Western Australia - "hard, cruel, superstitious".

Such attitudes did not prevent European people taking advantage, forcibly in many circumstances, of the Aborigines' local knowledge and skills. Mason (1909:32) argues against the practice of chaining 'wild blacks' to induce them to show the location of water for two reasons: - he believed it was a "breach of faith" to chain an individual who has not offered to molest or rob the author; and experience had taught him that under compulsion he was shown water not valued by the tribe. Mason (1909:30,40) advocates taking 'two civilised natives from different districts' on trips out bush because, although far from their own country, "wild blacks fear them more than they fear white men". Aspinall (n.d.:103) describes how at a prospectors' camp in the north-east Goldfields, white men used the Aborigines to find stray horses as they were very good at tracking. An Aboriginal couple who had come from the 'outback' to Red Flag (a mining camp near Laverton) were "taken possession of" by a white man, as "over here blackboys belong to anyone who feeds them". As the couple ran away after a few days, with provisions, the "owner" took to looking for his "sable servant" with a gun (Aspinall n.d.:113).

In principle Goldfields miners accused of maltreating the Aboriginal people or murders were brought to trial at the circuit court at Coolgardie or were dealt with more informally by the miners of a district. Some of those found guilty of such crimes were exiled, but their actions were frequently regarded as essential for survival and Stanton (1984:93) illustrates this point by referring to an incident at Menzies when 30 Aboriginal men were shot.

³² It was said that in 1895, a fight between three Irish prospectors and local Aboriginal people resulted in one of the prospectors being speared in the arm. A group of diggers, when told of the fight and that horses were being speared and camps robbed, chased and shot all the Aboriginal people. In 1898 a skull was found and given to Dr Laver who took it, along with a female skull found at Erlistoun, to the Paris Exhibition (SAWA RN 336).

European goods, their food and water supplies, were of considerable appeal to the desert people. Driven out of the desert by drought and attracted to the food and water at the settlements, the desert people at first voluntarily visited European towns and camps³³. A local Aboriginal woman, Vera, recounted the story of how, as a child in the twenties, she and her mother and other kin travelled on foot to country near the border and invited the people out there to come into the towns. Another Aboriginal woman, Pukungka, who has published her life story, describes how her people moved into the settled country:

"When the Ngalia first came in to the settled areas not all of them stayed. Some went back to their own country again soon afterwards and stopped out there for a long time until one day they start to think about all the good things they'd seen in town. The blankets, tea-leaf and sugar, Golden Syrup, clothes and things like that. They would tell the other people who still lived out Mangkili way, all about those things and the desert people would soon want to come in to have a look for themselves so, the first lot what had been before, would bring them in to show them all those wonderful things. They would walk back to places like Coxes Find and of course the new arrivals would get a taste for the new sort of food, especially the sweet things, and before long, they too would begin to wander around the settled country instead of return to their own tribal land" (Pukungka and Muir 1990:10).

Rudimentary exchange relations were established with Aboriginal people supplying skins, dog scalps, gold nuggets, and sex. Pukungka recounts how the "old aboriginal people... all been mix up with the old whitefellow prospectors in the early days" with gold nuggets being exchanged for tea, sugar, flour, Golden Syrup, clothes, and blankets (Pukungka and Muir 1990:2). Mason (1909:46) claims that Aboriginal men sent their women to white men's camps. He describes the exchange of women as a "tribal custom" and he believed offence could be given by refusing the women; by the women staying too long at the camp; and by shooting the "wild black's dingo" (dogs). According to Pukungka, prospectors would exchange wine or food for sex with Aboriginal women. She, too, describes such exchanges as an extension of traditional practices by claiming that, even though the husband sometimes became "jealous" if his wife stayed too long with the "whitefella", the Ngalia men sent their wives over to the whitemen's camps and "they all liked the idea...Out bush they used to lend their wives to one another too. That practice was known as the 'nightshift' and was a part of aboriginal tradition, so in that respect it was only one more step to lend a wife to a white man" (Pukungka and Muir 1990:16)³⁴.

³³ Berndt (1957:37) stresses that spatial mobility was a feature of Desert' culture which increased as the Europeans moved in. Stanton (1983:161) names the following migratory groups who moved westward, including to Mount Margaret - the Nyananyatjarra speaking people in the 1920s; the Mantjintja speakers from the north-east of Laverton in the 1930s and the Ngaatjatjarra speakers from the north of Warburton in the 1950s. But, sometime in the 'early days', according to Vera and Pukungka, Aboriginal 'soldiers from Darlot' raided Laverton and took people away, which according to a former missionary, inhibited travel in the district till the 1960s (personal communication). Morgan (1985:20) also records that a few years before Schenk arrived in Laverton, a raid by 'wanmala' (soldier people) had resulted in the death of 20 people camped close to the town.

³⁴ There is evidence of Aboriginal women's sexuality being used to establish connectedness with whites elsewhere (McGrath 1987) and to invest in multiple and cross-cutting relationships with Aboriginal men, in exchange for money tobacco and other such items. Martin (1993) portrays such sex as establishing a social relationship with the inherent right of 'relatedness' to then demand material goods from the person one has the relationship with. Cowlishaw (1988) refers to speculative debates about the impact on gender relations in Aboriginal communities and the degree to which these changes reflected gender relationships in a society dominated by white males. In her view, it may have been in part attempts by Aborigines to achieve some control over white invaders. She asserts that "it seems

In the twenties, the missionary Rod Schenk found there were only a few stations near Laverton, which either were not allowed to or did not wish to employ Aborigines. Some 80 Aboriginal people were issued rations in town but they disappeared into the bush after the flour was doled out (Morgan 1986:11). However, over the ensuing decade, it appears more Aboriginal people took up casual jobs in town and worked on pastoral properties. The local Aboriginal woman, Vera, remembered that many Aboriginal women, including her mother, worked at domestic jobs in the town of Laverton in the twenties, and the contribution of Aboriginal women, to the founding of stations, was recognised by a local white pastoralist:

Ian: A lot of the stations were established initially by men, and black women to a degree as cooks, washerwomen. White women came later and were supportive to the industry as a whole, because the men would not have stuck it out as long as they did without the backing of the women, black and white.

Seasonal employment on stations became quite commonplace for many Aboriginal people in the district up until the nineteen sixties. Pukungka describes younger men working as musterers for the "squatters" while the older people, men and women, cleared sticks and stumps to make station roads for which they would be given rations. She refers to a station as an example of a "good place" with "fifty married couples" working there during the busy seasons, with each couple allocated a "windmill run". In contrast, if the "boss" did not give enough rations for the work "the old people would get angry and walk off the job... Finish up they would have a little argument in the office but the boss would always win and the worker would get sulky and walk off". It appeared that small amounts of money were sometimes paid for mustering, as the Aboriginal workers would book up stores with the station manager or owner, which were then deducted from pay (Pukungka and Muir 1990:4, 6, 9,19).

From the early days of contact, it appears the explorers, prospectors and pastoralists found the Aboriginal population who were not employed on stations or as domestics in town, a 'nuisance'. In historical documents there are numerous complaints by Europeans of Aboriginal people 'begging' and 'thieving' around towns and camps. In the 1890s, Aspinall (n.d.:66) reports 'blacks' stole food and blankets from the camp, and he makes several references to begging - to naked Aboriginal women visiting each tent one by one asking for tucker (p.71) and to 20 to 30 'niggers' around the camp whose chief occupation was begging tucker and who, for a "few pieces of stale damper... will gladly sell their soul" (p.103). Pukungka describes how her people had fun with the 'whitefella' prospectors, by following the prospector's cart on foot but remaining out of sight. They would drink from the waterbag or steal it from the back of the cart and the "poor old whitefella wouldn't even know...[he] would scratch his head and look all around to find who took it but there'd be nobody in sight. They'd all hide behind the scrub and roll on the ground laughing at their joke on the whitefella" (Pukungka and Muir 1990:21,22).

In 1899, when the population of Laverton was about 200, the police reported that "several complaints were made regarding native depredations"(SAWA RN 336). In 1913, at Laverton, the Aborigines were "generally well behaved, a few convictions

that Aboriginal views of miscegenation were not fraught with the kind of moral judgements and status meanings which abounded in dominant society" (Cowlishaw 1988:96).

have been obtained for *pilfering*, generally from prospectors' camps. No known cases of *drunkenness* amongst them and no charges against whites for supplying them with liquor" (AR 1913, my emphasis). Similarly, in 1914, at Burtville, the "natives were treated well, no complaints", at Laverton "on the whole they behave themselves fairly well. Do not think any improvement can be made on the treatment they receive" and at Morgans, there were no complaints of ill-treatment by whites, although a fair number of petty cases of *pilfering* food and water occurred (AR 1914). When the missionary, Rod Schenk, arrived at Laverton in the early twenties, Aborigines lived out by the tip, near the dam, and "gathered furtively to share spoils of the morning's begging around town". Schenk's daughter records that the traditional food supply was shot out and a drought was on, so that the Aborigines used to scavenge and beg in the mining camps and the youngest wives were sold for flour, tea, sugar and tobacco (Morgan 1985:9-11).

Government monitoring

The migration of the desert people to the settled areas, of which Laverton was the first town to the west, alarmed the authorities and attempts were made to deter and control the drift. In part, the government was reluctant to support a dependent population and did not want the desert Aboriginal people to abandon their traditional means of survival and become a pauperised and parasitical population prone to begging and thieving. At this time, in the district, there were limited employment opportunities, with European employers not actively encouraging an increase in the availability of Aboriginal labour. In addition, in the settled areas, there was the undesirable influence of prospectors and other Europeans who were likely to supply the forbidden commodity, alcohol, and engage in sexual relations with Aboriginal women. With a reputation for being a 'wild and violent' people, 'contact' between large numbers of desert people and the small European population who had the 'frontier' reputation for disregarding government authority, was perceived as potentially explosive and likely to cause grief to the Aboriginal people.

Ideally, the distribution of rations was meant to be motivated by the benevolent wish to assist the indigent - the sick and elderly Aboriginal people incapable of looking after themselves. Rationing, however, became a crucial tool in the war against migration and as a method of preventing the killing of livestock. Until the 1920s, rations were distributed in the district by police at places such as Laverton, Morgans, and Linden. From Pukungka and Vera's accounts of their childhood journeys, it is clear people were influenced in their movements and where they stayed by the availability of rations. Thus, though rations were issued to reduce begging and thieving, they also had the effect of encouraging people to remain close to or to visit settled areas.

The local whites and the authorities may have disapproved of Aboriginal people wandering and travelling, but they were clearly against the Aboriginal people settling in towns. Wherever possible, the Aboriginal people were corralled into allocated 'spaces' - to eat on the woodheap on the edge of the station house, to reside on camping reserves and on Mission settlements. Much of the impetus for social segregation derived from the obsession with miscegenation, and Biskup (1973:43-44) associates the real deterioration in Aborigines' legal status before World War 1 with the increase in the number of 'half-castes'. Rowley (1972) writes:

"Until 1954 there had been an emphasis on preventing miscegenation, expressed in laws which purported to keep others away from natives 'camps', and laws which enabled a local Police Protector to order natives to remove their camping places to a distance from such town or municipality as he may direct; the Governor by proclamation, to declare any municipality out of bounds for all natives except those in employment, and any police officer or justice of the peace to order any native out of town. These laws enabled local apartheid traditions to develop in Western Australia. They were repealed in 1954" (Rowley 1972:68).

Although the overriding objective was to 'assimilate' part-Aboriginal people into the white population, constraints were placed on the movement of Aboriginal people to reduce their numbers in or near towns. According to Rowley, in large part the pressure to keep Aborigines away from towns was generated by local white residents - "the basic hindrance to urbanisation [of Aborigines], not only in 'colonial' but also in 'settled' Australia, has been the vulnerability of central administration to pressures from the local government bodies; or, where they do not exist, from the white citizens and property holders in the towns" (Rowley 1972:21)³⁵.

In 1921, when Rod Schenk arrived in Laverton, each day at midday, the Aboriginal people were chased out of the town by the police constable, on horseback, wielding a stockwhip. The local police sergeant was purported to have said:

"Government policy, you know, my job is to send them out bush so that they will go out in hunting bands throughout the country and not make a nuisance of themselves near the town" (Morgan 1985:6,7).

Other local responses to the presence of Aboriginal people in town and its environs, was to forcibly send children and adults away. Part-Aboriginal children were taken from their caregivers and placed in institutions, and adults were sentenced to detention for criminal acts. Morgan (1986:15) recounts how Schenk was told of Aboriginal children hiding in the bush in fear of the police. However, she notes that "it is easy in these days to point the finger at the police, but it must be remembered that they were carrying out government policy, and government policy was coloured by the wishes of local townspeople who in the main wanted the 'problem' out of sight" (ibid 15). Morgan (1986:15) claims there were stories from the early days of Aboriginal people being arrested with cuffs and necklaces, and of long sentences for *petty theft* and being sent to Rottnest island, near Perth, and Mogumber³⁶.

³⁵ Biskup (1973:79) stresses how in the south of WA, local government authorities and parent and citizens (P & C) associations had an all pervasive influence, with their demands for social isolation, on Aboriginal policy. By 1915 Aboriginal children were virtually excluded from state schools throughout the region and although Aboriginal people were entitled to free medical treatment and to free hospitalisation in government and in assisted hospitals, Aboriginal patients were invariably segregated in separate wards (Biskup 1973:147-148).

³⁶ An incident, where a group of local Aboriginal adults were removed to Mogumber (located on the coast and also known as Moore River) in about 1921, is recorded in Morgan's book. With considerable relish, she describes how the group soon escaped and made their way back to Laverton. It is not clear whether this particular act of forcible removal of people to Mogumber was an isolated incident. Certainly, as Morgan explains, the Chief Protector had the power to authorise such actions - "under the Aborigines Act 1905 the Chief Protector became guardian of all Aborigines and part-Aborigines to 16 years of age. He had power under the Act to remove people from one place to another as he thought best for them, without reference to any other authority, with the Police Department to carry out his directives" (Morgan 1985:21).

Local non-Aborigines were inclined to claim they had superior local knowledge when it came to dealing with the Aboriginal population. The prospector Mason (1909:57) was critical of contemporary penal practices. He believed that sending Aboriginal people away to prison did not act as a deterrent, and that the experience of imprisonment developed 'native cunning and treachery' and was looked upon as a picnic. Education he thought was even worse because it produced even bigger scoundrels and it meant "goodbye to all further control over them". According to Mason, it was educated natives' who in reality pulled the strings behind most native depredations'. Anticipating an outcry over his proposal to emasculate Aboriginal men, Mason (1909:59) predicted the cries of horror would emanate from people (in the cities and overseas) totally unacquainted with the subject and he recommended such people reside outback for a few years. He also criticised the government for appointing protectors without experience (p.55).

The department charged with the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of the state's Aboriginal population, though the state promulgated the rhetoric of protection, had scant resources allocated to the task. Short of staff, finance and political leverage, there was a lack of administration generally but most notably in the more remote parts. Due to the small size of the department³⁷, much of the authority conveyed by the legislation was delegated to local protectors³⁸, even though the responsible Minister and the Chief Protector still acted as gatekeepers, as their approval was required for such things as nominating reserve areas, and deciding upon the number of rations to be issued in the district.

In an effort to afford protection to Aborigines, Biskup (1973:30) refers to the government asserting its 'monopoly of justice' over the settlers once the pioneering days drew to a close. Biskup claims the implementation of the policy was hampered by huge areas, by the distance from centre of government, and by the persistence of a "settler attitude" among the Europeans, often including local officials. The government tried to lay down conditions of employment and to impress upon the settlers its determination to prosecute all acts of violence committed against the Aborigines (Biskup 1973:30,31). The application of these good intentions, for obvious reasons, left much to be desired, not least because Aboriginal people were less likely to report offences, Aboriginal witnesses were vulnerable to intimidation, and the evidence of Aboriginal witnesses was ignored, not understood, or did not conform to exact testimony. The Chief Protector, Neville, in the 1927 Annual Report complains of the complete ignorance of whites of the Aboriginal language spoken, and as "intelligent interpreters" were hard to find, he claimed "some witnesses in court [were] farcical". Biskup (1973:36) states it was hard to know the proportion of Aborigines who were under contract of service, but the protective clauses of the master and servant legislation were of little use to Aborigines, who Biskup asserts, were more likely to run away than complain to a magistrate.

³⁷ Biskup (1973) records that in the inter-war period, 60% of departmental budget was spent on relief (rations). In 1906 the department comprised the Chief Protector and one clerk-in-charge, and by 1936 it had expanded to the Chief Protector, one clerk-in-charge, and five clerks. From 1925 to 1930 there was one travelling inspector for the whole state (Biskup 1973:74-75).

³⁸ After the 1905 Act was introduced, all government residents, resident magistrates, inspectors and sub-inspectors were appointed as protectors. Sixteen police constables and 15 private individuals (pastoralists, ministers of religion and missionaries) were also delegated to act as protectors (Biskup 1973).

For local information on the Aboriginal population from 1913 to the 1920s the Chief Protector relied almost entirely upon reports from the local protectors, usually the police. Each year, local protectors reported on the size of the population, on the 'conduct' and the 'well-being' of the Aboriginal population (including deaths, diseases, and ill-treatment) and provided statistics on the numbers employed, and the numbers rationed³⁹.

The Chief Protector, Neville, from his personal knowledge of the Goldfields and concerned about the welfare and diminishing numbers of the local Aboriginal people, recommended to the United Aborigines Mission (UAM)⁴⁰ missionary, Rod Schenk, that he establish a mission in the area, at that time an unusual choice as mission activity was predominantly confined to the north-west and south-west of the state. Initially therefore Neville approved of, and supported the mission established by Schenk, Mount Margaret, as it could act as a sanctuary, as a place of protection for the local Aboriginal people who had already moved from the desert, and who, at least while resident on the outskirts of Laverton and the nearby mining camps, ceased to be self-supporting and resorted to living off rations and the acquisition through various means of European goods.

During the 1920s and 1930s support for mission activity was an essential part of administrative policy. Although under the 1905 Act, the Chief Protector had legal powers to establish training institutions for the education of full-blood and part-Aboriginal children, there was no money available and religious institutions were virtually the only avenue for education for Aboriginal children. Departmental support for the Mount Margaret mission during the twenties included placing part-Aboriginal children at the mission, and allowing the mission to issue rations.

The turning point for the Mount Margaret mission, according to Stanton (1984:103), was in 1927 when the local police-protector decided to place the first wards, part-Aboriginal children, at Mount Margaret. It was the part Aboriginal children who were subject to police intervention as Morgan explains:

"Government policy compelled part-white children to stay in the Graham Homes [Mount Margaret], the other alternative being Moore River Settlement. ...For the full-blood child it was a different matter. The parents had to see the need for education and leave their children" (Morgan 1985:141).

However, Pukungka recalls 'full-blood' children also being taken by police and placed at Mount Margaret and in later years, at Cosmo Newberry:

³⁹ The reliability of this information is questionable and the population statistics have to be treated cautiously. This was acknowledged in various reports - for example the 1924 Annual Report notes that it was very difficult to estimate population numbers in outlying districts and that the fall off in numbers may not be an actual increase in deaths but partially due to migratory habits. The 1942 Annual Report concedes that there was no system of counting, and that as protectors guess the numbers and that 'nomadic habits' make it difficult to count, these were unreliable and probably an over-estimate. It is hard to assess the contemporary impact of local protectors' district reports, on official actions and the formulation of policy.

⁴⁰ The United Aborigines Mission was called the Australia Aborigines Mission until 1929, when the name was changed.

"...in those days the police used to grab any half-caste kids they saw... We black kids was frightened too because they used to collect every fullblood kid in the camp if they saw any and send them all to Mount Margaret or Cosmo Newberry to go to school" (Pukungka and Muir 1990:6-7).

For a while, in the 1920s there were friendly relations between Schenk and Neville. Schenk was made a local protector and in the twenties he forwarded two reports to the department. In 1927 Neville decided rations for the area around Laverton should be issued solely at Mount Margaret and Laverton⁴¹. In 1928 a small portion of the mission lease was gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve and in 1930 Neville defended Schenk in the newspaper, the *West Australian* by saying he was "no sluggard" (Biskup 1973:138,139). However, this state of affairs, as will be shown later, did not last into the thirties.

Mission days

Rod Schenk was the first missionary in the region⁴². Appalled by the conditions of Aboriginal people in Laverton, and frustrated by his lack of contact with them, Rod Schenk decided a mission was required away from the township. Despite opposition from the local police, pastoralists and the Road Board (which had the power of veto of land applications), he was given a three month lease by the Premier's Department in 1922, for a compound of 80 hectares within the 2310 hectare common at Mount Margaret (Morgan 1985:30) which in the 1920s was the one of the few remaining portions of unalienated land to the west of Laverton (Stanton 1984:94). Located 30 kilometres from the town of Laverton, the mission relied on donations from UAM supporters in the eastern states and the barest of government assistance. By the 1930s the mission included dormitories for the Aboriginal children, a classroom, workrooms and a hospital.

In the ensuing years many Aboriginal children, wards of the state, grew up at the Mission, which acted as a refuge for part-Aboriginal children⁴³ who might otherwise be taken away to government settlements and as a place where Aboriginal parents, should they so choose, could leave their children. Although many parents took up employment elsewhere, the missionaries did encourage the parents to stay at the Mission, although the children were only allowed to visit the camps at weekends⁴⁴(Stanton 1984:106).

The Aboriginal children in the homes were subject to western notions of time, space, productive labour and individualism, through the western pedagogic techniques and routines of education and training. The daily life of children at the mission followed a

⁴¹ The Chief Protector authorised the numbers to be rationed, and the sites at which rations were to be distributed, which gave the Chief Protector a measure of power over the missionaries. In later years, because the Mount Margaret missionaries were suspected of attracting the Aboriginal people from the desert, other places were nominated as distribution points for rations, including the depot at Mulga Queen and the reserve established at Cosmo Newberry in 1940.

⁴² Subsequent missions formed a 'ring' on the western rim of the desert, including those at Ernabella, Coonana, Wiluna, Jigalong, and Balgo.

⁴³ Vera, who was one such child, remembered having her face blackened when they travelled to Kalgoorlie. After several visits to Mount Margaret, she finally went in the home in 1930 after Schenk 'caught' her, and her family were given rations as compensation.

⁴⁴ One of the reasons that relations between Neville and the mission soured was that the latter did not follow the official policy of segregating children of mixed parentage from Aboriginal kin.

routine, and in many respects was 'institutional'. Resident in the dormitories, their world centred on the activities in the Mission - the schooling, handicrafts, domestic chores, and Christian practices, all of which were separated into male and female domains - with limited visits to the 'outside' world. It should be noted, though, that many still retained contact with their kin, and not all children were left there. For instance, in a departmental annual report, Schenk complained that not all children had returned after the school holidays.

Education and changing environmental conditions were seen as important adjuncts to evangelisation (Stanton 1984:95). According to Stanton (1984:103) it was the "educational project that would distinguish Mt Margaret from many other missions of the period; the remarkable achievements of the school in literacy and numeracy remains the singular success for which the Mission is remembered". Based on the state school curriculum, the emphasis was on personal hygiene, money transactions and Bible history (Biskup 1973:132-133). Much of this educational achievement was attributed to Mrs Bennett, who arrived from Kunmunya in 1933 and who introduced simple but effective teaching methods which involved the use of visual aids.

Mount Margaret was the only WA mission in the inter-war years with a program of education which went beyond basic skills and proper hospital facilities. Morgan (1986:62) describes how the missionaries taught the work ethic - no work, no tucker according to the 'little black book' - as a Biblical injunction. The mission's motto of "Not Money but Sin Spoils", combined with Schenk's preference for practical vocational training, encouraged the Aboriginal 'inmates' of the mission to have a degree of independence unparalleled elsewhere (Biskup 1973:132). There was a stress on economic independence and self-sufficient industry at the mission and if a person could not find employment elsewhere, there were efforts to find paid work for him or her at the Mission.

At Mount Margaret girls were trained in domestic work, and the older women were instructed in raffia work for which they were paid daily. Some of the girls would later go elsewhere to undertake vocational training, notably Sadie Canning as a nurse and May O'Brien as a teacher⁴⁵. In 1935 or 1936, the men started a small mining battery. Although the Mining Act prohibited the employment of Aborigines on mining tenements, a loophole failed to disbar Aborigines from acquiring tenements. As a consequence the Mount Margaret men applied for small leases and crushed their own ore for a small fee at the battery.

Schenk's advocacy of decent wages, and the fostering of independent activities and judicious expenditure by Aboriginal men on commodities such as cars, bikes, and building materials, was ill-received amongst the local pastoralists and opposed by some church groups and other Mission supporters who did not approve of involvement in commercial enterprises (Stanton 1984:111). The local pastoralists wanted a docile cheap labourforce, whilst Schenk had called for better pay and working conditions, and he had set up self-supporting enterprises which enabled Aboriginal men at least to be self-employed and economically independent. As indicated earlier, the establishment of the mission was opposed by local white powerbrokers, and Biskup (1973:123)

⁴⁵ Sadie Canning eventually returned to the district as matron of the Leonora hospital, and May O'Brien has published many books.

describes how Rod Schenk continued to have difficulties with the local white population.

Local opposition

In September 1921 Schenk accused the Laverton police of irregularities in the distribution of relief and later in the year he sent an undiplomatic letter to Neville criticising the removal of an Aboriginal group to Mogumber. By 1924, Biskup (1973) claims Schenk was persona non grata in the district particularly with pastoralists who complained that the Aborigines were demanding payment in cash for their work. In addition, the mission broke the Laverton shopkeepers' monopoly on dog scalps, for which the government paid a bounty. In 1925, the local Road Board refused to pay for Mount Margaret scalps on obscure technical grounds, and thenceforth Schenk had to send the skins direct to the Department of Agriculture.

The secretary of the Mount Margaret Road Board said:

"Before this so called mission station was established in this district the natives were a comparatively quiet lot and gave little or no trouble, but now they threaten the sandalwood cutters and the prospectors, marauding up and down the country like a regiment of soldiers" (SAWA Police 1972/1921).

Old native welfare files reveal voluminous correspondence on specific local concerns and incidents. Dogs, either because of the money made from their scalps or because the ones kept by Aboriginal people were believed to attack livestock, were a constant source of friction. Pukungka recalled an incident when two policemen came to a camp and shot the dogs, presumably because the "squatters" did not like "too many camp dogs in the one place when all the wongkais came together". The Aboriginal people were very upset - "the old people didn't like it at all, but couldn't do nothing about it because the policemen had guns and they only had spears ...we was too sorry about the dogs to stay [on the station]" and as the 'old people' were angry with the 'squatters' they killed a sheep on another property (Pukungka and Muir 1990:7-9).

In the 1920s, many letters were forwarded to the Chief Protector, Neville, after Rod Schenk complained about the police shooting the Aborigines' dogs at the request of the pastoralists. Aside from the correspondence from Schenk and the local police officer Gravestock and the District Inspector of Police, Neville also received letters and submissions on this topic from local Road Board members, members of parliament, pastoralists, and an Aboriginal man, named Mr Green, from Mulga Queen.

Another strong-minded individual from the Mission, Mrs Bennett, was not likely to have enjoyed the goodwill of local pastoralists. An activist concerned primarily with the welfare of Aboriginal women, she was a very public and vocal critic of the pastoralists and the 'traditional power' of the old Aboriginal men. Titled 'Allegations of Slavery' her 1932 article in the newspaper *West Australian* described the suffering inflicted on Aboriginal women by the "cruel institution of polygamy". According to Bennett, the police and pastoralists frequently engaged in sexual relations with Aboriginal women. Morgan (1986:224) claims that after the mission's establishment and up till the 1930s, relations between the missionaries and the police had varied depending on the local officer-in-charge, who was the more senior protector than a

clergyman. Morgan alleges that there were seven officers up until the thirties and that five had lived with Aboriginal women, four of whom were very cruel.

In 1934 Mrs Bennett, in her testimony before the Moseley Royal Commission, accused the pastoralists of slavery methods and of treating the Aboriginal people as property. She alleged that traditional customs had been commercialised by the pastoralists bargaining with the old men for the old men's surplus wives and for the unpaid labour of young men. She described how white men applied to a police officer to obtain a permit for workers, with the employer conducting the recruitment and not paying wages. A settler told her that he had "had to keep on the right side of the local officer or he might refuse me niggers to work my stations" (Morgan 1985:158).

Both Rod Schenk and Mrs Bennett were outspoken critics of local conditions and, as they saw it, of the 'dereliction of duty' by the government and the administration. Mrs Bennett's 1930 publication *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, was a plea for the federal control of Aboriginal affairs and a scathing attack on the Western Australian Aboriginal administration. In June 1933 the newspaper the *Daily News* published extracts from a 'survey' prepared by Mrs Bennett for the 1933 Conference of the British Empire League in London and in which Bennett criticised the government for neglecting Aboriginal education, for deliberately encouraging polygamy (in the interests of pastoralists), and for the practice of placing half-caste women "at the disposal of the police" (Biskup 1973:93-95).

Both Schenk and Bennett sought to convince the public of the 'educability' of Aboriginal children, and contrary to popular opinion at the time, they stressed that Aboriginal children had the same abilities as their white counterparts. Schenk in 1935 wrote "they can master the lessons that white children learn quite as quickly and completely as they can" (Stanton 1984:113). In 1938 Schenk first raised the question of the government supplying properly trained teachers seven years before the Department of Education provided the first teachers to Aboriginal settlements (Biskup 1973:133). This belief that the 'natives' should be, and were capable of being, educated was not shared by many in the scientific community who still argued there were genetic differences between the races, and many white town residents who wanted Aboriginal children prohibited from attending schools because they were physically unclean and morally impure⁴⁶.

In comparison to many missions, for example Jigalong, Mount Margaret had a considerable number of conversions through the "selective salvation of part-European children" (Stanton 1984:134). Prayer-letters from the missionaries to their supporters

⁴⁶ Under the 1893 Education Act educational authorities could exclude because of infections, contagious disease or otherwise injurious to the health or welfare of the children. In wheatbelt towns white parents refused to have Aboriginal children in schools and there were complaints of "foul smelling bodies and their dirty habits". In late 1936, under pressure from P & Cs in the south-west, the Minister of Education reversed the earlier ruling by Director of Education which prohibited teachers from expelling Aboriginal pupils on their own initiative. From then on the suspension of children was allowed on the grounds that "their home surroundings or low morals [were] not fit for association with white children". Early in 1937 Aboriginal children were expelled from a wheatbelt town when the local P & C complained they "lacked for elements of knowledge of physical and moral cleanliness" (Biskup 1973:149-152). In 1542 the Director of Education ruled that future objections had to be substantiated by proof that child was "habitually unclean or infected with disease" (Biskup 1973:203).

alleged converts as early as 1928, with mostly girls and women proclaiming their faith. The first baptism was not till 1932 because the missionaries considered the traditional beliefs still too strong in peoples' minds (Stanton 1984:106). In the same year the first Christian weddings of four couples took place at the mission (Stanton 1984:109). All the hallmarks of bourgeois respectability - neat appearance, cleanliness, weddings, tennis - were encouraged at the mission. The comparatively successful level of conversions was attained, in Stanton's opinion (p.131), largely through the prolonged segregation of children from parents, the prohibition of the local vernacular in school⁴⁷ and the ridiculing of traditional religious beliefs.

The 1957 Select Committee of Inquiry endorsed the effective nature of the missionary work in the Laverton-Warburton area by 'taming' the Aborigines through the inculcation of a different cosmology:

"It is not sufficient to break down many of the practices and beliefs which have sustained the natives in the past notwithstanding that many of their practices are barbaric to the extreme, unless an alternative philosophy of life is presented to them... The missionaries, of course, are well suited to teach such an alternative philosophy. This aspect is being adequately dealt with" (Report of the Select Committee of Inquiry 1957:10).

Schenk's attitude to 'traditional culture' was typical of UAM which worked towards a speedy breakdown of practically all customs and traditions and which were called "works of Satan" and "dark superstitions" (Biskup 1973:133, Stanton 1984:101). Practices that were forbidden by the missionaries included infant betrothals, polygamy, avoidance, and ochre in women's hair (Stanton 1984:99,102). According to his daughter, Rod Schenk believed the "old law" was the way of fear and death and she describes Schenk going into battle with the elders over the killing of two young men who had disobeyed tribal law (Morgan 1985:110). When Aboriginal law conflicted with God's law of right and wrong, her father would explain to the Aboriginal people that their "law" was not in the "little black book" and Morgan (1985:62) regretfully states it took a long while for the Aboriginal people to accept the truth of the Bible.

Due to the missionaries' opposition, much of traditional life was kept secret and the missionaries were shocked in 1930 when there was a huge ceremony at Mount Margaret. As the ceremony coincided with the visit of Dr Elkin the anthropologist, he was blamed for reviving the ceremony (Biskup 1973:133). Mrs Bennett during the Moseley Royal Commission inquiry publicly accused Elkin of encouraging sorcery practices, and in 1935 when the anthropologist and student of Elkin, Kaberry, tried to stay at the Mission she was not well received (Morgan 1985:197).

The hostile attitude towards anthropologists and to scientists generally was exacerbated in the thirties by disagreement over the future of the Central Reserves (Biskup 1973:133). Neville wrote to Schenk in which he explained:

⁴⁷ Various local people, including Vera and a former missionary, said that some missionaries understood and spoke a local vernacular. Morgan (1985:61) states that her parents, the Schenks, decided to learn a working knowledge of the dialect most spoken. They believed Aboriginal people had the ability to be bilingual, but decided English should be the lingua franca because of the number of dialects in the district and to enable economic opportunities.

"It may interest you to know that certain scientists attached to the Adelaide University are seeking to establish a buffer area around the large reserve above referred to, with the object of leaving the natives entirely to themselves, presumably as subjects for further ethnological investigations" (Morgan 1985:142).

Schenk was not impressed by the proposal and he told Neville that the scientists were trying to keep the Aboriginal people for museum pieces and that, in direct contrast to the missionaries who wanted to save souls, the scientists and anthropologists wanted to drag the Aboriginal people back to hell. In subsequent letters to Neville, Schenk argued that there was enough room for government and missionary, that the scientists' desire to keep many natives entirely to themselves as "museum pieces" would be unsuccessful, and that the Aborigines needed the protection of the missionaries. He wrote:

"It appears strange that in a Christian country we missionaries and protectors of natives have to enter an Aboriginal reserve on the same conditions as a prospector or dog scalper, only that if he finds gold he can settle in and the natives turned out, while we missionaries are prevented from settling down" (Morgan 1985:167).

Government support

The Chief Protector, Neville, was always lukewarm in his practical support for the UAM work at Mount Margaret and later on, at the Warburton mission. Along with the constant struggle for official approval, the UAM received no financial assistance, aside from rations for their inmates, for many years (Morgan 1985:138). Certainly, the authorities felt obliged to monitor the local situation. Responding to complaints from the local whites, in particular the pastoralists, the Inspector of Police and the Secretary of the Aborigines' Department inspected the Mission in 1925, and the Inspector of Police visited in 1928 (Morgan 1985:87,108,116). According to annual reports, Neville undertook personal visits to the district almost every year - in 1927, 1928, in 1929 with the Minister, and in 1931 and 1933.

The government's philosophy was articulated in 1938 when the Chief Secretary said:

"Missionaries virtually claim they own the natives body and soul... we claim they are first and last a charge upon the State... our duty is to ensure that the job is efficiently handled and undertaken by those best qualified to do it" (Biskup 1973:185).

After 1930 there was a deterioration in relations between the administration and the UAM, which was growing rapidly and which differed from many other missionary church groups in its fundamentalist theology and the way much of the work was done by itinerant missionaries without adequate financial support (Biskup 1973). Furthermore, there was a marked cooling in the dealings between the two men - Neville and Schenk - to the point where they were adversaries.

Biskup (1973: 186) asserts a "paranoid suspicion" developed between Schenk and Neville, who were both "headstrong and self-righteous men". At one stage Neville had threatened to cancel the Mount Margaret reserve and to revoke Schenk's certificate of protectorship. In 1936 Schenk's application for a goldbuyer's licence was turned down by the Department of Mines on Neville's recommendation and Neville refused, in 1937, Schenk's application to start a mission at Cosmo Newberry and later, for a lease

of Crown Land at Wodjina in the Port Hedland district, in order to "thwart Schenk's imperialist designs". Schenk, however, did manage to obtain land at Kellerberrin.

The antagonism between Neville and Schenk, and their successors developed because, firstly, the missions were believed to be 'profiteering' from government subsidies by exchanging scalps, brought in by Aboriginal people, for rations. In addition, the missionaries were suspected of using the rations to attract the 'full bloods' away from their hunting and gathering existence in the desert and into the settlements. Second, contrary to government policy and more importantly Neville's wishes, the missionaries encouraged marriage between full- and part-Aboriginal people⁴⁸.

To make matters worse, from the administration's point of view, the missionaries inflamed local opinion around Laverton and became embroiled in local hostilities particularly over the issue of wages to pastoral workers, even though Neville was personally sympathetic to the cause of improving work conditions and tried to bring the issue to the government's attention on many occasions.

Areas of concern to the welfare authorities, therefore, were the manner in which the missionaries conducted their financial affairs, their treatment of the Aborigines, and their relations with local European groups and individuals such as the pastoralists. As a result, as the years went by, the missionaries at Mount Margaret were frequently viewed with suspicion and irritation.

In a move apparently designed to block the missionaries, who wished to purchase the pastoral property Cosmo Newberry located 112 kilometres north-east from Laverton, the 1939 Annual Report announces the establishment of Cosmo Newberry, a reserve of 339,645 acres. Two rationales were provided:

"Cosmo Newberry (sic) is situated ideally as a feeding depot. It is 58 miles north-east of Laverton and right in the path of natives coming into civilization. It is an intercepting point, as it were" (AR 1941:9, my emphasis).

"... native affairs in the Laverton district having become difficult in many important respects... It has become necessary for the sake of the community generally to draw the natives from the towns in the district, where considerable trouble has been occasioned in recent years through intercourse between whites and natives involving of course the supply of liquor to the latter" (AR 1939:6, my emphasis).

The first manager appointed to Cosmo Newberry, A.J. Donegan, visited the mining areas in the district and "arranged" for all 'indigent natives', including those from around Laverton and Mount Margaret, to go to the depot.

"Previously there had been many complaints of stealing, mainly from miners' camps, but these and other nuisances have lessened since the Depot was brought into being" (AR 1941:9, my emphasis).

⁴⁸The 1936 Native Administration Act allowed the Commissioner to prohibit marriages against tribal custom. For Neville, this meant two things - an insistence on proper tribal relationships and obtaining elders' consent to the marriage. Although the Act did not grant full recognition to tribal marriages, Regulation 106, which was drawn up after consultations with Elkin, allowed for the estate of a deceased person to be distributed according to the social structure of his/her tribe. In addition, 'tribal wives' could not be compellable witnesses in the Court of Native Affairs, and this was later extended to proceedings in the Supreme Court (Biskup 1973:184).

Although Neville retired a few months after Cosmo Newberry was set up as a ration depot⁴⁹, his successors continued with similar policies at least through the war years (Biskup 1973:250-251). During the forties and fifties, Cosmo Newberry acted as a prison farm for Aboriginal prisoners⁵⁰, until the reserve was handed over to the UAM in 1953 (Howitt 1990:55). According to a local pastoralist, Ian Marlow, in an interview with me *'the missionaries at Cosmo gathered up the orphans, the unwanted.... The missionaries thought they were doing the right thing, as they believed the part-Aboriginal children were neglected, and they wanted to save them and give them schooling'*.

Beyond Laverton

In the early 1930s, there was a flurry of interest in prospecting in the Central Reserves and an application for a pastoral lease of 192,000 acres, which was refused (AR 1930:12). Although there were a series of prospecting parties in 1932 and 1933 investigating the mineral potential of the Central Reserves, neither mining nor mining settlements were started until the latter half of the 1950s.

Due, presumably, to the short outburst of interest in the mineral potential of the Central Reserves, the government undertook preliminary surveying work in the Reserves. The 1935 anthropological expedition party, comprising Tindale, Hackett, Stocker and Mountford, travelled by motor lorry from Laverton to Warburton on two washed out wheel tracks made by a government surveying party in 1932, which followed an old camel route pioneered by a dogger (Tindale 1936a:481). In a footnote, Tindale (1936b:174) refers to a series of official bench marks in 1932 and found in contemporary WA maps of the Laverton-Warburton area. Once the outbreak of interest in mining had died down, the government seems to have, in the ensuing decades until the 1950s, left it to the missionaries to consolidate and maintain the road between Laverton and Warburton.

In the early thirties, three prospecting parties had returned from the Warburtons, and an Aboriginal man who accompanied one of the parties, reported to the missionaries that two Aborigines had been shot by white 'doggers', north east of Warburton (Morgan 1985:134). Commenting on the apprehension felt by the Aboriginal people when they saw white people in the desert, Morgan (1985:147) claims that "doggers habitually shot Aborigines' dogs, took their scalps and used their women". The 1931 Annual Report included the news that in December 1930, 'natives' were allegedly shot at Warburton, and Neville asked the Commissioner of Police to instruct the members of a police party (who were originally sent to investigate the alleged murder of two white men by natives), to make further inquiries as to the treatment of natives generally in the district by prospectors and others.

⁴⁹ Pukungka describes how at Cosmo Newberry Aboriginal people worked constructing brush fences for the 'proper hard boss', in exchange for rations. Her father's aunt, although a good worker, became 'wild' when Donnegan refused to give her the rations she believed she deserved, so she left with Pukungka, and other people, and they went on a long journey in country north of Cosmo for what Pukungka estimates was at least a year (Pukungka and Muir 1990:11)

⁵⁰ According to a local pastoralist *'the farm had local prisoners, mostly Aboriginal, who were sent out there after being caught on stealing charges. The prisoners had to work for their food supplies'*. However, the local Wongi woman, Vera, said mostly non-local Aborigines were sent to the prison farm.

The prospecting parties (of which there appears to have been at least six in 1932-33) which had ventured into the "somewhat forbidding country east of Laverton towards the SA border in search of gold" had to comply with a set of conditions including a 100 pound bond and an undertaking not to interfere or molest 'the natives', not to take ethnological specimens, and to supply the Department with positives of photos taken, before permits were granted for them to enter the Central Reserves (AR 1932:8).

The 1932 Annual Report announced that the police party returned in November 1931 and reported there were no grounds for any complaint of ill-treatment of natives in the Central Reserves. Despite the findings of the police party, one of the reasons given for establishing the Warburton mission, on the edge of the Central Reserves, was according to Morgan (1985:140), to protect the Aboriginal people from the doggers and prospectors, and "to lead the natives to Christ".

Schenk wrote to the Chief Protector, Neville, asking for land to establish a mission in the West Australian side of the Central Reserves, and received a reply nearly a year later in 1933 which recommended a deferral of such a plan because there was "a proposal for joint action on the part of neighbouring States with West Australia to establish some sort of Settlement or station within this area, but that this idea was in abeyance due to finance" (Morgan 1985:142).

Still uncertain of Neville's response and after conducting three expeditions to the area the missionaries with the assistance of Aborigines from Mount Margaret, set up a settlement just outside the Central Reserves, to which Neville gave conditional approval in 1935 (Morgan 1985). In the 1932 Annual Report, Neville expresses regret that his recommendation that the WA Aboriginal reserves should be classified Class A (that is inalienable) had not been pursued by the government.

In addition to the personal antagonism between Schenk and Neville, relations between the UAM and the department had reached 'breaking point' in April 1938 because of the introduction of regulations for the 'licensing' of missions (Biskup 1973). The missionaries believed departmental tactics were designed to create discord amongst critics of the department, to cause conflict between missions and churches and to set Protestants against Catholics (Morgan 1985:238). Late in 1939 an official party visiting Mount Margaret was snubbed by missionaries and 'inmates', and Neville later described it as an act of serious disloyalty. In 1940 the department cancelled Schenk's protectorship because of his 'subversive propaganda' against the department and transferred to the police the distribution of government rations. Although Neville retired in 1940, and relations were more cordial for a while, Mount Margaret continued to receive the 'lion's share' of criticism from the department until a whole new welfare regime was introduced in the fifties (Biskup 1973:215).

Modern times

Before the seventies, the town of Laverton was still small, so small that in 1963 plane destined for Laverton landed at Mount Margaret mission by mistake (Stanton 1984:123). A 1957 press release to protest the closing of the railway line describes Laverton as a town of 340 people, and the local industries are listed as gold, wool and sandalwood, with the stations employing 80 men and providing seasonal work for 20

shearers. The press release stresses the isolation and the lack of amenities by describing how there was no other transport, no roads, no power, and the children only went to sixth grade at the local school (*Daily News* 13/2/57). By 1967 the town of Laverton had one main street, two general stores, a pub and school catering for a population of 35 'Caucasians' and a 'native population' which fluctuated between 250 and 400 inhabitants (May and Wild 1967:207).

In the 1950s and 1960s there was a dispersal of Aboriginal people through the region. Contributing factors included the repealing of the more restrictive legislation which affected Aboriginal people, and drought conditions and the disruptive activities in the Central Reserves created by mining companies, the Giles weather station and the Woomera Rocket Range. Another important factor may have been the security of a regular income, as more Aboriginal people took advantage of the Commonwealth social security payments.

The fortunes and the size of the Aboriginal populations at the UAM mission settlements varied. The population at Cosmo Newberry remained fairly constant, there was a boom in numbers at Warburton⁵¹, and the population declined at Mount Margaret Mission. In the 1950s and 60s Aboriginal people spread out from Mount Margaret to towns, as the Native Welfare Act had enabled access to jobs, schools and hospitals, and as exemption certificates were abolished in 1961 (Morgan 1985:268,271). Consideration was given to the closure of the mission in the mid-1960s but there remained a core of approximately 70 Aboriginal adults who still regarded the place as home even though the majority no longer lived there. They were pivotal in ensuring the place continued to exist as a settlement and were responsible in the seventies for the formation of the Aboriginal Movement for Outback Survival, which took over control of the settlement (Stanton 1984:125-130).

The 1957 Select Committee had this to say on employment opportunities in the Warburton-Laverton area:

"Since there are no industries at the Warburton Ranges with the exception of a small flock of sheep and a herd of cattle at the Mission, there is no future for educated children there at present and their only hope of going on to employment would be to drift into the settled areas of Laverton and beyond.

There are already several hundred natives in the Laverton area and there is not the slightest shadow of doubt that there is not sufficient work in the district for them. Furthermore, there are no developments contemplated in the district, or which can be visualised in the future which would affect this position to any great extent. The natives at present in the Laverton area continue to lead a nomadic form of existence, depending on the game in the area and other natural foods to eke out a living. From time to time those - and there are many of them - who have been trained in stock work and other station pursuits obtain a limited amount of employment, but this, with few exceptions, is purely seasonal. For instance, prior to and during mustering there is call for a number of natives for mustering purposes.

⁵¹ In 1956 the Select Committee of Inquiry estimated there were about 500 Aborigines around Laverton (with 200 living in 'gunyahs') and 400 Aborigines around Warburton with 200 to 300 visitors from across the South Australian border. The burden of this large population at Warburton in the nineteen sixties was relieved when Docker River opened in 1968 (Glass 1978:8).

Another and most objectionable feature of station life in the Laverton area is that little or no facilities are provided by the pastoralists for native workers" (Report of the Select Committee 1957:11).

Rowley (1972:63) reproduces the results of a survey, conducted in the sixties, of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry in the area around Kalgoorlie and Leonora. A total of twenty-six stations were inspected by the officers of the Department of Native Welfare because they employed 'native' labour - a total of 55 male workers and eight women. The numbers had dwindled, according to Rowley, because Aboriginal people had moved into towns and few properties continued to maintain large workforces. Employment on pastoral stations in the Laverton district declined in the 1960s, although Cosmo Newberry continued to act as a place for 'training' in station hand skills up until the late 1970s. Like many station owners and managers, a local pastoralist blamed the introduction of award wages for the laying off of the Aboriginal labourforce:

Ian: Award wages and full drinking rights brought in mid 60s. Minister Lewis came through here about 61, 62 and the Council pleaded with him arguing that it was premature to give full drinking rights. The Aboriginal people in the south-west at that time had the drinking rights, but this area operated under what was called an identification card. To go into a hotel an Aboriginal had to produce the identification card. No Aborigines were employed once the award wages were introduced. Before they were quite happy with the wages we considered were fair. They were keeping them and all their families. Towards the finish you were lucky to get five or six weeks work straight... Six months work in the early days was quite common, they would work all the time and only having a fortnight off once a year or once every six months was common. As time went on they wanted more time off than before.

After leaving Mount Margaret, Vera and her husband, lived and worked on a number of pastoral properties in the district. However, they along with several other families moved into the town of Laverton by the late fifties. She remembered how in the 1960s many Aboriginal men and women were employed in town - the women in the hospital and the men by the Shire. The local pastoralist, Ian, also said that several Aboriginal families lived in the town for years, with the men employed by the Shire, one of whom was employed for 20 years. A further surge in Aboriginal employment occurred when Laverton was rebuilt in the 1970s, with many of the men constructing the roads and housing. The local Aboriginal organisation, Wongatha Wonganarra, was established in 1973 and operated in 1975 the town's only bus service and fulfilled contracts for landscaping, earthmoving, and the manufacture of concrete products (Syddall 1975:52). But, Vera reported, the Wongi men were laid off once the town was redeveloped and white staff replaced the Aboriginal women at the hospital.

In the seventies the opening up of nearby nickel deposits and the consequent selection of Laverton for redevelopment as the town site for mining personnel brought an influx of new people. Many of them were alien to Australia as well as to the Western Desert Area (Stanton 1975). The impact of the large influx of a European workforce on Laverton is described by the Laverton Study Group (Syddall 1975:45,49). Although Aborigines comprised over 75% of the permanent population at Laverton, their lack of specialised technical skills meant that few if any were employed in the mine (Stanton 1975).

After the opening of the Windarra mine, Laverton was the first venture by the State government to aim at integrating the Aboriginal and white communities in the newly formed mining town. Though ostensibly planned to foster racial harmony, the Laverton Study Group considered the 'new town' concept a 'qualified success' (Syddall 1975:9,67). The Aboriginal town housing was inferior, and in contrast to before when Laverton was a 'casual' town, there was a bigger gap between the Aboriginal fringe dwellers and transients, and the lifestyles of white mining personnel (ibid:672).

Changes in the Central Reserves

In the early 60s many Aboriginal people gathered around the Warburton mission, according to Douglas (1976) because parents were made legally responsible for their children and as these children attended the Warburton school, the parents stayed in the nearby camps. In the mid-60s the long drought and the clearing of Woomera rocket range brought 400 to 500 Aborigines to Warburton, some from as far away as the Rawlinson Range and Gibson Desert in the north west, the Mann Ranges to the east and extending into the northern edges of the Great Victoria Desert.

Patrol work in 1962 used a graded road from Kintore Range into WA and the National Mapping Survey used this road in 1961, sinking a well at the end of it (Long 1964:25). Military and civilian mapping and survey parties, research groups and individual travellers crisscrossed the region, though there was no all weather road (Berndt and Berndt 1970). The Giles meteorological station, an outpost of the Weapons Research Establishment, was built in the Rawlinson Range and using this as a secondary base, patrol officers moved around the country, through South Australia, Central Australia and Western Australia, to see that no Aborigines inadvertently strayed into potentially dangerous areas (Berndt and Berndt 1970:62). According to Long (1964:34), bringing people into the settlements had a beneficial effect on those contacted by patrols (mostly Pintupi), as the many years of migration out of the desert had adverse consequences for social life, especially creating a shortage of eligible males for marriage and initiation ceremonies.

The 1957 Select Committee of Inquiry records that in the Central Reserves the weather station had already been built, and that an area in excess of 4,000,000 acres was made available to a mining company for the purpose of prospecting for nickel (Report of Select Committee 1957:5). In its heyday in 1957, there were 40 Europeans at the Blackstone mining camp. In the three years of operation, the company occasionally employed Aborigines in menial work. Relations were said to have been strained between the Aborigines and the Europeans after several incidents, including *theft*, from the store and an apparently unsuccessful policy of rigid segregation was tried. At both the Giles weather station and at the Blackstone camp an official rule stipulated that all surplus or left-over food should be destroyed to discourage Aborigines from becoming *beggars and hanger-ons* (Berndt and Berndt 1970:60-61, my emphasis).

According to Douglas (1976:110) in 1961 the Warburton missionaries encouraged the Aboriginal men to mine copper. Several loads of copper, suitable only for fertilisers, were sold to British Metals, a mineral buying corporation in Perth. In 1963 the discovery by Aboriginal men at Warburton of further pockets of copper led to the formation of the company, Warburton Ranges Minerals, and for apparently the first

time the taxation department became interested in Warburton because of the increased income from copper (Douglas 1976:111).

From the mid-60s on, the possibility of large mineral reserves of copper, nickel, iron and other metals led numerous mining companies to send exploration parties into the desert (Gould 1972:20). In 1965 there was a large-scale attempt by the Hunt Oil company to find oil. In 1967 a temporary mineral reserve of 72 square miles was declared in the Jameson Range for a joint Australian and Canadian company to search for vanadium (Berndt and Berndt 1970:62). Gould (1968:2) refers to the prosperity of the people around Warburton who spoke English, because they had the chance to become involved in the mining activity. In the same year, Gould (1972:22) asserts there were still fewer than 500 Europeans living in or close to the Western Desert. However, this exploration came to nought and by 1970 it had been decided not to set up large mines in the Warburton area (*ibid*).

Peterson (1985) describes the integration of Aboriginal people into the cash economy as a post-1968 development with social service benefits being paid directly to Aboriginal people, full award wages and the training allowance program. When he conducted his survey in the early 1970s in the Central Reserves, 89.7% of income for the residents at Warburton were from social security payments. Even if full-time wage work had been widely available, Peterson points out that amongst such desert residents there was limited consumer dependency and the pressure was lacking to enter the labour market. Collective incomes, from what Peterson observed, were redistributed through kin obligations and gambling which, similarly, reduced the likelihood of the possibility to amass, and the desire to attain, capital.

In 1972-73 the newly formed Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA) took over the responsibility for economic development of the settlement. Under pressure from the federal government, the AAPA engaged the services of a consultant, an international management company, which had already prepared a report on the resources and needs of the Central Reserves Aborigines. An incorporated body, representing the Warburton community was formed and the consultants were asked to supply an adviser (Douglas 1976:115).

Effectively, the development of infrastructure began at Warburton in 1973. Expenditure by the government totalled around three and half million dollars, and included \$750,000 on a regional hospital (Syddall 1975:84). According to Stanton (1975) the redevelopment of Warburton had encouraged greater migratory movements between Laverton and Warburton⁵². Although for decades the Aborigines from the Central Reserves had travelled westwards to Wiluna to take part in the great summer cycle of ceremonies, the general resurgence of the Law in the Western Desert had meant greater numbers of people participating in the ceremonies without any improvement in their means of transport. An appendix to the report of the Laverton Study Group (Syddall 1975) describes how in 1974 some of the people from Jigalong travelled to Wiluna and from there 'musterers' were sent out to invite people from Leonora, Mount Margaret, Laverton, Warburton, Blackstone, Wingellina, Docker River and Papunya, to attend the ceremonies.

⁵² Compiled by field officers, the estimated population of the region in June 1973 was Warburton Ranges 435, Wingellina 51, Cosmo Newberry 65, Laverton 169, Mount Margaret 70 (Furnell 1974:481).

By 1975 there were 'outstation groups' established at Jameson, Wingkilina (nowadays spelt Wingellina) and Warakurna (Glass 1978:9). Douglas (1976:115) refers to the decentralising movement of Aborigines from Warburton to Giles, Wingellina, Jamieson Range, Blackstone and the Cavanagh Range - sites previously frequented by nomadic groups because of ground water and food supplies (and some of which had been occupied by white people as mining camps and as a weather station). Citing Coombs(1974), the Laverton Study Group (Syddall 1975:82) links the decentralisation movement to a desire to reduce the size of communities to a manageable level for social control - it was partly explained by "the desire to *re-establish discipline over the young*, to avoid conflict with other Aboriginal groups, and generally to escape the tensions which the threat and fear of these troubles carry" (my emphasis).

Bureaucratic welfare

In the sixties, government policy was inconsistent on the matter of Aboriginal migration from the desert to the Goldfields. In 1960 the WA Minister of Native Welfare told the UAM leaders at Warburton that actions should be taken to attract Aborigines back to the desert mission stations and away from the Goldfields towns of Leonora, Laverton, Menzies and Kalgoorlie. He stressed the political pressure of pastoralists and townspeople who wanted the Aboriginal population reduced in these towns (Douglas 1976:112). However, in 1962, the new Minister and Commissioner told leaders they must empty the desert stations, especially Warburton, and "get the people into the Goldfields where they will get employment". As little employment was available, UAM was allowed another two years on trial by the government (ibid:112).

According to Biskup (1973), in 1941 when children of 'de-tribalized' Aborigines were included within the scope of the Child Endowment Act, it signalled the introduction of assimilation policies, although it took another decade before such policies had an impact at a local level. He writes that "the legislation marked the end of an era during which the aborigine had been regarded as a human being essentially different from the Europeans; by tacitly recognizing that his backwardness was due mainly to historical and environmental factors, it opened promising vistas for the future" (Biskup 1973:196).

The 1957 Select Committee of Inquiry marks the beginning of the welfare era in the district, when state intervention became more noticeable. Precipitated by allegations that Aborigines were dying of starvation in the Central Reserves, it thrust the Laverton-Warburton district into the public spotlight with a young journalist called Rupert Murdoch visiting, and the Berndts conducting an 'anthropological expedition' in the area.

The report of the Inquiry reached a number of conclusions, many of which were critical of the government's role up till then. As already quoted, the employment conditions were found to be deplorable, the level of government aid to missions was criticised for being negligible, and, overall, both government and local pastoralists were accused of lacking any commitment to assisting the Aboriginal people.

With the appointment of Stanley Middleton as Commissioner of Native Affairs in 1948, however, relations between the government and the missions had improved, as government institutions were phased out and more help was provided to the missions (Morgan 1985:268). As Rowley (1972:55) explains, Middleton closed the government settlements as part of his assimilationist policies - "when S.G. Middleton, the then Commissioner for Native Affairs, persuaded the government to give up its Aboriginal settlements, he hoped that moral and political pressures would establish Aborigines in towns".

Middleton aimed for assimilation on the basis of 'reasonable equality'. He opted initially to work through missions and wherever possible tried to ensure the attendance of Aboriginal children at state schools. However, it seems 'reasonable equality' was difficult to attain primarily because of the continued opposition of the white community which regarded the Aboriginal people as apathetic and unreliable (Biskup 1973:241-244).

Biskup (1973:248-289) also underlines how Middleton emphasised improving the Aborigines' legal status. A range of legislative provisions - some protective, some restrictive and all discriminatory - conspired to create a situation where Aboriginal people were denied equality before the law. Although Aboriginal individuals could apply to get exemption from the 1936 Native Welfare Act, they were still subject to special provisions under the Criminal Code, the Evidence Act, Firearms and Guns Act, the Mining Act, the Dog Act, the Fauna Protection Act, the Fisheries Act, the Land Act as well as the federal Social Services Act. The Native Welfare Act introduced in 1954 had a significant impact because it abolished employment permits and prohibited areas. Though white schools had theoretically been open to Aborigines since 1945, they were often forbidden access to the towns where the schools were located. The Act also gave the Aborigines the right to medical care in white hospitals (Morgan 1985:268).

Key aspects of Middleton's policy focussed on the social environment, adequate housing and hygiene facilities, and he believed the lack of or insecure employment encouraged 'migratory' habits. Biskup (1973:245) sums up Middleton's thinking as "poor housing... produced in the aborigines an apathy towards their own betterment, and bred *juvenile delinquency* and a general lack of social standards" (my emphasis).

A major bureaucratic change under Middleton was the development of the concept of a purely welfare department (Biskup 1973:233). More funding was allocated to welfare work with Aborigines and the Native Welfare department grew exponentially in size. As he had been part of the colonial administration in Papua New Guinea, Middleton brought staff from there to assist with the task of transforming the department. His objective was to recruit a corps of departmental field officers who could work throughout the state. As a result, police protectors were phased out and more field officers employed⁵³. In 1951 there were 77 police protectors in the state but by June 1956 only 29 remained.

There was an increased presence of native welfare administration in the region. Up to the 1950s, Native Welfare officers irregularly visited the Warburton Ranges (Berndt

⁵³ The first departmental officer, based in the district, was A.J. Donegan, the supervisor appointed to Cosmo Newberry in 1940.

and Berndt 1970:59). In Laverton in the 1960s a Native Welfare officer was sporadically stationed in Laverton, in 1963 a Projects Officer was appointed, and a second one was appointed in 1965 (ibid: 58). May and Wild (1967) found three Native Welfare officers at Laverton involved with about 300 Aborigines at the Laverton Reserve. In 1969 a Projects Officer was appointed at Warburton Ranges, though the UAM still handled pensions, children's subsidies, employment, general law and order, stores, petrol, aircraft refuelling, registration of births, deaths and marriages, electricity and water supply, sanitary and rubbish disposal (Douglas 1976:115).

Welfare activities in the Goldfields region sought to implement the prevailing assimilationist policies. Improved housing was constructed and programs were set up to 'train' Aboriginal people to be economically independent and to be responsible citizens. With reference to 'native welfare' in the Kalgoorlie region in the sixties, Rowley writes:

"One had the impression of a humane administration operating in impossible circumstances. Part of the reason was lack of funds. But more important was the lack of the two bases for a general strategy - the right to basic and award wages, and a political-administrative organisation for the mobilisation and expression of Aboriginal opinion, which would provide a milieu for the development of Aboriginal leadership" (Rowley 1972:58).

Although there was a significant rise in the number of Aboriginal people on Commonwealth pensions, which provided a measure of financial security, the majority of Aboriginal people in the district were unemployed. The 1960 annual report reveals that the department at the time was concerned about 'paupers', and wished to combat attitudes, such as that of 'being owed a living' and of 'self indulgence'. In essence the department attempted to generate more employment opportunities in the district through two main strategies - by creating access to income via the Native Trading Fund and by organising employment programs. The Native Trading Fund, which created employment at Cundeleele, Warburton and Laverton, paid for the manufacture of artefacts and the sale of semi-precious stones (AR 1967) and had allowed a considerable number of people to be 'virtually self-supporting' thereby reducing the need for Departmental rations (AR 1965).

The gendered division of labour in the welfare sector was most apparent with employment programs. For example, with the mobile welfare unit operating in the early 1960s in the Eastern Division, two field officers travelled around the district and each officer had distinct areas of responsibility. The male officer erected houses, planted trees and maintained buildings, whilst the female officer arranged kindergartens, provided practical domestic welfare assistance and instruction, and supervised female workers in the moccasin industry at Laverton. Employment projects instigated by the Laverton projects officers, who were all male, involved the acquisition of skills in traditional male domains such as mining, sandalwood pulling, making cement bricks, and well-sinking. The projects officers implemented various projects - teams of Aboriginal people were involved in sandalwood pulling, men went out prospecting and 30 mineral indications were investigated in the Laverton area, stabilised earth blocks were made and used to build the hospital wall at Laverton, and at least one officer was involved in working the copper deposits at Warburton (AR 1966).

The 1966 annual report describes the adult courses throughout the division and the subjects included literacy, hygiene, sewing, firearms maintenance and care, leatherwork, handicrafts, motor mechanics and prospecting. The annual report for the following year states there was a decrease in the attendance figures, and as "environment and mission influence are factors", claims interest in the courses appeared to be almost inversely proportionate to the "degree of social development".

The department also ran adult social training courses for when 'unsophisticates' visited town (AR 1967). Efforts were made to train "less sophisticated Aboriginal people" and women were taught basic domestic and child care skills and men were offered guidance on the "economic pressures of tenancy". The department's Homemaker service was introduced in 1974 to Laverton, the primary aim of the service being to provide informal education and support for Aboriginal women in the skills of housekeeping, child care and social participation.

During the fifties and sixties responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children was increasingly perceived as a statutory duty⁵⁴, with at first, attempts made to bring about a degree of uniformity and the introduction of basic standards in all schools. In keeping with the underlying philosophy of the welfare era, from the 1950s on, government-trained and employed teachers began to replace the 'amateur' mission staff, and special measures were implemented to address the assumed disadvantages of an Aboriginal heritage.

Commenting on the standards of Aboriginal pupils in the Goldfields, the 1967 annual report refers to "retarded" educational standards in the first few years at school because of 'cultural and environmental factors', and laments that few Aboriginal students were progressing onto conventional high school (AR 1967). Because of the attrition rate and poor academic performances, vocational training was viewed as the most appropriate avenue for incorporating Aboriginal teenagers into the workforce and "mainstream" society. As with the adult training courses and employment programs, separate structures and curriculum were formulated for girls and for boys. In the 1960s in the Goldfields region, a number of boarding establishments, which were originally established by the missions, existed to inculcate Aboriginal youths from all over the region into "good work practices" and to teach them elementary vocational skills. Of the 36 "lads" in the working boys' hostel in Esperance, some lads were from Warburton and at the hostel they had supervised job training and an "induction into work habits". A "B" course was introduced at the Wongutha farm with more practical content and less theory (AR 1967). Fairhaven training hostel in Esperance provided training for girls in home management, laundry, catering as well as training in poise, personal grooming, and dress sense plus more formal aspects of schooling (AR 1966).

⁵⁴ In 1939 the WA education department started regular inspections of missions and settlement schools (Biskup 1973:191) and in 1945 the WA Teachers' Union supported properly staffed Aboriginal schools (Biskup 1973:226) and by 1949 Mount Margaret mission had its first education department teacher (Stanton 1984:116). In 1946 a special curriculum was developed for schools in Aboriginal settlements and for state schools with large Aboriginal numbers. According to Biskup (1973:226) the curriculum had the following aim - "to provide 'rudiments of civilization', to attain literacy, to inculcate 'desirable habits of hygiene and living', to secure a training in rural pursuits, and to provide 'desirable moral and spiritual attitudes'". He observes that the "aboriginal child" was still to be conditioned rather than educated.

A watershed occurred at the beginning of the 1960s when the official departmental policy on Aboriginal children changed, insofar that stress was placed on maintaining Aboriginal families rather than placing children in missions (AR 1960). At least in principle the emphasis was on encouraging Aboriginal adults to take responsibility for their children. In practice, nevertheless, a number of educational boarding establishments continued to play a crucial role in the education of older Aboriginal children in the Goldfields region. As part of the trend to replace Christian institutions with government services and infrastructure, in the sixties the department embarked on a large-scale construction of school hostels. For the north-eastern Goldfields, the Naberru hostel opened in 1967 and catered for Aboriginal children whose parents worked on nearby stations, and in Laverton, the departmental hostel was originally built as a school hostel. By 1980, however, the Aboriginal student population in the department's educational hostels had declined because more schools and teachers were located in Aboriginal settlements and in the following decade, the hostels were closed or given a different function (AR 1980).

Throughout this period it should be noted that several Christian establishments were of continued importance to the region's Aboriginal population who wanted their offspring to have secondary and/or vocational education - for instance Fairhaven, and Wongutha Farm near Esperance. Opened in 1982, the Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School (CAPS) (see Morgan 1985:289) at Coolgardie has remained in operation to the present day despite a series of changes in direction and administration, and a fair proportion of children from the Laverton area have attended CAPS over the years.

In 1972 a new department titled 'community welfare' was formed, which combined the Child Welfare and Native Welfare departments. The change in departmental organisation represented a new era in welfare services. Professionalisation of the industry translated into a push for the employment of generic social workers instead of district field officers. Of particular significance to the Aboriginal population was the stated objective of the new department to provide an equal service to Aboriginal people on par with the non-Aboriginal population. The official target of intervention and offers of assistance became needy or hapless individuals, irrespective of the person's racial or socio-cultural background. In the 1972 annual report concerns were expressed about the Aboriginal population's dependency on welfare officers and the expectations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in some areas, that the department existed to cater exclusively for the Aboriginal population.

Once again, though, a more complex picture emerged in the actual formulation of more precise strategies and bureaucratic goals. Collective disadvantages within the population were recognised under the rubric of 'community development' in that sectors of the general population were categorised as disadvantaged, and bureaucratic structures and practices were developed to address the perceived handicaps of identified groups assumed to have common characteristics and problems. Thus, the Aboriginal population were subject to special consideration and intervention, which Morris (1989) describes as an objectification of Aborigines as a "deprived" social group.

Juvenile delinquency

Although a persistent theme running throughout writings and reports which related to the Aboriginal people was 'their troublesome' behaviour, in particular begging and stealing in towns, it is interesting that in 1927, the annual report of the Native Welfare department stressed low levels of offending by the 'natives':

"Proof that the aborigines are a law abiding people is contained in the Report of the Commissioner of Police recently issued. It is therein stated that offences brought to trial against persons other than aborigines, lunatics and neglected children amounted to 3.30 per cent of the population whereas in regard to aborigines based on a population of 15,000, being those within the confines of civilisation, the percentage is 1.52" (AR 1927:10).

However, by the fifties such claims were not being made for the state's Aboriginal population. Instead the focus was on the criminal activities of 'part-Aborigines'. When the original version of the 1954 Native Welfare Act was debated, a member of parliament quoted figures from a contemporary Annual Report of Police Department to document his concern for the "growing disregard for law among the part-Aborigines" (Biskup 1973:258).

In the Goldfields region, officials appeared to become concerned by signs of increasing 'delinquency and crime' amongst the Aboriginal population towards the end of the sixties. In the annual reports of the native welfare department, for the early 60s, under the section on the crime and justice in the eastern district, the local officer notes there were the "usual incidence of liquor offences" and claims all disturbances were "amongst themselves" with little evidence of "anti-social behaviour against Europeans". Two serious crimes are mentioned - a spear wounding and a murder - both of which occurred at Warburton (AR 1960 -1966).

Throughout the latter half of the sixties and into the seventies juvenile offending increasingly rates a mention in the annual reports, as an issue for the department in the eastern district. In 1967 there were complaints about the "almost complete lack of facilities for assisting the over-spirited, disturbed and occasional delinquent child", the 1973 report stated that Kalgoorlie was the busiest children's court outside Perth, which "together with numbers of the less sophisticated Aboriginal juvenile offenders from the north [of the Goldfields Division], poses great problems in the area of treatment and rehabilitation". The 1974 annual report asserted that "a major problem in the Goldfields has been the incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency, involving a large number of white and Aboriginal children in Children's Court appearances".

In the 1972 annual report, the section on the Goldfields dwells on reasons for the increase in juvenile and adult offending:

"Aboriginal groups in today's situation are often unable to assert, for many reasons, any form of authority over dissident members... Collapse at the socio-cultural level is reflected in individual deviance and misbehaviour... As for heavy drinking and the social norms which give it respectability in these areas, is wreaking havoc among people newly exposed to the effects of alcohol. The increase in child delinquency and adult appearances in police courts for anti-social behaviour is an outcome of these parallel factors. However, any return to legalistic repression would be unthinkable" (AR 1972:12,15).

In the 1974 annual report the major problems identified for the district were "juvenile crime rate, family disruption and Aboriginal social development" which the writer believed were related to the social, economic and technological changes that rapidly occurred as a result of the development of the mining industry. "Family stress and breakdown" were associated with white families because of shift work, the "prolonged absences of the father figure" and sudden shifts in geographic locality. In contrast, the Aboriginal population were thought to be affected by the "technological and complex social development not previously known to them" (p.18).

Petrol sniffing is mentioned for the first time in the 1974 annual report, as a 'dangerous practice' found at Warburton Ranges and at that time, the efficacy of introducing an additive to the petrol was being investigated. In the same year, the department was working with other state government departments and the shire in "planning for the social changes which will follow the development of Laverton", to avoid "social breakdown for families and individuals". An increase in appearances before the Laverton children's court was recorded in the 1979 annual report, and the annual report for 1981 records a decrease in juvenile court appearances throughout the Goldfields, despite an increase in the population, the exception being Laverton with an 80% increase in offending. In 1982/1983, 145 children appeared in the Laverton court (AR 1983). Petrol-sniffing in remote Aboriginal communities re-occurs as an issue in later annual reports - a senior psychologist conducted research on the prevalence of the practice and information was forwarded to the State Task Force on petrol sniffing. In the 1991 annual report a local officer was reported to be involved in a federally funded youth initiative designed to tackle petrol sniffing in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Even before the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, concern was being expressed about the over-representation of Aboriginal youth appearing before the children's court. The 1985 annual report highlighted the issue in the following fashion - "Aboriginal offending is an area of great concern. In any one year country Aboriginal children are over 30 times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to appear before a Court or Panel. As well, 3 out of 10 country Aboriginal children aged 7 to 17 appear before a Court or Panel" (p.43).

As part of the responses to juvenile offending and symptomatic of the changes in the welfare ethos, the stress was placed on 'community involvement and participation' because children were not to be treated as "entities separate from the social environment in which they live" (AR 1974). The department funded youth activities and drop-in centres for older children. In 1978 a major initiative was a program of youth activities for the Central Reserves' communities aimed at "encouraging communities to take responsibility for the content and variety of programs".

A variety of sentencing options were developed over time which reflected contemporary trends towards community based sanctions⁵⁵ (see Gale, Naffine and Wundersitz 1993). In 1986 a pilot scheme was set up which allowed Aboriginal children to be directed into programs "arranged in conjunction with local communities". As an alternative to custody, Aboriginal young people were sometimes sent to various Aboriginal outstation settlements as a term of conditional release (AR

⁵⁵ These included the introduction of community service orders in 1978 and high threshold work orders, as an alternative to secure detention, in 1985.

1988). Within the region, there was a variety of conditional release programs and community work alternatives that allowed young people to remain with their local area "while the community takes some responsibility for their management following a Court disposition".

Conclusion

When large numbers of non-Aboriginal people first moved into the Goldfields region in search of gold in the 1890s, violent contact occurred with the local indigenous population. People in the Central Reserves area remained largely unaffected by this invasion until the 1930s, when a mission was established and various prospecting parties searched for minerals. However, large numbers of desert dwellers visited settled areas, notably the Laverton district, drawn by what they had heard of European goods and at various times, driven by drought conditions. Before the 1920s, some Aboriginal people congregated around camps and settlements in the Laverton district, which encouraged exchanges of basic commodities and resulted in some instances, in sexual relations between Aboriginal women and white men. With the establishment of the Mount Margaret mission and viable pastoral properties, more enduring relations were fostered between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Biskup (1973: 6-7) characterises the response of the local Indigenous people to Europeans in the following fashion - as "mutual intelligent adaption was not publicized either by the aborigines or the settlers... In the marginal region, there developed an almost classical colonial situation: political and economic power was in the hands of the Europeans, while the aboriginal societies retained much of their traditional characteristics".

For the historical period, pre-1968, Peterson (1985) describes three different articulations between Aborigines and the state in the Northern Territory, namely institutionalisation for those of mixed descent, exploitation on the stations, and peripheralisation on the reserves. He, however, makes the point that 'traditional orientations' continued to flourish on stations and reserves, albeit with modifications. This was more likely to be case in places like the Laverton district where the degree of control exercised by mission and government was not as great as might be supposed. Before the sixties it appeared that the 'institutionalisation' experienced at Mount Margaret and Warburton, did not result in a complete severance from family and country and despite exploitative working conditions on stations, many of those that were disgruntled by pay and conditions chose to leave for stations with better reputations, even though it may have meant a move to a lesser of two evils.

The most intimate and significant influence exerted by white people was over the Aboriginal children who grew up at on missions, particularly at Mount Margaret before the 1960s. The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Neville, and anthropologists, may have been concerned about the fragility of Indigenous order, yet the missionaries saw the biggest challenge to their evangelisation of Aboriginal children as coming from the authority of the Indigenous cosmology.

A major consequence of the earlier Mount Margaret regime has been the persisting influence of a group of stalwarts, children who grew up at the mission in its heyday, who continue to advocate policies based on Christian beliefs and mission practices. After the second world war, former residents stayed in contact via the UAM newsletter,

the holding of conventions at Mount Margaret (the first solely run by Christian Aborigines was held in 1969), and a radio show (Stanton 1984:116-120). In his thesis, Stanton (1984:128-129) recounts the struggles over the management of Mount Margaret in the seventies between Christian Aborigines represented by the Aboriginal Mission for Outback Survival and many of then residents who were 'easterners', that is people who had moved there in more recent times and who supported traditional religious beliefs and practices. Even in the early nineties, some of the former mission residents were called upon to intervene in the bitter dispute between a manager and some residents. Proselytising activities have continued in the Laverton district and in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, partly carried on by visiting preachers, visits by former missionaries and by several Aboriginal leaders.

It could be argued that another legacy of the missionaries was a guarded and even antagonistic attitude towards outsiders, particularly anthropologists and officialdom. In the seventies, in a reprise on Schenk's hostility to Elkin, Stanton himself was accused of being a follower of Satan by Schenk's daughter (who no longer resided at Mount Margaret) because of his interest in the Law (Stanton 1984:133). Again, it is hard to gauge the impact of such attitudes on local Wongis but it was evident that influential brokers in regional Aboriginal politics, who had grown up on the mission, were very suspicious and frequently hostile towards anyone who exhibited an interest or inquired into any matters that related to their sphere of influence.

Intent on saving souls, the missionaries tried to convert Aboriginal children to the Christian faith and to transform them in model citizens by inculcating a work ethic, and the virtues of Protestantism such as thriftiness, orderliness, and dependability. The Aboriginal families who settled in the town in the sixties, whose older members grew up on the mission, participated in the economic life of the town and were accorded a measure of respect by the white residents, who of course overwhelmingly remained in positions of authority and seniority.

All sorts of tensions existed between government policies and local practice, between mission and government, between missionaries and pastoralists as they struggled to regulate and control Aboriginal people - mind, body and soul. The government sought to control the movements of the Aboriginal population and to police the contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In general, the government attempted to control the migration of 'full-bloods' from their 'sanctuaries' to towns and to prevent Aboriginal people lingering in settled areas, and begging or stealing, by the strategic issuing of rations. Official policies reflected the concerns of philanthropists and the Mount Margaret missionaries over the 'immoral' exploitation of Aboriginal bodies - in particular, the pastoralists exploiting Aboriginal labour and frontier European men taking sexual advantage of Aboriginal women - but the actual prosecution of offenders in the Laverton district appears to have been virtually non-existent.

It was the attitudes and behaviour of many 'frontier' whites, local residents and transients, which upset the philanthropists and the missionaries, and caused a measure of disquiet in government circles. For example, members of the Legislative Council gave the 1954 Native Welfare Act bill an unfriendly reception on the grounds that the Aborigines were likely to adopt the worst drinking habits of the "white swillers", the groups with which they had the most intimate contact (Biskup 1973: 258). In contrast

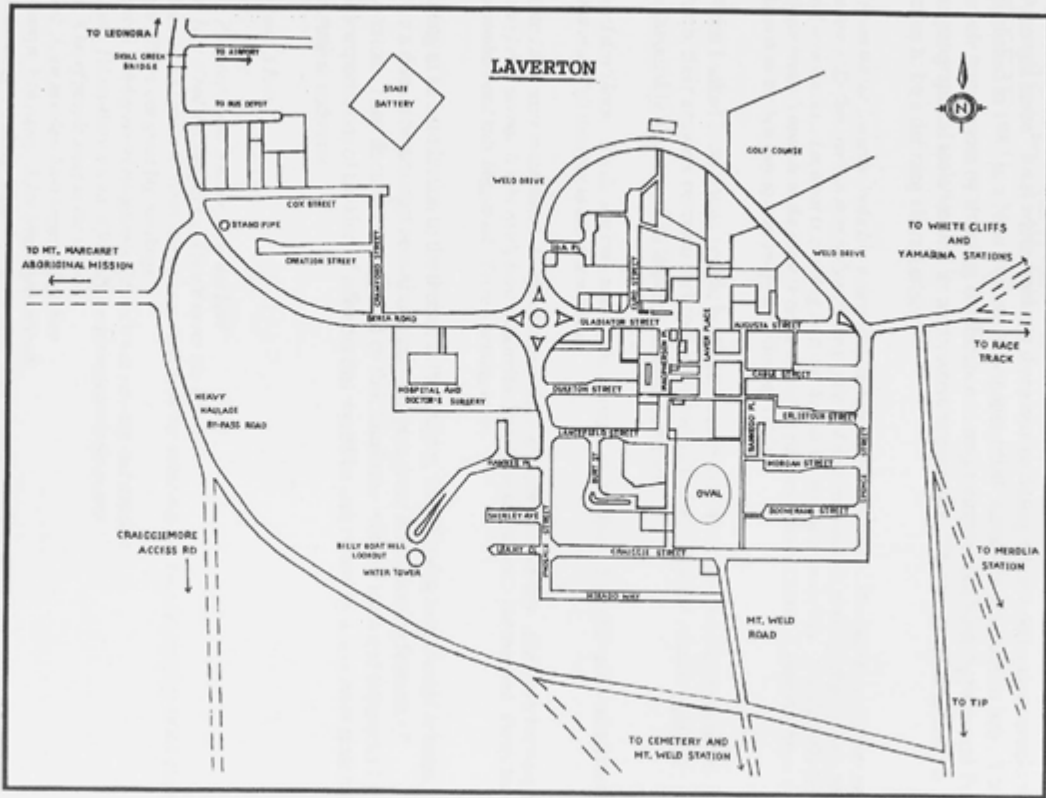
to the presumed fraternisation of the 'swillers', the civic leaders in town supported measures designed to ensure there was segregation from the local Aboriginal population because the latter were viewed as 'dirty' 'immoral' and a 'nuisance'. Never incorporated fully into the local economy, except as seasonal and domestic workers, their presence was regarded as highly conditional, even at the best of times. Any sign of 'pauperism' and 'vagrancy' such as theft and begging was met often as not by punitive and exclusionary measures.

When reading or hearing about the early days, one is struck by how small the social world was back then. Individual protagonists such as Schenk and Neville represented and constituted the dispute between mission and government, individual pastoralists and police officers were remembered by local Aboriginal people as hard or good men, individual missionaries were named, and the current location and activities of former mission residents were known. From the sixties onwards, these identified persons were replaced by structures, by agencies and by companies, which had unnamed employees and representatives who came and went. The end of restrictive laws, increased travel and improved communication, meant that many of the old boundaries dissolved and a wider social landscape, much of it impersonal, shaped the lives of those who lived in the Laverton district. Increasingly there was less 'isolation' and more white people in Laverton and in the Central Reserves, many of them involved in mining and neo-governmental activities.

Years before the Chief Protector Neville had expressed his frustration in the lack of reform and the lack of political interest in 'native' affairs. In the 1927 Annual Report, he notes that "the time is long overdue when the people should be *treated as individuals* in distinct districts and not be dealt with *in bulk* as is generally the case now" (my emphasis, p.11). The conceptualisation of a race apart - of an indigenous population which was biologically and irreversible different - underpinned the prevailing colonial managerial regime for many years. Biskup wrote that (1973:261) "we have never envisaged the aborigines as having any *right of choice*, and our attitude towards them have always involved a physical, spiritual, or cultural imperialism of kind or another" (my emphasis).

In the 1970s, despite the introduction of policies of self-determination and of bureaucratic practices that focused on individuals, many in welfare administration were alarmed by the increasing numbers of Aboriginal youth began appearing in the juvenile courts. It was the generation of children, those who were born after pastoralism had virtually disappeared as a viable industry in the district and after the missions became 'settlements', who were the ones were exposed to far more metropolitan and global influences and were born when, for the first time, 'formal' equality existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Since then, many Aboriginal children have been viewed, by authorities, their families, and older residents of the district, as troubled and troublesome youth. The basic principles of departmental responses to juvenile offending in the district, expounded and implemented in the seventies, continued to inform practice and policy until the present day.

Figure 3: Laverton town and environs.



CHAPTER FOUR

The town

Amongst some⁵⁶ local white residents there was an outcry when a newspaper article was published in 1987 in a New Zealand newspaper titled 'Laverton, gateway to hell'. The article commences by stressing the distance to major centres like Alice Springs and Perth, its geographical isolation and its unattractive appearance. That it is a mining town is taken to be a defining characteristic:

"From the air Laverton looks like a dirty blot on a dirtier red tablecloth...The two-storey pub has pale yellow walls that contrast miserably with the grubby red rock and sunlight glinting off the broken beer and wine bottles... Laverton is a mining town and has all the mining town worries. At Kalgoorlie the illegal brothels operate in the same street as the police stations, whose officers let their neighbours flourish as the best way to keep the peace" (Gosling 1987).

When I asked local young people how they would describe Laverton to someone in Perth, their answers revealed that they were aware that an outsider would regard it unfavourably because of its location, weather and size.

Lily: I don't know. It's the last town to nowhere, it's right on the edge... A hot little place, don't know what else. Tell them not to come here (laugh).

Scott: Little oasis in the desert. Heaps of trees and lots of green grass usually. And really hot (laugh). Lots of dust storms. It'd be really hard to describe.. give them the picture... Not that bad. Pretty hard for mothers and kids, bugged all. There's nothing to do.

Acting as an introduction to the themes in the chapter, the following long excerpt is taken from a discussion amongst non-Aboriginal teenagers about distinguishing features of Laverton. Their discussion is informed by their familiarity with the town and influenced by their expectations of the kind of referents that would be understood by a non-Aboriginal but Australian audience.

Teresa: A hole

Karl: Pox

JP: For people who'd never come out here

Di: Lots of red dirt and flies and you'd never like it

Teresa: This town is so clean and you can walk down the street and you can see your face in the cement here. There was great big buildings..

Karl: A holiday resort (laughter). I'd say it was very dry and desolate

Alison: I'd say there's a lot of friendly people especially the coons

Di: A lot of people sleep in the streets

Karl: A few murders have happened up here

Bronwyn: Few rapes. A few tried rapes anyway

[Someone comes along, cigarettes are hidden. Talk about food, photos]

Bronwyn: We're getting off track again. Back to questions

⁵⁶ The word 'some' has an ubiquitous presence in the thesis and indicates the difficulties of presenting a generalised description. Some people, sometimes, in some situations, do some things.....

JP: We've only done one question so far. How would you describe Laverton?
 Jenny: If you want to **save money** come to Laverton
 Alison: If you want **gossip** come to Laverton. Peace and quiet, the quiet life
 Karl: Laverton's the capital of bullshit
 Bronwyn: Yeah, of shits
 Di: Yeah, if you want to learn to be a real good gossip come to Laverton and we'll teach you how
 Karl: So many people teach you how to gossip
 [Simultaneous comments 'Mrs Pearce' 'I could' 'Aunt (?)' 'Who said gossip is for women?' 'Mr Holt']
 Di: Are you a woman Karl?
 Karl: Yeah, I think so
 ?: Perhaps you're a transvestite
 Di: Any more questions, we're getting off track people
 JP: You mentioned some advantages of the place
 Alison: It's **quiet**. People are friendly..
 Jenny: You don't get mugged, you don't hear of any murders in Laverton (laughter)
 Karl: There has been murders here
 Di: Aboriginals
 Karl: **Aboriginal murders**
 Di: Spear each other
 Karl: You remember that guy who almost speared you and me, Bronwyn? That made me shit my pants..
 Di: Thank god it wasn't me, I'd kill myself
 JP: How did it go again Karl, in your house?
 Karl: Me and Bronwyn were walking into my yard and this boong came up to us and he's running up to us with his spear like this and if he'd let it go, I'd have been a goner. Bronwyn's hiding behind me..
 JP: That's very brave of you Bronwyn
 Bronwyn: That makes a change. You hid behind me that day sitting on the oval [indistinct]. Aboriginal woman came over, hooned over to us and she goes, what ya laughing at? I find you laughing at me, I'll belt you.
 [More talk about the Yugoslav]
 Teresa: He's going to think he's popular with all the girls and one boy. Julie can't say anything cos she's taken
 Di [to JP]: The guy who walked past, he works at Crocodile and we make an effort to go to Crocodiles every Friday night
 Teresa: My dad's going down the **pub** tonight
 Alison: My mum might go to the pub
 Karl: I'm not, I'm off pubs and drinking forever
 Di: Mrs P probably dob us in..
 [Discussion about stolen pens and Year 9s]
 JP: Anything else you'd say about Laverton?
 Teresa: It's the **dirtiest hole** you can get
 Alison: It's not. People make it suck
 Teresa: It's a clean town cos of the Shire
 Bronwyn: Better than Leonora or Menzies
 Teresa: And Wiluna, definitely Wiluna
 Alison: I'd say Laverton is the best place for kids, any kind of kids cos here, got **most white kids and black kids stick together**
 Karl: But then Laverton is a terrible place to come for kids because there's **nothing for us to do**
 Di: But then you can't get into trouble very often
 Karl: I mean what do we do, we always sit down and smoke, that's all we ever do, there's nowhere for us to go
 Di: You can't get into half as much trouble, shoplifting and that, as if you were in Kalgoorlie or Perth
 ?: To have babies you got to travel 400 kilometres
 ?: I'd never have a baby here
 [discussion about waiting for the doctor. Talk about whether Karl said hello to Mrs Pearce. Stephanie going to a Perth school]

JP: I don't think I'd have a very good idea yet what LA is like
 Di: OK then, it's a **remote place** and it gets **really hot like in summer, when it's winter its really cold.**
 And **there lots of red dust and its quiet** but its not very big. **There's no shopping centres or anything**
 Alison: **The only good thing about it, it's peaceful**
 JP: **How many people do you think there are?**
 ['Fair few' '1000' '2000' Debate ensues]
 Teresa: **What about the guys who live in the dongas**
 Karl: **Are you counting the ones in the mines?**
 Alison: **Joe Little, he's counted as one, and his dog**
 Bronwyn: **And his poxy little orange bomb**
 JP: **And what do people do?**
 'Shit all' 'Bugger all'
 Teresa: **The people aged over 18 go to the pub and the kids aged under 18 sit around and do nothing**
 Karl: **Kids under 18 go to the pub too**
 Emma: **To buy smokes**
 Karl: **They go into the pub too. Sue Walker and all those Abos go in there. I mean Aborigines**
 Teresa: **I go in there**
 JP: **They don't get chased out**
 Karl: **No, they stay in there**
 Teresa: **Yeah, the manager of the pub they're really nice**
 Di: **I don't like Colin that much but Vince's alright**
 Teresa: **Vince's pretty cool but Colin always growls at people if you're under the age of 18**
 [Talk about the owners, how rich they are etc]

Virtually every comment is negative, and can be divided into four ways of categorising the place:

- the environment (red dirt, extreme weather)
- a mining town (place to make money, single men a breed apart, pub)
- a small isolated town (distances to have babies, lack of services like a shopping centre, nothing to do for young people, quiet, gossip)
- there are violent Aborigines (coons, Abos, Aboriginal murders).

This chapter will concentrate on the last three categories by examining various facets of the place - being part of an outback mining region, the social relations and spaces within the town, and the racial divide that seems so apparent even to a casual visitor.

An outback mining region

Laverton is located at the north-east rim of the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. For most West Australians, the Goldfields are synonymous with the mining of gold and nickel. The dominance of mining as the economic base for the region is reflected in the infrastructure, with bitumen roads connecting the main centres of mining along the north-south axis of the region. Bisecting the Goldfields in an east-west direction are the railway and the great Eastern Highway which provide transport links between Perth and the eastern states.

Characteristics of the mining industry have had a major impact on the landscape, the social life and identity of the region. The ebb and flow of the white population, and locations of white settlements have been regulated by cycles in the industry. In the Eastern Goldfields,

the mining industry has remitted most of its profits elsewhere. Secondary industries have developed alongside booms in mining and the mining sector has contributed to improvements in infrastructure but, by and large, investment in the region has been of a transitory nature and kept to the barest minimum. Due to the 'boom and bust' cycles of mining, much of the Goldfields infrastructure has a temporary appearance, best exemplified by the ubiquitous transportable housing unit, the 'donga'. Even today, the most impressively solid buildings date from the turn of the century. There is little economic diversification in the region and once mining has ceased, towns decline to very little or vanish completely. Leinster for example was non-existent until WMC rebuilt the town from 1990 onwards.

Towns which survive during mining doldrums are those that act as service centres and are located on the two main roads that transverse the region. Thus, heading north from Kalgoorlie to Laverton where the bitumen road ends, a distance of 360 kilometres, there is the small community of Menzies and the regenerated town of Leonora, both of which have survived as white settlements since the first gold boom at the turn of the century. In the surrounding bush, however, there is evidence of past and current mining activity - the ruins of old gold towns and the debris of exploration such as stakes and translines from surveying.

The new generation of mines of the past decade, open cuts of predominantly short life span and low-grade ores, have accelerated the pace at which settlements are created and dissolved. Although mining has always been a notoriously volatile industry subject to the vagaries of world prices for metals, the transience of these mines is more due to changes in extraction techniques, which have enabled the reworking of lower grade ore areas. However, there is only a small margin of profitability while the price of gold remains at a relatively low level. There has been a proliferation of smaller pits, often manned by fly-in/fly-out personnel, located in bush settings away from established towns. There is no attempt to create 'permanence' and these self-contained settlements lack connections to the local economy. The fly in/flyout personnel live a dual existence - with periods of work in the insulated world of the mine interrupted by short visits to the 'outside world', usually Perth, where they may take up wider social relations with family and friends.

Larger projects where the mine is expected to have an economic life of at least a decade spawn more stable communities. The nickel boom of the late sixties and early seventies created a dramatic increase in the regional population, with the company, Western Mining Corporation (WMC) injecting funds into the towns of Kambalda and Laverton. Recent examples include the mines like the Super Pit in Kalgoorlie and WMC's Mount Keith and Leinster nickel projects.

There is an important distinction between company settlements and other communities. Although the regional centre Kalgoorlie and smaller towns like Leonora and Laverton are profoundly affected by company activities and policies, especially in relation to community support, they remain autonomous entities, with separate Shire administrations responsible for the upkeep of amenities and services. A more complex picture of local power exists

with the mining companies being involved in but not determining where and how residents may live and work. In such communities there are a small core of people working outside of mining - in small businesses, public servants, shire employees.

Probably the biggest company player in the Eastern Goldfields in the past few decades has been WMC which built 'company towns' at Kambalda, assisted with the expansion of Laverton⁵⁷ and recently rebuilt Leinster. The latter is an exception to current trends as most contemporary camps and settlements are self sufficient⁵⁸. In the Laverton region only Mount Morgans was not a fly-in/fly-out operation, more typical was Granny Smith which for instance, sent staff to a doctor in Perth instead of using the one in Laverton. A smaller operation at Barnicoat, however, did contribute to the local area by providing funds to assist with for example, subsidising the doctor, the pool and roads.

The employment opportunities in the Goldfields are overwhelmingly related to mining. Mining throughout Australia was and is a male preserve, with an almost all male labourforce and management. Irrespective of the kind of ore being mined, traditionally females were employed sparingly in an administrative or domestic capacity or in larger numbers in the processing of ore. Despite inroads by women into this male preserve in a range of occupations, notably as professionals such as geologists, engineers and environmental scientists, the more manual aspects such as removing the ore from the ground remains dominated by men. The environment inculcates and reinforces certain kinds of masculinity - aggressive chauvinists that are quite blatantly opposed to or ridicule the notion that women might replace them in the workplace. In the coal mining company town she studied, Williams (1981:51) found that many men were unashamed sexists who regarded mine work as a masculine preserve because it was rough, tough, dangerous and therefore requiring strength and endurance. She describes the mining engineers as symbols of tough masculinity who directed the mining operations and who were trained to 'handle things not people'.

Williams (1981) observes that the coal mining was not as dangerous nor as labour intensive as it used to be, but it retained enough elements of risk and manual work to sustain this ethos of tough masculinity. Gold mining is not as dangerous as coal mining but there are still high rates of serious injury. There has been a steady increase in mechanisation and sophisticated technology which has provided some insulation from the more harmful effects of the environment and reduced the strain and stresses of demanding physical work. Actual working conditions have improved too with a stricter adherence to occupational health and safety standards. Nevertheless, despite these improvements, mining in comparison to many other occupations continues to be risky unhealthy stressful and dirty work. According to local status distinctions amongst workers in Laverton, the 'real miners' continued to work underground, which was more prone to high-risk

⁵⁷ Originally, a joint venture between Poseidon and UHH was formed to mine the nickel deposits at Mount Windarra and South Windarra. WMC acquired a 50% interest in the Windarra Nickel Project in late 1972 and only became the sole owners of the project in 1983.

⁵⁸ In 1993 the outlying mining camps and settlements in the Laverton district included Corktree Well, Barnicoat, Granny Smith and Mount Morgans. Of these, Granny Smith and Mount Morgans were the biggest, with several hundred employees and families.

accidents. In contrast, work in open pits was seen as comparatively healthy and safe, with much of the work done in air-conditioned trucks.

The Goldfields region is associated with a tough aggressive masculinity not only because of its economic base. Being on the frontier, and distant from 'civilising influences' in hot inhospitable country has reinforced and amplified the sorts of masculine traits seen to epitomise mining. Williams (1981:49-51) writes of the 'masculine frontier' where workers take pride in their tough masculinity and refers to a 'harsh edge' in the way people are treated, with tough-mindedness reciprocated between managers and men.

The first gold boom in the region at the turn of the century established many of the quintessential images and practices that are integral to popular images of the place even to the present day. There was a gold 'rush' where huge numbers of people mostly men were drawn to the region to strike it rich and who had to endure great deprivation in their search for wealth. Settlements were formed in a very short space of time, and because of the distance from the centre of government, means of regulating these settlements were organised locally and took on a reasonably autonomous identity. The progressive domestication of the region has been rendered as the tempering and 'taming' of the wild unregulated rugged individualism of the digger and the explorer by locally developed institutions that had earned the respect of these unruly men. These large concentrations of men who originally were individual diggers in tent camps but who became over the years aggregates of workers in hurriedly erected housing and 'camps' of dongas for the larger mines, were and are notorious for the excess and bingeing nature of their recreational pursuits. Gambling, hard drinking, fighting, and the use of prostitutes were naturalised as the kind of practices to be expected of working men enduring harsh social and physical circumstances unfettered by the constraints of home life, a sense of civic duty and other forms of informal social control and self-restraint. The control of these men required, it was assumed, the hard discipline of tough men who represented the authority of company, union or the police.

Between World War I and the nineteen sixties, because the future of gold mining was uncertain and the industry was in the doldrums for decades, only a small number of non-Aboriginal people settled in the region and made it their home. Therefore, those that did become locals, both men and women, were typified as needing the qualities of endurance, self-reliance and toughness to withstand an arid, isolated, under-serviced, impoverished and under-civilised environment.

The centenary history of Kalgoorlie and the eastern Goldfields commissioned by the City of Kalgoorlie - Boulder shows that stories of mining are largely stories of men's activities (Webb and Webb 1993). The author of a book on the pioneer women in the Eastern Goldfields laments the limited historical material on women which mostly comprised references to female 'battlers', nurses, a few barmaids and prostitutes. In the introduction it is noted that society had placed women in the background, but that they were welcomed and resented by men as a 'civilizing' influence (King 1988). The continuing dominance of men in the public profile and reputation of the region is

indicated by the all male cast in a photograph taken in 1990 of the celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of the Poseidon nickel share boom (Webb and Webb 1993).

Nowadays the more recent boom in nickel and gold mining has attracted another large influx of workers, the majority of whom are male. In Kalgoorlie, the 'two-up ring' and sex workers' 'stables' are proudly advertised as tourist attractions, and there is a vibrant pub scene where most hotels advertise their 'skimpy' barmaids⁵⁹. A young lawyer who had moved from the city to work for the Aboriginal Legal Service and who had lived there for nearly five years, was less than enthusiastic about the attractions of Kalgoorlie:

Hugh: I was really enthusiastic about the change of scenery at first, tided me over so I didn't get any shocks. I got the shocks later when I realised there were third world conditions in Australia which most city dwelling coastal people have no perception, no experience of. If you draw a line from about 200 km inland right up the WA coast that's the third world. The first world is the coast and about 200 km inland. The rest is second and third world. Look at Kalgoorlie, it's a real dump, it's the only major inland city in WA and it has the facilities of a real backwater...People who think it's great haven't had a broader experience of life or else they're got a very happy family life and that's a central value which is fulfilled regardless of where they are. Other than those categories, those that think it's fantastic may be a short term resident or maybe they get flown to Perth regularly for replenishment. Or otherwise they've been drinking too much and they've a few brain cells short of the full complement. I find the social conditions unpleasant. Unless you're into the pub culture, what else is there to do in Kalgoorlie?

The 'single men' today who come from many different places to work for limited periods of time to make a lot of money and who are warehoused together in donga camps, were portrayed in a derogatory and slightly ominous fashion by the non-Aboriginal teenagers in Laverton.

JP: But people in Perth don't know what dongas are

Karl: Little units

?: It's like one room with a bed, a wardrobe and a sink

Alison: Some dongas have two rooms

Jenny: Some of the dongas here quite big, very nice

Bronwyn: Except dirty old single men go and stick topless ladies all over their walls

Karl: Only cos they can't get anything else

JP: What about the bush?

?: Very dirty

?: Lots of it

JP: You lived out on a station Emma, how would you describe it?

Emma: Shitty

JP: So you don't miss it at all

Emma: Oh, sometimes, you can do whatever you want

Teresa: Turn up your music real loud without neighbours complaining

Alison: Don't care about your music

Karl: If I had nothing except music and tape player I'd be right. If I was going out bush by myself, I'd take tape player and music

Alison: They watch dirty movies

?: Who do?

Alison: Out bush, the people who work out there. Where Martin's going they watch dirty movies

Jenny: Out bush, bad thing about it, people with drugs they take them out there

⁵⁹ As the name suggests, such barmaids wore very little or see-through clothing and were referred to colloquially as 'skimpies'.

Teresa: They take them here

Jenny: But they have more drugs out there than here

Several iconic practices, institutions and attitudes of the Goldfields mining masculinity survived and thrived in Laverton. There was the popular TAB, a widespread appreciation of 'blue' movies amongst the mine workers, and at least in the late eighties, a conspicuous degree of fighting and drinking at the pub. Together, these things set the tenor for much of the wider social life of the town.

There were commonplace indicators that demonstrated the workplace was a male domain. Although it was stated that WMC was an equal opportunity employer during an induction course for the new worker, women were only referred to specifically in relation to working in the laboratory. An amateur video on back injuries set at WMC operations in Kambalda showed only two women, one behind a desk, and a physiotherapist who demonstrated exercises in her swimsuit whilst her fully-dressed male patient client reclined on a table. Like the single men's quarters, the workshops were festooned with posters of naked women⁶⁰. Although a woman was employed underground at the Windarra mine for the first time in 1993 the majority of the workforce were opposed to her presence, and a female professional who worked above ground at the pits and in the bush complained of struggling to gain acceptance and respect. Sexism was so entrenched that it went unremarked in men's conversations at the workplace which I was told centred on sport, money, sex and overseas travel. Amongst themselves I heard that some men were disapproving of instances where men, while intoxicated, had hit their partners but they did not express any social censure in front of the perpetrator, nor did they demand the intervention of the law. Widespread homophobia was also emblematic of the aggressive and predatory heterosexuality that characterised the way the mining men acted and talked to each other.

During the eighties and early nineties there were three significant WMC mines - Windarra, Lancefield (a gold mine closed in 1940 re-opened in 1979) and Beasley Creek (opened as an open-cut in 1987) - as well as the mill (commissioned in 1974 and treated both gold and nickel). The mines and the mill were some distance from the township of Laverton itself. In a deal between the state government and the mining company it was decided that the existing town would be redeveloped to accommodate the majority of the workforce rather than build a new town 20 kilometres away at the site of the main nickel deposit, Windarra⁶¹, which had originally precipitated the worldwide fever over Poseidon shares. Laverton therefore was never truly a 'company' town in that it retained its role as an administrative and service centre for the locality, whilst a massive rebuilding program created the amenities and accommodation normally featured in company towns.

Company towns which reached their apex in the sixties in WA, primarily in the iron ore area of the Pilbara and to a lesser extent the Goldfields, were read as signs of mining

⁶⁰ By the mid-nineties a ban on sexist imagery was rigorously enforced.

⁶¹ A small community Windarra Village was constructed to accommodate single persons and a number of families with its own shop, post office, swimming pool and sports facilities. Only a tiny proportion of workers stayed at the Windarra Village and it was closed in 1992.

companies' long-term commitment to the area, and were planned to attract 'family men' (Webb and Webb 1993). When Laverton was rebuilt in the seventies it was also designed to attract 'families'. As a consequence, despite the visibility of the single men, there was a substantial proportion of families where the male 'breadwinner' was employed directly or indirectly in mining.

Socio-demographic statistics on the Laverton district show that the population was predominantly male, youthful, and well paid. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) statistical area of Laverton covers one of the largest geographical areas in Australia. Even though the main population centre is the town of Laverton, it should be borne in mind that the statistical area embraces various small Aboriginal and mining communities.

Of the 1850 persons counted in the 1991 census 84% were aged between 20 and 40 years of age, with a median of 28 years. Nearly two thirds were male (62%) and there were double the number of men to women in the group aged 15 years or more. One third of persons aged 15 years or more were living with partners. But of the single persons aged 15 or more there were three times as many men than women. This meant that 61% of men in the district were not living with a partner as against under half of the women. However, for the total population, over half of the district's households (54%) were 'families' defined as single parent families, two parent families and couples without children.

In this age group of 15 years or more, the overwhelming majority was employed on a full time basis. Of those that were employed the vast majority were in the private sector (90%) with the rest employed in the public sector. In terms of industry sectors 64% were in the mining sector with the next highest category being community services at 8%. Of those that were employed in mining 85% were male. There was also a major sexual division in occupations. The most common occupation was plant and machine operators and drivers at 28% followed by tradepersons (19%). The sex ratios for these two occupational categories were respectively 89% male and 97% male. The biggest occupational categories for employed females were first, labourers and related workers and second, sales and personal services.

Nearly two thirds of the persons (65%) aged 15 years or more defined themselves as not qualified (58% of males and 80% of females) and just under a half (44%) had left school aged 15 years or less (47% of males and 38% of females). Only 6% claimed to have a university degree and 3% a diploma but 18% said they had skilled vocational qualifications, almost all of them male. Half of the qualifications were in the engineering field and of those persons holding these qualifications 97% were male.

In 1991, the median for both the annual household and annual family income was between \$40,000 to \$50,000. For individuals aged 15 years or more, where it was stated by respondents, 33% said they earned incomes over \$40,000 a year. Employed persons worked longer than average working hours with 78% working at least 40 hours a week and 57% of the total worked at least 49 hours a week.

Conducted in 1988, the results from a childcare needs survey⁶² of Laverton's non-Aboriginal women confirmed that the women's partners worked long hours and often shift work. Of the 60 partners 38.3% did shiftwork, the average number of hours worked per week ranged from 40 to over 80 hours per week, with the majority (80%) working between 40 and 84 hours per week. Similarly a high proportion worked more than 10 days a fortnight, with 43.3% working 13 or 14 days a fortnight.

Nearly half of the survey's respondents had work, but the majority of these (82%) had casual or part-time work. Very few were employed out at the minesites and just under half of the respondents (43%) said they had no skills or qualifications. Caring for children was their major responsibility with 90% of them having offspring. The majority of these children (65%) were aged five years or less.

The mean for the intended length of stay for the respondents in Laverton was 26.1 months. The 1991 ABS census shows that, where it was stated, 35% of persons lived in the same area five years before, 42% lived elsewhere in WA, 13% resided in another Australian state, and 10% were overseas. These figures confirm the impression that the non-Aboriginal single men and families were predominantly short-term residents, in that most would stay no longer than a couple of years.

The most significant reason for coming to the town was usually the desire to save capital in a relatively short time. After Laverton, company mining people might move on to another mining site whilst for others it had been an unusual or unique experience and they might return 'home' or to other non-mining environments. Amongst the latter category, for many public servants in the service sector it was an experience in a 'remote' location which would improve or enhance their career prospects elsewhere post-Laverton.

Social spaces and activities

When Laverton was rebuilt after 1972 it was supposed to be a model town of integrated housing with a mixture of mining accommodation and amenities, and extant infrastructure and housing. The aim was to reduce the distinctions between mining and non-mining, and between white and black. Some observers judged it a limited success (Stanton 1975, Syddall 1975). The New Zealand newspaper article quoted earlier was scathing:

"Laverton: built inside a 2.6 kilometre circular road every bit as symbolic as the circle of wagons in a western. The whites are on one side and the blacks on the other. And on the outside there is no thing but bush and desert... There are three key buildings in Laverton - the pub, the social worker's community services offices, and the police station. Most of the Aborigines seem to make the trip between the three on a regular basis" (Gosling 1987).

⁶² Conducted by myself with the assistance of a local committee in November 1988, 200 questionnaires were distributed to households and caravan parks and all women, irrespective of whether they had children, were asked to fill them out. Those excluded from the survey were non-English speakers, residents of Mount Margaret, the Aboriginal Village, and single men's quarters, and women living on pastoral properties or outlying mining camps. 62 completed questionnaires were returned. Of the total of 62 women, 81% were in their twenties or thirties.

Seen from the air (see photograph p.vi) it is apparent that the town covers a small area with a hub surrounded by a ring road. In the hub there was the pub, the WMC mess, a supermarket, a post office, a number of small shops, and up until the early nineties WMC had a small office, next to the supermarket, manned by one person. A short distance from the centre were various offices and service buildings including a police station, community services and community health offices, the Shire offices, the school and pre-primary, and further afield the Wongatha Wonganarra (the local Aboriginal community organisation) centre which acted as a social security agency in the early nineties. Within the ring road there was a football oval, a sporting club, a youth centre and a range of sporting facilities, including a swimming pool. A few brick buildings including the pub and the newsagency (formerly a pub) survived from the turn of the century mining boom.

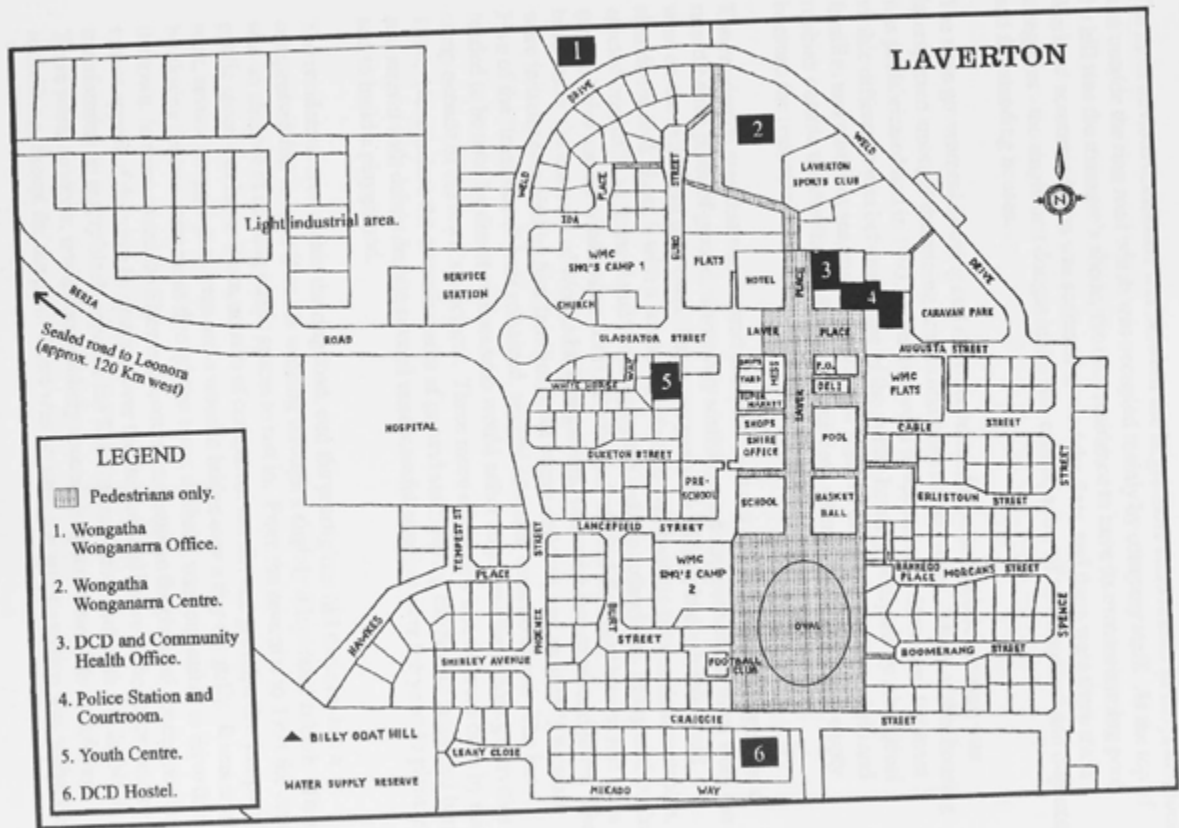
On the outer side of the ring road were the hospital, the DCD hostel, the service station and the Wongatha Wonganarra office, and the most prestigious residential area (sometimes called 'nob's hill'). At a greater distance from the ring road was the light industrial area and beyond that the 'Village', formerly an Aboriginal residential reserve managed by Wongatha Wonganarra. The latter was such a distance from the town that it did not appear on the Shire map of the town (see Figure 4 overleaf) nor in the photographed model (see photograph, p.vi).

In terms of residential accommodation, the bulk of it was located within the ring road and nearly all of it was owned by WMC up until 1994, when the company closed up its mining operations in the district. In 1988 there were 20 Homeswest houses (15 of which were nominated as Aboriginal houses) and about an equivalent number of state government houses. In the same year there were two caravan parks, one owned by WMC which had 40 sites and the Shire park which had 28 sites. From 1988 to 1994 there was a steady decrease in WMC accommodation with the closure of the caravan park, the single men's quarters and the sale of housing, as the company progressively withdrew from the town. During the same period, there was an increase in public housing, with the state housing authority building more solid brick homes on the southern fringes of the town and the construction of three bedroom houses at the Village.

The ABS 1991 census indicates the following distribution of dwellings in the Laverton district - 56 caravans, 33 dwellings owned or in the process of being bought by private individuals, 35 housing commission residences, 26 other government residences and 227 'other' dwellings which would be those owned by WMC and in a few cases, other mining companies. In 1994, when WMC auctioned off its housing, much of the stock was bought by other companies with only a few individuals purchasing dwellings.

Williams (1981:16) refers to the visibility of the working class in the coal mining town, with managerial staff wearing white safety helmets and the workers coloured safety helmets at the workplace and with gradations in housing accommodation. The allocation

Figure 4: Town of Laverton.



of accommodation in Laverton primarily reflected gradations in workers' status in the company hierarchy and whether a worker was single or had a partner and/or children.

The most obvious distinction was between the larger more solid homes in the prestigious area outside the ring road which was occupied mainly by company staff. At the top of the hill was the manager's abode, the only residence to have its own swimming pool. Workers' accommodation was scattered around the flats, and there were three main categories - the single unit dongas in the two camps, a row of 'townhouses' and duplexes and freestanding houses.

The state government housing and shire accommodation and public housing was interspersed amongst the mining houses and units around town. Much of this housing was prefabricated and in 1993, rather careworn in appearance. However, the most visible difference was between some of the public housing occupied by Aboriginal families and other houses, mainly because of signs of disrepair, and the debris and rubbish outside the dwellings. Several 'identified' Aboriginal houses were empty because the residents have moved out after a death.

The residential area that was beyond the 'pale' was out of town at the Village. On a raised barren piece of ground, it was very visible as one approached the town from the west on the main road into town. For many years the Village had a desolate and abandoned look about it with a scattering of small very basic two room demountables, erected originally as 'transitional' housing by the welfare authorities. Many of them had gaping holes and no windows or doors. By the end of 1993 five new houses had been built under the auspices of Wongatha Wonganarra, with wire fences around them. These were initially occupied by four families, with young children, and an elderly woman. Five of the 'transitional' huts remained, several of which were occupied. The huts tended to be used by desert visitors who would either stay there for drinking activities or camp outside of the town's precincts. Three more of the new houses were built by mid-1994. Nonetheless the extensive area of ground surrounding the houses remained barren and strewn with debris despite several unsuccessful attempts over the years to plant trees and to build a playground.

The residential area within the ring road, and the prestigious hill enclave, has a compressed feel to it, as if one is walking through a slightly dilapidated suburb. There was an absence of inviting public spaces to rest in. From the seventies to 1994 the central public space was Laver Place, an area of compacted red dirt and gravel, a few lumps of rock, several straggly gum trees and a wooden bridge over a tiny dry gully. It was created by closing the two main roads through the town, so that it was impossible to drive through the town. In more recent the Shire endeavoured to improve the physical appearance and tourist appeal of the town by grassing over the strip of land between the shops, and by transforming an empty block opposite the Shire offices into a park with a toilet block. There were, however, few indoor publicly accessible spaces amenable to informal socialising, except for the pub. There was no cafe, the service station was without a

dining area, and the only places the locals could 'dine out' were at the mess or the restaurant at the pub.

During the day and to a lesser extent at night there was an exodus of workers (mostly male adults) to mines by bus and company vehicles. As a result, during the day the public spaces in the centre of town were primarily used by non-Aboriginal women and their children, who purposefully moved between their cars and the supermarket and shops, and teenagers and Aboriginal people 'hanging around'. It was commonplace to see Aboriginal people sitting around town, in clusters, cross-legged and immobile, watching the town go about its business. They used to sit wherever there was a shady tree - in the park, in Laver Place, by the pub and on the oval. Sometimes these groups were engaged in card games and sometimes singly or in pairs and circles, drinking. Teenagers were less omnipresent, but they often sat around in groups on the basketball court, the oval, or on the bench outside the supermarket, and they were more likely to be heard because of loud music from their ghettablasters.

In terms of struggles in town space, Merlan (1998) emphasises how historically changing restrictions upon Aborigines capacities to shape town spaces or at least to imprint social meanings upon them, has meant that in Katherine Aborigines tend to use the margins and interstitial spaces of town (bushland and riverbank) rather than central ones. In Katherine there were many places where there was relatively little overlap between Aborigines and non-Aborigines in space-time. There were no places in town where Aborigines could gather in numbers and socialise as they might in town camps or outside of town, and one of the few indoor places where they could spend time and socialise was the pub. The highly unequal use of town spaces was characterised by differences in trajectories and use, with many Aborigines for example feeling comfortable about sitting on the grass unlike the non-Aboriginal visitors or residents. Young Aboriginal people however tended to sit at a table on the median strip and not on the grass.

After a while, in the town of Laverton, the presence of certain groups and absence of others in the central public spaces was taken for granted as this excerpt from my notes indicates:

At about 10 am I walked down to the post office to see if the mail had arrived. An elderly couple had set up a picnic table on the grass outside the post office. Their four-wheel drive was parked a few metres away, and from the vehicle they were unloading the plates and accoutrements for the picnic. It was a startling sight - I had not seen non-Aboriginal people having a picnic in a town 'public space' before, and it was even more bizarre to see the elaborate paraphernalia being set out for the ritual of eating. A group of Aboriginal people had gathered near to the couple - one man, weaving slightly, approached the couple and demanded money from them. They shook their heads and sidestepping the man, they made a point of continuing with their preparations.

The presence of Aboriginal people in these public spaces was most noticeable when there were large numbers of desert visitors or a critical mass of more local people who engaged in regular drinking and begging. These 'local' people were well acquainted with Laverton and other Goldfields communities such as Leonora, Kalgoorlie and Cosmo Newberry, and less frequently might visit the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. There were no more than about a

dozen who were known for going on the grog and begging when in Laverton, mostly men and women in their thirties and forties who rarely stayed for longer than a few months in any one place and most of whom knew the region well because they had worked on pastoral stations in their youth.

In the eighties January was notorious in Laverton as this was the month large numbers of 'desert people' from the Ngaanyatjarra communities would pass through the town on ceremonial business, many of them staying for weeks and seemingly consuming vast amounts of alcohol. The numbers and the length of stays had diminished in the early nineties, but this month and other occasions when there were truckloads of visitors passing through were times when the town's public spaces were more likely to be places occupied by inebriated and often brawling people. There were more likely to be outbreaks of 'incivility' in Laver Place and adjacent areas with physical fights and altercations involving the yelling of abuse and people stalking back and forth towards the police station. It was not uncommon for community health or community welfare workers, whose offices overlooked Laver Place, to run injured individuals up to the hospital in their vehicles. One day in January for example in the middle of the day I counted 20 people staggering around the shopping precinct.

For much of time however, the town centre during the day on a weekday was a quiet place. In the summer this lassitude and lack of movement was more marked as the heat had an enervating effect and there would be few people out in the open. Overall, the rhythm and pace of the town appeared quite tranquil much of time, and only at night, especially on Friday nights, would there be much action, with loud noise and music emanating primarily from the pub and in the eighties, from the single men's quarters. In the evening and at night there tended to be more people driving and walking around town, certainly more men and mostly white men who were engaged in a range of recreational pursuits.

The town's recreational amenities catered largely for physical sports and were virtually exclusively used by the resident population. Visitors might use the swimming pool, and a number of sporting teams from nearby mining communities and the town of Leonora sometimes competed against local sides, but for the main part townspeople had to organise games and competitions amongst themselves. The principal 'public' recreational amenities for outdoor activities were the swimming pool which required an entry fee, the oval and basketball courts. There were various sporting amenities near the sports club and as a member of the appropriate club you could use the squash court, the bowling area, the tennis and netball courts and 'golf course'. For indoor activities there was, for a while an indoor cricket centre and the iron man clubroom (a small gym housed in a donga), the youth centre, the arts and crafts club building, the sports club building and the pub.

By the early nineties long term residents were complaining of the decline in organised sport and activities which was usually attributed to the decline in the town's population. The seventies appear to have been the heyday of organised activities before the advent of

television. In the eighties there was greater access to more radio and television stations, and the opening of a video store and the rapid acquisition of video players seemed to result in more people spending their leisure time at home.

The use of recreational 'social' spaces was structured by gender, race, age, and to less obvious extent, occupation. Although there were mixed teams and male and female teams in various sports such as indoor cricket and squash, it was the men who dominated the physical sports - both in terms of numbers and usually in the management of the competitions. It was more often than not male teams (for example football and golf) that played against rival out of town teams that constituted community events, unlike the female dominated sports like netball and softball. The most gender-skewed clubs included the iron man club (nearly all men) and the arts and crafts club (nearly all women).

The Sports Club was probably the closest thing Laverton had to a local white enclave. Again there was a dominance of men in the drinking holes - the pub and the Club - although women were still present as a minority. While the Club was geared for family socialising and quiet drinking, the pub endeavoured to meet the requirements of different strata within the town. In 1988, the pub had still had a 'black' bar, the 'animal' bar and the general lounge area. By 1992, the black bar had been closed and for a while was re-opened as a cocktail bar. The 'animal' bar was the rougher part of the pub where there were pool tables and where visiting bands performed. It was where the fights usually broke out, while the more sedate and bigger general lounge only became packed and volatile on the nights when a disco took place. Very few Aboriginal people were members of the Club, but they made a sizeable minority of the patrons who drank in the pub. Aboriginal people were less in evidence at the swimming pool as well, but were players or had their own teams in a number of sports, notably football, netball, softball and basketball.

Children were sometimes taken to the Club by their parents but the pub was basically an 'adult' enclave. The young people had their own youth centre and this was predominantly used by local Aboriginal children and teenagers. In the eighties there had been a range of junior sporting competitions but these had largely disappeared in the nineties.

It is hardly surprising that two groups who were either forbidden or discouraged from using certain social spaces were more likely to congregate and use 'neutral' and less visible public spaces. Thus often in the afternoon and at night young people would gather on the basketball courts and oval. They were also likely to meet in places beyond the ring road - the most famous being Billy Goat Hill (a water tower at the top of 'nob's hill') and the abandoned mine shaft, Marymac, situated about one kilometre from town. They were also more likely to be found wandering around town at night, although it was the sight of younger Aboriginal children prowling around that caused the most comment amongst the non-Aboriginal residents. Aboriginal visitors would frequently camp in the bush beyond the ring road, though this practice was discouraged now and again if the

camps were located on the 'golf course'. Often drinking circles were established in empty blocks within the town's precincts and on the fringes of the bush beyond the ring road.

Dempsey (1990) comments on the 'physicality' of culture in the Victorian rural town, Smalltown, because of the domination of sport and social life in pubs. He also found a huge number of voluntary organisations run by committees which were part of a strong tradition of self-help in organising services and activities. The tradition of 'self help' he believes was due the smallness and isolation of the town, and to social factors. These factors included the less than wealthy status of the community and certain mores of the local middle-class culture. Participation and voluntary work were seen as virtuous by the middle class because they were thought to be vital to the community's survival and life style.

Up to a point, these characteristics of social life were found in Laverton, at least until the late eighties. Certainly sport activities and socialising in licensed premises have remained the dominant pastimes amongst non-Aboriginal adults, although there was a discernible decline in the nineties in the range and participation rates of sporting groups. All of the sporting groups and the arts and crafts committee relied on local committees of volunteers to coordinate the funding and scheduling of activities. In the nineties, longer term non-Aboriginal residents commonly remarked on the dwindling support for local initiatives, and the virtual disappearance of self-help in the community.

Unlike Smalltown, however, Laverton had few voluntary organisations with a civic purpose. For instance in the eighties and nineties there were no clubs like the Lions or Rotary clubs, and the only voluntary services were the fire brigade and the St Johns ambulance organisation. Religious institutions conspicuous in rural towns had only a muted presence in Laverton. In the early nineties there was one small wooden church which was used periodically by the Catholic priest who was based in Leonora and less frequently by an Anglican minister who came up from Kalgoorlie. There was a local non-denominational Christian group which held its services in the Shire hall. Special events to raise charitable funds, for example for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, were held every so often, but again these had been more numerous and larger functions in the preceding two decades.

The vestigial rural identity of the place which coexisted, in a very subdued form with the dominant mining identity, was brought to the fore on race days. Reduced to an annual meet by the nineties, horse racing was organised by a few families with local pastoral connections or histories. In contrast another special community event, the beer can regatta, had epitomised Western Mining involvement in the town, and brought together families and single people when there was a reasonably large and stable workforce. Held annually, the regatta was organised in the eighties by mining workers and took place at the Windarra 'ponds' some distance from town.

Social relations

In Smalltown, Dempsey (1990) asserts that the principle factors that shape social life are class, age, gender and to a lesser extent length of residence. Broadly speaking this would apply to Laverton but take on a different character in the town. In Smalltown, membership of voluntary organisations like friendship cliques was often but not always class, gender and age homogenous. Certainly in Laverton friendship cliques were based on gender and age and occupation but there was considerable heterogeneity in the membership of some sporting activities and recreational pursuits.

The three most significant age groupings in Laverton were children, teenagers and adults, with a bulge in the numbers of young children and adults up until the middle years. The ABS 1991 census for the Laverton district showed that there were few elderly people, a small proportion of teenagers in comparison to younger children, and a disproportionate number of males aged 20 to 50 years of age. The elderly were invisible, but the teenagers though their numbers were small had a reasonably high degree of visibility.

Occupational distinctions played a critical role in social relations and it was working adults', mostly men's, occupations that influenced patterns of social life. Unemployed youth and women were, where applicable, frequently marked by and associated with the occupation of the adult male who was in their household group.

Dempsey (1990:158) defines classes as aggregates of people sharing similar market and work situations as indexed by occupations, degree of work autonomy, and employment status. He distinguishes six classes in Smalltown and argues that class was more important than status in structuring inequality. Two of his classes - farmer and business classes made up negligible numbers in Laverton although they exercised a significant influence in Shire politics.

The big distinction in Laverton was between those that worked as government employees, those that worked in the retail or cleaning sectors, and those that were employed in mining. The internal hierarchy within the mining industry created two classes - the workers and the staff. Further distinctions were between 'millrats' and underground workers (in particular the miners), and between contractors and company employees who were considered the former a necessary evil. In Smalltown, Dempsey (1990) characterised the service classes as having reasonably high incomes, economic security and potential for career advancement. However, in Laverton, the only members of the service classes who had incomes comparable to most mining workers were the doctor and a handful of more senior government workers. The staff employees of the mining company had economic security and the potential for career advancement. Thus the 'classes' in Laverton were not easily categorised.

According to Dempsey (1990) there was a striking similarity in material culture and recreational pursuits, with indicators of difference being revealed largely through

membership of more expensive clubs (for instance thoroughbred racing) and sending offspring away to private schools. In Laverton a few professional staff of the company and a few pastoralists exhibited signs of belonging to a more exclusive or privileged set. Mining, however, had its own status meanings which were rooted in working class masculinities and these tended to impose a degree of public adherence to egalitarianism and expectations of social mobility. Nevertheless, union membership, once upon a time an institutional form of working class solidarity, was not great and had been actively discouraged by the company. Williams (1981:16) notes that "the various managers and superintendent strata at the minesites themselves have been frequently promoted either from working-class or from other non-ruling class elements"⁶³. She also found that spending power was less important in forming class distinctions because wages were high. In Laverton, it was hard to discern differences in patterns of consumption and investment, except indirectly through stories of activities out of town for instance sprees by couples or single persons, and of family assets located elsewhere.

A considerable amount of informal socialising in Laverton revolved around occupational groups outside of mining, where there were sufficient numbers to make this possible. For instance the police and their families held social gatherings, as did the teachers and the hospital staff. Although these social activities reflected and fostered intra-occupational friendships, there were opportunities to mix with other people through participation in sport. Another factor, cutting across these occupational distinctions were whether a person was single, part of a couple or had children. Single people were more conspicuously involved in 'partying' and the pub scene - and it was not unusual for single female teachers or nurses to socialise regularly with single mining men. Similarly, friendship groups sometimes occurred where several families had young children even though the men were not 'workmates' or were not in the same occupation.

There were discernible class biases in some of the sporting activities and social events. Darts, football and netball had a more working class image and memberships whilst squash, the arts and craft club and many fundraising events were likely to attract the more middle class and professional residents. Voluntary leadership positions on committees, however, were very much determined by occupational position. Committees formed to address social issues such as regional development, community recreation and youth activities largely comprised representatives from key agencies or organisations such as the police, shire, community health or rarely, a mining company. There did not seem to be much status attached to being a member of such committees, and often the members saw their involvement as an extension of their job and not a civic responsibility. One organisation that did attract prestige and competition for membership was the Shire Council, but then that probably reflected its pivotal role in local politics. The Council comprised representatives of rural and town wards, and until Western Mining withdrew from the town there was always a company representative on the Council. The membership of the Council underwent a marked change from the

⁶³ A sign of corporate change in mining is however suggested by the fact that the former chairperson of WMC, Sir Arvi Parbo started as a surveyor while the current chairperson, Hugh Morgan began as an accountant

eighties to the mid-nineties when there was a dwindling in the number of older, local, male non-Aboriginal councillors. There was an increase in female members, Aboriginal members and a greater number who were 'transient' public servants, such as police and an employee of the Department of Community Development (DCD)⁶⁴.

Women were marginalised in several important respects in Laverton. First and foremost, as already indicated in an earlier section, the minority that worked were mostly employed in the less well-paid and the less prestigious band of occupations. Although single women by and large held full-time employment, women with families were more likely to have casual or part-time unskilled work. For women with partners and/or children, their economic dependency on their partners combined with the demands of child care circumscribed their recreational activities.

Whilst non-Aboriginal women's social status was not dictated by the male head of the family's occupation to the same degree as in the more traditional social milieu of Smalltown, her standing and social life was affected by his employment. Importantly for couples there was usually a shared expectation of future security and prosperity because of the capital accumulated while in the mining town. Even where partners were staff with the company, the women were anticipating the rewards of a more convivial lifestyle once they had accumulated sufficient assets in their 'home' base. Women were, as well, less likely to be involved in local decision making, with several of the 'old timers' on the Council quite publicly disapproving of female councillors, and more likely to be supporters of and auxiliaries to men's leisure activities.

A more insidious form of marginalisation, moreover, was endemic to the local social life. Gender segregated socialising could be seen as an outcome of the disproportionate number of men, but was no doubt influenced as well by the prevailing aggressive masculinity that thrived in and encouraged exclusively male comradeship. In what seems a rather dated account, Williams (1981) saw the working class women in the coal mining town as being victims of Australian norms of masculinity which incorporated the preference for male companionship, reserve and 'inarticulateness'. In Laverton, the opportunities for cross-gender contact were highly constrained for couples. At sporting events, barbecues, and work, at both gatherings for single people and families, in general friendship was seen as really only appropriate between members of the same sex. Women had to be more cautious than their partners about talking to members of the opposite sex otherwise they might spark rumours of chasing them.

Williams (1981) refers to the extra burdens placed on marriages by the isolation from kin and established friendship networks, though in many instances couples had reported that a motive in moving to the town was to avoid family interference and pressure. Some women had formed confidant relationships with other wives and through participation in

⁶⁴ The name of the welfare department in the late eighties changed from Community Services to Community Development. As this was name of the department during my fieldwork period from 1992 to 1994, this title is the one most commonly used in the thesis. More recently, the department was renamed again, as Family and Children's Services.

activities, predominantly by joining sports clubs. In general, Williams found people open and friendly, though a number of women complained of lack of privacy and of a prevailing proneness to gossip.

Of the Laverton women who responded to the 1988 childcare needs survey, nearly one-third had relatives, mostly parents or siblings, in town. For many women, though, these supports were not available or did not translate into assistance with child care. The rearing of young children was left largely up to mothers because of the number of fathers who were doing shiftwork and overtime, and because there was a lack of childcare facilities for occasional or after school care and for children under pre-school age. With the respondents to the 1988 survey 39% belonged to no club or social group, and of the 47 who had children under the age of 6, over half (54%) said they had no leisure time or social activities without their children.

In Smalltown there were status distinctions within the acceptable populace, and the salient distinctions in everyday conversations were those of gender, age, occupation (but not described in hierarchical terms) religion, length of residence, community spirit and respectability. Dempsey (1990) uncovered a greater use of attributional rather than relational factors in the residents' accounts. Residents talked in aggregates rather than bounded groups, and referred to attributional status rather than an interactional system. For status distinctions a mix of impersonal (positional) and personal (reputational) criteria were employed. Accounts were often confusing and conflicting but community members stated they had little tolerance for overt snobbishness and 'tall poppies'. As a result those who make explicit demands for deference were threatened with social isolation. Dempsey (1990:145) concludes there are "cross cutting pressures in small rural communities which confuse social imagery" and that despite substantial differences in material resources and some social exclusiveness in Smalltown, there was a good deal of informal and friendly contact.

In Laverton there was little explicit recognition of social stratification within the non-Aboriginal population and people were often described by using impersonal criteria. Personal or reputational criteria came into play amongst longer term residents. More noticeable in the eighties, there seemed to be a fair degree of tolerance which at time bordered on applause, for libertine 'wild' behaviour including fights and drinking binges. Ribald tales were recounted of excessive behaviours at parties, usually while intoxicated, and the antics of renown drinkers were communicated around town.

Dempsey (1990) distinguishes between social groups in Smalltown who were marginalised because they were resource poor like the elderly and those groups who were deemed unacceptable by most residents. He describes four kinds of unacceptable groups - 'no hoppers', 'blockies', 'deviant women' and some transients. In Laverton there were no 'blockies' and criticisms of non-Aboriginal 'deviant women' who drank excessively in public contexts were largely confined to ridicule rather than outright ostracism. Extra-marital affairs were discussed reasonably discreetly and single women were not necessarily condemned for an active sex life - approbation was confined to

liaisons with men considered unsuited to their 'occupational standing' in the town. 'Deviant' men, if defined in terms of homosexuality, were so unacceptable that no-one publicly claimed to be one. Certainly some professionals, especially teachers, were derided by longer term residents, not so much for being 'two-bob blow-ins' but for their alleged inexperience and ineptitude. Many of the 'working class' residents employed in mining or with their own small businesses were also often dismissive of the government employees, who were scorned for their 'soft', 'unproductive' occupations removed from the 'real world'.

In Smalltown the symbols which marked the acceptable from the unacceptable were dress (including cleanliness and tidiness), quality of dwelling, language (for example excessive swearing), the willingness and ability to work, and moral probity. No-hopers were reputed to be in trouble with the police because of drunkenness and sometimes petty theft, and were castigated for failing to work, excessive drinking, neglecting their properties, being dirty unkempt and neglecting the physical appearance and well-being of their children. In Laverton this was how many non-Aboriginal people judged the Aboriginal population, as well as fringe dwelling white men who drank to excess and lived with Aboriginal women.

Crucial additional factors shaping life in Laverton were race and ethnicity. This is not unusual in mining or rural communities. Smalltown and the New England rural community, examined for its crime and criminality by O'Connor and Grey (1989), were ethnically homogenous with nearly every resident of Anglo-Celtic stock. Nevertheless, many rural towns in Australia, like Brindleton, have a significant number of Aboriginal residents. Although Williams (1981) in her study of the coal mining workers does not discuss the issue, mining in Australia also has a history of attracting ethnically diverse workforces.

In the ABS 1991 census of the 1850 persons in the district 360 (or 20% of those answered this question) stated they were Aboriginal⁶⁵. Of persons aged five years or more in the district 166 were recorded as speaking an Aboriginal language. With the reduction in Laverton's numbers there seemed to be a decrease in the multi-cultural composition of the district's population. The 1991 census did not show as great a diversity as I would have expected. Where it was stated 73% of persons were born in Australia, 10% in New Zealand, 8% in the United Kingdom, and 4% fell into the 'other'⁶⁶ category. The birthplaces of the handful of remaining persons born overseas, in descending order of numbers included the following countries - Philippines, Poland, Germany, Ireland and Yugoslavia. Where it was stated for persons aged five years or more, 83% spoke English only, 10% an Aboriginal language and 7% other languages including Chinese languages, German, and Polish.

In the early nineties, the only migrant group that was recognised in everyday conversations as a distinct social group was an extended Samoan family from New

⁶⁵ Three men stated they were Torres Strait Islanders but they have been excluded from the figures used.

⁶⁶ The 'other' category includes those inadequately described, as born at sea and not elsewhere classified.

Zealand. It was, however, the fact that they were related and part of a 'family' rather than their ethnicity that was taken as the significant attribute. There was no interest expressed or seemingly expected in whether they had different cultural practices and beliefs to other residents in the community. A quite different attitude, however, was evident amongst many non-Aboriginal residents in relation to the Aboriginal population. At one extreme racist sentiments were antagonistic and dehumanising whilst more liberal residents spoke in a pessimistic resigned fashion about 'their problems'. The segregation between the social domains of the non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal residents was stark, as will be discussed below.

The question arises as to who is influential in defining certain behaviours and social groups as 'unacceptable'. Social censure in a small community is typically assumed to exercise a powerful control over the social relations but how 'stable' does the population have to be before this might apply? Status distinctions are assumed to have a greater import to locals and being 'local' embodies a power to name the disreputable and deviant. The longer term residents, the 'locals' in Laverton comprising Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people articulated differences amongst themselves and were in a position to inculcate newcomers into their perspectives on socio-cultural distinctions and the causes of inequality. Such residents were more inclined to single out particular Aboriginal people and particular 'transient' mine workers and government employees for approbation.

Being a local

The following exchange between the Laverton youth worker and a Ngaanyatjarra Lands' community adviser revealed a common 'outsiders' perception that there was no attachment amongst residents to the town of Laverton:

Basil: What has Laverton got to offer us? It's nobody's place

Dale: Better to regard it as everybody's place

The itinerance of the population has been portrayed as creating a vacuum which contributes to and impedes the tackling of social problems. In the 1985 submission for funding to have a full-time recreation officer, prepared by a local committee, emphasised one of the main problems experienced by the non-Aboriginal population as being - "no continuity and regularity of programmes organised by concerned citizens and parents as they are only in the town for a limited period of time". Other social problems were named as being youth unemployment and a housing shortage that forced some family groups to reside in caravan parks. The submission stressed that the majority of population had families of relatively young age, and that there was a lack of older relatives to assist parents with the children's upbringing. This was more of an issue, it was implied, in a place where 'a larger than normal percentage of parents in town are both working'. Overall, an impression was created of a community characterised by dysfunctional 'abnormal' social conditions.

What Laverton was being implicitly compared against was the idealised portrait of rural life where there are town residents with a profound sense of community and belonging. Dempsey (1990) identifies two features which he claims play a crucial role in Smalltown's social life - a small and stable population and its geographical isolation (by Victorian standards!) which he sees as instrumental in developing a strong attachment to the community and a shared sense of identity that takes precedence over class, age and gender based rivalries. The local identity he describes as incorporating a valorisation of rural life. Smalltown's residents positively stereotyped rural community life in comparison to city life, describing it as characterised by personal and enduring relationships, and a social life where pretence and masquerade could not be sustained because lives were so public. Honesty, fair play and personal integrity were seen as resulting from long standing and intimate knowledge of people and their families. Residents frequently referred to the helpfulness of neighbours and underlined the egalitarian nature of the community, with no classes or with classes having little bearing on social relations. In contrast, the city was seen as an awful place and as the 'home to the enemy' - of government and bureaucracies that were unsympathetic to rural Australia. The 'ideology of localism' he claims was transmitted in conversation and by the local media, which contained negative caricaturing of outside forces and the need to thwart outside agents (Dempsey 1990:91).

Dempsey links the sense of belonging amongst Smalltown's residents to the ideology of localism, and to the opportunities for face to face interactions and to participate in voluntary organisations and friendships even if they tended to be class, age and gender homogenous. Everybody felt that they knew everybody else, and this was reflected in the density and multiplicity of social ties between community members. He found that taking up residence recently did not preclude the development of a sense of belonging, because newcomers could rapidly become known and part of things. Many members of marginalised groups - no hopers, the elderly and 'deviant' local women - expressed a sense of belonging and some no hopers expressed a mixture of attachment and alienation. Many of these said they chose not to leave because of the experience of being known and accepted even if it was only within one's immediate circle. As an aside, he comments in the conclusion that people can hate each other but still feel they belong to the same place and together, and they may unite against a common external enemy.

I did not have the resources to conduct an investigation of community attitudes and perceptions on the scale undertaken by Dempsey and his assistants. Nevertheless, a number of subjective assessments will be made here about the residents' sense of community and belonging. In everyday conversations very few people indicated that they felt they 'belonged' to the town of Laverton. Those that did were mostly Aboriginal, and no more than a score of non-Aboriginal people. Predictably it was usually the case that these residents were part of a family who had lived in the district for at least two generations. There were dwindling numbers of white people who were likely to fall into this category - a missionary, a pastoral family, a prospector.

There were a much larger group of residents who seemed to consider themselves 'locals' in that they had resided in the district for a significant number of years. With the non-Aboriginal people they were small business people and mine workers who had been around since the seventies or early eighties, and several pastoralists. An economic investment in the area, in the shape of running a business or property, appeared to predispose the person to judge himself or herself as a 'local'. Their offspring were also inclined to consider themselves 'local'. This self-conception may have translated into only a weak attachment to the community, but it did imply a sense of familiarity with the place and its inhabitants. There were durable and multiple social links amongst those that had lived in town for longer than the couple of years typical of most residents.

The 1991 census of the district showed that about one-third of people had been living in the Laverton area five years before. A fair proportion of them would be Aboriginal people, of which a minority would consider themselves as town 'locals'. Many of the older people would have grown up at Mount Margaret or Cosmo Newberry but during the seventies the movement of people to other parts of the Goldfields and to the Ngaanyatjarra communities had left only a few families and individuals with an established history of residence in the town. Amongst many Goldfields' Wongis there were bonds of attachment to nearby settlements and the country surrounding the town, even though they may have only visited the town intermittently and for short periods. They, and visitors from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, also had social ties to the town residents because of being related or because of shared pasts.

Amongst the town's teenagers, it was the Wongi adolescents who were inclined to view the place as their home. One young man for instance when drunk sheepishly confessed to 'loving the town', and several of the other youths said they became homesick when they were away from the place for any length of time. Only three white youths called the town 'home' - two young white women who had lived for most of their lives in the town and a white young man who had lived many years in town but more importantly whose significant peer group was the local Wongi youth. For other white youths who had lived in the town for large part of their lives, many expected to leave town as soon as the opportunity arose. This, however, did not preclude an interest or attachment to the place.

According to Dempsey (1990:313) the 'ideology of localism' mirrors a tendency in the literature to exaggerate the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relationships in small town and urban contexts. But he claims that community studies overseas and his own show that both characteristics will be present in any social grouping and that the same relationships can display a mixture of calculative and personal traits.

Whilst outsiders or professionals concerned about the town's social ills highlighted the transience of the population and the absence of community spirit, it was the 'locals' who in their conversations tended to articulate elements of the 'ideology of localism'. They stressed the advantages of knowing everyone, of how helpful people can be, of knowing

what is really going on, of having an informed perspective and their hostility to 'external' forces.

Talk about people and trouble

When asked to describe the town, a local Wongi young woman referred to only two positive characteristics:

Lily: So quiet, not much more. You know everybody and that's handy. That's all.

The local teenagers and young adults frequently condemned the town for being boring and a dump. Again, though, they would sometimes in moments of sombre reflection, refer to the advantages of knowing everyone, and of having 'good' friends. The following two young women stated their dislike of the city, expressed in terms of the traffic, the strange people on trains, and being approached by drug dealers. In Laverton's favour, they had this to say:

Kelly: If you're a street kid up here you get help. It's so small..

Di: Everybody knows your business

Kelly: Even if you just come here off the street from down there at least you get help up here somebody.. We'd open our doors. Mum and Dad opened their doors that many times, we ended up with 13 boarders

The small size of the town meant that there was a high visibility of its actors and of events, as this young adult man recognised:

Scott: Close community, can't do much around here without people knowing. In the city you can.

Dempsey (1990) reports that in Smalltown news of any acts of 'deviance' were quickly transmitted through numerous gossip chains and that sanctions could be swiftly invoked against the perpetrators, their spouses or children. The sanctions he refers to include the use of derogatory names and ostracism. In the main, moral judgements and social censure were less apparent in Laverton at least in discussions by and about local white residents. There was nevertheless tacit acceptance of the power of gossip to enhance or damage reputations which could have implications for a worker's standing in the community, and of how the possession of social knowledge was an asset that relied on and formed the substance of much of the communication between locals.

In a discussion between the non-Aboriginal high school students they complained of the inaccuracies of gossip and rumours, which in their opinion created perjorative and distorted representations of themselves and their activities:

Karl: That's what pisses me off. Because the story gets changed around every time it goes from one to another

Jenny: Like Chinese whispers

Karl: Like when I quit [the supermarket] there was a rumour going around that I had to quit because I was stealing cigarettes and selling them

Alison: There's not one person here where there wasn't any rumours spread around. Like Teresa, there was rumours about being a bitch ..[indistinct]

Karl: And she's only been here three months

Alison: And there was a rumour about Karl selling smokes and Di there wasn't that much of a rumour.. [indistinct]. And Emma's like an alcoholic. And someone said them two they were stumbling on the oval, they thought they were drunk or something.

[Alison saying something in the background about her father not liking to hear such rumours]

Teresa: Rumour about Bronwyn too. Bronwyn went down town the other day and they go there's the girl that was wearing no nickers, really loud (laugh)

Emma: I heard about that

Teresa: And she goes, I'm here, talk to me and she goes..

Alison: It's mainly the ladies that spread it

JP: What, at morning coffee?

Karl: People have nothing better to do, they sit down and gossip about other people. They have problems, they can't solve them, they just have to nag on.

Jenny: The advice I got from Amelia and Jordan is that you add on your own piece..

Alison: To make it more fun (laugh)

Jenny: That's what they always did when they heard rumours about Amelia and Jordan, they just added on because they both knew it weren't true

Alison: Cos Miss Ford wanted to go for Amelia's husband, she was flirting with him. Miss Ford was flirting with Jordan. And like Amelia wanted to give her a hiding but she thought nah, not worth it.

In a subsequent discussion a distinction was made between sources of credible information, with credibility being related to length of residence:

Alison: She [Mrs Pearce] told us not to hang around with Malcolm cos she reckons he goes and gets everyone pregnant..

?: And he does not

?: He's a virgin

Bronwyn: She hasn't been here long enough to know Malcolm, to know anyone

Karl: She hasn't been here long enough to make her own interpretations of other people

A Wongi young man, Tommy, said there was "no trouble in this town really. Small town, everybody stick together". Other young adults too declared the town was quiet unlike the teenagers who spoke of 'trouble' with relish. Nevertheless, in everyday conversations adults and teenagers would gossip and pass on information about purported sexual liaisons, strife between people, and a recurrent topic, the latest news on crime incidents and the perpetrators and their victims. Within a single day, for example, I heard the following local 'news':

Jake at the youth centre meeting ...said that there was alot of money around as there had been a couple of thefts the day before. The skimpy [barmaid] had her room broken into and money taken and a bloke (who was named) had money stolen from his room at Camp 2... Mickey dropped round with Lee ...and said some blokes and stolen two WMC utes the night before and driven them out along the Mount Margaret road. He did not know if they were local blokes.

Stories of white crime tended to take on the dimensions of a scandal. Most longer term residents knew of incidents such as where a supermarket manager stole money and covered up his theft by claiming the store had break-ins, the theft of explosives by mine workers, a bank agency worker convicted of fraud, the investigations into a doctor for fraudulent claims, and a teacher who was convicted for possessing marijuana. There were also rumours circulating about insider trading, sometimes in relation to mining senior management, and of drug dealing amongst the mining workforce. Such matters

were frequently discussed with barely concealed excitement. Stories of drug dealing and insider trading indicated that the teller was in special position in that he or she was privy to hidden or secret information. Allegations of theft or other criminal activities against particular non-Aboriginal individuals, especially where charges were laid, were unusual community events and it was exciting to discuss details of the offence and the perpetrator.

Rumours of wrong-doing may have been talked about did not necessarily result in reporting to the police. A local police officer believed drug abuse to be rife in town, from what he had heard at the pub and from hospital workers who had claimed they had treated individuals for illnesses caused by drugs. However, he called the town 'tight lipped' with no-one telling the police directly what was going on. He indicated that the police had to be careful about how they acted:

Terence: ... until people start coming to us and telling us who it is, there's not alot we can do... We can't go around searching everybody's house because that only upsets people and we've got to live with the people here.

Certain crimes by non-Aboriginal individuals were less likely to be reported and even if they were reported, less likely to become public knowledge because they were dealt with by outside police or by the mining companies. The outlying mining communities were up to a point self-regulated and policed by the companies. The Laverton police would pay courtesy visits to outlying pastoral stations and minesites but used to rely on the companies calling them in when needed. Home baked heroin, for instance, was discovered at one of the larger mining sites in the early nineties, but an investigation of such a matter or other serious crimes were usually dealt with by detectives from Kalgoorlie, from the drug, gold or some other squad. The investigations and interventions of the outside police, especially if they related to matters in outlying minesites, were often not known to local residents. In addition, even if charges were laid the court proceedings were often held away from town, usually Kalgoorlie.

Physical violence, where it involved non-Aboriginal people as perpetrators was rarely reported to the police. Fighting in the pub might attract police intervention but in the main, violence was accepted as a routine occurrence that was a 'private' affair that should be normally dealt with by the parties concerned. It was also regarded by predominantly working class locals as an appropriate response to certain kinds of provocation. One young woman said she had been taught by her father to '*to treat people with respect but once they step over the line you got to clip them*' and she gave the example of where she had floored and knocked out the teeth of a man who called her a slut. A few non-Aboriginal men, with violent reputations, were regarded with an element of respect and wariness by other men in the town. Accounts of family violence against women or children contained tones of disapproval but police intervention was usually only seen as appropriate if the assaults were happening frequently or with increasing force.

There was an acceptance of a reasonably violent environment, as long as it did not pose a risk because it was predictable and confined to specific locations, times, and protagonists.

High school students: [Everyone talking at once about the pub 'It's a hole' 'Full of animals' 'Bit loud in there sometimes' 'Jukebox got smashed up' 'Lady got smashed up' Except for the animal bar, that's really stupid' 'Sometimes the people from the pub try to pick fights with you' 'Yeah, someone got bashed up at the back of the pub' 'Vince got bashed up and all Colin did is watch' 'This man chucked a big whoopee I don't know what about, and he threw this glass ashtray and hit this lady's foot. And Vince and Colin just sat there, shitting their pants, she was pregnant, first time at the pub and she got a glass ashtray thrown at her toe']

Kelly: ...Like I was working at the pub when I was about 15, I never told them that I was 15, they didn't even ask. I was working as a waitress in the restaurant and I used to get followed home by drunker [indistinct] [explained how her father made her an iron clad lead bar to carry when walking home at night. She never used it] ...As Mum always said words are stronger than violence. As I got older I just go off my face and them in Wongi if they're black. Like whitefellas I never trust whitefellas [indistinct]. Cos blackfellas respect that I'm my Mum and Dad's daughter so they sort of stay away from me. Except for Boris Brown, he always used to give me a bad time. But the whitefellas they couldn't care less.

It was far more common, to hear non-Aboriginal people deplore the 'depredations' of Aboriginal people. 'They' were criticised for public drinking and fighting, but most of the complaints were about property crime, where non-Aboriginal property had been affected. Much of the violence was seen as intra-group conflict that would be dealt with by the police if it became 'out of control'. Fighting between Aboriginal people and aggressive begging during the day were spoken of with annoyance rather than a source of direct threat. A white woman matter of factly said the main hassle she encountered was when she parked her car outside the shops because the 'Abos chuck rocks at the windows so they can have a warm bed and food for the night'⁶⁷.

Houses appeared to be viewed as reasonably safe havens provided there was adequate security, which in many instances included the ownership of a dog. Feelings of being personally unsafe, however, were sometimes expressed by non-Aboriginal women and young people, usually in relation to transversing public spaces at night time. There were widespread anxieties about rape after a policeman's wife was sexually assaulted by a local Aboriginal young man.

Some white people indicated that they were careful about going out at night or carefully monitored their younger children because they were afraid of Aboriginal people. The most extreme case I heard about was where an underground grader man had left town after he was warned that people were out to get him. A few years before he had been involved in a car crash and Aboriginal people were killed. The story went that the children of the deceased left town or were taken away but now they were back and seeking revenge.

⁶⁷ A common explanation provided by non-Aboriginal residents for disorderly and drunken behaviour of fringe or visiting Aboriginal people was that they wanted to be locked up in the police cells for the night.

Many local whites were familiar with the notion of 'payback' but were often hazy about what it meant and how it fitted into the Law. For many it was equated with revenge although the method for apportioning of blame was seen as essentially irrational. Again, it was perceived as unlikely to effect white people though it added to the impression of a people who did not hesitate to use physical violence and who were 'wildly' unconventional. A schoolteacher had heard that riots in Leonora were connected to payback, which she dismissed as 'stupid'.

There was an escalation in concern and anger typically after a specific incident involving a non-Aboriginal victim or where there were large numbers of disorderly desert visitors in town. For example, one day the community health nurse told me that a single white man had been stabbed with a screwdriver and that last year '*they began to get out of hand*' and there was even talk of forming vigilante groups. In 1993, during a month when there were many desert visitors, a couple of incidents upset the whites - a contractor's car was stolen but they were picked up at Menzies, and a white woman was threatened by an Aboriginal woman carrying a broken bottle near the hospital at night time. I was in the police station when a white woman came in and complained to the police sergeant about a broken window of her car. She asked '*how they would like it if we smashed their house windows?*' to which the sergeant's wife responded that '*welfare would buy them new ones*'. The woman said that in the mess there was talk of rounding '*them*' all up and taking them out and dumping them in a mine shaft⁶⁸.

Further proof of the hopelessness of Aboriginal people in the eyes of some white people were the activities of younger Aboriginal boys. Over the years there was group of about five young boys, below the age of criminal responsibility who were responsible for a fair amount of property damage. A young white adult who spent her teenage years in the town thought the extent of the damage had increased:

Hannah: I can remember walking along next to the kindergarten or the pre-primary, and looking over and seeing some little four year old Aboriginal kids throwing bricks at the windows. And it was just little things like that. And I think it's the same now, but on a larger scale.

The targets of stone throwing and other activities that caused damage to property were usually public buildings rather than private homes. I was told that WMC spent thousands of dollars refilling camp fire extinguishers that had been let off by Aboriginal kids, and I observed a couple of boys doing just this one day. Some of the boys had taken up sniffing glue and it was assumed they stole their supplies from the shop. Several of the boys had been caught over the years stealing from cars, houses and the shops although they typically took small items, food or small amounts of money.

⁶⁸ The following year, again when there was a significant presence of desert visitors, there were rumours that a traffic policeman notorious for his strict enforcement was moving from another country town to Laverton in order 'clean it up'. White people had been complaining about the number of car thefts and they were hoping the if the traffic policeman 'yellow-stickered' cars belonging to Aboriginal people they would keep away from town. When I mentioned this to a police aide he just scoffed at the idea of the traffic officer being able to bring the desert mob to heel by pulling up their cars and trucks.

Although these Aboriginal boys only intermittently resided in the town, they were around enough to be familiar to most local residents and one in particular was notorious. He was the only son of a notorious local couple, but it was his own activities and behaviour that had made his reputation. Tales of his past and present exploits circulated in the town, and the word was spread when he arrived back or left the town. He was also seen as instigating the more extreme actions of the other boys, and as having been instrumental in encouraging them to start glue sniffing. There was considerable interest amongst non-Aboriginal residents about the outcome of his first court appearance when he turned 10 years of age. For instance, a white worker at the service station asked me about Rory's court appearance and went on to explain that the boy was not used to discipline because his mother was beaten by his father if she tried to discipline him.

A notable feature of country towns, namely local knowledge of perpetrators and crimes, is alluded to by Cowlshaw (1988:164) when she states "in fact most people know little of the processes of the law but do know that *everyone* knows who broke into the club last weekend and that the police can't or won't arrest them" (her emphasis). Cowlshaw describes some of the views held by the whites, particularly in relation to car thefts, break-ins and property damage by Aboriginal people and their general unseemly behaviour, as typical of public calls for 'law and order', with complaints of police impotency and lenient courts.

In Laverton there were two main discourses on Aboriginal juvenile crime, one relating to desert youths which was confined largely to those working or involved in juvenile justice and youth work, and one relating to local youths, those who had spent considerable periods of time in Laverton and who had family in the town. The discourse on local youths and children focused on the activities of the more notorious offenders and on the inadequacies of their home environments. There was a hint of amusement and mock outrage when the latest escapades were recounted. Dissatisfaction was mostly expressed about the handling and ineffectual response to the behaviour and situation of younger children by welfare and the courts.

Many of the local non-Aboriginal residents expressed sympathy with the police, and knew them socially. Where local residents were familiar with other country towns, they believed the local police compared favourably to their counterparts elsewhere. A local resident cited a high figure for car theft in Leonora, and she put the difference between the two towns down to the response of the police. Nevertheless, the police were sometimes criticised for a failure to act or for their inadequate reactions to particular incidents or when there were there were a high number of incivilities occurring in public places. Levels of dissatisfaction with the police amongst non-Aborigines increased when there were numbers of Aboriginal people drinking in public spaces or 'polluting' local shops and amenities with their smell and 'unseemly' deportment of intoxication, swearing and/or aggressive begging. This dissatisfaction tended to only crystallise into specific complaints when for example, a car was stolen or property damaged.

Race relations

A thread running through the previous sections of social spaces and relations was the major fracture created in community life by the racial divide. This divide is illustrated by three public events that were free and open to all members of the community:

1. The Aboriginal public relations manager from Dominion (the mining company which owned the mine at Mount Morgan) and the Aboriginal couple who managed the DCD hostel, had arranged for a basketball team to visit the town, and a barbecue was held in the evening on the oval to celebrate the occasion:

The whites clustered around the barbecues. After the speeches, the band 'LA Beat' played the old favourites and most upstanding citizens mainly white wandered away. In the dark areas, on the edge, sat the groups of Aboriginal people. I sat behind Mavis and Vera and the Lads sat in a row behind. Ruth got up and sang a few country and western songs. The new hit was Achy Breaky heart. Several women including Nancy got up and danced and Fisher joined in. He had to come over and explain to Mavis that he could not keep the women away, they kept on approaching him when dancing. Marie staggered over and hit Mavis with a handbag, yelling that she did not care for Cherry... The school principal toured the perimeter asking the Wongi people, like a gracious hostess, if they had enjoyed themselves.

2. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance troupe visited the town and put on a performance at the Shire hall:

The whites aside from my partner and I were three Christian women, a mining family and three others... The Aboriginal 'drinkers' sat at the back of the hall, as did the Lads (Leo, Lee, Tommy and others). In the middle row of seats were [a young couple and two other young adults]. Vera sat in the back row of seats and tried to supervise her great grand-daughter Ella and Jessie's kids. During the performance the people [from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands] chattered away, the kids ran helter skelter up and down the aisles and the whites stared fixedly at the stage. A contemporary jazz ballet piece elicited cries of 'larra' (shame) from Belinda.

3. Western Mining sponsored a weekend of activities, the 'Back to Laverton' weekend, to mark their withdrawal from the town and to create a festive reunion for past and current residents. Aboriginal people were not present at most of these activities but on the Saturday night at the oval, the band 'LA Beat' played before the resident manager's speech. The Wongi spectators were in the dark, in semi-circles to the rear of the band, whilst the white crowd were under the marquee.

Few local Aboriginal people were employed in mining and the rest who had jobs were employed in service sector or by the Wongatha Wonganarra organisation. A few younger Aboriginal men had short term periods of employment with several small contractors and businesses. There were few opportunities for white and black to know each other at a common workplace and the Aborigines economic power was not great, with most people's incomes depending on social security payments.

By 1992 the Wongatha Wonganarra shop had closed, so that the local Aboriginal population relied on the local shops for their consumable goods. The white women and teenagers who worked in the retail sector had considerable contact with Aboriginal people

and in some instances, developed a friendly, more personal style of interaction with some of the local Aboriginal people. Many were, however, impatient with visiting Aboriginal people, especially if they were intoxicated. There was ambivalence amongst local black and white residents about such desert visitors - on the one hand they boosted local businesses like the pub's off-licence, the petrol station and food shops but on the other hand, they were often responsible for trouble at the Village and other kinds of public disorder around town.

The practice that generated the most direct transfer of money from white to black residents was begging, which was confined to mostly local fringe dwelling drinkers and visitors on a binge. Aside from transactions in shops, the other category of direct economic exchanges between Wongi and white residents was the 'trade' in artefacts and 'collectors' items' discovered in the bush. This trade was a significant source of extra income for Aboriginal people and would involve the retail of old coins, bottles, chrysoprase, gold nuggets, artefacts and paintings. The most common articles - paintings - were hawked around the mess and houses, where inhabitants were known to be interested in purchasing works of art. Local families drove around in cars to sell paintings and other goods and made use of their knowledge of local non-Aboriginal people. Visitors were more likely to be on foot and to approach passerbys and the rare breed, the tourist, in public spaces. The provenance and 'ownership' of paintings and other goods were often uncertain especially where the vendor was intoxicated.

A few of the local Aboriginal people also offered to perform 'cultural services' for monetary payment - such as the recounting of stories and language lessons. More common however was the proffering of information or the enactment of the role of interpreter or broker on behalf of local white residents - these services received no immediate financial reward but an obligation was created which might in the future create an opportunity to demand repayment in kind or in material form.

Writing of Brindleton, Cowlshaw (1988:214) states that "despite the familiar sight of Aborigines around the town, most whites have virtually no personal, domestic or social familiarity with blacks". For many Laverton residents, who had limited social or personal contact with Aborigines, they treated and discussed them as an objectified, homogenised 'other' group which constituted an exotic nuisance. The most remote to the daily lives of Wongis were the majority of the mine workers - one remarked to me that having talked to a local Aboriginal person at my place that the experience *'makes them seem like real people. I'd seen them around town but never really t'ken any notice'*. Even where white people by virtue of their occupation had daily contact with Wongi people and had established a rapport with some of the local people, there was the tendency to regard carousing visitors as a colourful, depersonalised feature of the landscape. For example, a police officer, due to leave the town permanently drove around with a video camera and quite blatantly filmed drunken Aborigines, and I witnessed the pub manager filming people as they used the drive-in bottle shop at the rear of the hotel.

There were only a few non-Aboriginal people who had long standing and personal contact with local Wongis. There were instances of 'intertwined personal histories', most notably several missionaries who had grown up or lived for years on the old missions. For example, an occasional visitor to Laverton an evangelical preacher was condemned by a few local Wongi women for not conforming to Wongi mores because he had not waited a year before remarrying after his first wife's death. Another who rarely came to Laverton had his actions and public utterances carefully scrutinised because I was told he '*grew up with Wongis*'. He had quite a high public profile being engaged in regional party politics and was reputed to have alleged at a meeting, to a Ngaanyatjarra audience, that a representative of the opposition's party '*drank babies' blood*'. He was also reported to be involved in a peripheral fashion with internal politicking within the Aboriginal domain, especially in relation to struggles over the control and direction of Mount Margaret.

Although shorter term residents to the district some Christians made a point of trying to befriend local Wongis and to 'do good' for the Aboriginal community. During my second period of residence the members of a fundamentalist non-denominational church were very involved in the management of the youth centre and the lay preacher was for a while the centre manager and co-ordinator of job skills programs for Aboriginal young men. The visiting Catholic priest endeavoured to establish good relations with the local people and was sympathetic to requests for food and help from intoxicated persons.

For the most part, however, it was through work that most friendships and social rapport were sustained. The justice and health practitioners had everyday contact with the local Wongi adults and it was part of their duties to provide services for them, but it was where there was a local employed within the agency that more intimate relations developed. So that it was where local Wongi people were employed as aides - at community health, at community services, in the police at the school and at the hospital - that 'inter-racial' friendships were forged. Even where, however, the white employee and the aide worked together for a number of years there remained an element of patronage and tutelage to the relationship, not doubt encouraged by the formal subordinate position of the 'aide'. More senior or autonomous positions were held by Aboriginal women - for example the ALS field officer, the DCD hostel manager and the social security representative but only the hostel manager had white people working under her. The Shire administration during this time had no Aboriginal employees despite the history of Aboriginal employees in the seventies and earlier, and Wongatha Wonganarra had only the one white 'employee', the manager, and he never socialised with the local Wongis outside of workhours.

It was amongst the younger generation of longer term residents that there were more durable friendships between black and white children, although as will be discussed in Chapter Six, they did not often survive into adulthood. With the older generation there were several 'mixed' couples, all white men and Aboriginal women except for one couple, but with nearly all of these couples they had become part of the Wongi milieu

and were rarely visible together in white domains. In contrast, several younger mixed couples participated in sporting activities and social life at the pub.

Cowlshaw (1988:95-97) states that circumspection and secrecy dominated the sexual aspect of contact between white and black residents in Brindleton. As outlined in Chapter Three, sexual liaisons were commonplace between white men and Aboriginal women right from the beginning of white exploration and occupation of the district. After Laverton was reborn as a mining town and up until more present times, a proportion of the mining workforce have 'paid' for sexual relations with local Aboriginal women. A local white resident who had lived in the town for nearly two decades gave this account of the 1975 Skull Creek incident which resulted in a Royal Commission:

Walt: ...the immigrant contractors of all nationalities who arrived in the 70s were part of the trouble. The 'gins' were making a buck and the Aboriginal men did not appreciate it. Would have been alright if the local police had dealt with it but a bunch of young lads were brought up from Kalgoorlie....

I was told that in the eighties the mine workers would knock off and drive past the Village where they might stop for sex, and in the late eighties, I sometimes witnessed on weekend nights, drunken young Aboriginal women knocking on doors in the single men's camps. Even where longer term relationships were established between an Aboriginal woman and a white mine worker and a child born, there were very few instances where the father acknowledged paternity and remained in town.

Racism

Cowlshaw (1988:208-210) states that hard line resentment of blacks by whites in Brindleton was articulated in terms of stories of government handouts, destruction of houses, lack of control over children, and conspicuous consumption by Aborigines. The latter was indicated by what was assessed as an inordinate use of taxis, intake of alcohol, and amount of money given to children for tuck-shop food. She found that the "repetition of stories of Aborigines' supposed depravity is a rich and never-ending source of social comment" (Cowlshaw 1988:213).

In Laverton it was typically the middle-aged and more working class or country whites who did not hesitate to employ racist language. Thus, a white man who had worked for many years at Windarra when asked why he did not run for Council replied that there "*there are too many boongs involved*" and muttered something about 'Mabo' and not wanting anything to do with it. He concluded by saying that his dogs attack 'them'.

There was palpable resentment in some quarters about what was perceived as a double standard by government in its financial assistance to Aborigines, which was often glossed as 'hand-outs'. One woman would constantly return to the refrain of how her sister '*battles on the station while the niggers get hand-outs*'. Another white woman after a house burnt down said that if it was an Aboriginal house it would be replaced immediately '*they just have to hold out their hands.*' Several white men suggested I sell our old ute to the Aborigines when, as they said with disgust, they get their couple of

thousand dollar cheques from the government (their tax returns). The use of the term of hand-out was in itself telling, conjuring as it does suggestions of begging.

A particular sore point for many was the subsidies for Aboriginal children to attend school. No mention was ever made of the heavy costs borne by taxpayers to educate 'isolated' and rural white children. The white parents' attitudes affected the way their children interacted with their Aboriginal counterparts at school, as this young woman's story shows:

Kelly: The Aboriginal kids back then.. like all the white kids they get really jealous cos the Aboriginal kids got paid to go to school, they get money for books, the parents get paid for sending them and all this that and the other. And that was a lot of trouble. And they just say well, look, the government is giving them money, they don't have to go out and work like our parents. Our parents work for our education. And they're getting paid, why can't they put a bit of their dole money towards the kids' education. And most of the white kids they get really wild about it.

JP: And the Aboriginal kids boasted about the fact that they got money for going to school?

Kelly: Mostly the educated ones. Like Rowena, one of the really nice girls..

JP: Harold's daughter

Kelly: Yeah, she never used to say much about it. But everybody used to hassle her about it because her Dad had a job, her Mum was working, she had a part time job. And everyone used to hassle her about it because they were working. And Rowena used to say let's just put it this way, I'm saving it all so I can buy a house then I am out of this hole. Shut them up (laugh).

In the nineties, the hand-out discourse to some extent was superseded by complaints of mismanagement and nepotism. It was asserted, that not only were the Aboriginal people receiving unfair advantages in relation to government funding and subsidies, but that this largesse was misspent and squandered, and did not produce tangible benefits for the community. According to a non-Aboriginal youth worker all he had ever encountered in Aboriginal affairs was corruption - the leaders were not concerned for their people's welfare, only chosen for their biggest and newest Toyota.

Personal hygiene epitomised for many Aboriginal inferiority. A questionnaire (see Figure 5 on the next page) was in circulation at one stage at the mines, and was supposed to be a piece of humorous satire. The 'smell of the Wongis' evoked responses of disgust and the shops were regarded as the coalface where the unpleasantness of the smell had to be endured. Two young local white women recounted their experiences in the shops:

Becky: They'll go to the shop, Wongis they'll go to the shops. After they walk out, they'll start to get the spray out, even if they don't smell. Just because they're black.

Kelly: I used to carry air freshener when I was working at Wonganarra because some of them just stunk. I'd used to straight out say you're not buying any food today. You'll get your food hamper, you can get clothes, soap, shampoo. You can go and have a shower and a shave and put clean clothes on. And we'll do the shopping for you. I'd give them meat and the bread, the milk and the flour and all that..

Becky: That was what Walt used to do in the shop. Every time a Wongi went into the shop to buy smokes, he'd make them buy milk and bread for the kids, before they bought smokes.

Kelly: You know those food vouchers from welfare?

JP: Yeah

Kelly: They'd get all their shopping and if they've got any money spare they could buy cigarettes and lollies. Before then they can't. No clothes. They buy all their food first

JP: Should say on the voucher food only

Figure 5: Racist questionnaire.

ABORIGINAL APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

(It is not necessary to attach a photo as you all look alike)

NAME: DATE OF BIRTH:

ADDRESS: (If living in car give make, model & registered number)

PLACE OF BIRTH:

- (a) Free public hospital ()
- (b) Under gum tree ()
- (c) Zoo ()

MARITAL STATUS:

- (a) Common law ()
- (b) Shackled up ()
- (c) Other ()

LATIONS LIVING WITH YOU:(continue list over)

NAME OF MUM: NAME OF FAVA:

MAKE OF CAR:

- (a) 62 Holden ()
- (b) 63 Holden ()
- (c) Valiant ()

IS THE VEHICLE:

- (a) Under Hire Purchase ()
- (b) Stolen ()
- (c) Owned by Lations ()

IF VEHICLE IS UNDER HIRE PURCHASE, WHAT IS REPOSSESSION DATE:

APPROXIMATE ESTIMATE AND SOURCE OF PRESENT INCOME:

- (a) Unemployment Benefits ()
- (b) Theft ()
- (c) Armed Robbery ()
- (d) Accident Compo ()

WHAT SPORT DO YOU PLAY:

- (a) Rugby League ()
- (b) Soft Ball ()
- (c) Head kicking ()

TICK FOODS YOU LIKE BEST:

- (a) Pa) ()
- (b) Fish & Chips ()
- (c) Kentucky Fried Dog/Roo ()

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SHOWER:

- (a) Yearly ()
- (b) Monthly ()
- (c) Weekly ()

AT WHAT DISTANCE CAN OTHERS SMELL YOU:

- (a) 800 metres ()
- (b) 400 metres ()
- (c) 100 metres ()

WHAT EQUIPMENT CAN YOU OPERATE:

- (a) Crow Bar ()
- (b) Knife ()
- (c) Space Invaders ()
- (d) Juke Box ()

WHAT ARE YOUR ABILITIES:

- (a) Truck Driver ()
- (b) Process Worker ()
- (c) Venereal Disease Spreader ()
- (d) Pub-Fight Starter ()
- (e) Rapist ()

WHAT ILLNESSES HAVE YOU HAD IN PAST YEAR:

- (a) Scabies ()
- (b) Head Lice ()
- (c) Venereal Disease ()

HOW MANY CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS DO YOU HAVE:

- (a) More than 30 ()
- (b) 20 - 30 ()
- (c) 10 - 20 ()

LIST YOUR GREATEST DESIRE IN LIFE (In 50 words or less)

.....(Other than white girls)

Kelly: But like some people they'd never check. They'd have gone over to welfare, wingled a food voucher out of them somehow. Buy all the food with their money and then buy clothes with the food voucher.

JP: It can be very hard to work out who to give them to

Kelly: I used to hate doing them in the shop. One time they used to ring Wonganarra and say these people can you book up there⁶⁹ or not

Becky: At one stage I had about 10 food vouchers to put through the till in a row, that was at the deli

Kelly: The other day, Warbo lady, Stirling's wife, couldn't speak English in the deli. She wanted to get nappies for her kids. Now she got all the food. She said nah, you can't buy that [nappies], that's part of groceries. Those kids should be toilet trained. And I said Wongis teach their kids to toilet train when they're [indistinct]. This kid wasn't even walking.

Becky: When she was working at the shop, any Wongi come in and start hassling anyone, she'll yell at them in Wongi

Kelly: I still do it now. Shop assistant is standing there and someone's going 'mirrka' [food], what are you saying? I got to go and translate. It's difficult for the Wongis, they get angry and frustrated and they get wild and you don't argue with them in the middle of the shops. I go over, leave kid with someone, and find out what they want. I said to, when I was working there, you should learn Wongi, there's more Aboriginals here than anywhere else, other than Ranges⁷⁰. See Oscar, don't know whether he's still there, he spoke it fluently, fluently enough to know what they want.

Becky: I used to talk flat out Wongi, can't remember half of it now..

The non-Aboriginal high school students were aware that it was 'racist' to go on about Aborigines being smelly and dirty, but struggled to discuss the topic in a non-racist vein:

Teresa: ...down here it stinks the air it gets polluted by like the Aboriginals

Greg: You're a racist (Teresa laughs)

Teresa: Excuse me, I'm related to them thank you. Not down here but related to some Aboriginals. You know but they have showers

JP: Geraldton way

Teresa: They're not like people down here

Greg: So, a couple of them have showers

Teresa: A couple! (laughs) How many that's, two or three. Ones that live in houses have showers but the ones that live you know wherever they can sleep

Alison: Not really, not ones in houses. Their houses are cracked and...

Greg: Most of the ones I know have showers

Di: Most of them have got the opportunity, there's that well thing down there

Karl: And public showers as well

[Babble of voices]

Teresa: Where are they going to get their clean knickers from? (laugh) They can go to Fred's and buy some new knickers and have a shower (laugh).

Adopting the high moral ground, the high school students would parody such sentiments:

Jenny: Sometimes here you've got racial sort of stuff not like really racial but I mean I've heard some kids say they're not allowed to go there because its only for Aboriginals and all that sort of shit

JP: Yeah, I've heard that

Alison: Yeah, parents won't allow them because there's black kids that go there

⁶⁹ When Wongatha Wonganarra operated a shop, Aboriginal people could 'book up' stores, the accumulated cost of which would be deducted from social security payments.

⁷⁰ Local Aboriginal and white residents often referred to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, or to Warburton specifically, as 'the Ranges'.

Greg: Those little bastards are real.

Alison: Smelly ones, naughty ones

Greg: They should make a dress code for it like the pub

Teresa: And have a shower before you enter (laugh)

Greg: Like no bare feet, no thongs, shit like that. Minimum dress, sneakers and stubbies, shit like that..

Aboriginal people were described in negative ways by non-Aboriginal people because of their public drinking and begging. The excessive drinking by some Aborigines was seen as the reason for a lot of the rubbish and damage about town. In Katherine 'public drunkenness' was absolutely central to the contestation over town spaces (Merlan 1998). It was taken as the stark and salient difference as one between Aborigines and others and the nicknames bestowed on wine casks by non-Aborigines was an ironic comment on Aborigines perceived disregard for material possessions and the avidity of drinkers for grog. This Aboriginal use of space was attributed by whites to lack of ambition, dependence on state and taxpayer economic support and social inconsequentiality (Merlan 1998:195-196).

Gerrard (1990) found that 'humbugging' was a major cause of racial tension at Maningrida especially at barge times when many Aborigines were drunk. Initially at least the Europeans, who were unaccustomed to refusing point blank such requests and were motivated by pity, based their behaviour on what Gerrard calls a government welfare model of interaction with Aborigines. Gerrard found that the whites inevitably became hardened even to requests couched in terms of 'I need money to feed my kids'. The whites justified their refusal to give commodities to the Aborigines on the grounds that they 'would not look after them' and learnt to dissemble. Europeans in Maningrida often saw "this 'gathering' as a form of Aboriginal deceit, laziness and irresponsibility and they often made comments to this effect" (Gerrard 1990:276).

The most common form of justification articulated by Laverton white residents was that the 'money would just go on drink'. A white woman, a former Shire councillor who was known to respond to a 'bite', said she felt sorry for 'them' but if seven people gather round begging it could be a costly business. She said she did not want to hang around town because people demanded money from her and she had learnt to just carry small change. The high school students explained their strategies for dealing with begging:

Di: There was a little argument a while ago. They put the prices of casks of moselle up just because the Aborigines buy it all the time

Teresa: That's how they spend all their money

JP: As a deterrent or for money?

Alison: They had \$15 for Aborigines and \$12 for whites

Di: I think it was both actually. To stop them from like drinking so much

Karl: They won't stop

Teresa: What's the use, they go round asking people...

Karl: Yeah, they go scabbing

Teresa: You gotta silver, you gotta silver. Five dollar. I don't carry that much change. Sorry (laughter).

Di: Sorry I don't carry that kind of cash, it's too much (laugh)

Alison: One lady asked me for five dollars, I had \$100 in my hand and I said sorry, I've got no money (laughter)

Teresa: They come up and ask for a smoke and you've got a packet of smokes in your pocket you know. And you say no, I got no smokes

Di: You got to make excuses because they keep hounding you. You sit there for five minutes trying to tell them you haven't got any money

Karl: And if you haven't they try and take you out on physical abuse

Everyone: Yes

Teresa: Yeah, you fucking cunt

Di: Well, can I just have a smoke

Alison: You slut

Greg: I got attacked by Agatha the other day for cigarettes (laughter)

Karl: Is she the one with the squashy face? She's got herpes

Di: She's always got a beany on

Greg: She wouldn't let go of me. I said get off me, I don't have any cigarettes (laugh). Ended up giving her a [indistinct] to get rid of her

Alison: Oh yuck

[Clamour of indistinct voices, someone says 'all those pussy scabs, shit things... I almost spewed on her']

Teresa: Yeah Karl, what about your friend? Gotta smoke, gotta smoke

Di: [as an aside to JP] This is Hal yeah

Di: Me and Greg gave him one and he's sitting there. We're trying to light it for him by the way was blowing on it instead of sucking in on it

Greg: He's like rocking back and forward and the cigarette is going and the lighter is going [etc etc].

The emotional content of many utterances ranged from revulsion and irritation at 'their' habits, a feeling of being frightened and under threat, and pity and compassion for 'their' plight. Common tactics of avoidance by non-Aboriginal residents in public spaces combined with public statements of hostility reinforced the boundaries of social segregation. So did conscious decisions to exclude Aboriginal people from private spaces and wherever possible, recreational activities. A white woman who ran jazz ballet classes for girls in the town had heard that some parents had refused to let their kids do ballet because two Aboriginal girls were going along. She thought the parents were afraid that their kids would be invited to go round to Aboriginal homes.

Longer term white residents were more inclined to sound resigned about the 'undisciplined' and 'uneducated' Aborigines. For example, a white woman working in the shop, after some Aboriginal children squabbled loudly over the purchase, said "there's no hope for some of them". On another occasion a shop proprietor said that alot of people talk badly of the Aborigines 'but they're just the same as us, only uneducated.' Several local inhabitants were keen to stress that 'relatively speaking' Laverton was not a very racist town, at least in comparison to other nearby Goldfields towns. Like the Smalltown residents who believed class distinctions were negligible in their town and who could cite examples of across class friendships and the openness of voluntary organisations, some Laverton white residents attempted to minimise the racial divide by highlighting the Wongi families that participating in sporting and civic activities, the Aboriginal individuals who had jobs, and the lack of formal prohibitions. Another tactic was to stress that it was only 'some' Aborigines who caused the problems and only 'some whites' who were really racist. The white teenagers admitted to being prejudiced against 'stereotypical' Aborigines in a conversation about equality:

Emma: Being equal like men and women should be equal
Karl: Black and white should be equal. Every race should be equal
Bronwyn: Except for Teresa
Karl: And Aboriginals, just the typical...
Emma: Typical ones, not the...
Karl: Yeah, well...
Emma: Hmm...
JP: Why isn't there equality in practice?
Emma: What do you mean by that?
JP: Do you think everybody is equal?
Emma: No
Karl: Yeah, everybody is equal...
Emma: In their own way
Karl: No, I think people are... to the same extent but people just don't see it that way, like me. I'm prejudiced and racist towards the Aboriginals in town, not all of them, just the typical ones that...
Emma: Stereotypes
Karl: Drinking and harassing, threatening, just those ones piss me off.
JP: Any other group you feel prejudiced towards?
Karl: No not really, that's about it.
JP: So do you think that's what causes inequality?
Karl: Yeah
JP: Would you two agree with that, the group you feel most prejudiced towards?
Bronwyn: Yeah
JP: Would you call it prejudice?
Karl: More racist than anything else but I see prejudice there as well
JP: You're saying inequality created by people's own behaviour?
Karl: Yeah
JP: Do you see any other forms of inequality in this town? [Long pause]
Bronwyn: The single men
JP: Why?
Karl: Cos they're just typical drunks
Bronwyn: I don't know
Karl: They're good for a root and that's it
Bronwyn: Most of them
Karl: Just sleazebags that's all
Bronwyn: I could name a few too (laugh)
Karl: So could I

It was mostly white women, shop workers and young people who encountered Aboriginal people in public spaces regularly during the day who were heard to complain about the smell, begging and threatening behaviour of *particular individuals*. Some justice practitioners, especially the police, employed a dichotomy to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable Aborigines. As will be shown in Chapter Eight, those that had regular contact with the desert people and visited the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were more inclined to distinguish between the dignified and honest traditional person and the demoralised townspeople. Nevertheless, a distinction that was articulated by white people who had lived for many years in rural settings, including the police, was the singling out of politicised Aborigines who were outspoken critics of racism, who were characterised as the worst examples of townspeople. A youth centre manager, a country man, and a good friend of one of the police officers was very antagonistic towards a young Aboriginal woman, who had accused the police of harassment and discriminatory

behaviour. He said she was 'very racist, the most racist person in town.... just like half-castes'.

A white high school teacher older and more experienced than the other teachers conceded that Aborigines were prejudiced in their way because they did not like white people nor did they like to conform to white ways. She implied that it was hard to remain tolerant because of this non-conformity and because of the white racism in the town. She explained that for many graduate teachers it would be the first time they had dealt with Aboriginal kids and that they had to face their own racism and the racist views of people in town, exemplified by complaints that 'they smell, they have nits'.

Her viewpoint, informed by cross-cultural training and her own work experience, represents the attempts by liberal middle-class professionals to recognise and respect cultural differences, as a means of avoiding racist stereotyping. Her account of how the Wongi kids 'differ' combined generalisations about culture and more specific traits that she had encountered in Laverton. Excerpts from my notes of her account are provided below:

Miriam: They are uncontrollable in the classroom, they do not like to be 'shamed' in public so I would take them outside to talk to. You can't be authoritarian - they dive under the desk and hide when being rebuked and shamed in such a setting. The girls tend to hide their figures. They are fairly sexual active by year 8, but it is inappropriate to discuss sexual matters. In their culture, family comes first, and their learning is through trial and error, by observing what others do and 'modelling' their behaviour accordingly. Their values are shared, communal rather than individual ownership. They help themselves to equipment otherwise they never have anything - things gets burnt, destroyed by drunks at home. I covered books at beginning of the year so they didn't get destroyed as fast.

Cowlshaw (1988:106) asserts that the social and behavioural traits associated with blacks had a class significance - whites equals regular work, stable nuclear family; black equals large family network, unemployment, lock up, trouble paying rent, binge drinking. While this was the case in Laverton as well, more positive constructions centring on cultural differences and disadvantage were deployed to explain these traits by those wishing to help the Aboriginal residents.

Doing good

Over the years, a small minority of Laverton residents, nearly all whites, have involved themselves in local initiatives to assist Aboriginal people. Those concerned about Aboriginal welfare have concentrated their efforts on helping the local youth and children. The recreation officer submission in 1985 underlined the degree of anti-social behaviour by Aboriginal youth:

"There is a great deal of vandalism and other minor offences against property at Laverton including breaking and entering, stone throwing, unlawful use of motor vehicles, petrol inhalation and property damage. This is caused mainly by youths between the ages of 10 to 18 years".

It is worth quoting the original submission where it offers an explanation of underlying causes of the anti-social behaviour:

"Children in a traditional Aboriginal group do not receive any formal individual discipline as understood by Europeans because in traditional life this is provided by the harsh physical environment and the small, very circumscribed social environment. Formal introduction to personal discipline only comes in the early teens with initiation.

This traditional organisation breaks down in a settlement situation and the people have not been able to establish new controls to cope. The European method of individual discipline at an early age especially for destructive behaviour towards property is so alien to that it is only very gradually being adopted. The problem of establishing new methods of child rearing is compounded by the increasingly large family sizes. This is a result of better food and medical facilities associated with lack of birth control and a great reduction in nomadic travelling, which, in the past, enabled only the fittest child to survive.

The community at Laverton offers very little in the way of alternatives to parental discipline for the children. There are no constructive recreational outlets provided for them by the European community and the people have neither the understanding nor the resources to help themselves".

Dempsey (1990) found that in Smalltown the problems of the aged were defined as personal problems, and therefore the responsibility of family and government, rather than being public or community problems. Similarly, and probably to an even greater extent, in Laverton, Aboriginal issues were perceived by white residents as the responsibility of the government. The authorities may have been misguided but it was still their concern. The only issues that were defined as a community responsibility related to public disorder or incivilities but this translated into pressuring the Shire or police to take action.

The efforts to prevent youth crime in the town in recent times reveal that it has predominantly been justice and welfare professionals who have instigated initiatives and struggled to control community committees. The youth worker referred to in Gosling's article was instrumental in setting up a youth drop-in centre in the town, which has carried through to the present day. The principal antecedent to the centre had been a youth club, which appeared to rely on the enthusiasm and interest of the local welfare officer and was run from about 1973 on an intermittent basis. In the 1985 when it was called the 'Petrol Sniffing Club' (!) it was funded by the then DCS as a peer group program for the fringe dwelling Aboriginal children. Up until 1995 the DCS or equivalent had been the principle funding source and its local representative a significant instigator of youth activities for marginalised youth. In annual reports for the welfare department from 1974 on there is a stress on community involvement and participation in youth activities and a condition of funding for the Petrol Sniffing Club was that at least two of the supervisors were to be Aboriginal and from the local area.

In 1985 a local committee applied to the state Department of Sport and Recreation for funding to have a full-time recreation officer. This was a locally driven initiative in that the submission was prepared by a Committee comprising the Shire president and clerk, the Wongatha Wonganarra manager, a local DCS officer, the school principal, and the prime mover, a local police officer. The submission referred to the 1975 report by the

Laverton Study Group which had recommended the appointment of a recreation officer for the local area, and to the Peer Group Program which they claimed was very popular with the children but which had ceased after a relatively short period because of the "lack of suitable supervisors". While the program had been running, a total of five local Aboriginal people were employed as supervisors and although they were "genuinely motivated" the submission states that they lacked the skills and confidence and that they often left Laverton for long intervals of time due to "basic nomadic tendencies" and "strong traditional families". Although it is not stated explicitly it is indicated in the submission that there was a need for professional expertise and for someone with a full-time ongoing commitment to tackling youth issues.

The main target group for the recreation officer was identified in the submission as the "socially deprived fringe dwelling youth as it is within this group that the highest incidence of petrol sniffing, alcohol abuse and other anti-social behaviour occurs". The causes of sniffing and anti-social behaviour were stated as boredom, peer pressure and "lack of parental guidance and discipline". Funding was made available the following year, but by the time someone had been recruited to fill the position, petrol sniffing was no longer common amongst the local youth and the overall numbers of fringe dwelling youth had declined⁷¹. Nevertheless the officer for a few years endeavoured to work with local youth with a particular focus on the needs of disadvantaged youth until there was a shift in funding and focus for the position. Once the position was fully funded by local government the recreation officer was expected to assist 'the entire community' and by 1993 the incumbent in the position was doing very little with Aboriginal youth. In that year the position was converted to a part-time activities officer with office duties.

In contrast the drop-in centre or the youth centre as it became known continued to have a predominantly Aboriginal clientele, and to have more boys than girls attendees. Unlike the recreation officer position which had always been held by a woman, the youth centre manager had always been male except where he was relieved or assisted by women. The remuneration offered to the youth centre manager was always been less than that of the recreation officer, and never included accommodation or a car, significant drawbacks in Laverton where private rental housing was at a premium. From 1987 to 1994 there were three youth centre managers and four recreation officers who stayed in the job for a considerable length of time. The experience and interests of individuals holding these jobs varied with, for example, the first recreation officer having worked in Aboriginal settlements in the Northern Territory whilst a more recent officer was a recent graduate in recreation studies. One youth centre manager was very interested in music and another was concerned about the job prospects of Aboriginal male youths and supervised several local work experience programs in which they participated.

⁷¹ I heard various reasons for the decline in population, including the movement of people to other places after a car collision near the Village resulted in many fatalities and after Cosmo Newberry was closed. Also, the condition of a local boy, who was crippled by his petrol sniffing, was said to have acted as a deterrent to the practice.

There are broad similarities between the two youth initiatives - the recreation officer and the youth centre - in that they shared the same underlying philosophy that by addressing boredom such initiatives would prevent substance abuse and offending. Both were originally conceived of as targeting disadvantaged Aboriginal young people. Both initiatives were locally managed by community committees although the recreation officer had the daily support and supervision of the Shire clerk and staff, whilst the youth centre manager always had to operate alone. The community committee that managed the recreation officer for several years comprised local heavyweights in the service sector and from the Shire while in contrast the youth centre committee struggled to attract members, and for many years the funding agency, DCS, was instrumental in setting the parameters on the administration and function of the centre.

Cowlshaw (1988:218) describes 'do-gooders' in the health, education and welfare fields during their three years of residence as "a number of blow-ins live constantly in an embattled situation and spend their time expressing outrage at the racist whites and encouraging active blacks...The lack of close personal relations between the black and white populations leads to these do-gooders relying on a few Aboriginal comrades as their source of Aboriginal opinion".

In the town of Brindleton, do-gooders were considered naive and ineffectual, and the stirrers as having political motives. Stirrers were no more popular among Aborigines, who Cowlshaw portrays as disliking conflict. Cowlshaw asserts that do-gooders and stirrers had similar motives but their tactics differed. The risk of stirring, according to Cowlshaw was ostracism, and could have an adverse impact on a person's career. Although they were ineffective, she believes the stirrers were considered a threat because of their ability to challenge the view of the world which justified and took for granted the lesser social worth of Aborigines.

Written in 1987, the New Zealand newspaper article about Laverton distinguished between 1500 "transient miners who stay for six months and leave before they go crazy" and a 'ruling class'⁷² of 500 local persons. The 'ruling class' were accused of taking over the youth centre, after they declared the place poorly run, because they objected to white kids playing with black kids. According to the journalist who wrote the article 'the ruling class' and the Perth government agree that "the Aborigines, their crime and their alcohol abuse, pose a serious problem" yet the "difference lies in how the problem is perceived". The journalist referred to a 'stack' of local committees set up to address the problems but he caustically notes:

"Acknowledging the problem means that plenty of political attention is paid to a town that would otherwise be a speck of fly dirt on the map. Attention from Perth adds up to money being sent to Laverton, and political clout for that small group of committee devotees...The local 500 didn't want things to happen, and the 1500 blacks living on the reserves just didn't have the soul. The temporary Laverton miners and their families didn't care" (Gosling 1987).

⁷² The term 'ruling class' was inflammatory and not very accurate. The town may have had a very small dominant group of longer term white residents but they did not constitute a 'class' in the sense promulgated by Connell (1978).

The displeasure of Laverton residents at the article was reported in the newspapers, the *West Australian* and the *Kalgoorlie Miner*. One riposte was a letter to the editor from a white woman who had not resided in the town for many years, but who was a daughter of the town's 'founder' Dr Laver.

"The pioneering spirit is still abroad in the outback and never more strongly than in Laverton...The Laverton people work together and play together, and there always seems to be some project in hand... Father had a lot of contact in the early days with the Aborigines, whom he admired for their fine physique, ethics, intelligence, generosity and happy natures. He trusted them and they trusted him. He never carried a gun. They called him 'Mr, the doctor'. Dr Laver learned from their bushmanship and culture. It is tragic that other white men did not, in general, learn from the Aborigines and their wonderful skills in the environment" (Kalgoorlie Miner 23/7/87).

In an article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* (4/7/87) the Shire President and his wife, a shire councillor and the hospital matron, were said to have lived in the town for 26 years and to have taken a "dim view of the blow-ins who wrote about the town in such derogatory terms". The President complains of inaccuracies and the Matron was quoted as observing "most of the mining executives also lived outside the supposed road boundary."

An impassioned letter to the editor was sent by a long-term white resident:

"To understand and love this country you have to live here; to understand and love the people, you have to be part of the community... The green of the trees and lawns stand out from the surrounding redness and scrub of my beloved country...[there are] about 35 Aboriginal families fully integrated within the town, and the upper echelon of Western Mining Corporation (WMC) staff living outside the circle"(Kalgoorlie Miner 2/7/87).

The journalist was castigated for relying on the opinions of one social worker "one obviously embittered egotist... neither reporter nor friend were here long enough to identify true problems and were obviously only interested in promoting unrest". The letter-writer acknowledges problems which she claimed the community was facing in a positive way rather than the negative approach epitomised by the demeaning depiction of committees.

This correspondence touches upon the internal politics and tensions amongst do-gooders in small communities. Distinctions are drawn between old timers and 'blow-ins', radicalism and welfarism, and strategies to save the uneducated as against those that are oppressed. After the outcry of 1986 only a few of the protagonists remained in town into the nineties and internal politics amongst the do-gooders took on a somewhat different character. Very long-term non-Aboriginal residents had moved on or died and their absence left the field dominated almost exclusively by a procession of government representatives, who stayed in town for periods of less than three years, and in relation to the youth centre, members of the fundamentalist Christian church. Nonetheless, the management and direction of the youth centre continued to be contentious, and its committee meetings remained the only regularly held forum to discuss non-school youth activities once the recreation officer's management committee disbanded.

At monthly meetings the voluntary members of the Committee would hear from the centre's manager and have an update from the treasurer on financial matters. Often the members would discuss issues arising from the youths' behaviour, such as policies on smoking and bad behaviour, and would approve expenditure on repairs or the purchase of new equipment. Rifts occurred between members over such matters as the recruitment and selection of the manager ('nepotism'), the recruitment of new Committee members ('stacking'), the use of funds ('profiteering' 'incompetence') and decision making (the role of the manager and the Committee). Some members favoured a service premised on youth advocacy that catered for the local Aboriginal youth whilst others preferred to attract a broader clientele base and to focus on improving the centre's 'image'. Such disagreements were affected by tensions between various agencies and their representatives, most obviously the police and welfare on the youth centre committee. This subject is pursued further in Chapter Eight on justice practitioners. Like other political fora in town, it was usually the men who were the publicly recognised protagonists in disputes though women frequently played an equally important but less visible part in the processes associated with conflict and dissent. Female members usually had the job of treasurer or secretary but from 1987 to 1994 the chairperson was always male and usually a police officer.

The 1985 recreation officer submission contained several references to the lack of community support in Laverton for 'doing good' for the less fortunate. The submission stated:

'As Western Mining is a major influence within the community, the result is their employees, being the greatest group within the town, receive the support given from this source...the other community members, such as the Aboriginal section fail to receive adequate support.... The main result [of the itinerance of the population] is the lack of continuity and regularity of supervision or organisation of recreational activities'

This lack of civic minded residents was a recurring complaint over the years. A police officer, who acted as chairperson of the youth centre committee for a while, said he ran for the Shire Council because he wanted to promote the interests of children which were in his view neglected by self-interested councillors. A recreation officer, who had lived in Laverton in her early teens and returned as a young adult, complained of the lack of parental involvement and support for the activities she organised. She attributed the apathy to laziness but also saw it as reflecting the lack of social investment in the community:

Hannah: The parents are up here to get money and that's it...With Laverton it's the case that people being up here because they have to and because they want the money, not because they want to. Except for the likes of the Marlows .. and the Marlows(laugh).

The dominance of government employees on community committees and pivotal control over the processes involved in soliciting and distributing grants could be partly explained by a disinterest amongst most residents and employers in civic projects not directly related to their own immediate interests. There was a lack of philanthropic activity in the area except for a few self-proclaimed Christians, both black and white. Juvenile

crime was consistently defined by most residents as an Aboriginal problem which should be dealt with by the appropriate authorities like the police, health, and welfare professionals.

Every so often young people agreed to act as representatives on the youth centre committee, although such involvement was usually short-lived. A few took the initiative in organising dances but there never developed a tradition of involvement and pride in the place. The perspectives of young people are examined in more depth in Chapter Six.

Local Aboriginal people were not really involved in the recreation officer or youth centre committees. The main exception was a woman who had been on the recreation officer committee, who was a justice of the peace, a former manager of Wongatha Wonganarra and a shire councillor. Once she moved out of town to a nearby settlement and severed her ties to Wongatha Wonganarra she stopped taking an interest in town youth activities. A few non-local Aborigines - the hostel manager and a police aide - were on the youth centre committee. Other committee members, and the positions of youth centre manager and recreation officer, were always held by non-Aboriginal people. It would not be right, though, to conclude that people were disinterested in their children's well being. A local Wongi man was reported as saying when he resigned as a police aide that "Laverton is a hard-drinking place for blacks and whites. Mr Winter, like most of the Aboriginal community, worries about how alcohol will affect the local children" (*West Australian* 12/5/86). The local Wongi domain is examined in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Many Laverton residents expected to live in the town for relatively short periods of time, and they responded in diverse ways to what were seen as the salient features of the place. These embraced and synthesised characteristics of a traditional rural pastoral town and a regional Goldfields mining community. Being tough and hard were attributes commonly associated with the pastoral and mining sectors and the 'frontier', and they were recurrent themes in accounts of the town and its people. For example a white woman who lived on a pastoral property remarked that she felt 'hard' when she went down to the city, a hardness she saw as being caused by financial worries and the conditions.

Underpinning every facet of daily life in the town was the economic dependence on mining. The majority of men worked in mines or in related industries and the town's social life was shaped by their patterns of work, and an aggressive masculinity celebrated as integral to the way Goldfields mining men conducted themselves on and off the job. Those that marginal mining life - women, young people and Aboriginal people - were nevertheless affected by this masculine ethos of hard work and play.

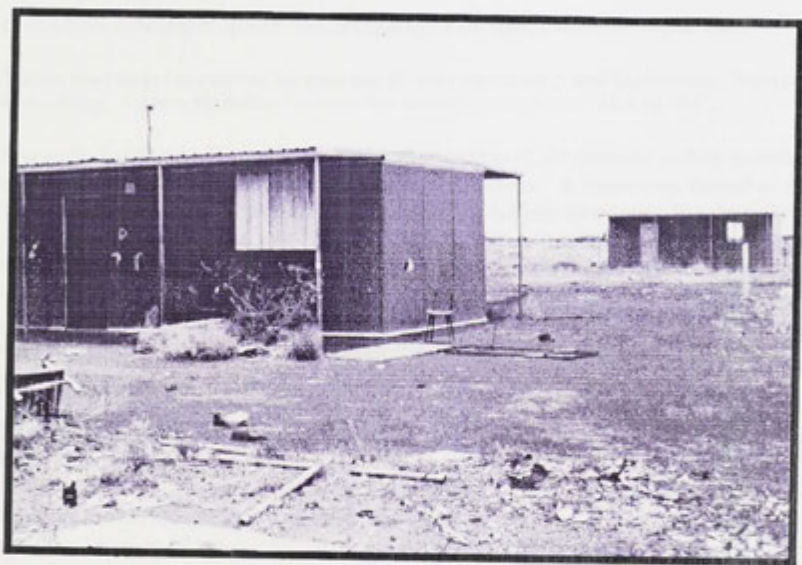
Most white families had young children, and did not intend to stay in town beyond a few years. In contrast to other portrayals of rural communities, Laverton was widely regarded as suffering from a range of social deficits because of the fundamentally transient nature of the white population. It was characterised as having only a limited

degree of 'self-help' in more recent times largely because of an impoverished sense of community in terms of both attachment and social investment.

Another core facet to the town was the significant presence of Aboriginal people. For many whites, they were a collective nuisance or demoralised group with whom they had no personalised relations with. Aboriginal people were widely viewed as a 'social problem' who perpetrated much of the crime around town, and who were leniently dealt with by the authorities.

There was a core of longer term white residents, including a small number of teenagers and young adults, who knew many of local Aboriginal families and young people. It was these people who were more likely to share local knowledge about trouble and troublesome individuals. An implication of the town's small size was that past and contemporary events and personal histories could forge a semblance of communal identity that transcended the racial divide.

The other group who had contact with local Aboriginal people - mostly via work and around town - were residents employed in certain occupations - police, community health, community services and so on. Although personnel changed over the years, it was this group that consistently focused on efforts to alter the circumstances of local Aboriginal people, though their efforts to provide help were mostly directed at local Aboriginal youth. It was in a sense what set this group apart from other white and Aboriginal residents, the vast majority who were not engaged in the liberal democratic project of progressive change by assisting the young of those less well-off. Within this small group there was however considerable disagreement and tension about how change might be wrought.



CHAPTER FIVE

LA Wongis

As indicated in the previous chapter, the 1991 census recorded that one fifth of the Laverton district's population or 360 persons stated they were Aboriginal. Most would have lived in town, followed by Mount Margaret and smaller outlying settlements.

In the 1986 newspaper article on Laverton the Aborigines were described thus:

"All the black faces I saw around Laverton held the same expression of total hopelessness. These people have nothing. Not even the political strength that numbers could provide" (Gosling 1987).

The stark divide was illustrated by the local operation of the criminal justice system, with over one third of the article dedicated to this subject. A figure was quoted of 364 faces 'coloured black' in the 366 juvenile cases for the previous year. The juvenile justice system is described more fully in Chapter Seven, but the impression was created by the article of a demoralised minority, discriminated against and oppressed because of their racial identity. In this chapter it will be argued that the local Aboriginal people did not believe they had 'nothing' nor were they despondent immobile spectators of mainstream Laverton life. But this is not to say there were unaffected or untroubled by wider structural constraints, racism or factional politics.

The chapter begins with racism and interactions with whites, as these subjects follow on from some of the issues raised in the previous chapter. The next section considers the distinct social and economic domains of the local Aboriginal people before exploring the subject of localised identities. Several writers have discussed what they have perceived as critical aspects of Aboriginal social life including ways of rearing children and the significance of kin and affinal relationships, which are relevant to the process of identifying relevant cultural practices and meanings within the Laverton context. From the point of view of local Wongi people, daily life was shaped by and conversations dominated by various kinds of politicking particularly within the regional Aboriginal field of politics. Amongst town residents, interpersonal conflict and dissent between local people were observed with keen interest and attracted lively debate and commentaries. Of particular interest was type of incident which resulted in calls for 'external' intervention, notably from police. The final section examines attitudes towards police and local Wongi perceptions of and relations with 'powerful external agents'.

Racism

Except for a few of the younger adults, I rarely heard racism being discussed amongst the local Aboriginal people. Only when people were 'wild' and/or intoxicated did they berate white people for being 'prejudiced'. This is not to say that people were unaware of hostile and damning attitudes of some white people or that they did not experience

marginalisation because of structural inequities. It was however, specific places in town, specific people and specific incidents which attracted comment and were condemned as instances of racist belief or practice.

The pub has long served as an icon of racial segregation. Up until the seventies, most Aborigines were not allowed to drink in the pub and even after this prohibition was lifted, discriminatory practices continued. Along term non Aboriginal resident, a WMC employee, who was in the town when the 1975 Royal Commission was in progress, had heard that the publican was partly to blame for the Skull Creek incident because he treated the blacks differently from whites. The newspaper article quoted above illustrated the racial divide in town by reference to the three bars in the Desert Inn, which it stated had "segregated bars. It won't serve alcohol to blacks in the other two. The Aborigines like it that way, someone said"(Gosling 1987).

Five years later there was no designated 'black' bar in the pub but there was limited socialising and drinking together between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people within the pub, and many Aborigines purchased their alcohol at the off-licence rather than drinking inside. There were mixed groups, both in the animal bar and lounge bars with the latter being frequented by the more 'respectable' older drinkers on non-disco nights, but it was more common to have separate clusterings of people with maybe a few individuals sometimes moving between them.

For the younger local Wongis interviewed by Robyn⁷³, however, it was management practices and animosity and disrespect from some of the non-Aboriginal patrons that symbolised the endemic racism in town. Lily told Robyn that she encountered prejudice or discrimination 'every day in this town' with the pub being the main place. She gave the example of the price of Coolabahs, which were favoured by many Aboriginal drinkers, as costing four or five dollars in Kalgoorlie while they charged \$15 at the pub off-licence. According to Stella, many Aborigines were forced to use the off-licence because they were prevented, on the grounds of their appearance, from entering the pub.

Robyn: What do you think of the white people in Laverton?

Stella: I think they're prejudiced too [as well as the police]

Robyn: Do you encounter discrimination or prejudice in your daily life?

Stella: Yes insults

Robyn: In Laverton or..?

Stella: I think in Laverton

Robyn: It's bad isn't it?

Stella: Yep, mainly in the pub, you can't go in if you are not clean and you have got thongs on, not allowed in the pub and have drinks there.

Robyn: So you can't have drinks in there?

Stella: No, you can't, you have to go around the back and buy the drinks that you want in the drive-in, not even if you are clean.

⁷³ As mentioned in Chapter Two on method, a local Wongi woman, Robyn, assisted with the research by conducting interviews and video-taping various activities around town.

A young local Wongi man, Lee, explained to me that some white guys were 'alright', a lot were good mates but some were 'cheeky'. He said that they all know him now and that he went to parties with the people he knew. Parties involving white people were often held on Friday and Saturday nights after the pub had closed, and having turned 18, he and his friends regularly went to pub on Friday nights and he might go to a party afterwards. He and his friends had, however, been involved in fights with white men.

Lee: Cops now started little bit of trouble, told me to stay away. Cos of fighting, cheeky white blokes get smart. push you, say get out of the way nigger. Make you wild, look for a fight. Flogged that one bloke, about eight come after you. This weekend it happened. Louis Dickson [a policeman] told him to stay away for a while. I know who the white guy is. First time had trouble with him, don't know whether drunk. He and his mate were looking for a fight... [On Friday night] a couple of other boys involved. Don't know whether anyone was hurt. Had trouble before at the pub with white guys. There was a big fight, about 20 guys rushed the boys, chucking rocks and all at the back of the pub. I was fighting one bloke, hitting him and he called his mates across and they started booting me. Chased him with a stick. Cops came. Explained that white blokes started it so they let me go.

Incidents such as these were less frequent than the exchanges of verbal abuse amongst the more intoxicated patrons, both black and white, inside the pub and short outbreaks of fighting between individual white men on a crowded night in the animal bar. Whilst women when drunk sometimes became abusive they rarely participated in physical fights. Single women irrespective of their race were subjected to offers of drinks from single white men, but more it seemed was expected from Aboriginal women if these drinks were accepted. One night a Wongi woman happily drunk because it was her birthday, expressed her outrage to me over a proposition from a drunk white man that he give her \$100 for sex.

Swimming pool regulations, too, were a sore point with some members of the Aboriginal community, who complained of being picked on and of being adversely effected by a ban on clothing as substitutes for bathers. One woman said she took many of the younger children, including her own, to various 'water holes' in the region (abandoned open pit mines that have filled with water, and dams) instead of using the pool. The majority of older Aboriginal residents never used the pool but this may have been more related to the cost of entry and it being seen as a young person's recreational amenity, and amongst women at least, a self-consciousness about their bodies. Younger Wongi children were quite often at the pool although it was typically the boys who attracted the ire of the manager.

For some local residents, the denial of access, although purportedly for another reason, was interpreted as overt and direct discrimination against Aborigines. A local Wongi woman, Jessie, had to be politely insistent before she and her grandmother were allowed into the Club to play bingo. The man at the door had refused them entry on the grounds that it was 'members' only. Jessie had pointed out that adverts around town had not said the event was 'members' only, and they were reluctantly allowed to go in. Another example was provided by a local Aboriginal man:

Fred: ... and the garage has all the Toyotas up there, but I think they're prejudiced up there. Won't let Aboriginals hire their cars. Me and my brother went up there to hire a car, they said we couldn't, none here. While we were standing there a guy came in hired a car, gave him the keys. I turned around and swore dirty at her and walked out. They got the cheek to say they're locals, they own the place but we were here before them.

Skin colour was a sensitive topic and clearly a legacy of the past which still affected the way people talked about difference. For some non-Aboriginal people a 'whitish' appearance equalled non-Aboriginal, or not truly Aboriginal. For example, Fisher told this story to a several older Aboriginal women and myself of an altercation with the police. He was drinking and the police kept on asking him 'what he was doing' and he eventually gave a 'cheeky' reply. Vera seemed to find it amusing but Fisher was annoyed that the police said he was not really 'Aboriginal'. Vera said it was not people's fault that they often looked white. Mavis recounted how two brothers, when they were born years ago, were told that one was should go to the Reserve and other should stay in town because of the difference in skin colour.

Interacting with whitefellas

Some of the ways the older Wongis, and the very young children who they look after, address or refer to *walypala* appear to be influenced by missionaries' teachings and the nature of their relationships with *walypala* in the past and the present (for example, welfare authorities, pastoralist employers). So, for instance, many white people were referred to as Mr So and So or Mrs So or So or by their occupational sobriquet (Sister So and So, Constable So and So). Such formal modes of address could be interpreted as old-fashioned courtesy or characteristic of relations between supplicants and patrons. School also reinforced the etiquette of address and teachers were called Miss So and So or Mr So and So. In conversations in English amongst each other or when referring to another Wongi in a conversation with a *walypala*, these terms were seldom used the exception usually being when certain older individuals were named.

Such modes of address indicate the formal interactions between older local Wongis and whites. As an objectified category, whites appeared in many instances to equate with an 'external formal' authority and, metaphorically and literally, a 'vehicle' through which governmental assistance could be obtained. So, for example, I called around at an elderly Wongi woman's house and her first question was what department did I come from. On another occasion while sitting outside the Wongatha Wonganarra building I heard a father reprimand his child for playing with the lawnmower saying that she would get into trouble with the '*walypala*'. Though he was not named, in this instance the father was referring to the white manager of Wongatha Wonganarra.

There was little explicit discourse amongst Aboriginal people, at least in my presence, on how their ways differ to the *walypala*. Only it seemed when quizzed by whitefellas were there the relativised objectifications of blackfella and whitefella culture which Merlan (1998:102) found more common amongst Aboriginal people who had lived a more sedentary way around settlements. Morris (1989:214-215) records some of the distinctions

the Dhan-gadi draw between themselves and the whitefellas. The major criticism of whites was that their outlook was focused upon the self-interested and egoistic, thereby ignoring the importance of social relations. The Europeans were portrayed as 'hard-hearted' in their instrumental and impersonal forms of social interaction. Primary importance was given to personal relations and social connectedness grounded in intimacy and duration, and expressed through personalised knowledge of the contingent and particular.

Both Morris (1989) and Martin (1993) have underlined the disjuncture between Aboriginal and governmental modes of relating with people. Morris (1989:216) writes "the emphasis on personal relations is seldom reflected in the structuring of relations between the Dhan-gadi and particular government personnel" and he characterises bureaucratic organisations as "where an impersonal rationalised hierarchy of experts dominates interpersonal relations". Martin (1993) observes that Wik access to resources was no longer mediated through personalised relationships to whites. Instead, the mainstay of economic life was the money paid through the welfare state, whose employees interacted only in terms of formal work roles. Although these observations could apply to Laverton inter-racial relations up to a point, it was significant that a fair proportion of 'humbugging' and 'trade' between whites and blacks in the town of Laverton was mediated through personalised relationships, and this issue is explored further later on.

In Laverton, I heard a few people express pity for the *walypala*, and more commonly, criticism directed against whitefellas for their 'hardness' and 'meanness'. Compassion was extended to encompass all whites for their lack of sociality, for being by 'self' and for the constraints imposed on them by their occupations and the 'white' priority placed on material acquisitions. This sentiment was not expressed very often or by many, but when it was it sounded like there was an element of moralising underlying the compassion. It bordered on being condemnation for the whites' deluded sense of self-importance and self-worth, which entrapped them in an asocial and confined affluent 'space'.

A lot of *walypala/wadjulla* behaviour was characterised as 'hard' and several white males who had lived in the district in the past had earned the sobriquets of being 'hard' persons, as that they were harsh in their dealings with Wongis and best avoided (for example, a missionary, a manager at Cosmo Newberry, and a dogger). In contrast a pastoralist was spoken of with approval for being a 'good man' because he had given permission for local people to shoot on his land, and had fostered close ties with a particular local family. Contemporary actions that were called 'hard' typically involved the white person refusing to do as asked or demanded by the Wongi person. An example was when Robyn had told the white manager of Wongatha Wonganarra, Lou, to 'fuck off' after he refused to give them money to pay for petrol to attend a funeral. She was angry because she believed plenty of money had been generated from hiring out the bus, and Vera called the manager 'cheeky' and said they would have a meeting the following day.

A frequently heard complaint was that 'he', 'she', or 'they' 'don't want to help' and was often said in anger to representatives of welfare or social security, and was part of the discourse about the shortcomings of government in general and Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in particular. In the context of personalised relations the criticism of being hard has been interpreted as signifying the speaker's upset over the rejection of social connectedness and obligation (Myers 1986) and when directed against an institution can be seen more as a criticism of a failure in a duty to care. This was encapsulated by the refrain of many people when drunk yelling at welfare staff that 'you are there to help'.

Gerrard (190:301) believes that the Aborigines at Maningrida realised that the whitefellas had functioning hierarchies but they were never able to tell the relative importance of one over the other, as all whites talked like they had power. In Laverton many Wongis, both residents and visitors, had more contact with certain government agencies than white residents. The practices of police, community health and community services were well-known to many Wongis and they also had considerable contact, at meetings mostly, with representatives from federal government such as the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and ATSIC. Such contact did not necessarily result in a deep interest or familiarity with organisational structure and policy, but it did produce an extensive knowledge of contemporary sources of resources and the practices of local practitioners. It was widely recognised that the ultimate site of organisational power was removed from the local field of politics in that key decisions were made by bosses elsewhere and that local representatives were subject to their authority. It was not unusual to hear a Wongi person frustrated and angry at an agency to demand to see or speak to the boss, who they would expect to be male and white, when they were unhappy with the individual worker they had already tackled.

There is a need to distinguish between people who regularly begged publicly, though they had their favourite targets, and the cultivation of key white brokers. In a small town, it is feasible to distinguish between practitioners and to have 'intense' contact at the workplace and outside of work with influential or useful 'brokers'. Thus, the impersonal relations Morris depicts as characteristic of bureaucratic relations with clients is subverted and affected by the degree and nature of interactions between practitioners and members of the community. In Laverton, more personalised relations between whites and Wongis existed as outlined in the previous chapter where people worked together, and where white do-gooders were cultivated by Wongis as brokers.

There was strategic seeking out of particular agencies and individuals for particular kinds of business and 'help'. Sympathetic, 'soft' brokers were local white residents or agency representative who had a track record for being responsive to demands, of having spent time with them and of past involvement (for instance going out bush) and assistance (such as a lift in a car)⁷⁴. Sometimes there were disputes or competitive bids for primacy between local Wongis over access to local white brokers, be they sources of

⁷⁴ There was not much evidence of the kind of workplace relations described by Myers (1986:279) when he claimed that the most dependable Pintupi workers appeared to labor out of a personal sense of obligation to a 'boss' from whom they expected a reciprocal special relationship in turn. Contemporary work relations were such that there were few instances where two people might work together for years, given the mobility of Wongi residents and the transience of white residents.

money or other services. Critically, it is the way these white individuals had conducted themselves in interactions with Wongi people, by being perceived as having 'respected' the appropriate individuals and families, which influenced judgements about who to approach for help. An example was where Jessie and Lily had 'talked it over' as to who amongst the police they should approach in respect of a complaint about a particular officer's behaviour. It was not the most senior officer they decided upon, but an officer who had lived in the town for over three years and who had the right 'attitude'. On another occasion, Jessie explained that she expected a DCD officer, Mel, to help her with a job in return for the favour she did him when she had looked after some children when living at the Village. She refused to consult Mel's wife about her prospects of getting the vacant position because the wife had been 'rude' to Jessie's grandmother and 'not friendly'.

Contributing to the social distance between black and white were signs, evidenced by statements and actions of local Wongi people, of fear of and discomfort around whites that were not known personally. During a trip to South Australia, a local Wongi woman Mavis said they had not liked to stop the bus on the road to South Australia because 'somebody might take a shot at a black'. To a large extent, it was assumed there was mutual suspicion and apprehension. That white people in general were perceived to be afraid of Wongis and more to the point, the desert people, was revealed by commentaries on the avoidance practices amongst whites, including their 'walking away' from fights and arguments. The following remark by Vera was revealing - at Vera's house, Abel explained that Jean was too shy to ask for a cigarette. Vera told her to come in and not to be scared of 'Miss Putt, she is friendly to all Wongis and walypala. Like me, stop in the street talk to anyone, not scared'

Another dimension to how white people were characterised and constructed in local Wongi discourse was their susceptibility to the sexual allure of Wongis. Despite the attempts to maintain formal distance motivated by a sense of superiority by many whites, local Wongis were aware that this was a public facade and that under the cover of darkness and in secret these whites would seek out sexual relations with Wongi women. Cowlshaw (1988) makes a passing reference to the fact that contemporary Brindleton Aborigines recognised status meanings for whites and at times miscegenation was a subject of humour and cynical comment. Although Vera once observed that 'white and black kids only mixed together after dark', the discussions I heard tended to suggest that it was not construed amongst certain Wongi women in quite this way. Instead it was interpreted as demonstrating the sexual power of Wongi women and an inherent weakness of all men, in their desire for sex.

White men, however, were sometimes portrayed as taking advantage of their occupational positions to exploit women who may not wish to be intimate with them. For instance, Vera said the prison farm manager at Cosmo Newberry in the 1950s 'used all the Aboriginal women all the time', as did his sons. A young local Wongi woman, Ingrid, said when she was at school some of the male teachers used to 'get around' with the Wongi girls and she and others could tell this was going by the way the teachers

'looked and touched'. She believed the girls were too frightened to complain. It was the police who had the most long standing and persistent reputation for having sex with Aboriginal women, which continued into the present time though not necessarily in an exploitative way. One was named as having liked to have 'girlfriends' up in the Ranges and of having had sex with a woman in the Laverton lock-up, and the police patrols to the Ranges were described as being liked by the police because they could '*get away from their wives*'. Several DCD male workers rather hesitantly reported that they were propositioned by a number of local Wongi women who were known to indulge in drinking binges and who had fiery relations with their current partners. However, when one of these workers became the boyfriend of a local young Wongi this was not regarded as an inappropriate or exploitative relationship as they were of a similar age and she had encouraged the relationship.

Vera described the 1970s as a time when the '*white men were chasing the Wongi women*' and as a result quite a few children were borne by local Wongi women. She also names two long term white residents, a man and a woman, who were well known to have had Wongi lovers at this time. Although she acknowledged that sometimes white women went with Wongi men, she did not wish to pursue the topic and it was never raised by other women unless they were talking about a known 'public' liaison. Despite the fact that some white and Wongi women had reputations for being quite forward in initiating sex with men, it was men who were spoken of as predatory creatures, as having their lives dominated by desire. Assertive and promiscuous male behaviour was expected and therefore normalised. At Aurukun the relative evaluations by Wik men of male and female sexuality powerfully resonated in the wider Australian society, through for example the media of television, porno videos and magazines (Martin 1993:64), and in a mining town like Laverton there were many everyday practices and images that reinforced notions of a particularly predatory and instrumental masculine attitude to women.

'Mean' or 'selfish' were the most common attributes I heard employed to caricature the difference between white and black. Whites' capacity to horde and to haggle was contrasted against the Wongi ethos of 'sharing', sometimes stated as the 'generosity' of Aboriginal people. Many times I heard younger children berated for not sharing and when teaching the Wongi word for '*all of us*' Vera explained with pride that people like Beatrice would say '*let us all share the drink*' when she had a Coolabah. One day when at the Village with Ronny he claimed, in earshot of several other men, that a mattress belonged to him but a white man who was staying at the Village said '*no, you should know I always give, share whatever I have*'.

Celebrating the practice of 'sharing' as something quintessentially Aboriginal seems widespread with for example the Dhan-gadi asserting that Aborigines 'share' and are 'soft-hearted' in contradistinction to whites, because they see themselves as malleable or responsive with regard to close familial or community ties (Morris 1989:214-215). In Myers (1986:92) account of the Pintupi, ideal relations between adults were for the Pintupi characterised by support, generosity, familiarity and warmth, which should be

demonstrably more valued than ordinary possessions. Not conforming to these ideal relations was to invite criticism of being 'selfish' or 'greedy' and those who did not demonstrate ably feelings of relatedness with generosity were believed to be 'hard' or as the Pintupi sometimes put it, 'like rocks' (Myers 1986:111,115).

In everyday conversations between local people, though, individual Wongis were named and censured for being 'mean' because he or she had not shared as he or she should have. However, it was the whites who were criticised as a 'people' who universally did not practice sharing and who continually tried and often succeeded in 'ripping off' the Wongis. Many stories of whites' mercenary and unfair treatment of Aboriginal vendors were told in relation to the retail of paintings. An example was when Vera was angered by the amount of money paid by a white shopkeeper for a picture painted by Mavis. Vera had told Mavis's nephew to ask for \$200 and to accept \$150 or \$100. The nephew had accepted \$50 which, Vera fumed, was an example of 'prejudice'⁷⁵ and of white people 'taking advantage of the black man'. When it was discovered that a local couple had sold several paintings to some Tasmanian tourists for \$400 each, other local Wongis took this as proof that local white residents were purchasing paintings at unfairly low prices. Expectations of high prices were further fanned by stories of the big money paid for Aboriginal paintings in the commercial art-world, and it seemed a constant source of grievance that these prices were not matched locally nor paid by the proprietors of a small art gallery in Kalgoorlie.

A number of resident Wongi women were interested in generating money by producing 'Aboriginal' artefacts, and discussed at length the potential for selling 'traditional' stories and bush medicine but emphasised how they would have to be vigilant otherwise white or non-Wongi people would take advantage of them. The appreciation that there was a commercial market for many things 'Aboriginal' (commodities and services) no doubt contributed to the instrumental approach taken to relations with white brokers. The reason for a conversation with a *walypala* seemed to rest primarily on an economic or a material basis, and most Wongis in Laverton did not often approach the *walypala* unless it was for money, or help with a commercial venture. With direct requests for money, several Aboriginal townspeople and 'outside' Aboriginal individuals such as Greta and Fred, were less likely to act this way and they too seemed quite annoyed by this practice which often extended to them as well. Where a white 'ally' was being pestered, local Wongi residents often intervened and told the beggar or plaintiff to go away. Jessie was quick to point out to me that she 'growled' at people like Agatha, Muriel and Rita, when she found them hanging around and 'hassling' white people for money.

When discussing humbugging, Gerrard (1990) states that from the Kunibidgi's point of view they were in chronic need, and under the surface she encountered anger against

⁷⁵ When recounting her life, Vera did not refer to abstractions such as racism or structural inequality. A sense of injury and anger surfaced in her narratives when she told of the wrongful arrest of her sons (Boris and Campbell) when they were young men, the wrongful attribution of the Windarra discovery to a white man, the loss of employment for Aboriginal people after 1974 in Laverton, and a pastoralist's treatment of her husband when he was young.

settlement Europeans who had constant access to commodities but who would not share them with Aborigines. The Aborigines saw Europeans as giving something which they had a right to expect, just as they had a right to expect social security payments and government grants. According to Gerrard (1990:235,238) the tendency of the Aborigines to treat her and other Europeans as resources rather than people militated against inter-subjective relationships. The failure of Europeans to claim social debts, out of a sense of etiquette, entrenched Europeans into a role of anonymous resource-giver. In addition, the transience of Europeans inhibited the development of 'interlaced individual histories' described by Sansom (1980), which contributed to the objectifying and dehumanising of Europeans by Aboriginal people. Even though there was time for social debts and credits to accrue, Europeans never intended to really *belong* which positioned them outside a system of exchange based on social investment.

A separate domain

In the town there were Wongi domains into which very few whites entered. They were the Wongatha Wonganarra centre and its surrounds, the Wongatha Wonganarra office and the Village. In a bid for ATSI funding the Laverton people had asked for a bigger community centre with a basketball court and their own pre-school, on the grounds that the children were teased and told that they 'stank'. It was not the first time that the local Wongi people had been argued that more money should be made available for their own amenities. The desire to consolidate an autonomous domain of amenities was reinforced by various external events⁷⁶ and organisational policies of Aboriginal specific funding.

Nearly all Wongi houses and camps were also spaces that were rarely entered by white people. Conversely, most local Wongis were reluctant to enter white houses and would take the opportunity to talk with non-Wongis on the street and from vehicles. Upon entering a house or upon arriving at a party held outside, a chair would be offered to the *walypala*, an item of furniture that would normally be reserved at outdoor parties for several older Wongi women. In the few houses where people gathered for the longer drinking sessions, there was at certain times an almost constant traffic of people coming and going. With many houses local Wongi people would just walk in and I took it as a sign of (temporary) acceptance when one day, after I had knocked at the Vera's door, a six year old told me '*you should've pushed [the door] open*'.

Several women were visibly self-conscious about the differences between white and black domestic spaces and practices, and apologised for the 'mess'. In some houses there did seem to be a greater 'unregulated' use of domestic space with non-resident visitors calling in or staying over, and the noise created by the flow of people could cause discontent and complaints amongst white neighbours. The rudimentary furniture usually consisted of a formica table and tables, fridge, sofa, and beds, with a television and video in the 'entertaining' area. Inscribed with the hallmarks of impoverished material conditions, furnishings and household goods were threadbare and bore the signs of damage and much use (for example holes in the wall, blocked up windows, wrecked

⁷⁶ At the Kiama festival in Perth the white singer of the local band 'LA Beat' was not allowed to perform.

toys lying on the ground outside). The smell of cooked kangaroo sometimes pervaded the houses which has quite a pungent aroma for the unaccustomed olfactory sense. Most houses had little in the way of ornaments although several of the homes belonging to long-term older residents such as Maisie and Shirley contained more furniture and decorative ornaments such as photos and doilies.

Another demonstration of the social segregation in town was the communal events organised by local Wongi residents. An example was when Wongatha Wonganarra organised its own Christmas tree for their children, while the Shire had set up a tree for the rest of the town's residents. Over a two-year period there were a number of birthday parties for members of the Brown family, held at a house at the Village, a town house, at the Shire hall and at the football club. Only a couple of white people were invited to these events - a youth worker who played in the band 'LA Beat', his partner, an ex-station woman who looked after one of the Brown children, a young woman who was engaged to a Wongi young man, myself and my partner. Common elements to most of these parties were that women brought food which was laid out on a trestle table with a cake as a centrepiece, men cooked meat on the barbecue and a few men would play music on their guitars. It was the older women who provided the overall direction for the events and who kept a watchful eye on the younger children. At the parties there was little in the way of formality or organised activities with the only noticeably orchestrated moment being the signal to begin eating the food. There was a fluidity in movement with individual people choosing to dance when they were so inclined and no attempt to regulate the more wilder antics of the inebriated. Initial positioning however at the parties was structured by gender, family ties and age, with distinct nodes of older women, of younger children, young men, young women, the adult males and a few adult couples. The women of the family that hosted the party were in more prominent places, evidently responsible for the food and the money that went into the event, and who would later have the job of tidying the place up⁷⁷.

For the majority of local Wongi residents reliable sources of income were from various welfare payments such as unemployment, child welfare and supporting parent benefits. In addition to the nuclei of waged workers in the public sector or employed by Wongatha Wonganarra there were the occasional opportunities as a casual worker or through skill development programs. Engaging in this kind of employment, however, did not generate much surplus cash as the worker's income was not much greater than their benefit payments. Most families relied therefore on low incomes. For example Vera paid Homewest \$200 a week in rent for her house (and she had to pay for repairs to the house) which left her about \$200 in disposable income to cover household expenses for a minimum, at any one time, of three dependent children. There was constant pressure on her and other households to find money for necessities interspersed with concerted efforts by kin to mobilise sufficient funds for trips to Kalgoorlie or further afield. That

⁷⁷ The division of household labour was that women typically did it all. For example Ella said Lily did all the work in the house, while the men and boys did nothing, a fact confirmed by Vera. When Ruth was in town she commented on how tired she was, looking after everybody at her mother's house and driving around all day.

lean times had been experienced by most local Wongis was reflected in individuals' fond memories of places where they were well-fed, where food was regularly available and in abundance. Meat was prized, and many of the older people expressed their pleasure on seeing people who were '*sleek and fat*', who showed by their appearance that they were prosperous.

There were three main ways that extra income was obtained by local individuals and family networks. The first involved windfalls from criminal and accident injury compensation, and from deceased estates. The former was more commonplace than the latter, and might involve a lump sum of several thousand dollars that would be paid out to an individual. Where a few local Wongis acquired new large commodities (for example smart cars) they were purchased via high purchase or sudden windfalls. The second way incorporated 'trading' with and begging from local whitefellas. The third way involved gaining funds from private and public institutions through, on the one hand, negotiating with mining companies and trading in mining leases⁷⁸, and on the other hand, applications for government funding to underwrite personal or community initiatives. All of these ways of raising money could be very time consuming for potentially low returns. The income from these activities was irregular in that the amount and timing of payments was not always predictable and were only engaged in on an intermittent basis.

The most obvious (to whites) method of raising revenue from white residents was the begging, which was primarily a practice routinely engaged in by several younger children and drinking visitors. Less visible were other productive activities of many local Wongis, including metal detecting in the bush, the making of artefacts and paintings, the attendance at meetings, the writing of letters and filling in forms for grants. In Maningrida, Gerrard (1990:170) found the flow of cash, goods and services from Europeans to Aboriginal people was considerable and distributed unevenly, with Europeans giving more to 'workmates' or to individuals with more confident and assertive temperaments. In Laverton begging was a generalised activity by some individuals, though particular whites were known to give more. Demands for goods and services tended to be restricted to a number of people in key occupations. Artefacts and paintings were hawked around in public spaces but most local Wongi residents took a more targeted approach and sought out brokers such as myself. These same brokers and the occupational 'advisers' were also approached for assistance with applications for funds.

A distinction should be made between activities and practices that involve money flowing from white people to Wongis, as against those like card-playing which redistributed money amongst the Wongi players. Gerrard (1990) observes that Aboriginal people complained constantly and bitterly about the demands of their relatives, while at the same time making demands of their own. Certainly, the central issue for the Laverton Wongi residents was the widespread unpredictability in rates of

⁷⁸ Several Brown men had mining claims at Cosmo Newberry and a joint venture was instigated by a number of family members to stake a chrysoprase lease on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

consumption due largely to the sudden drain of resources because of theft or demands from visiting relatives, or the evaporation of capital through gambling or a drinking binge. Gambling was a risky, gregarious and exciting business. The most common forms of gambling in town were Scratch lottos and card games, but it was the only the latter which redistributed money amongst local people, and could result in a spectacularly sudden drain or windfall of a large amount of money.

Neither goods nor capital were accumulated. Most income was spent on immediate consumption - food, drink and entertainment. The giving of gifts between adults was not commonly practised, with consumables being exchanged via demand sharing (Peterson 1993) or mutual taking (Myers 1986) and with certain goods acting as resources held in common. Households with televisions or video players would be visited by non-residents, and popular culture accessed through these media. Television watching was a popular (and free) pastime in some households for most of the day. Similarly, women's magazines would be circulated amongst female kin. Children could be observed buying fast food when they had received a mini-windfall from their caregivers⁷⁹ but the money was not set aside and saved by children to be spent, for example, on leisure activities⁸⁰.

The one commodity that appeared prized above all others, even if ownership was transitory, was the car. Most men and a few women were interested in the second hand car market, and the acquisition of a car was a marker of a young man's newfound 'adult' status. Desirable cars were the older utes, sedans and station wagons that could be used in the bush and which could be easily fixed by driver-mechanics. One young man spent most of his time either working on or negotiating the purchase of cars. In one week for instance he bought and swapped four cars. It was soon apparent that a family or individual had received a windfall when they were seen around town in a 'new' vehicle. Once a car was in a person's possession, he or she may be the driver but again it was accessed by peers and kin as a resource in common.

Gerrard (1990:108) depicts white outrage being directed at Aboriginal beliefs that secular objects are disposable, destructible, and replaceable. She sees it as a basic clash with black concepts of the appropriate treatment of goods. She characterises Aboriginal attitudes to commodities as imbuing them with a certain autonomy so if they happened to 'die' one did not interfere with life or death (p.182-3). As a result commodities were over-used, not maintained, and if small, not kept under surveillance. Objects were not counted, stored nor kept under human control and having a life of their own, they sometimes appeared in other people's homes.

In Laverton, the long-term possession or care of commodities was not practicable where social relations with family were of over-riding primacy. The damage or destruction of

⁷⁹ The handing over of considerable amounts of money to children was the cause of several arguments between adults that I witnessed. Martin (1993) records that at Aurukun large amounts of money given to children.

⁸⁰ When a manager introduced payment for the use of Nintendo games at the youth centre, everybody lost interest in the games. It seemed that in an environment where money and goods disappeared rapidly and were often in short supply, they had to be used or consumed as soon as they became available.

goods was regrettable but was not subject to sustained resentment, retaliation or moral approbation. Such incidents were opportunities to demonstrate respect for personal autonomy and the mediating and superseding effects of relatedness, and I never saw children seriously admonished or penalised when they destroyed objects. Gerrard (1990:182) observed that when Maningrida children damaged objects they were verbally admonished, threatened but never punished nor deliberately kept under surveillance except in European homes. Perhaps it indicates the degree of autonomy granted to both goods and children.

Localising identity

Martin (1993:155) comments on the all pervasive scrutiny by Wik of black and white, a 'watchfulness' concerning the doings of others (see also Merlan 1998, Sansom 1980). In a literal sense, this watchfulness was practised by many Aboriginal people who occupied and traversed public spaces in Laverton during the day. The progress of familiar whites and Aborigines was observed with interest. However, local Wongi residents had a larger circle of people beyond those in the immediate vicinity whose movements and activities they liked to keep abreast of, which since they could not be observed, had to be relayed through conversation. The doings of town residents and of kin and those with whom they had had personalised relations at some point in their lives were a recurring topic of conversation face to face and over the telephone. The whereabouts of people was a matter of great import and for instance, a phone call from someone in Kalgoorlie would involve a long account of who was in the town and news of people's current locations.

In situations where an issue was being canvassed at a meeting it was the identity of people involved in the meeting or who had involvement beyond the meeting context who were absolutely central to considerations of the issue. When photos of community art projects located at various places in the state were passed around at a meeting, the photos were closely examined to see if the people shown could be identified. When they received an invitation to attend an International Day of Indigenous People in Perth, Mrs Higgins and Vera seemed more interested in the people who signed the invitation, than the issues listed such as land rights, separate nations, and using names like Wongi and Nyungar instead of Aboriginal.

Martin (1993:167-171, 274) stresses the remarkable fluidity of Wik household compositions. Within households there could be a number of 'economic units'. Over a four month period he found that 36% of the entire population had changed residence, that half the men aged between 15 and 24 had moved households at least once, and that many had done so because of household disputes. He also witnessed many children suffering physical deprivation, as the "fractured nature of domestic life" often meant that there was no clearly defined caregiver. A survey of Wik children aged five to nine, revealed that 47% were not living in a household with their genitor, and one third were living in households with neither genitor nor mother.

In Laverton, most of the local Wongi households had a stable core of residents, mostly couples, women and children. The actual fathers of children were often temporarily out of town or had never been present in the children's lives. However, the composition of households were forever changing in that there would be fluctuating numbers of additional residents - visiting individuals or families who might stay for relatively short periods of time. Certain families and individuals were frequent movers and were more likely to live at the Village and to engage in drinking activities when in town. For example, a family group of a couple and four children stayed at the Village when in town and in a two year period had moved between Mount Margaret, Kalgoorlie, Tjirrkali and Wingellina (where the woman's family was from). The man, Isaac, said he found it impossible to stay in one place and as his driving licence was suspended, they always had to take the back roads to reach these places.

It always seemed clearly defined in everybody's mind who was responsible for the care of younger children, although sometimes there were doubts expressed about the quality of care if the caregiver(s) were drinking heavily when in town, and there would be talk amongst the women of organising a kinswoman to act as caregiver. With teenage boys it seemed to be accepted that it was up to them to determine who they might stay with, but as a safety net, they tended to depend on a number of female relatives who could be relied upon to house and feed them should there be a fracturing of their living arrangements. Several of the older teenage boys, in a two-year period, moved at least twice in a year. A number of them, including Lee, Sam and Matt stayed together at the home of older man, Fred, at the Village and went with Fred and his family to Geraldton for a couple of months. In the months following their return from Geraldton they no longer resided together, and settled into different households. If they had established more stable relationships with a 'kurri' (a girlfriend), then their place of residence was influenced by her family's connections to places and her familiar abodes. For instance, Lee stayed with his uncle in Laverton then went back to Fred's house for a while and spent several weeks at Tjirrkali and Mount Celia, before moving to Cosmo Newberry where his 'kurri' was living. Matt stayed at Fred's house at the Village before moving into a house in town which was occupied by his girlfriend's family whilst Sam after a period of detention in Perth stayed at Robyn's house in Laverton.

Among the more stable household groups in town, families usually only moved away from town for an extended period of time when there had been a death of someone in the house or next door, or where a member of the house had been sentenced to detention and was incarcerated at Boulder prison. Sometimes family groups and individuals stated they had to move away because there was 'too much trouble' in town. Quick trips away, usually to Kalgoorlie, could also be for other reasons including shopping, health concerns, legal and other business, and various recreational drawcards such as sporting events and concerts. During the two year period the Wongatha Wonganarra bus was used to take a group of people away on longer journeys, to attend a festival in Perth and for a holiday in South Australia, but these journeys were quite exceptional and unprecedented. One man, Fisher, was left behind in South Australia after he went off

with his cousin and never returned. Mavis explained that he was left behind because he had kept on *'getting drunk and causing trouble'*.

During the two years I was at Laverton I was told about 12 funerals in Kalgoorlie, Warburton, Jameson, Leonora and in Laverton which local residents either wanted to attend or had attended. The location of the funerals indicated the networks of connections to people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the Goldfields. In addition, these gatherings highlight how funerals bring together extensive networks of people, who might not otherwise congregate. The only other events which brought such numbers together in one place, but did not express familial and social relatedness in quite the same way, were sporting carnivals and music/cultural festivals. Trips to funerals were usually short visits and when the two were held in Laverton, the people from Ngaanyatjarra Lands and Cosmo Newberry did not stay long in town.

Patterns of residential aggregation, and temporary places of residence when travelling for the Pintupi in the seventies were organised by affinal and kinship ties (Myers 1986:40-41). This was also the case for Wongi residents in Laverton - trips to Esperance, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, and settlements in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands relied on accommodation being provided by affines and kin. There were individuals with affinal or kin in more remote locations such as South Australia and Geraldton, but the links were predominantly with people in several Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements, notably Tjirrkali, and Goldfields towns, notably Kalgoorlie.

There was no sense of fixity about the membership of a Laverton 'mob'⁸¹ and there were few self-references to this entity, except in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) funding struggles with other family or town 'mobs' in the region. Several families were synonymous with the town, because they had lived there a long time to the point there was a second generation who had grown up in the town and there were sufficient numbers who were current residents. Nevertheless, this was at a particular moment in time and could change rapidly. For example a prominent family in local politics moved to Cosmo Newberry in the early nineties and the Walker family, comprising several households, moved to Mount Margaret a few years later. A larger number of people gravitated to the town and some had spent a considerable number of years residing in the town, but their attachment was to a wider set of places and not restricted to the confines of Laverton town or the district.

The regional identification of being a Wongi, an Aboriginal person of the Goldfields area, had more meaning. Within this geographically bounded area there were places that were significant because of personal experiences of them and of the relationships with past and current residents of these places. Martin (1993:220) underlines the "continued centrality of placedness in Wik corporate identity" which should be understood in the words of Myers (1986:41) "place (or localization) as the embodiment of relationships

⁸¹ The term 'mob' was used by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in the town to refer to an aggregation of people, associated with a particular place, family or activity - for example, the Leonora mob, the desert mob, the Brown mob, the drinking mob.

among people". In addition, however, the term Wongi denoted a political identity with was separate to that of the residents in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Thus, though people had connections to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands their primary identification was with other Goldfields Wongis.

Several local residents expressed their concerns about the levels of drinking and mortality amongst the Wongis. According to Vera *'the Wongis [in the Goldfields] live, they drink, they die.* Her view was that the situation was better when there were missions but they *'should've educated people before drinking rights were allowed.'* She stated her sorrow for Wongis by referring to the thousands of people who died in the two years after 'drinking rights' were introduced. Many contemporary deaths were also seen as being connected to substance abuse. With the 12 funerals the reasons for the deaths of the older people were because of ill-health, fights and car accidents. Two young men committed suicide. On hearing of another funeral, Robyn said *'Wongis were dying like people had birthdays'* and Vera agreed that *'too many people were dying'*⁸².

Attributional and relational distinctions were made between Wongis and Nyungars, and between locals and the desert mob. A gulf between Aboriginal 'out here' and Aboriginal people in the south-west and in the city was implied by a local woman who had attended a community development course in Perth. She described the course as whitefellas talking about things more relevant to Nyungars than the people in Laverton or the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Vera and Mrs Higgins asserted that Wongi people were different from Nyungars because they *'don't want to cause trouble. They [the Wongis] are happy'* with their lifestyle, which was equated by Vera with the drink, pensions, and the freedom to move around. There was a degree of pride in statements about how the Nyungars were perceived to be afraid of Wongis, at least in Wongi 'territory'. Vera said the Nyungars at Cosmo Newberry prison farm in the 1950s would not run away because they were afraid the Wongis would kill them. A Warburton woman at a party in town assumed I was a Nyungar and said she would *'look after you, you are with me'*. A few Nyungars who came up to Laverton for work with DCD did not stay in town for very long - one woman left after two weeks saying the money was insufficient for the 'hassle' and she did not like it in the town. A man stayed for a few months but said he was not eager to stay on in Laverton because of his fears for the safety of his wife and children.

Despite all being 'out here', regional and local differences amongst the Aboriginal populace were suggested by references to family groupings, places of residence and the distinction between the desert mob and 'locals'. The people that lived in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were associated with practising the *'old ways'* of which adherence to the Law was the most emblematic. The older local people knew of some old ways but

⁸² Vera, like the older people of Katherine (Merlan 1998:32), expressed a sense of disappearance of her contemporaries from the scene, of those who were relevant 'close others' with whom she had shared a life and a way of life. This sentiment is commonly expressed by older people everywhere but had greater poignancy when stated by Vera, who believed they had died 'too soon' and whose disappearance symbolised for her the passing of her generation, her people and a better way of life.

did not practice them either because they chose not⁸³ to or because they felt their knowledge was incomplete and fragmented by their lack of intimate contact with those that enacted and practised the beliefs.

For Vera, the most telling indication of the passing of the old ways was that her generation and their descendants had been married without taken into account the prescriptions of right unions between the six 'skin groups', and that younger people were ignorant of how these groups should shape social relations. She did, however, observe on another occasion that many Aborigines, 'half-castes too', were now taking an interest in the Law, when before it seemed to be dying out. Her immediate kin in the nineties were spending more time in Ngaanyatjarra Lands, especially at Tjirrkali, and there was an increase in travel to the Lands by local Wongis. To facilitate this contact, which included the forging of couple relationships, her family had chosen the skin group of a community leader at Warburton, Omar, because Vera's mother was married to his grandfather.

There were certain beliefs and practices that suggested continuities from the past and which were present in everyday life, including conceptions of spirits, sickness and health. Children were brought up to know and to fear spirits 'mamu'⁸⁴, having been told of certain varieties that threatened and even killed young children. Vera would prepare remedies based on bush plants and animals and 'witchdoctors'⁸⁵ were occasionally consulted for serious and minor ailments although this did not imply a lack of faith in bio-medicine. It was a complementary strategy to address a number of causes of the sickness, so that Shirley asked an elderly woman from Jameson to help with her aching neck and she managed a partial cure, and an elderly male relative from Warburton removed stones from Ruth's back because she had accidentally caught the spell for someone else. Only one of the local residents (an elderly man who only camped at the Village or near the town intermittently) was named as a 'witchdoctor', a power and skill he had inherited from his father but his sons were described as being 'like whitefellas'. According to Vera, the power could be weakened by various practices including the imbibing of hot tea and grog. Essentially, it was older desert people who were related to the local Wongis who were called upon to use their diagnostic and healing powers, including what was described by Vera as a 'use of hands.. like spirit healing'.

An aspect of the Law, 'payback' was seen as a routine practice of desert people which had a profound effect on the lives of local people in a very immediate sense because of kin ties. An example was the 'feud' between two families - the Chichesters and the Hamiltons - as these notes indicate:

According to Robyn the 'feud' began when one of the Hamiltons died after a drinking binge - he had been advised to stay off the grog for medical reasons. As he was in the company of a Chichester or

⁸³ Several had reputations for explicitly rejecting the 'old ways' which included not speaking any Aboriginal languages, even if they were familiar with them.

⁸⁴ 'Mamu' was the most common name used in relation to spirits by local people. I only heard children refer to *mamu*, although the older woman Vera named five main categories of spirits.

⁸⁵ This was the term used by the local Wongi people when talking with white people, including me.

Chichesters, they were blamed for enticing him to drink. A Chichester died in the car crash on the way back from Alice Springs, and then one of the Hamiltons died in Laverton after Gertie Reid's funeral, when he fell off the back of a vehicle. He was with a bunch of drinkers who did not take him to the hospital, and he died in his sleep. Now one Chichester and two Hamiltons were dead, which is why another Chichester is supposed to die. Mavis Reid (nee Chichester) was scared and chased away but she soon turned up in Laverton again.

At Joey's birthday party Vera, Mavis and Fisher were talking about the 'feud'. Mavis complained of the Hamiltons who were prowling around in a Hi-Lux threatening to get her as part of the payback for the recent Hamilton death. They had hit Mavis after the death occurred. Fisher explained that they would pay back 'me... the dogs, the kids it did not matter.. somebody had to be blamed'. According to Mavis, Lawrence pushed his brother off the back of the vehicle because his brother had a child by his niece.... Mavis had been to see the Sergeant seeking protection.

It was a complex picture as mixed feelings were expressed about the notion of 'payback'. The more severe penalties, and the mobilising of a sanctioned group to perform the retribution were primarily seen as confined to people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands who continued to uphold the Law, and their actions seemed to be regarded with a degree of fear and respect, depending on who was affected by the process. However, the underlying principle of seeking retribution for wrongdoing was endorsed and acted upon by local residents, which created friction between families when one family member was judged as having done something with intent or by their negligence that had an adverse effect on the member(s) of another family.

Beliefs about the appropriate handling and conveying of information generated a degree of circumspection amongst local people, and with their kin from elsewhere. The most stark examples within the Laverton context was the care exercised in the representation and recounting of 'traditional' knowledge. I was told by Vera and Mavis that people had to be careful with 'country stories' as, for example, Mavis could only paint her country stories, and people became 'wild' if you painted their stories. An Aboriginal woman who had married a local man said it had taken her a while to realise that she had to ask permission before using designs or telling oral history and stories⁸⁶.

Looking after children

Martin (1993) said children at Aurukun were omnipresent, often playing in the vicinity of adults but largely self-directed. If the adults were disturbed, they might remonstrate, abuse or swear at them but it was relatively rare to see a child physically punished for teasing. According to Myers (1986:110), underlying Pintupi adults' treatment of children was a respect for their wilfulness and a recognition of their autonomy of desire. Through tantrums, Pintupi children attempted to coerce others to satisfy them, to demonstrate their will. In turn the adults expect to be 'asked' by children, for the children to assert themselves to get caretakers to act (Myers 1986:178-179).

⁸⁶ With the Wik, verbal representations of certain events and the circumstances of certain individuals were the symbolic property of a set of persons and their kin, and a common source of conflict was the complaint that someone gave out information or commented on them or close kin without the right to do so (Martin 1993).

In contrast to Hamilton's findings (1981) of indulgent child rearing, Martin (1993) found Wik children independent and exploratory at an early age. Children's access to care and resources such as food depended more on their own initiative, and by four or five years of age interactions between children and adult kin were characterised by demanding and testing behaviour - with children asking for food, takeaways, toys and so forth. Adults still responded with a degree of indulgence but it was tempered at times with exasperation. Wilfulness was expected of Wik children and though tantrums were thrown by both boys and girls, it was the boys who were more generally successful in having their demands met not least because female kin provided much of the sustenance for children. Though fathers were indulgent towards their sons, relations often became more restrained and competitive as the boy matured.

Martin (1993) found that there were very few formal learning contexts, with only minimal transmission of explicit information and skills. Adults might comment when children transgressed limits of appropriate behaviour but he saw no signs of a consistent application of discipline, which tended to depend on momentary features of adult-child relationship rather than on a philosophy of character moulding through control and restriction. He argues that the Wik believed children's personalities could be shaped but only insofar as enhancing particular facets of an already existing 'person'.

With many local Wongis in Laverton, I observed little in the way of systematic surveillance of young children in my house or elsewhere. If the young children were not shy in the presence of whoever was there, they wandered around the house and were intrusive in their behaviour and language. Objects would be picked up and then discarded whenever their interest moved on to another object. They would demand food and drink and help themselves if such items were easily reached. Their female kin might yell at them but then often laugh at their children's antics. I frequently witnessed demands being made of younger children but these were often ignored and the adult did not usually pursue the matter. The reasons Vera gave for occasions when the two primary school children in her care did not attend school showed her desire to actively support her kin against people who were not family, particularly white authority figures, and her respect for their personal autonomy. Sometimes it was because the children were still asleep and they might awake in a 'bad mood', or not 'feeling very well' or an action of a teacher that the children had complained of, for example, a teacher snatching a book away and once a teacher hitting one of them. Physical threats by non-kin were met with anger and a public dressing down, even when the children's behaviour was not condoned by the caregiver. For instance, Vera 'growled' at the school gardener when he threatened the young boys (Rory, Joey, Keenan and Connor) for hanging around the school kicking walls.

On a honeyant expedition⁸⁷ I witnessed kids hitting each other and every so often one would burst into tears, but the mothers did not interfere other than to tell them to stop it.

⁸⁷ On this expedition there was a woman with several young children whose appearance suggested neglect to the European eye. The children had burn scars, snotty noses, flies clustered around an infected ear. The

The children swore at each other a lot, the most frequently used words being 'fuck' and 'cunt'. When fighting I saw twice a boy burn another child with a smouldering twig from the fire. The children were left to entertain and organise themselves whilst the women dug for the ants, and on the last expedition Jessie's children had run off on their own and only the call of the crows had indicated where they were. If the children's noise or actions disturbed the women, both Jessie and Eva would admonish 'go away, you kids, don't look, the honeyants will disappear' yet the children rarely took any notice. By the time we left the area soiled nappies were strewn in the bush; teabags, sugar and powdered milk spilt; and the remnants of lunch (white bread and meat) left on the ground.

Jessie indicated to me that she wanted her children to be tough. When her young daughter was hitting an age-mate, a boy relation, she refused to intervene on the grounds that the boy was 'sooky' and always cried. Being tough implied a measure of aggression and stoicism in the face of attack. The local Wongi boys displayed more physical aggression than the girls and their teasing of each other often continued into physical tussles. Carers (nearly all women) were often very tolerant towards and amused by such activities, and with the older boys there was a measure of admiration for their wilder exploits though not to the extent suggested of the Pintupi when Myers (1986:239) states "the young [men] are viewed as wild, uncontrolled, and somewhat antisocial, but they are also admired. They represent the passions of human nature".

Martin (1993) states that from infancy Wik children were encouraged to retaliate physically against perceived wrongs, and for a small child to be aggressive was positively valued. He observes that once Wik children became mobile they spent much of their time with other children. Much of the learning and socialisation process of children took place within relatively unhierarchical and informal peer groups. He comments on how competition and acrimony were constant undercurrents, despite a great deal of affection, care and laughter amongst peer groups. Similarly, Myers (1986) stresses the role of peer group pressure in socialising young children, primarily through ridicule and shaming. A sign of maturity was the capacity to demonstrate one's appreciation of standards and propriety by exercising restraint and by knowing what is 'shameful'. Myers (1986: 121-122) describes it thus "in its developed sense, "shame" is a quality of the socialized person and entails being embarrassed as a means of avoiding the appearance of egotism, self-assertion or private wilfulness... The intended message is that a person does not think he is better than the others".

According to Myers (1986:122), for the Pintupi the process of growing up was from a state of not 'understanding' to one of mature appreciation of one's relatedness to others. To be a fully complete and autonomous person was only possible through sustaining relations with others so that genuine autonomy was not a product of private will, but resulted through successful negotiation in relation with others. This 'fundamental tension' Martin (1993) claims applied to Wik social life but he adds a corollary insight that has even greater

mother did not intervene when a toddler played with a sharp knife, and made no attempt to dress the wound when another child scratched himself so badly that there was blood all over his face.

relevance to what was seemingly being taught to the younger generation in Laverton - he found that reasons for injury, loss and anger were being personalised and externalised onto 'outsiders' (outside familial and kin network, whites) who were blamed for events like sickness and death.

Being related

Akin to the Pintupi (Myers 1986), but in a less structured and passionate sense, relations between Wongi people were nuanced by the demonstration of appropriate emotional states and by the expression of social sentiments. In certain situations notably when people were after money they called onto the prospective benefactor to demonstrate compassion, by showing that they were moved by another's wishes or condition. Conversation where news was imparted of others' mishaps or misfortunes were punctuated by expressions of sorrow (for loss) and of regret (for inappropriate behaviour).

In Katherine, Merlan (1998:205-206) reports that most Aborigines said they felt 'shame' that deterred them from thrusting themselves upon people who they did not know and with whom they had no significant and existing connection. 'Different' people had no claims they could legitimately make on one's things and one's social effort, and one could not 'go' to people who were felt to be 'different'. Even though one's drinking partners tended to be 'close' known people, grog facilitated a relaxation of restrictions to the point where people had no 'shame'.

In Laverton being shy in public with non-familiars was considered good social etiquette. Demonstrating shyness involved not speaking or saying very little when asked a question, and body language that spoke of the desire to avoid or move away from the social exchange. In front of whitefellas, it would be said that a person was shy or 'shamed' to speak. There was also a sense of decorum in how social interactions in public places were meant to occur, so that when a woman was swearing loudly at her children in public, several women nearby muttered 'shame' to hear her speak such language in front of whites and strangers. However, a crucial factor was whether one's peers were around to witness the modest and reserved manner. Gerrard (1990:270) believes that 'shamed' and 'shame' is most often equivalent to 'embarrassed', as one never feels shame when alone and notes that "children and teenagers, who use the word constantly, always use it to refer to a situation in which they are singled out from their peers (by praise from a teacher, for example)". Children and adolescents in Laverton constantly used 'shame' to express their disapproval of or to tease their peers and to explain their non-cooperative response to adults.

As a way of demonstrating social censure for inappropriate behaviour the labelling of actions as shameful was a form of peer pressure that constrained individualistic practices in public contexts. When asked if they could be recorded on tape or on video, irrespective of whether the interviewer was local Wongi adults (Robyn and her nephew Lyle) or myself, the local young men were said they were shy and did not want to participate as a group. The young man Lyle said he was going to try and interview other

young men when they were 'charged up' and more inclined to talk and not be shy. Robyn said the older people would talk better in front of a video, than on tape, although it would be better to get them by themselves as they would be 'shamed' when others were around.

Martin (1993:155) portrays the invocation of 'shame' as an attack on one's autonomy. One day the young man, Lyle, made a statement about what he saw as shameful behaviour and indicated that he was acting differently to a much older man because of his sense of personal autonomy. He and Sam were outside the newsagent having bought a pile of Scratch lottos. Sam told Lyle to go back into newsagency and get their winnings. Lyle said '*too much shame taking in dirty tickets*'. Sam then said that Ronny (an older man) did it to which Lyle replied '*that's Ronny but I'm Lyle*'. His response suggested a generational difference between what might be considered shameful for Lyle and his peers as against the standards of propriety practised by older people.

It has been noted by other authors that for many Aboriginal people that the use of public contexts to express anger and sense of grievance is integral to disputing processes (Langton 1983, Martin 1993, Sansom 1980). For certain situations in Laverton, where there was to be peroration against a kinsperson for their bad behaviour, it seemed important to have an audience to witness the chastisement of the offender. The following excerpts from my notes indicate how I along with others constituted the witnesses to public expressions of disapproval and scolding:

Outside the deli, where white people were clustered inside and outside the shop, Vera yelled at Rory and brandished a stick, threatening to beat him if he continued to sniff petrol...

Ursula and Boris came round to Mavis's house and she launched into a tirade - about how they did not care for Rory, for not sending him to school, for letting him run around sniffing glue... 'they're too busy chasing grog, being selfish'... Boris said they were educating Rory themselves... Ursula made a final plea and hunted around for money on the kitchen table. Hilda sat in the background, smiling, Rory took lollies from the kitchen. After they had left Mavis explained that Ursula was alright but that Boris steals money from her and spends it on grog. She did not want to go out bush later as she was afraid that Ursula and Boris would steal the food...

At Wongatha Wonganarra seated outside with Shirley, Stella and Michelle. Mavis and Fisher are dropped off by Abel and Mavis asks me when are we going to look for emu eggs and tells Fisher to give me a cigarette. Fisher starts going on about the Leonora Art show when he is interrupted by the arrival of a car with Boris in the back. There's a slanging match with Stella and Mavis in particular calling Boris a 'dog' and a 'fucking arsehole'....

...an older Hamilton woman smashed a rock through a station wagon's window. She was yelling something about 'carrying on with your sister'. The station wagon screamed off...

Went out to the Village with Mavis. Fisher had been on the grog for two days and had not come home. Kids climbed in and the crowbar was placed in my car. Mavis had been talking quite calmly about Fisher going off the rails and how he was scared of her because she was going to give him a good flogging. As soon as we reached the brown house where the drinking circle was, Mavis erupted from the car and charged into battle. She barrelled over to the house, talking very loudly about how he had his drink yesterday and now it was time to come home. Fisher blustered but followed Mavis to the car, where he

carried on about her being 'fucking lazy' for not sending the kids to school and her being the 'the fucking Laverton loudmouth'...

Three of these incidents were precipitated by tension within the extended family over the care of a boy, Rory, who was mentioned towards the end of the previous chapter. His parents were condemned in conversations amongst whites and by occasional public displays of anger, mainly directed against the father by his partner's female kin.

All of the above incidents involved sober persons who wished to show a proper and angry response to perceived wrong-doers. Amongst the Wik, Martin (1993:145-148) found a strong emphasis on expressing grievances and anger. When really angry, Wik described the emotion as irresistible. Anger arose from grief, from 'jealousy' over 'perceived imbalances', and from the denial of material and symbolic resources. Wik men were more likely to demonstrate their anger over the denial of resources through violence, and young men tended to express their anger like children by having tantrums, rages and going berserk. He refers to a "powerful ethos of equivalence and balance" and from an early age Wik learnt to monitor and appraise the flows of material and symbolic items towards themselves in comparison to those around them. A similar ethos appeared to influence local Wongi relations and interactions, as there was pervasive gossiping and disparagement of those who had prestigious jobs, and friction and often violent conflict instigated by jealousy in the more general sense and more particularly, in relation to sexual relationships.

The above vignettes, of anger expressed 'close others' who had behaved badly, differed from the haranguing that erupted when intoxicated individuals expressed deeply felt grievances and anger that had their source in perceived injustices against their own selves or in frustration over their lack of control of adverse events. An example of this was when Ursula stormed into the DCD office, with a soft-drink bottle half full of wine, and angrily stated that the officer, Seth, would not take her son Rory away from her. When Seth responded angrily Ursula retreated from the office, throwing her arms around and say '*fuck you*' over and over. For the rest of the day she stalked around Laver Place or sat glowering in a nearby drinking circle.

The most public demonstrations of anger in Laverton were when individuals, usually '*sparked up*' with grog, had not received the response they wanted from local brokers or gatekeepers to resources. An example was when a man threw rocks at the post office, frustrated because his cheque was not due till the next day. Despite the language of personal vilification, such abuse was not necessarily designed to express anger *at* a particular individual. It was designed to show feelings of anger, and the cause of the anger may have been outside the control of the individual at the receiving end, although they represented the agency that was seen to be a fault. With the incident involving Ursula, on the same day in the evening, Rory's father Boris yelled abuse at me in Laver Place '*white cunt*' and so on until Ursula told him to '*shut up, she don't work for them anymore*'. After incidents of this nature, the person when sober and in a calmer frame of mind would often apologise face to face to the target of the abuse for their actions, although these apologies tended to be offered only to those agency employees with

whom they had ongoing and friendly relations. The next day Ursula said was sorry to Seth, explaining that she had been drunk and assuring him that he was '*the only one in the world who understood*' her.

Expressing anger through verbal abuse sometimes escalated into the throwing of rocks and physical attacks, although the latter rarely occurred against white people. Fighting between couples was not uncommon in the public spaces of Laverton, apparently brought on by accusations of infidelity and being driven 'wild' by feelings of jealousy⁸⁸ and exacerbated by the liberalising effects of alcohol. Women were also attacked by their male partners for allegedly neglecting their children. In the adult court, several serious cases of domestic violence, where the women had sustained physical injuries, the defendants had explained their actions in these terms.

In many instances, the harm inflicted by the protagonists on each other occurred within the context of a social gathering characterised by the inebriated state of the participants. Martin (1993) makes the point that with so many Wik drinking fewer people were able to provide care and nurturance, and the capacity of non-protagonist kin to diffuse conflict was diminished. Merlan (1998:205-207) also points out how people's sense of responsibility for drinkers was 'tested' and that many people found it too difficult to deal summarily with drinkers whom they know well and whom they had long-standing, complex, social ties. Katherine Aborigines revealed a certain resignation about the possibility of directly influencing another's behaviour or exerting authority over another when it came to drinking. Attitudes were frequently expressed by non-drinking Aborigines that drinkers like to drink and cannot be influenced and were best left alone. Nonetheless, though drinkers tested the limits of relatedness by prodding others to react in their flaunting, abusive and self assertive behaviours, Merlan stresses that the personal and family identity of those who drank was not supplanted by definitions of them as drinkers, drunks, alcoholics or diseased people. Unfavourable assessments of current capacities and social worth did not erase a sense of personal entitlements and status (Merlan 1998:198, 200-201).

In Laverton, when large numbers of people were in an aggressive inebriated state it seemed that many hid or avoided the conflict, and would call the police rather than become directly involved. Up to a point, violence was sanctioned as an appropriate response, as with the Wik (Martin 1993:183), it was seen by many as part of the past way of life and a Wongi characteristic. Large-scale conflict in public spaces, usually involved visitors (though often they were kin) and such episodic outbreaks of uncontrolled drunken fighting were to some extent taken for granted and 'naturalised' by local Wongis and longer term white residents.

After a spell of 'self-discipline', where a person had been hard at work or had engaged in a muted lifestyle, there seemed to be, for many, a build up of pressure to go '*off the rails*' that was hard to resist. The principal temptations that formed part of going off the rails

⁸⁸ Sexual relations were regarded by the Pintupi as possessing great potential for creating disorder in the public realm (Myers 1986:123)

were getting into the grog and/or into gambling. There were instances where women had undertaken painting or craftwork fairly intensively for several weeks, and they admitted they were feeling a great craving to participate in card-playing and other forms of gambling. Several men who had full-time jobs for several months expressed regret when the employment ceased because they then felt compelled to go on a drinking spree which could last for several days to several weeks. Partly it seemed from what people said, that they were experiencing ennui or a sense of boredom, which precipitated the almost uncontrollable urge to seek excitement and a more chaotic environment. The only people who seemed to be viewed as completely immune to these impulses were the elderly and the adults who had fervently adopted the Christian faith⁸⁹.

Myers (1986:259) claimed that trouble amongst the Pintupi was resolved less often by collective actions and subordination of individual autonomy than by a reaggregation of people in space. Merlan as well found a common perception amongst the Aboriginal people in Katherine that they were 'better lunga bush'. This suggested the town scene was inherently full of problems, some of which were related to the availability of grog. The advocated solution was to move away and live in the bush thereby getting away from one's drinking 'mob' whose compulsive urging was hard to resist (Merlan 1998: 197,201)⁹⁰.

Internal politics

Gerrard (1990:299-300) makes a distinction between two kinds of relational power: that which is exercised within a group, and that which occurs between groups. Her 'groups' were first, within the Aboriginal community where individuals uncertainly contrived to create intracultural status in a fairly chaotic environment, and second, between the Aboriginal and European populations. In Laverton, the overriding concern for local Wongis was their standing within their own domains and fields of relations. Nevertheless, this did not mean that there was a straightforward bifurcation between intracultural and intercultural relations.

Several families and individuals were very sensitive and responsive to the status meanings of wider society, especially where they sought formal political positions in either the Wongi and white domains⁹¹. There were several local Wongi residents who held positions of authority as well as employees in the service sector who were adept at dealing with the *walypala* on a daily basis, and expected a degree of respect and cordiality from both white

⁸⁹ For the Pintupi, Christianity was an effective source of authority outside the individual that made it acceptable to refuse to participate in drinking (Myers 1986:269).

⁹⁰ Despite the expressed preference and nostalgia for bush life, Merlan (1998) stresses how in fact town now has a focus for Aboriginal people in the region as a centre for resources and supplies, with a range of services (medical, educational, social security and general consumer outlets) and a place of social intensity. As a consequence, it is implied, many continue to live in town and to only move away infrequently and only for short periods of time.

⁹¹ Merlan (1998: 102, 68) distinguishes between families of mixed descent who had been around for many years and who had a different socio-economic position to local residing 'fringe' families who were integrated at a quite different level into town's economic life. Other Aboriginal people in Katherine lived in travelling mode, had nothing and accumulated nothing.

and Wongi residents. The longer term white residents were also expected to acknowledge and esteem the more influential personalities within the local Wongi political domain, even if this was not embodied in an official position. There were members of key local families who in their social activities and who by their personal appearance, manner and household arrangements indicated that they were familiar with and aspired to 'respectable' white mores and styles.

Amongst those that did not conform to the outward signs of worker respectability, who were regular visitors to the town mostly it seemed to engage in drinking sprees (going off the rails), there was a sense of confidence in their dealings with non-Aboriginal residents, especially those that were local or government employees. Their ability to move around literally and metaphorically between different socio-cultural groupings was suggested by one woman who in a distraught state at the police station called herself an '*educated woman*' an '*in-between*' who was born at Warburton but '*looked after*' by white people.

Gender relations were comparable to those in much of the non-Aboriginal domain: they pervaded the division of domestic work, occupations, sporting and recreational pursuits. Household compositions were structured by family and affinal ties, but friendship cliques were shaped by age and gender. Formal political power was held mostly by men but several key older women exercised considerable influence in intra-domain politics. In Laverton, women were also more likely to have jobs in the service sector. But it was not just that their income was larger or more predictable; women were more able to withstand the vicissitudes in consumption rates and were the ones who tended to 'gather' capital, at least in the short-term, for specific events, such as a holiday. Women were more able to hold on to goods, with household goods purchased and possessed mostly by women in Laverton but then it was the men who usually controlled the prestigious commodity, the car, even when women may have contributed to its purchase.

The political and economic power exercised by individuals, notably women, was mediated and diffused by their familial and kin obligations, and did not automatically confer durable social standing amongst local Wongi residents⁹². Personal status was inextricably bound up to the shifting fortunes of one's 'family' and the accumulation of social capital attained through the practice of relatedness with peers, affines and kin. Martin (1993:125) asserts that for the Wik commercial success was not the paramount concern, instead it was the opportunity to attain status within the Wik domain so that all business was personalised. Much of life internal to the Wik domain continued to be "rationalized and legitimated in terms of relations of kinship" including close and distant connections (Martin 1993:267).

Although local Wongis in Laverton would explain the nature of the kin or affinal connections to visitors who would 'attach' themselves to local households, the

⁹² Amongst the local Wongi residents of Laverton there was no special glorification of old people as 'elders' although several older women had almost a matriarchal status in their own families. Merlan (1998:59) writes that old people in Katherine did straddle the border between the past and the present but they did not seem an especially privileged group in any clear social sense.

superseding descriptor for forms of affiliation was of belonging to a 'family', known by its Anglo-Celtic surname (see Birdsall 1988). In relation to acquiring jobs, accessing smaller funding grants, or controlling the Wongatha Wonganarra organisation, there was competitive edge in the jostling that went on between local families in Laverton. A temporary coalition of families' interests only appeared to operate for short intervals when there was perceived to be an external threat to the Laverton 'mob' from non-local Aboriginal groups. The significance of a family's connections to place, and the need to demonstrate historical and contemporary 'residency', was emerging in the early nineties as a stronger factor in inter-family rivalries because of a growing awareness of the implications of native title.⁹³

To outsiders local Aboriginal politics appeared deceptively moribund with only a few participants. Such a conclusion might be drawn on the basis of a single family's domination of the local organisation, Wongatha Wonganarra, and the fact it was at the time administered by a white manager, and the absence of Aboriginal community projects with a profile in the town. When Robyn asked young people whether they were interested in Aboriginal politics, they all answered in the negative. Being 'political' seemed to many local Wongi people to represent militant and coherent opposition to the dominant white society, which they either did not want to engage in or saw as irrelevant to their own milieu. As among the Wik, there was no explicit recognition in everyday discourse about domination or marginalisation, rather there were complaints of the overt control over resources exercised by white and black individuals and the disregard by institutions (primarily ATSIC⁹⁴) of their wishes.

A narrow version of politics implies engagement in civic life, where one takes on responsibilities to bring about broad-based change in the interests of a bounded collectivity loosely termed a community. Both Martin (1993:16) and Myers (1986) refer to the strains of settlement life where the notion of 'community development' is hampered on the one hand by the assertive individualism of the people, and on the other hand, by social relations based on egocentrically defined kinship networks. Amongst the Pintupi, the concept of the good of the community remained without persuasive force and there was little precedence or significance in the performance of task for the sake of 'community welfare' (Myers 1986:268,278).

In Laverton, Robyn along with several older people, argued that '*something needed to be done*' because it was sad to see people picking over rubbish bins and pinching food from the shops because they had run out of money. She had only arrived back in the town after years away and initially, spoke of conditions with a fiery anger and she was eager to

⁹³ Vera interpreted Mabo as unfairly expecting Aboriginal people to live in or remain in the bush when the work and schools were in the city. She seemed sanguine about the spate of native title claims for the district, believing that the area around Lake Baker would be claimed by her family. In contrast, her granddaughter Jessie was critical of the various groups applying for native title in the district alleging that one group was from Kalgoorlie and '*descended from a Burrville cop*'. She claimed they had not '*lived or hunted or collected food around Laverton for years.... anyone can name a few waterholes and wells*'.

⁹⁴ Dissatisfaction with ATSIC was a recurring theme in conversations about Aboriginal politics with diatribes against the '*black bastards who do nothing for their people*', except for favoured groups.

get courses running and to see more houses at the Village as she expected more people to move there from Warburton and Tjirrkali. Over time, however, her passion subsided as she became more enmeshed in intra-town politics. Although statements were made by older people and Robyn at meetings and to a white interlocutor about improving the situation and creating opportunities for the local community the actual direction and organisation of change, and who would undertake the work, was left unspecified.

The imposed structures of Aboriginal self-governance - ATSIC councils and local incorporated bodies - and funds earmarked for Aboriginal initiatives have generated a tumultuous field of 'Aboriginal politics' but it was the identities of those involved and their conduct towards others which aroused comment, lobbying and tactical interventions by local residents. There was widespread active involvement in politicking and a vigorous discourse about local and district Aboriginal politics to which several non-local Aboriginal people were central players and contributors.

In 1989 there had been mutterings of discontent amongst local Wongis and criticisms from several non-local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about the then manager's benevolent dictatorship of Wongatha Wonganarra, namely the tight control exercised over individuals' social security payments. When I returned in 1992 I was told that an almost riotous situation surrounded the overthrow of the manager, which had occurred some time before and which had been precipitated by allegations of corruption and nepotism. The after-effects were still been felt with strained relations between several local white residents, who had supported the former manager, and various non-local Aboriginal and local Wongi residents who were instrumental in the overthrow. The former manager's influence and that of her family continued to be marked within regional politics, and after leaving Laverton they had successfully rebuilt the settlement at Cosmo Newberry, with several local Wongi families moving from Laverton to take up residence there. One long term white resident in Laverton blamed '*discontented elements*' for destroying the successful operation of Wongatha Wonganarra. In contrast, an adversary asserted that local white supporters were misinformed and that Wongatha Wonganarra was being ripped off and that many of its goods and chattels were removed with the departure of the Campbell family.

An Aboriginal man married to a local Wongi woman had this to say about the contemporary situation and the past management of Wongatha Wonganarra:

*Fred: The Browns are Wonganarra. Monica Campbell was good. She had the shop running. Then everybody started running her down, saying she was stealing money. But she got everything going, she built it up. Then pulled out. They can't get it going so they had to get Lou, a white manager [indistinct] Ruth Brown ran it for a while, wanted it for the car, the phone in the Wonganarra house, for drink. Ran amuck in that house, smashed everything, stuffed everything up that mob. Chip in charge after Ruth. Then Lou came in, he got all the debts out the way which was good, so it's all back to square one JP: There's talk of the shops opening again
Fred: But who's going to be working at that place, the Browns...The only people left in town are the Browns. Pam and Nancy James, they're not really interested, they're just into the drink.*

Although the Brown family controlled Wongatha Wonganarra with members in key positions and in the few paid jobs, their influence was limited to the town. When it was revealed that an application to ATSIC for funding for a community centre had failed, it was assumed by local Wongis that their application had been sabotaged because the two ATSIC representatives from the district were from Mount Margaret and Cosmo Newberry. The following year two local Wongi women ran, albeit unsuccessfully, for the ATSIC regional elections in an attempt to improve town residents' access to resources.

When bureaucrats representing various state and federal departments visited the town on Aboriginal 'business', meetings would usually be called and attended by mostly Brown family members. Similarly if there were opportunities to attend meetings elsewhere then a consensus would be reached as to who would attend although the choice was limited to the Brown family. The dissipation of resources and the scarcity of accessible funds were a constant source of tension and recrimination between the Brown family and the Wongatha Wonganarra manager and other Aboriginal (not necessarily Wongi) residents.

A case in point was the art and craft activities of local Wongi women, which had flourished sporadically over the years. By 1993 a number of local Wongi women wanted to develop activities modelled on the women's groups at Warburton and Tjirrkali, which several local women had participated in. With the women's groups at both Tjirrkali and Warburton, considerable money was made from the sale of their products but disputes had arisen over access to and the use of vehicles. White women had helped out at Tjirrkali and Warburton, and since I had a four-wheel drive, the local women suggested that I become involved and believed that conflict would be avoided by using my vehicle for trips out bush.

Several meetings were held but attendance was confined to a few stalwarts. No-one was sure what had happened to an earlier grant of \$3000 for art and craft activities or to a set of silk screens that had been sent to the town. At a meeting organised for a representative from the state Department of the Arts, the Wongatha Wonganarra manager revealed that he had put the silkscreens in storage and that most of the \$3000 grant had been spent, with only \$150 put back in the kitty for the future purchase of materials. There was a hostile atmosphere when the manager Lou stated the art and craft enterprise needed to generate income and that they should not keep on expecting grants. Vera demanded to know where the money had gone. Lou explained that rather than pay for the materials people should put so much of the selling price back in the kitty. Lou said that instead of this, people sold their works door to door because they wanted money quickly for grog and for the kids. The meeting ended on a dejected note with grumbling about the rejection of the funding application for a community centre.

Not many women came along on the bush trips. The reasons varied but usually revolved around the care of sick children for the younger women, or other business that needed their attention in Kalgoorlie or locally. Past activities had also had limited support. Painting T-shirts had been popular with about half a dozen women yet the sewing

materials which had been bought were never used. Jessie when she returned to town in 1993 said she was not going to undertake artwork through Wongatha Wonganarra but set up her own business instead. She had endeavoured to facilitate activities when she was last resident in town but she said she had *'sat around for six months with nobody showing up'*.

According to Robyn the local people were very pessimistic because they had been *'sucked in'* by the views of the white manager. She said that the white manager had asserted that nobody would work in the job of trainee manager and he was against the introduction of the CDEP scheme because he doubted that local people would work. Robyn characterised the white manager as *'old fashioned'*, as having *'attitude'*, because he did not mix with anybody and although he was supposed to do what the Committee said, he did not always comply.

Wongatha Wonganarra was not a resource rich organisation, with no independent source of revenue outside of government funding⁹⁵. The mini-bus was one of the few resources owned by the organisation for the common use of the local Aboriginal people, but was the catalyst for innumerable disputes. The Wongatha Wonganarra manager, Lou, allowed the bus to be hired out to as a way of raising revenue, and this practice appeared to be condoned by the local Wongi residents until some of them wanted to go to Kalgoorlie in attend NAIDOC week celebrations. They could not use the bus because it was booked by the Laverton school and the manager was criticised for allowing this to happen. Some months later the youth centre manager said he had asked Lou several times if he could borrow the bus to go to the Leonora discos but was told the attendees would have to be 95% Aboriginal because the bus was for the use of Aboriginal people, and that in any case it was always being used by local Wongi people to go to funerals and the like.

Restricting access to the bus to Aboriginal people did not overcome competing demands for its use within the local community. An Aboriginal young man was scathing:

Fred: All the young boys thinking about going to Esperance for the basketball carnival...

JP: Are they going in the Wongatha Wonganarra bus?

Fred: No... Red Brown wants to go to Kalgoorlie for shopping, he, his wife and his daughter. Three people go in a big bus to go to Kalgoorlie when all the boys could use it to go to Esperance. Red Brown makes that decision. That what the bus is for, it's a community bus, all the Aboriginals want to go to the basketball carnival, they've asked Lou, he's said yes, then Red turns around and said no, I want it to go to Kalgoorlie. So the boys can't have it, simple as that.

Although the Brown family was the dominant group in Wongatha Wonganarra affairs at this time, there was still tension over who could claim priority of access to resources. It was several older men and women within the family who would usually claim privilege although this was never a permanent state of affairs as who was in town affected the

⁹⁵ Wongatha Wonganarra had an old truck and a yard in the industrial part of town, which was used to store materials and tools for maintenance and at one stage had been used to make slabs. A nearby station property Korong was jointly owned by Wongatha Wonganarra, Leonora, and Mount Margaret, but it was run by a white manager and did not seem to produce revenue for these three groups. Several local Wongis said they sometimes bought a sheep for \$10 from the station.

dynamics of intra-family status. The most consistently peripheral to the politicking for access were the younger men and the no more than a dozen men or women who would spend most of any one year in Laverton participating in the grog lifestyle. Influential factors in mobilising support when there was friction between individuals were whether the person was 'close' - both in terms of being kin or affines and in terms of shared experience and periods of co-residence. An illustration was provided by the struggle between two young women in town to garner funds for their respective basketball teams.

Raising funds for sporting activities was problematic when there were few potential benefactors and where the players battled with a chronic lack of liquidity. When a local Aboriginal woman wanted to revive an Aboriginal incorporated sporting organisation, she started raising money and in a relatively short period of time amassed \$1000. She had, however, through her and her husband's job an extensive network of contacts amongst the non-Aboriginal residents and local business people, and could draw on the fund raising capabilities of several friends. In contrast, the two young Wongi women who wanted to raise funds for their respective basketball teams to go to a carnival in Geraldton had to rely on their connections with key white brokers in the Laverton and Mount Margaret. Thus both of them wrote to the same organisations - the youth centre committee and two mining companies, with whom they had personal links, that had cultivated local Aboriginal people because of mining interests at Mount Margaret or Cosmo Newberry. One woman alleged that the other had copied her strategy, and various people in the town were accused of passing on information and of talking behind the protagonist's back - of being disloyal and duplicitous. In the ensuing months the woman with more tenuous ties to the local residents had her intra-group status downgraded with a resulting restriction in access to resources and positions.

Contestation over mining royalties and claims contributed to and fanned disputes. Aboriginal town residents observed keenly and took sides in what became a very public imbroglio at Mount Margaret⁹⁶, even though they were not personally involved. For some time there had been animosity between the then manager and a particular family which according to local gossip the manager had refused to assist and had been trying to evict. Though the manager and dissident family were distantly related their lifestyles differed marked, with the former aligning himself with 'traditional' mission values whilst the family were more oriented towards town-fringe practices and movement. Laverton local residents made comments that made plain their sympathies - Vera called the manager the 'devil' and said he should welcome everybody whether Christian or not, and said it was a sorry business when family fought (the manager and the family were distantly related). Mavis and Fisher thought the manager should have been speared. Local gossip had it that \$10,000 received from the mining company had been pocketed by the manager. There were rumours that a further \$300,000 was being promised by the company, and the main protagonist⁹⁷ in the dissident family, who had returned to Mount Margaret after

⁹⁶ The regional media and the newspaper *The West Australian* ran stories on the dispute.

⁹⁷ His father Ronny was originally from Blackstone but Ronny had lived along the Laverton-Kalgoorlie axis for most of his adult life after forming a 'wrong-way' marriage. I was told that Ronny had learnt the

spending a month in jail for attacking the manager with a tyre lever, claimed he wanted to 'protect the interests of the illiterate old people' by ensuring that the families of 'old people' received the royalties should the 'oldies' die.

Staking leases in areas beyond the local district became more common in the nineties, though several Brown men already had mining leases at Cosmo Newberry. The situation at Cosmo was unresolved when I visited in 1994, and dated back to when all mining claims were frozen at Cosmo Newberry in the eighties and since then various mining enterprises involving Aboriginal people including a company with links to Kalgoorlie-based Wongis had been endeavouring to negotiate a range of deals. There was also an interest in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and a consortia of several Laverton residents pegged a lease in the Lands, as did the Campbell family based at Cosmo Newberry. I was not aware of how the incursions by the Browns and Campbells were regarded by the Ngaanyatjarra people, as the broader picture of negotiations for mining exploration in the Lands was veiled in secrecy. What was clear, however, amongst many Wongi residents in Laverton was a recognition that they should be taking the initiative to position themselves for the ever-expanding opportunities for Aboriginal people to deal with mining companies. This was stimulated in part by a noticeable increase in overtures from companies aimed at fostering channels of communication with Aboriginal groups in areas where future mining activity might occur. Even WMC, not known for its constructive dialogue and public relations with Aboriginal peoples, was by 1994 sending out feelers to ascertain who might be significant brokers in the locality.

Whilst in the past there was often gossip that suggested that certain black and white individuals were reaping personal advantages from the administration of Aboriginal affairs ('corruption' in the shape of 'feathering one's own nest') by the nineties this was being supplanted by local discourses which focused on the potential for 'self-gain' accruing from being party to negotiations and agreements with the mining industry over royalties and leases. Criticisms were voiced of local Aboriginal people who held jobs or were designated representatives in terms of how they were not working for the 'benefit of their/our people'. When I suggested to someone that they talk to a local Wongi woman about a specific piece of legislation, I was told that she '*doesn't want to help the people, she's just in it for herself*'.

It was the small group of non-local Aboriginal residents who were inclined to take concrete steps to expose the purported malfeasance of key administrators and councillors. It was this same group who were known by white residents for their commitment and interest in civic matters such as Shire and youth centre affairs. For some years the Aboriginal couple who ran the DCD hostel in Laverton had been powerful, behind the scene players in regional Aboriginal politics, having been involved in the manoeuvrings that precipitated the Wongatha Wonganarra coup and the events which brought about a change in the regime at Mount Margaret. They were respected by and had personal relations with a diverse range of people in the region - mining company personnel, local

location of sites at Mount Margaret from an elderly Aboriginal friend and an elderly non-Aboriginal ex-missionary.

and regional bureaucrats, local authority figures, politicians and residents in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands because of their earlier employment history and their contemporary work with the Ngaanyatjarra young people who resided in the hostel after being charged with offences relating to petrol sniffing.

The couple's intercultural status was unsurpassed in the local field of politics, yet it was diminished somewhat when, after leaving the hostel, they formed a company (with several Ngaanyatjarra men had resided periodically in Laverton). Their stated aim was to dampen down division and dispute amongst people in the Lands that had been reportedly precipitated by smaller companies offering money to individuals rather than bargaining with representatives of collective interests. However, the formation of the company was widely perceived as being driven by 'greed'.

Dissent and outside intervention

'External' agents were favoured by Laverton local residents when it came to apportioning responsibility for certain decisions and their implementation and were called upon to intervene in 'Aboriginal' disputes. The desire to place ultimate responsibility for certain decisions and actions onto an external agent has been discussed by Myers (1986) and Martin (1993). They argue that this should not be interpreted as an avoidance of personal responsibility nor as solely an outcome of being 'institutionalised' in an environment of welfare colonialism. Both instead focus on the fragile character of authority which affected a 'leader's' (such as elected representatives) capacity to make decisions or exert compliance. Myers (1986:280) observes that concepts of representation and community are in themselves elements of a different tradition. In the Wik's fluid political environment Martin (1993: 288-294) states that individual authority was bounded socially, temporally and socially, with authority confined to a particular event or class of event or processes and decisions contextual, mutable and contested.

Pragmatic reasons for asking for outside help and for intervention are referred to by Martin (1993) where in certain situations it is politic to shift responsibility to outsiders. Myers (1986:285) underlines the significance of relatedness - "a Pintupi person, bound in the web of kinship and his or her duty to look after others, cannot refuse a request, but a white boss can". He further notes that whites can be approached equally by everyone for help and trusted to deliver on their responsibilities no matter who asks, although he adds that the Pintupi "were content to have whites embody the responsibility for them as long as the whites did not exceed their authorization" (p.281). Certainly in Laverton individual whites and non-local Aborigines who had no affinal ties were seen as having a basically ephemeral presence, irrespective of whether they played a helpful or obstructionist role in local politics during their period of residency.

Aborigines in Roebourne preferred outsiders to intervene in certain matters (Edmunds 1989) and Cowlshaw (1988:171) calls it a 'final ironic tragedy' that police in Brindleton were called upon frequently to stop Aborigines hurting each other and to control internal dissension. This aspect of relations between police and Aborigines is seldom discussed in

the literature. Edmunds (1989:104) interprets such relations as a form of dependency, writing that "the actions of the police and the court create and reinforce another level of dependency, so that sanctions and control have become largely externalised. The removal from the community of any sense of control over their own affairs has exacerbated the transfer of community regulation to dependency on external authority". She does not, however, elaborate on what she means by 'community' which makes it hard to appreciate the kind of internal regulation she believed had or could operate in a town such as Roebourne.

During the four years I was in Laverton I never heard or saw in the records a single complaint laid by a local Wongi resident against another person for a property crime⁹⁸. Yet I was informed of or witnessed many incidents of damage to property, and the taking of goods, commodities (paintings) and money. Commodities as large as cars and ghetto blasters were also purchased from Aboriginal vendors without questions asked about their dubious provenance. The rapid movement of goods in and out of camps and households were it seemed accepted as part of the essentially ephemeral and transitory nature of material possessions. People were upset by the taking of money or destruction of their homes and possessions, but such incidents were not viewed as appropriate for police intervention even if the perpetrators were distant relatives or visitors. I only knew of a solitary incident where police were asked to intervene in a matter which related to property was when a senior Ngaanyatjarra woman complained to the police about a truckload of people, who were returning from Kalgoorlie to attend her son's funeral, had been delayed by drinking in town. A local police officer, Brad, impounded the vehicle.

Interpersonal violence and threats to personal safety or the safety of others were another matter. Undoubtedly there were many incidents which went unreported, especially where the main protagonists were intoxicated to the point where they might only have hazy recollections of what happened. If the fight occurred in a very public place and where there was apparent danger to one or more of those involved or where the fight was considered a 'disturbance', the police were likely to intervene when conducting a routine patrol without requiring an incident to be reported before taking action. It was impossible to 'measure' the extent of unreported violence, but it appeared to occur when people were sufficiently close and the matter so uncertain and the injury considered not serious, that relations between them were re-affirmed within a short space of time after the event. Even if permission had been granted to access medical figures for the town (which was not forthcoming), they would have only provided a partial picture of levels of interpersonal violence, as most people seemed reluctant to seek medical attention unless an injury caused a reduced capacity to get about.

One day outside the swimming pool I was talking with a local Wongi woman when she pointed to a vehicle parked outside the police station which she said had been spinning out of control at the Village. She said they were the same people who started the trouble with the police and went on to observe that the local people usually minded their own business but it was the people passing through who caused all the trouble. It was

⁹⁸ Several thefts were reported by non-local Aboriginal people who worked in town.

primarily the Village residents who were exposed to higher risks from 'visitors' causing trouble, by for example spinning their cars at the Village, or by directly threatening the residents. At the Village at that time there were no phone connections so asking for police assistance involved going into town; anyway, there appeared to be a general ethos of managing the trouble wherever possible by taking defensive measures (fences, staying inside, having a weapon handy).

One night two unknown people tried to scale the fence of one of the houses, and a resident lay in wait ready with a knife in case they succeeded in entering the yard. I was told that if the people had been from Cosmo (or were otherwise known) they would have called out. On another occasion an altercation broke out between some Ranges people and a Village resident, Fred. The latter said the altercation had occurred because somebody had been creeping around his house at night, and that the visitors were a nuisance at the Village when they went on the grog. Fred and three others had just returned from an afternoon of shooting in the bush and he claimed he just removed his gun from the car and walked home. However the Ranges people filed a complaint with the police, saying that he fired at them⁹⁹. The story I heard from another local resident was that Fred had fired a warning shot in the air and threatened a man, who had a bad reputation because he shot up a nurses' home at one of the Ngaanyatjarra settlements when high on petrol. The matter kept on being adjourned because the complainant did not show up and it was not until about nine months after the incident that Fred was sentenced to nine months in jail.

A threat of a different order was posed by retributive action by non-local Aboriginal people. Vera contacted the police after receiving a threatening letter because she had not attended a funeral in Leonora, and had advocated the police intervening when 'featherfoots' were out at Mulga Queen because 'they should not be out there killing people'. As indicated earlier, when Mavis was being sought out as part of the Hamiltons and Chichesters series of 'paybacks' the police were informed of her concern for her personal safety.

Family ties and loyalties were strained in many incidents of interpersonal violence, most notably when there were domestic and sexual assaults against women. The local young Wongi man who was convicted of sexually assaulting the police officer's wife was a few years later charged the rape of one of the Chichester sisters. Her sisters provided support to her but no-one would sit with him when he was interviewed by the police and a non-local Aboriginal person acted as a substitute witness at the interview. One of the sisters of the victim revealed to me that their uncle had told them to drop the charges but that they (not she) refused to do so. He was subsequently convicted and received a long jail sentence. The younger brother of the Chichester sisters, 'who had done everything' according to one sister, had spent a considerable proportion of his adult life in prison for sexual assaults. Soon after his most recent release from jail, he allegedly raped a woman at a Village house, and one of the sisters and her defacto had 'split up' after the latter

⁹⁹ Fred said a young Wongi man, Sam, could back up his version but Fred dryly commented 'they only turn up if the court is to do with them'.

was accused of 'dobbing' the brother into the police. Another version was that the defacto's niece had 'dobbed in' the Chichester brother.

When a Wongi woman, Helena, had her body and face severely burnt by her defacto, Neville, several local residents were concerned for her safety, especially during the time (which was expected to be months) before the final court outcome for the charges against the man. Although the couple had been principally residing at Cosmo Newberry, both were well known to local Aboriginal townspeople and several white residents because they had spent many of their childhood years in the town. A number of discussions were held between a local white resident, Joy, and Vera, and what follows are edited notes of these discussion:

Joy asked Vera who should look after Helena. At first Vera named Lex and Virginia out at Cosmo Newberry as caregivers and protectors - the people who had looked after her in the past. But the situation was complicated by kinship. Neville was a cousin of the Campbells. Although under the Law, the couple should not be together as Neville was 'uncle' to Helena, nobody was likely to interfere (for example Lex or Virginia spearing or injuring Neville) because first, they were afraid of the police response and second, the police only listened to the Campbells and not the local Aboriginal people. The latter, like Vera, did not want to create further bad blood as the Campbells have still not forgiven them for ousting the Campbells from Wongatha Wonganarra. Joy said the police were very angry about the assault. Vera said Helena could stay with Stella in Laverton or with one of Helena's brothers in Kalgoorlie. Joy said Helena should go to the police and get a restraining order. Vera asserted that the police would not help as they would side with the Campbells. Joy said she was afraid of Neville but Vera said a white woman would not be harassed. I proposed DCD as a 'broker' and an officer from this department Seth came over when it became clear that the female DCD officer was out of town. Seth said ALS was a more appropriate agency, but Vera was sceptical as the field officer was related to the Campbells. I also pointed out that ALS would be representing the defendant, Neville...

Another discussion between Joy, Vera and myself about Helena.... At work Joy had talked to a police officer's wife who had said the police were very angry and that if Lex wanted to exact tribal punishment they would not intervene. Vera said Lex would not want to but Virginia might. She had hit one of the Campbells with a crowbar for disrupting, when drunk, a birthday party for her daughter. Joy said Neville was remanded in custody to appear in court next month, and the police expected him to get two years. Helena had run away from the Kalgoorlie hospital and Joy said she had rung the hospital and told them not to 'growl' at Helena. Joy told Vera to go directly to the police sergeant or his wife with any problems. Later on I asked Vera if the DCD officer had been helpful. She laughed and looked away, replying "I don't know what to say". It had been agreed that Helena could stay with Mavis in town.

Another incident of domestic violence, involving a different couple, escalated into a confrontation between the police and several Aboriginal men. The accounts I heard of the events revealed a strong antipathy to a particular police officer, and anger over the alleged bashing by the police of the men who fought them. The skeletal narrative of events, based on what local Wongis told me, was as follows: a couple who usually resided in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were in town, and the man (George James) assaulted the woman, who took refuge with her kin in a town house. Her relatives contacted the police who after an unsuccessful attempt at arresting him, chased him to the Village. Several men came to the assistance of George and were arrested and taken to the police station where they were beaten by the police officers.

A summary of my notes show how the sequence of events was communicated to me during a number of conversations with different local Wongi women:

Time of the year, big drinking parties in town... the evening before at 7.30pm we had seen four paddy wagons and police milling around, several had blood on their clothes. The next day Lily told me that George James had stabbed his defacto Kristin, a niece of Shirley, she thought in the forearm with a long knife. Kristin had hid in Red and Shirley's backyard, who had gone down to the police station to dob George in. The police had searched for him in the backyard with a torch, but finally found him in the single men's camps. They managed to get a handcuff on before he 'took off', punching out two police in the process. One of the police who was injured, Shaun, had previously caused trouble with Mickey and Robyn so that Lily reckoned he would be getting the message to leave town. The police eventually managed to catch up with George...

Jessie called in to drop off my camera and she described how the police and woken them all up the night before looking for George and the police had beaten up the 'boys'. This statement was clearer when Robyn came round that evening and told me that the 'boys' were flogged by six police the night before. She said "you know what the police are like. Show's who's boss. After Shaun and [indistinct] were bashed at the Village". The boys' faces were bruised from being hit by the batons. She was thinking of contacting ALS and the Ombudsman and getting a medical examination. Her cousins were beaten up in the Kalgoorlie lock-up and nobody was called to see them until the swellings had gone...

...before court I conversed with a Mount Margaret woman. She was angry with the Wongatha Wonganarra manager who was quoted in the 'Kalgoorlie Miner' as saying the assailants of the police were from Mount Margaret. She said the manager was talking 'shit' and though she and others had been at the Village at the time only one of the young men charged was from Mount Margaret, the rest were residents of a Ngaanyatjarra Lands community.

A rather different representation of events emerged in court, where the emphasis was on the original assault by George. In court, the cases of the six, mostly young men, facing charges related to the attack on police at the Village were dealt with fairly quickly. The ALS lawyer (Mr Barton) gave the explanation that the assaults of the two constables were precipitated by what the men saw as undue force, when the police pushed George James to the ground. Mr Barton stressed the lack of prior assaults and referred to the drunken state of the defendants, citing very quickly the case which allowed drunkenness to be a defence for Aboriginal people.

George was singled out for more serious consideration. The police prosecutor, a local police officer Terence, read out the police facts - about how the police apprehended George after receiving a complaint and how they had one handcuff on him before he ran off. It was at the Village where they caught up with him. George had attacked his defacto with a large knife and the stab wound required attention in hospital including a number of sutures. The ALS lawyer Mr Barton read out a handwritten letter from the defacto, Kristin, which he had obtained from her the day before and which asked for the complaint to be withdrawn because she did not want George 'sent away'. George had provided the following rationale for the stabbing to Mr Barton - that he was 'full drunk', he and his defacto were both drinking, and that he told his defacto to stop because she had to look after their young children. No allegations were made of police brutality.

Before passing sentence, the magistrate expressed his disapproval of violence against women, saying his views on the ability of the police to look after themselves were well-known. He told George that he had a responsibility to look after his children too. He noted that George had used a dangerous instrument and, importantly, he had a dreadful record of serious assaults, practically one a year.

When Robyn visited me that evening, she was not surprised by the court outcome as she had known George had a bad record. She thought the Wongi men may have been beaten by the police to scare them into pleading guilty. Although the assaults had not been brought up in court, she said this would not deter her from continuing with her complaint against the police officer, Shaun.

The trouble between Shaun and Robyn had begun earlier in the previous year. I first heard about the incident via miners' talk that a young cop, just new to town, was drunk down the pub on the Friday night and yelling at the Aboriginal people that they should make sure their kids wore seatbelts.

Robyn's defacto, Mickey, gave the following version of what happened: he, Robyn and Stella were down the pub and moving from one bar to the other when Shaun told the '*black bastards*' to keep out. A heated exchange followed, with Mickey taking a swing at Shaun. When Mickey and the other two got home, the tyres on his ute, on Robyn's car and on the motorbike had been slashed.

Robyn's version was as follows: she, Lily and Stella were down the pub and they had looked into the disco. Shaun was drunk and told the '*fucking black cunts*' to get out. Mickey who had been talking to the pub owner, came over to see what was going on and Shaun squared up to him. Another Wongi woman Michelle intervened and put up her fists like a boxer. The most upsetting event for Robyn was the slashing of their tyres, which had caused her great anxiety for nights afterwards as she expected him to come back. She saw a print of his shoe, a trainer, in the ground and she believed she would be able to identify it if she saw it again.

A regional superintendent of police came up to Laverton to investigate. All the local police, Robyn and Mickey attended a meeting and the pub owner was asked to report on what he saw. Robyn was upset that Shaun, even though he had apologised after the incident, had in the meeting denied doing anything. As far as Mickey and Robyn knew, after the superintendent's visit, two 'blokes' were meant to come up from Perth to conduct further investigations. Since they laid the complaint against Shaun, Mickey claimed that an old parking fine and the fact his licence expired months ago were resurrected by the local police and brought against him.

A few days after the determination of George's case in court, Jessie described some 'cops' now as bad. She said on New Years Eve a police officer, Saul, yelled abuse in front of his companions such as '*fucking black cunts*' at her, Lily, Stella and others when they walking across the oval. Although several in her party were drunk, she and Lily

were not. Jessie went to see a local senior officer, Brad Curtin, and explained that she did not want to make an official complaint but would like him to explain to Saul that he should not talk to certain people like that. She thought Brad must have spoken with Saul, because Saul was very friendly when they were both on the Kalgoorlie bus one day.

Robyn said they (the local Wongis) had got on 'alright' with the police until Shaun came along, except for an incident some years before involving a police aide, Jacob, and the young Wongi man Alex. According to Robyn, Jacob smacked Alex and Aunty Vera was furious - '*you know what she's like*'. The aide, Jacob, was also held responsible for an assault on a Brown man, Boris, who I saw at a party with a battered face. Boris's defacto had told the police that he was driving without his licence, and they had chased his car and rammed it into a tree a few times, purportedly to prevent him escaping. Jacob was said to have then beaten Boris up and boasted of this around town. At the party, the defacto Ursula wanted me to take photos of Boris's face as 'proof' and asked what she should do about the anger building up inside her. The police aide, a non-local Aboriginal man, did not stay much longer in town and was spoken of disparagingly by local police.

Although relations between local Wongi people and the police had been reasonably good until the incident between Robyn and Shaun, there was a police officer who had already been in town for several years who was disliked by many, especially by Wongi and non-Aboriginal teenagers. He was unpopular with the Brown family because he was driving the police vehicle which allegedly hit a toddler, Dora, who was playing in the driveway of her mother's house. Even worse, he did not stop to check on the toddler's well-being. The mother showed me the mark on Dora's head which she said was caused by the police vehicle knocking her over. The Browns laid a formal complaint and it was listed for magistrate's court. When I raised the subject with the police sergeant he was unperturbed saying that the complainants could not even agree on the same story with two witnesses giving different accounts of the incident.

So far, two methods of dealing with police actions that were perceived as unlawful or grossly improper, have been referred to. Local residents had laid official complaints, and with one incident, had an informal discussion with a senior officer. The local young Wongi men were more inclined to take direct personal and physical action against the offender, which invariably seemed to result in them appearing in court. After Dora was hit by the police vehicle her uncle and several other young men were reported to have gone down to the police station and hit the police officer, Doug, on the chest with a beer can. The uncle was convicted of assault and given a large fine, of about \$1000, which he did not pay so he landed up in jail for a month.

Some time later, two local young men and their older male relative (Sam, Lee and Isaac James) were charged with assaulting the police officer, Shaun, when he was attempting to intervene in a 'disturbance'. The following year Robyn was listed to appear in magistrate's court charged with some type of threatening offence. She said the police

had continued to hassle her and it caused so much trouble between her and Mickey, that she had gone round to Shaun's house. Because the dog had barked loudly she had picked up a stick and had asked Shaun to come out and fight.

The stories of police brutality and drunken racist abuse were uncommon, but subsequent efforts to bring the culprits to task highlighted the fundamental inequality between the institutional might of the police service and individual complainants. However, for much of the time the local Wongi residents did have cordial relations with the majority of local officers and their ire was directed against individuals who were deemed bad and lacking in respect. Local residents did not depend on the police but called on them, when it was considered appropriate, to intervene in situations where there was interpersonal violence and disruptive or threatening behaviour, primarily where the offenders were visitors. Local people knew that they could make life difficult for the local police, by withholding information, by making complaints, by in effect withdrawing their goodwill.

In turn however, past experience and the contemporary situation reinforced an appreciation of the police's superior power, including their capacity to make life disproportionately more unpleasant for local Wongi people. This could occur through enforcement practices and by ignoring requests, as Mavis and Fisher recognised when they said that Ursula was in trouble because the hospital and police would no longer help her after she attacked a nurse. An ALS officer commented that *'people here talk about different police - the nice ones and ones that pick on you. They see the police as the boss, you can't beat the police, you can tell by the way the magistrate talks to them'*.

For local residents, both black and white, the most powerful practitioners in the justice system were the police, as their presence was ubiquitous and their actions and inactions impacted on people's everyday lives by shaping the way residents perceived the orderliness and safety of their environment. For local residents who had frequent contact with the administration of justice, overwhelmingly Aboriginal people, there was familiarity with the various legal and welfare practitioners but criticism of them tended to centre on their refusal 'to help' and their perceived favouritism, rather than the abuse of power. Local justices of the peace were probably regarded with a greater degree of wariness when they meted out prison sentences but the decline in their role had lessened their public profile and influence. I seldom heard people refer to the magistrate, who was only in town one day every month, except to condemn a particularly harsh sentence, for example the tut-tutting that followed that revelation that a man *'was sent down for two years for trying to steal food'*. A previous circuit magistrate had been talked about a lot because of her penchant for handing down prison sentences and Jessie said that *'the Wongis had all been afraid of her'*.

Except for Robyn, few local residents talked the language of abstract 'rights' in contradistinction to an action or event not being 'right'. One exception was Fisher, who announced himself as someone who had *'been around'* having lived in SA and NT before settling down with Mavis to periods of residence in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and

Laverton. On a number of occasions, at their place, I raised the subject of their young son's arrests and court appearance. Fisher went on a rave about police '*being used to doing what they like around here*'. He had been to a conference in Darwin about juvenile justice¹⁰⁰ and he knew that there was little crime in Darwin because Aboriginal organisations had taken over the area from '*welfare*' and he had brought back information on '*rights*' - on how the police were meant to contact parents and the ALS when they pick up children. When further charges were laid against his son, he stated his intention of talking to '*welfare*' about the requirement to keep juveniles separate from adults in police custody. After his son's court appearance¹⁰¹ and during my third attempt to broach the subject, Fisher complained that he had not realised his son had been taken down to Kalgoorlie by the police until the next day, when he was told by the father of another boy (Rory - a co-defendant of Fisher's son). He loudly declaimed that he had gone round to see the ALS field officer and she had rung the police and given them '*a blast*'. At this point, the boy's mother, Mavis, shook her head and said the field officer did nothing. Normally loquacious, Mavis had remained silent on previous occasions or had talked of other affairs.

The topic of their son's behaviour was manifestly one that Mavis and Fisher did not wish to discuss with me in a personal way. I had felt discomfort, a sense of people being embarrassed, in other contexts when their children's '*misdeemeanours*' were brought up in conversation by *walypala*. Interpreting this evasion or silence involves recognising facets of local ideology and practice, including the implications of relatedness and personal autonomy for adult-child relations. Amongst the older Wongi people there was an ambivalence about the young. There was recognition of a generational difference, most clearly in relation to the young men's perceived lack of a work ethic, and sometimes they were talked about to outsiders with despair. However, in their relations and interactions with their young there was considerable indulgence and a progressive distancing as the child grew older. This indicated the adults' appreciation of the child's self-will and perception that the older children were not longer amenable to certain kinds of control or restraint.

Conclusion

Amongst local Wongis, there was very little talk about whites, although in everyday interactions, they were frequently deferred to as a form of external authority and treated instrumentally as vehicle through which assistance and goods could flow. Help and intervention was sought from whites, but this was predominantly from specific individuals in a narrow band of service occupations. Around white people who were not known personally, there was a discomfort, and a shyness, which in certain situations was an apprehension about how the whites might act. Such hesitancy or distance often evaporated

¹⁰⁰ Fisher had visited juvenile institutions in the Northern Territory, and found a marked contrast to the '*very hard*' conditions he experienced as a child. When he committed his first offence he was placed in a boy's home for three months, where he said the kids were woken and hosed down every morning.

¹⁰¹ During court Fisher had tried, with limited success, to complain that he was not informed by the police about his son's arrest.

when a person was sufficiently intoxicated to make demands and to stridently complain. Those that were familiar were more likely to be local white people who were 'do-gooders' or where there was a history of contact in a work environment.

As an objectified category, whites were characterised as 'hard' and 'mean' or 'selfish', which compared unfavourably to the Aboriginal ethos of sharing. Whites were criticised and pitied for the priority placed on material acquisitions and worldly success which was seen as affecting their capacity to appreciate and enjoy sociality and connectedness. Many local Wongi women were inclined to be scornful of whites' delusions of superiority and distinction, believing that such posturing by men concealed their susceptibility to the sexual allure of Wongi women. In many respects, Wongis might claim they had a better set of priorities, primarily by their emphasis on social life, and greater local knowledge, because they knew of events and individuals in a way which was opaque to the non-local Aborigine and non-Aboriginal visitor or short-term resident. The younger adults were more likely to talk of racism and rights whilst older local Wongis complained where they believed individuals had been unjustly blamed for particular incidents¹⁰².

A large part of daily life for local Wongis was taken up with activities within their own domain - economic and social activities - that had spatial and discursive dimensions. Goods or capital acquired through card playing, the retail of artwork, or other kinds of trade, were predominantly used or consumed immediately, without much nurturing of these 'assets'. Possession was valued but viewed as a fundamentally transitory state of affairs. An avid interest in the whereabouts of other Wongis was displayed - residential arrangements and the location of familiars, kin and affines were a continual topic of conversation and contributed to a sense of identification with the district and region. Political and economic activities were structured by family networks, and by tensions arising from a desire to assert personal autonomy yet sustain relatedness. Relatedness was reaffirmed by expressions of compassion, shame, and anger. Yet, 'toughness' was valorised and children were encouraged to act independently at an early age and to behave assertively and aggressively when playing with peers. The 'toughness' of Wongis, it seemed, was a source of pride and distinguished them from other Aboriginal groups, especially those in the south-west of the state.

This is not to imply that the local Wongi domain was a cohesive 'community'. It was given coherence by the racial divide, a fracture that existed since the first non-Aboriginal settlers arrived in the district, and by the separate social and economic activities within the domain. It was also strengthened by local affiliations to familial groups, a regional Wongi identity and more weakly to a pan-Aboriginal identity, and by an adherence to values and practices intrinsic to their daily lives.

There was considerable knowledge of and contact with Aboriginal people who usually resided in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and in the Goldfields region. Rather competitive attitudes came to the fore when discussing political events and the distribution of

¹⁰² In Smalltown, some 'nobopers' believed they were unjustly blamed and socially punished and that a double standard existed (Dempsey 1990).

government funding in the region, with Aboriginal people in nearby settlements and in other Goldfields towns disparaged and criticised for their efforts to marginalise or to claim more than the local townspeople. There was less interest in the political struggles in Ngaanyatjarra Lands, though some developments in the Lands were watched carefully. It was acknowledged that many of the 'old ways', both beliefs and practices, confined as they were to mostly Ngaanyatjarra Lands residents, were no longer adhered to by the townspeople. Nevertheless, there were signs that more townspeople were visiting and staying for months at a time in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and certain practices, such as 'payback' and attending funerals, were recognised as common across the region and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

The vigorous politicking encouraged links with white and Aboriginal brokers outside the local Wongi networks. Internal rivalries, dissent and interpersonal conflict were evident within the local Wongi domain and it was sometimes expedient to call for outside intervention. One family or another dominated the local organisation, Wongatha Wonganarra, over the years, and there were fights over positions, access to resources and funds. Complaints were frequently voiced about particular individuals' interest in self-gain or self-promotion, and doubt cast over their capacity to act on behalf of their 'own people'. A commonly accepted explanation for many fights between couples and between families, and for the undermining of people in positions of power was the motive of 'jealousy'.

Where interpersonal violence erupted between local Wongis or a threat was posed by visiting Aboriginal people, police were sometimes asked to intervene. Rarely did local Wongis complain to police of property damage or theft. When a local Wongi had 'run amuck' or 'gone off the rails' there seemed to be little done about it except to minimise the harm to others during the course of the outbreak. There appeared to be an expectation that the outbreak would run its natural course and others should only become involved, such as health professionals and police, if there was risk of injury, or a large numbers of people had become 'sparked up'.

Local Wongi residents may have manipulated non-locals and non-Wongis but objective structures indicated their subordinate position. For the Wik, Martin (1993) concludes, relations of domination and subordination were created through direct interactions between persons rather than being mediated through objective institutions such as a legislature or bureaucracy. However, "in perceiving and rejecting only the level of direct control, Wik ultimately acceded to their domination by the wider society" (Martin 1993:16).



CHAPTER SIX

LA teenagers

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the experiences of young people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in Laverton. This has to be seen in the broader social context of the place of adolescents in Australian society and more specifically, of rural adolescents. It is a popular truism that adolescents are 'difficult', affected by biological changes and navigating their way through the transition from childhood to adulthood. Broadly speaking in the western world, for most of the century, the period of adolescence has traditionally been publicly marked at the beginning by entrance into secondary school and at the end by the take up of full-time employment. The shift to economic independence was accompanied by various legal rights that were designed to recognise their social maturity and civic status. At present, at around the age of 17 to 18, these include the right to vote, to legally purchase and consume alcohol, to drive and to be treated as an adult in criminal matters. At the slightly younger age of 16 it also becomes legal to have heterosexual sexual relations with consenting adults.

As a developmental phase it is widely recognised that the boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred. Contributing to this blurring is the younger age of physical sexual maturity and more lenient social mores with regard to sexual experiences between younger teenagers. A blurring of the end of adolescence has been affected by the trends in western industrial countries in the prolonging of economic dependence on parents or other significant adults, with an increasing proportion of young adults remaining in education and being under or unemployed. The decline in opportunities for financial independence has meant that older teenagers are less likely to set up independent households, and for a variety of reasons, general social trends indicate that establishing their own families is starting later in life (White 1998).

Another trend has been the global phenomenon of 'youth' as a mass market. The genesis of 'youth sub-cultures' marked by distinctive fashion, goods and recreational activities have contributed to massive commercial interest transnationally in consumerism of youth 'styles' (Wyn and White 1997). Through mass media young people throughout the world are more aware of global 'youth styles' which can have an influence on the construction of local youth identities. In addition, there is a global recognition of youth as a distinctive 'troublesome/adventurous' social group who are distinguished and associated with certain distinctive products, behaviours and attitudes.

Despite these global trends there continue to be rich local variations in youth 'sub-cultures' identities and relations to the older generation. Differences between non-metropolitan communities in Australia are apparent across a range of factors, including variations in spatial location, economic foundations, demographic profiles and changes wrought by government policies. However, studies of young people in rural communities indicate common issues that transcend local differences. Key issues include limited access to education and training, loss of employment prospects, poor public transport, limited housing, lack of recreational and leisure

outlets, and difficulties in gaining adequate health information (White 1998).

The first section provides an account of Laverton teenagers, with little distinction drawn between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in terms of their activities, participation in schooling, their social networks and significant changes over time. The second section presents the perspectives of local young people, in particular critical aspects of belonging to the tough 'in crowd' and how there was a divergence in lifestyles between local Wongi youths and white youths after the mid-teens.

Young people in town

In Laverton, young people responded to some of the global homogenising trends in youth fashion and taste, with most teenagers looking like their counterparts in metropolitan centres. Indicators of local identity were subtle, and included locally-produced motifs on T-shirts, with the distinguishing feature of much of the clothing of several Aboriginal youth was its shabby, torn and dusty appearance. From 1987 to 1994 there appeared to be an increase in equivalence between black and white 'youth styles', although the possession of commodities clearly remained very skewed in favour of white youth. There was a shared passion for music, cars, clothes, and similar definitions of desirable 'brands' although there was a gendered dimension to the acquisition of commodities and in recreational pursuits which tended to cut across this similarity. Over this period I observed a general change in preferences for types of music and in other consumption patterns. Interest in country music declined, and there was a greater degree of spread in the consumption of brands away from the traditional working class (male) tastes of the past decade. Instead of just favouring jeans and check shirts, Winfield, Bundaberg, Jimmy Barnes, ACDC, the Angels and so on, there was more diversity in the kind of music listened to and in the clothes worn (rap and grunge styles were adopted by several youths), and in the use of illicit drugs and brands of alcohol and cigarettes.

As a proportion of the town population, there was a relatively low number of teenagers in Laverton. The 1991 census revealed 25% of the district's population was under 20 years of age. However, Table 1 shows how the numbers dwindled in the late teens. The reasons commonly given for this included the lack of a senior high school and training opportunities.

Table 1: Population aged under 20 years, Laverton district, 1991.

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
0-4 years	84	89	173	38%
5-9 years	78	68	146	32%
10-14 years	39	44	83	18%
15-19 years	35	23	58	13%
Total	236	224	460	101%

Source: ABS 1991 census

With education, there was only the junior high school and by Year 10, there were only about eight to ten regular attendees at school. A few had endeavoured to do distance education in a centre attached to the school, with the support of local

teachers, but no-one seemed to have successfully completed years eleven and twelve in this fashion. A teacher remarked that immense self-discipline, motivation and family support were essential to be able to undertake school work through distance education.

Some more well-off white families sent away their teenage offspring to city or regional boarding schools. Some parents of younger children stated an intention to move back to metropolitan centres once their children were adolescents. Concerns were expressed about the quality of the junior high school, about the lack of the employment opportunities and most importantly, about the 'unsuitable' environment for the difficult teenage years.

In relation to employment, the main opportunities were in the mining sector, at least for a male young person. A barrier, however, was the employment practices of mining companies and associated sub-contractors. The companies and contractors favoured mature, experienced workers even for unskilled positions, and most employees are not recruited locally. They also typically required the minimum of an A class driving licence. There were limited opportunities in the service sector and a few teenagers, mostly females, had part-time jobs in shops. Work in shops usually ended as soon as an individual turned 18. Access to all sectors was facilitated by parental or family contacts.

Various employment programs were run over the years, primarily targeted at Aboriginal young people and young men. These programs concentrated on skills associated with 'traditional' occupations in the pastoral and construction sectors. Similar to the local programs run in the sixties, there were courses on slab making, brick work, fence mending and so on. A more pronounced shift was discernible in courses for young Aboriginal women, with raffia and other craft-work being replaced by office and administrative skills.

Other factors that led non-Aboriginal parents to judge Laverton an unfavourable environment for adolescents included their concerns about extra-curricular activities and their associations with peers. Many parents referred to the lack of attractive amenities and activities for teenagers but underlying these kinds of statements appeared to be a concern that their children would become involved with unsuitable peers. Such associations seemed more likely in a small community with a limited range of young people. Even though the city and regional centres were seen as potentially dangerous and treacherous locales, it was believed a measure of protection could be arranged by either the family in its entirety taking up residence in such places or by placing the teenagers in safer enclaves such as boarding schools.

According to Martin his parents were not impressed by the local kids because *'they saw everyone all smoking and saw everyone like getting drunk'*. Hannah said her parents were concerned when her teenage brother was 'in trouble' - *'yeah, they were. They weren't very happy about it. He was smoking and he wasn't so much drinking like the other kids kind've very bad attitude problem. So they ended up sending him away to school when he was in Year 9 and he was fine after that'*.

Amongst some white parents, as well, there was disquiet about the unseemly

behaviour of adults, that might act as a negative influence upon impressionable minds. Such unseemly behaviour appeared to be epitomised by the pub on the Friday night – the drunkenness, aggressive and lewd displays by men, and to a lesser extent, by women. Public drunkenness and fighting by Aboriginal adults, it was implied, was the behaviour of people who were ‘different’ and therefore not role models. Their behaviour did, however, contribute to the uncivil feel to the town. In the late eighties, the most dangerous places for young women and the place where young men could be led astray was the single men’s camps, where all kinds of licentious and illegal activities were presumed to be rife, including overindulgence in alcohol and other drugs.

Some of the older Aboriginal people shared these concerns, especially if they were practising Christians and/or grew up in a mission setting. Education did not feature highly but the lack of employment was a concern, especially for the boys. So too were inappropriate liaisons and ‘getting into trouble’, although it was not the ‘place’ which was seen to be contributing to the misbehaviour. Mostly, specific individuals were singled out as causing the ‘trouble’ – for example, an age-mate or a particular police officer for picking on the young person.

Some Aboriginal young people were also sent away to boarding school, typically CAPS in Coolgardie. This practice was more commonplace amongst families at Cosmo Newberry and Mount Margaret. Occasionally, where the young person was seen to be out of control or in profound trouble, moving elsewhere was viewed as a temporary solution, which usually meant that the young person stayed with kin in another place. If younger children were in trouble then it sometimes happened that a family group would move elsewhere for a while, but such moves were frequently precipitated by difficulties also being experienced by the adult(s).

It is interesting to contrast the views of young people to those expressed by adults. Despite numerous complaints about Laverton being a boring place, it was grudgingly acknowledged by many young people that it was not a bad place to grow up. Positive features appeared to be ‘knowing everyone’, the potential for close friendships and the ‘mixing together’ of the black and white kids. Less attractive features that were referred to included the standard of schooling, the attitudes and surveillance of the adult community and the ‘limited’ experiences available in the town. A young white adult, Scott, for example, felt the main thing he missed out on was sporting opportunities *‘here only muck around, social shit. Talent out there, people just don’t know of them’*. These subjects will be pursued further in this chapter.

The most obvious youth oriented places were the school and the youth centre, and in a slightly different way, the hostel¹⁰³. The school was clearly a white domain, despite sporadic attempts to make it more congenial for its Aboriginal students. Many teenagers expressed antipathy towards this site of institutional authority, and ‘wagging’ was endemic amongst the ‘tough kids’.

¹⁰³ From the late eighties the DCD hostel primarily housed young men from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, who had been placed there on court orders. These young men were chronic sniffers who were removed from their own communities because of their poor health and/or anti-social activities. Some of the local young offenders worked at the hostel for their community hours, and the hostel managers had a high profile in community affairs in relation to youth and justice matters, and Aboriginal politics.

Tables 2 and 3¹⁰⁴ show school attendance figures for 1993 and reveal several important characteristics of students at that time including the small numbers in high school (13% of the total school population in comparison to 26% pre-primary and 61% primary school), the significant proportion of children who were enrolled for only part of the year (41%), the relatively low proportion of Aboriginal students (17.3%) and consistently higher levels of absenteeism for every age group amongst Aboriginal students.

Table 2: Laverton school attendance figures, 1993

School	Age/Year	Numbers	% students enrolled for the full year	Part-year enrolments (average no. of months)	Number of absent days by months enrolled
Pre-primary school	4 year olds	28	57%	4.7	1.5
	5 year olds	33	67%	3.6	2.5
Primary school	Year 1	37	54%	6.2	6.0
	Year 2	25	68%	4.2	4.9
	Year 3	25	60%	4.8	4.6
	Year 4/5	26	50%	5	8.1
	Year 6/7	27	78%	5.7	5.3
High school	Year 8	15	40%	4.9	4.9
	Year 9	6	33%	5.7	6.9
	Year 10	9	55%	5.2	4.6
Total		231	59%	5.0	4.9

Table 3: Laverton school Aboriginal attendance figures, 1993

School	Age/Year	Numbers	% students enrolled for the full year	Part-year enrolments (average no. of months)	Number of absent days by months enrolled
Pre-primary school	4 year olds	2	50%	4	2.4
	5 year olds	4	75%	6	5.4
Primary school	Year 1	9	55%	7	14.4
	Year 2	2	50%	2	10.7
	Year 3	5	80%	1	9.8
	Year 4/5	2	100%	-	13.9
	Year 6/7	6	67%	2.5	11.8
High school	Year 8	6	17%	4.6	9.4
	Year 9	3	0%	5	11.9
	Year 10	1	0%	2	18.0
	Total	40	52%	3.8	10.8

In contrast, the youth centre was perceived as a Wongi domain (see Figure 6). For example, Hannah's mother tried to keep Hannah's brother away from the youth centre because she '*used to think it was the indigenous people who were influencing him*' and a friend's parents would not allow the friend to go to the youth centre so

¹⁰⁴ The figures in Tables 2 and 3 were compiled by me based on school records kept over the year, and may differ slightly from the statistics collected by the Education Department.

Hannah spent a lot of time at the friend's house. Younger teens and children frequented the centre, and it was less popular amongst older youth. The energetic activities of the younger children was in marked contrast to the few older youth who were more inclined to watch television and ignore the antics of the younger youth on the pool table or outside. Providing a basic, free amenity for young people to 'hang out', play pool, watch television or play outside, the centre was always dominated by males (see Figure 7).

Young people had the opportunity to participate in many community sporting activities and social events, although the range of activities declined in parallel to the decreasing population. Several junior sporting competitions were organised during the eighties but these had largely ceased in the nineties. In relation to adult sports teams, the involvement of teenagers, notably Aboriginal teenagers was evident in two sports – football and netball. With netball, there was an Aboriginal team which had several young women as key players. The Laverton football team regularly played against Leonora, and had young Aboriginal men on the team. Basketball was the most obvious marker in the sporting realm between young people and adults. The court and the ring at the youth centre were often used by young people for informal practice. In contrast, golf, squash and bowls were played exclusively by adults.

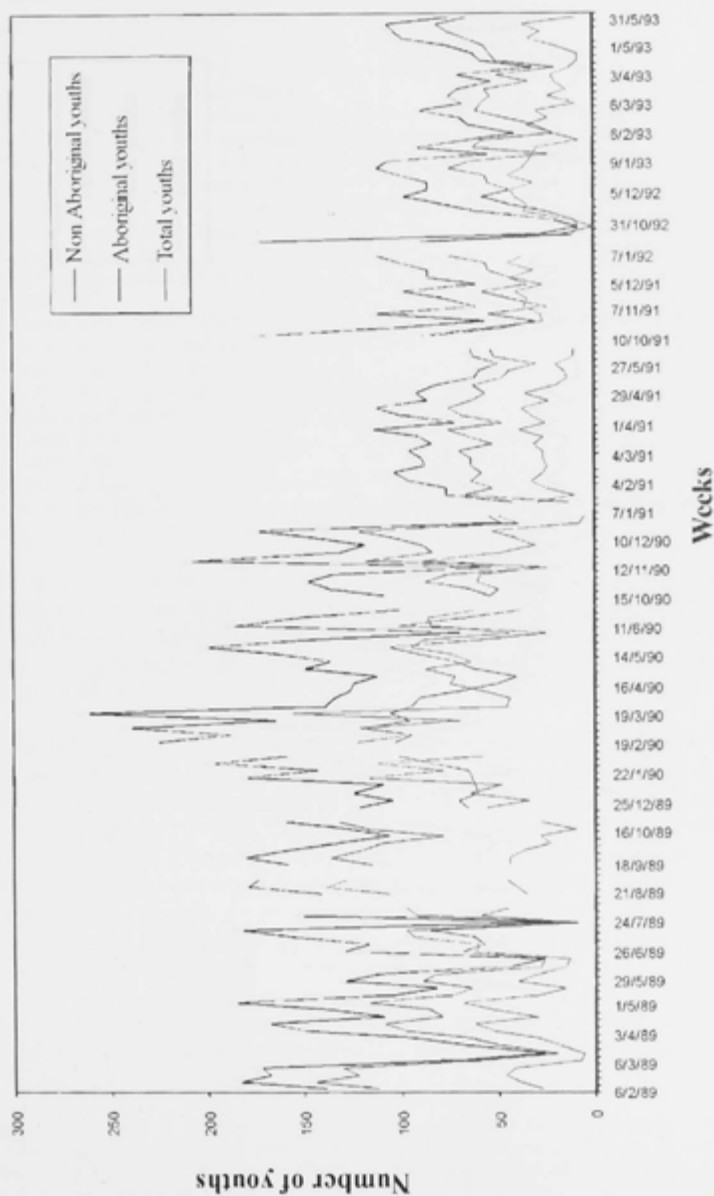
Youth specific activities were organised by the school and the youth centre. The nature and extent of these activities depended on the enthusiasm and interests of individual teachers and the youth centre manager. For example, a youth centre manager in the late eighties was very interested in music and was instrumental in organising the local Aboriginal band 'LA Beat' and encouraging several young Wongi men to play guitars and drums. The Shire's recreation officer was responsible for organising many community events but, by 1992, there was less organised specifically for young people, and most activities did not attract Aboriginal participants.

Similarly, day trips and camps were organised through the school and the youth centre and, like the discos, attracted different groups of supporters. In addition, young people joined their families on informal trips – for example to Kalgoorlie or Perth. White young people tended to go away with their parents on annual holidays, whilst Wongatha Wonganarra sometimes organised community trips to events in Kalgoorlie or further afield, and young adults sometimes used the bus or private vehicles to attend sporting carnivals.

Very few 'structured' activities were organised by the young people themselves. Adult support varied depending on where activities occurred and whom they catered for. Teachers and white parents assisted at school-based discos whilst the discos organised by the recreation officer and/or youth centre manager for the youth centre attendees relied on the help of the centre's management committee. As noted in Chapter Four, youth centre attendees and their parents rarely helped or took responsibility for activities or special events.

Figure 6: Laverton Youth Centre attendances: weekly totals by race, 1989-93.

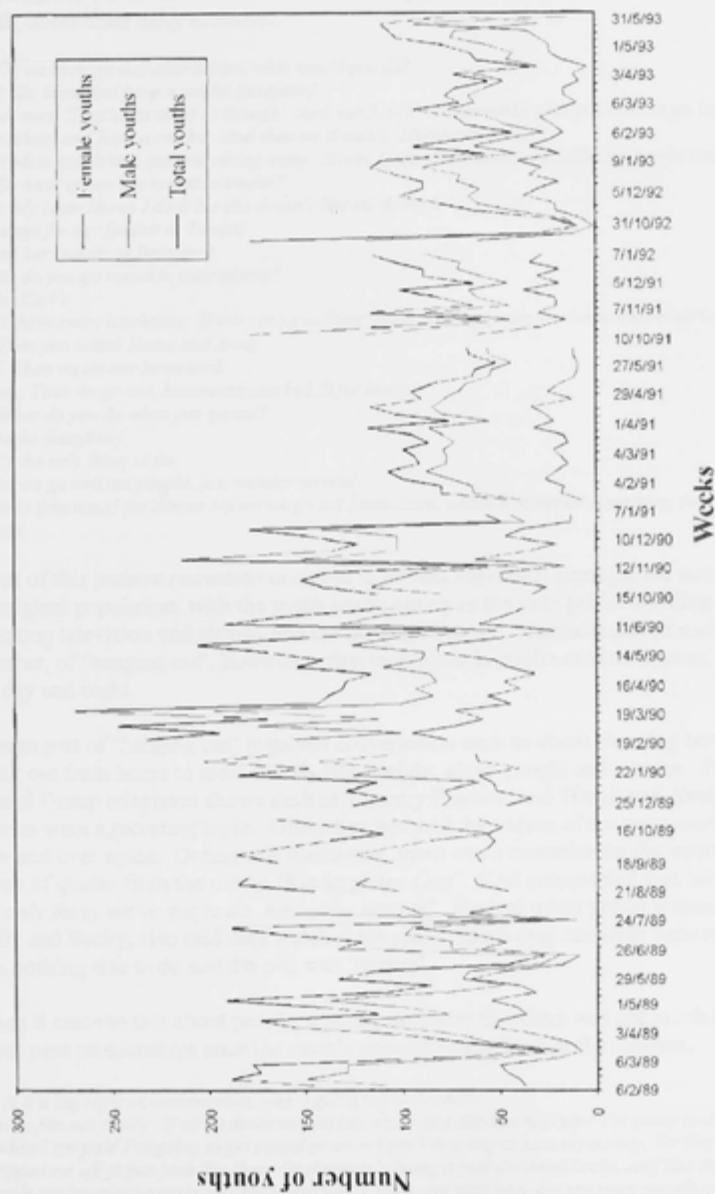
Laverton Youth Centre attendances - weekly totals by race, 1989 to 1993.



Note: Breaks indicate periods for which data was unavailable.

Figure 7: Laverton Youth Centre attendances: weekly totals by sex, 1989-93.

Laverton Youth Centre attendances - weekly totals by sex, 1989 to 1993.



Note: Breaks indicate periods for which data was unavailable.

With school aged adolescents and older unemployed youth, a large part of their time was taken up with 'hanging out' and more passive recreational pursuits like listening to music and watching television and videos. For example, I asked the Year 10 school group (hereafter called the School Group), who were all non-Aboriginal youth, about their daily activities:

JP: On an average day after school what would you do?

Karl: Go home and have a smoke (laughter)

[All at once 'That's not all of us though' 'And watch tele' 'six sevenths of us in the room go home after school and have a smoke' 'And then we'd watch 'Home and Away']

Karl: Mum gets home, put everything away. Stores [cigarettes] under the table so she can't see them

JP: So none of you are meant to smoke?

Karl: My Mum knows I do it but she doesn't like me doing it

?: Except for her [points at Teresa]

?: And her [points at Bronwyn]

JP: So do you go round to their places?

?: No, Karl's

?: Sit there every lunchtime. If you see us walking down in a big group you know where we're going.

JP: Then you watch Home and Away

Karl: Then we do our homework

Teresa: Then we go out, homework can be left for later

JP: What do you do when you go out?

?: Smoke (laughter)

?: It's the only thing to do

?: No, we go and see people, just wander around

?: Go to [the mess] for dinner before we go out somewhere, watch a movie or something, just wander around.

Much of this passive recreation occurred in homes, especially amongst the non-Aboriginal population, with the youth centre acting as the only public building for the watching television and videos, and the playing of music. The business of socialising together, of 'hanging out', however, often took place in public outdoor spaces, during the day and night.

A large part of 'hanging out' involved conversation such as about planning how to sneak out from home to meet friends late at night, about people and movies. For the School Group television shows such as 'Country Practice' and 'Home and Away', and movies were a recurring topic. Often they watched the videos of the same movies over and over again. During one discussion, there was a recitation by the entire group of quotes from the movie 'Kindergarten Cop'. Karl commented that '*that's the only thing we've got to do, memorise movies*'. Several white young women, Kelly and Becky, also said they watched the same videos over and over because there was nothing else to do and the pub was '*boring*'.

When it came to talk about people, a young man said that there was not much gossip about peer relationships once the town's population declined in the nineties.

JP: Is it a big topic of conversation, who's going out with who?

Martin: No, not really. If we sit down we just talk about just shit like next year I'm going to do this, or when I get paid I'm going to get pissed or when I get I'm going to save my money. Or like so and so ripped me off or just junk like that. Or someone's being a real dickhead lately, stuff like that. There's not too many people worried about who's going out with who, not too many people are going out with people now (laugh).

JP: There's nothing to talk about. More of a scene a few years ago.

In terms of contemporary practice, and in relation to memories of their teenage past amongst young adults, two places stood out as places to 'hang out' - the oval and the basketball courts next to the school. Within the ring road, in the town itself, these were the two places where a group of young people would usually be found, sitting around, listening to music and if on the courts, playing with the ball. These places were commonly frequented in the afternoon and into the night. These were the places where the majority of teenagers, black and white, would gather - as Gena said it was '*the majority all together*'.

Gena: We used to go and sit on the basketball courts or on the oval, that was all there was to do. Go sit on the oval and gab and play basketball. And someone used to bring a tape recorder and we'd dance around the basketball (laugh). We used to run amuck on the courts.. used to be real terrors.

Beyond the ring road, in the bush, there were two places that were referred as being favoured spots for youthful pastimes by young people over the years - the abandoned mine Marymac and Billy Goat hill. These were away from the public gaze and were mentioned as sites for sexual liaisons, drinking, and the concealment of stolen goods. In addition, when younger, Marymac was a place to explore and to demonstrate bravery. For example, Gena acknowledged the danger of going to Marymac but said they were afraid of being called '*chicken*' if they did not do it.

Young people, along with Aboriginal people, had a visible presence in the town's public spaces, because of the amount of time they spent in groups sitting around or walking about in such spaces. They were sometimes noisy, and made their presence felt by playing their music at a loud volume. Their use of public space was even more noticeable during the night, when they and Aboriginal adults were the only ones occupying and entertaining themselves in outdoor public domains. Other residents of the town would be moving purposefully about such spaces, moving between cars and shops and homes and the pub. During the day individual adult women did sometimes stop to chat to another person as they entered and exited shops, or in the car park, but they rarely lingered for very long.

The most 'visible' groups were the male teenagers, mainly because of the size of the groups, the noise they created, and the length of time they would 'hang out' in public places. Outside the supermarket, on the oval and on the basketball court, small groups of about four or five teenage boys would 'hang out' often with a large ghetto blaster blaring out music. Sitting outside the supermarket entrance provided an opportunity to be visible and to keep an eye on the comings and goings of other residents in town. In the early nineties, when a teenage Wongi, Lily, was working at Wongatha Wonganarra centre it became a popular place for Aboriginal young people to congregate.

A constant refrain from the young people was that events, activities, places were '*boring*' or that '*it sucks*'. They portrayed their hanging out as a consequence of the lack of activities and amenities for young people. A certain degree of resentment towards adults was expressed by some young people:

Martin: ... I think the adults are pretty pleased, they've their Sports Club, their pub, their squash, they have to go to work. Their day is pretty much occupied. Whereas us kids, I don't know, we just go out and sit down and that's it. Sit down and play basketball when the youth centre is open, sit

down and watch TV, play pool, something like that. At night time there's nothing left and if you like drinking then that's it. And if you've got money and you like drinking you go and get drunk or if you like smoking dope you'll get stoned.

Martin was also critical of adults' perceptions of young people as trouble:

Martin: I don't want to stay because it's Laverton. I don't like it. The people here alright but like I suppose, just the social sort of things. Like the town itself, it's alright, but the people in it, but their attitudes really stink towards kids.

JP: In what way?

Martin: They've got this thought that kids go out every night and get up to mischief and stuff like that. And that's not always the case. Most of the times now we go out and sit down just talk and dribble and listen to music. But before I suppose they did get up to mischief a lot but the group that was always doing it, they've like broken up now. They still hang around but their interests have changed.

He condemned a recreation officer for having the same preconceptions as other adults in town.

Martin: She doesn't see jackshit of us. So she doesn't know what we're like and we don't know what she's like. And then like brings on like typical assumptions of other people. Like she's a bitch and she probably thinks they're just little shits.

Resentment was expressed by the School Group about the level of scrutiny they believed they endured from their parents, their teachers and the wider community. Their activities, they felt, was the subject of undue comment and gossip. When the School Group were discussing the shortcomings of the youth centre, they criticised the centre managers for passing on information about teenagers' activities to other adults.

Alison: And plus another big reason why we hate it is because we do something or we talk about something then rumours get out.

Jenny: Cos Jan's job is to inform the parents of what goes on if you're doing something really serious like having sex or something like that, just an example. Instead of going through the parents she goes to Lynn, Lynn tells Lorraine, Lorraine tells Renny, Renny tells - it just goes around town instead of getting right to the parents. Like the parents are the last people to know. That's something really sick about it as well.

After a diatribe against the 'gossipers' in the town, I asked the school group why they thought they were the subject of gossip:

Emma: We do everything wrong

Bronwyn: They see us doing things that we're not meant to be doing [indistinct]

Emma: We do what we want and we don't care what other people think

Bronwyn: And they're always watching us. At the [shop].. Marg and bloody Betty stand out the door and watch us.

Another aspect to surveillance was in their relations with police but this issue will be explored later on. It was acknowledged, mostly implicitly, by the School Group that there were opportunities to evade the surveillance and a young white adult suggested the town's young people had more freedom than in other places.

Karl: I had a really good time in Laverton

Jenny: Yeah definitely

Di: I think you get away with more than you would anywhere else. Cos people they just stay at home at night and you're out by yourself and you get up to whatever you like

In much of the young people's discourse the impression was created that they viewed themselves as a discrete social group, which was self-sufficient in terms of social life and in creating their own fun. Like most teenagers, they saw themselves as apart from adults and resented what they saw as unfair negative stereotyping by adults of their activities and attitudes. For most non-Aboriginal youth being part of a small social world had pros and cons, as they were subject to scrutiny by older people but there was also the opportunity to become close to one's peers. Their social life and the interaction between adolescents become very important. This was recognised by several observations, for instance:

Gena: You get to know all the other kids a lot better and you get to know everyone of them. There's maybe a couple in the whole school. You get to know them all. And that's pretty good I reckon.

JP: You form strong friendships

Gena: Yeah, or you form horrible friendships just it all depends, mainly who you're good friends with. A lot of good times. You would've only have one or two friends in a bigger high school and you'd live in different suburbs and everything like that. You're too far apart, that sort of stuff. At least in this town, everyone's within a couple of kilometres of each other.

Because of the small number of other teenagers however, several non-Aboriginal young people talked of the significance of 'peer pressure'. The following quotes are taken from different conversations:

Kelly: Reckon it's frustrating living up here, you got a lot of peer pressure. Guys.. like if you're going out with someone older than you they used to call you slut, whore, mole, dog, things like that

Grania: ...smoking cigarettes, get pushed into that, all the peer pressure.

Grania: I think peer pressure gets to you a lot here. My friends are doing this so I should be doing it as well. I'm their friend and I'm in a group. I know that happened to us a lot... there was no leader, one person would do something and it would look good to the others.

Hannah: ... I found that the kids around here didn't have any discipline at all. There's a lot of peer group pressure, more than what you'd find in most towns because there's only one group to hang around with around here. They all smoke, they all drink, they all stayed out later every night. And you either did what they did or you weren't in with the group. So I wasn't really in with the group. Did my own thing but my brother was in with the group (laugh)... He sort of got into a lot of trouble when he was up here because of wanting to please the rest of the .. all his peers.

Schooling

Everyone who had gone to Laverton high school commented on the small numbers and were negative about the teaching standards. They referred to lower standards in comparison to city and other country schools and those that went to other schools found themselves behind. Low opinions of teachers were voiced by young adults and the School Group, by Wongis and whites.

Kelly: Growing up in this time is horrible, wouldn't wish it on anyone. You get favouritism too. The police kids.. It's horrible. I reckon I don't blame the education system, I blame the teachers they sent up here. They're all city slickers they don't know anything about country life, straight out of college. They don't know anything about Aboriginals and their ways. Expect to just slot in.

Negative perceptions of principals and of teachers appeared to arise from or be reinforced by parents and other adults in the community. Excerpts from the School Group discussions indicate this:

Karl: So many people reckon since she's become principal the school's gone downhill

Jenny: That psychologist that came up here, he said the young teachers here they went to the lowest university. They've only had two years experience of teaching when you should have more and that's why they're so dumb at teaching.

Bronwyn: My Dad reckons if [the teachers] swear at you, you swear back at them. He reckons whatever they do to you its not right, you do it back.

A feature of being in a small town was the opportunity for mutual surveillance between students and teachers in and out of school. The School Group indicated they were aware of teachers' extra-curricula activities, but were resentful of teachers or the principal referring to their own out-of-school pastimes or personal problems:

[Discussion about drinking binge the night before]

Karl: A lot pissed

Emma: She wanted to crawl down the hill

Teresa: God, that would've been so shamed

[Simultaneous comments – 'No it wasn't for me' 'Imagine all the teachers seeing us'

'You alcoholics' 'went to the pub every night..' 'Probably looking at us with binoculars' 'Mrs Pearce probably staring out the window']

JP: She was down the pub last night

?: That's right and dickhead saw Jenny buy fags last night

?: Oh, wow [whispering]

Karl: Oh, I hate her

Teresa: I hate the way she brings your personal business in school. Cos I had a fight with Bronwyn at my house, she goes have you got any problems at home. She was walking past she reckons

Karl: I tell her to ram it up her arse sideways

Teresa: I was calling her a slut and everything else. She heard it. She brought it up in school, she goes you got any problems at home. And I go, not for you to hear. She goes, I just want you to know if you've got any problems, like periods..

Karl: Oh god

Di: She said the same to us last year in child development. She taught the class..

Bronwyn: If you've got a period, come and have a coffee or something. I've got my period every day [laughter]

Di: If you're really sick she'll give you a cup of coffee

Teresa: You know that day I spewed up...

Another School Group discussion revealed negative views of teachers, and the perception, amongst the Group, that at least some parents held unflattering views of various teachers and were unsupportive of the teachers' actions towards their children.

Jenny: But they're more mature. Teachers are supposed to be more mature but not that sort of type.

Karl: I could name a few that are sluts of the town

Teresa: Tom, Dick and Harry

Di: One that's the biggest..

Alison: What, a teacher?

Karl and Di: Yeah

JP: Does that cause problems for the teachers?

Jenny: Mum calls her a slut too

Karl: No, they can do whatever they want but if we do anything we want it gets taken back to school and then..

Di: I mean some teacher couldn't go past here, like if it was Mr Hughes and one of us couldn't say you fucking dickhead or something, he'd go and dob us in and on Monday we'd get dragged to the office.

Karl: It's not right though, cos it's out of school time. They can't do anything about it.

JP: So you feel you're being policed in a sense when you're not at school

All: Yeah

Karl: What happens out of school should be like attended to out of school, not in school

Alison: Yeah, like Mrs Pearce talked to me about going to the pub, she told me it's not a good..

Di: It should be up to your parents to tell you what you're doing wrong and don't do it again.

Karl: My parents would just go, well is he? Yeah, and they'd go fine.

Teresa: Mr Evatt rang up her parents and told them she done this, your daughter's done that

Jenny: But the parents sort of add on to the problem cos they like believe the teachers

Alison: When I got suspended Mrs Pearce drove me home and she said your mother's very disappointed in you

Karl: How would she know?

Teresa: She knows shit

Alison: She goes, she's going to give you a hiding and I said, oh yeah. When I got home my mother started laughing at me. She goes, that stupid old bum shouldn't come around here anyway

Karl: Oh man [sounds of disgust].

In the previous decade, judging by comments of young adults, it seemed that unpopular teachers were treated more directly rather than being discussed behind their backs in a disparaging or scornful way.

Kelly: We used to hassle the teachers when they first came up here. We used to give them heaps. Follow them. The Wongi kids used to stone them. ...The Wongi kids used to stone the teachers, shanghais (laugh). Get them. All us white kids sitting there on the basketball courts watching the teachers running across the oval trying to get away from these Wongi kids with shanghais. Cos they got one shot and they're good at every shot they fire. I know, I've been stoned a few times.

Becky told me that a teacher had resigned 'cos kids run amuck on her. They were calling her things like slut and mole and that and she started crying. Couldn't take it'. After I asked her what running amuck might involve, she replied that it included writing on the blackboard, swearing, throwing chalk, yelling and screaming, and sticking pins in the teacher's chair. Another young woman, Hannah, gave the following explanation for why 'many a time the teacher walked out' of the classroom:

Hannah: ... I think it had a lot to do with some of the teachers not knowing how to handle the kids and the kids knew what they could get away with. The teachers haven't got any respect for the kids at start of year and the kids aren't going to respect them... Teachers under impression.. I don't know. Not being able to let the kids show both sides of their personality, only the bad side comes out.

A consistent difference over time was how age affected activities and group formations. Younger teenagers spent much of their time at school and when not there were on bikes, in the bush or, if Wongis, at the youth centre. Their play was more vigorous and they would only start to slow down and hang out with groups in their mid-teens. A demonstration of this difference was in the use of the swimming pool. Younger children would energetically use the pool, jumping and diving in the water, very clearly at 'play'. Teenagers did not actually go as frequently to the pool and, when they were there, they mostly sunbathed by the pool in small groups of two to four individuals.

The older teenagers, young adults, were less likely to be 'hanging out' in public spaces. The few non-Aboriginal young adults, who stayed on or returned to Laverton, were involved in work and were mobile in cars, whilst most young women, black and white, were home-centred as nearly all of them had babies before they were twenty.

Differences over time

Few had spent and could talk about early childhood in Laverton. Those that did have such memories of the place were Wongi youth, for example Tommy who was aged about five years when the town rapidly grew in 1973. He described the past in the following way:

Tommy: ... all dirt around the town ... we had little tin houses in town, the bottom end of town, there used to be three houses. We didn't worry about anything, no TV, just radio. Used to walk around all day, go out bush, walk shooting gings [shanghais], chasing birds. We'd get old milk tins and make rollers out of them, put holes in them and fill them with dirt and pull it around. All the entertainment we had, didn't worry about toys.

Tommy said he did not get to know the white families when he was young 'we just stuck to ourselves'. But in the late 1970s the children had to move to a new school and he observed:

Tommy: ...felt different, all flash. Most of the Aboriginal boys stuck together, slowly got to know the white people. When we got older we used to go up to the Western Mining houses on Billy Goat hill, used to have a lot of white friends. Parents didn't mind. We used to play around inside, I never used to steal from them. Some of the boys did, toy cars but the parents didn't take it so bad. Go back the next day and take the toy back. I got to know a lot of white kids.

Some of the non-Aboriginal young adults had been primary school aged children or young teenagers during the eighties, and they were all nostalgic for what they saw as a more action back then. They talked of more amenities (such as a skating rink, an outdoor cinema, and a speedway) and sporting activities. Scott, for instance, said in the eighties there was football, softball, netball, tennis, squash, golf but that 'now it's stuffed'. Gena commented that everything went downhill when people started leaving. Before, she claimed, there was organised sport and the youth centre was 'alright then' but 'people started growing up and going their separate ways... parents moved on to another town'. She called the contemporary town boring and believed it should be closed. Grania regretted that, with less people, there were not any parties anymore. In a separate conversation, Kelly said 'now all there is to do is go to the pub that's it' to which Becky added 'or go round in someone else's car'. Martin pointed out that young people still used to complain in the eighties 'now there's nothing to do at all, full stop. Before there were things to do but still people would say oh there's nothing to do'.

From what the young adults recollected or heard, there seemed to be three sequential eras since the late seventies in local youth dynamics - what I have dubbed the Gangs, the Lads and the Yuppies to denote the dominant group and character of race relations amongst teenagers.

A non-Aboriginal young man when he first arrived in Laverton as a boy was told of two gangs:

Martin: When I came here I heard there were two gangs, the Wanderers and the Warriors (laugh). And like what I was told that they had always had clashes. When they told me I sort of laughed cos its like a bunch of four foot kids running around with glass bottles, flick plastic knives. But I heard they used to get really serious.

JP: Who were they?

Martin: I think, I can't remember which way it was. I think the Aboriginals were the Warriors and a lot of the white guys were the Wanderers. And Matt was the only white one with the Aboriginals.

A young white woman, Gena, was told that the kids watched 'Zulu Dawn' at the outdoor pictures and afterwards they had fights on the oval. She observed:

Gena: It was the whites onto the blacks back then, Scott and his brothers, Corin Mawson, all the big tough boys, they all the time. But not so much when we were young, we always got on.

Her boyfriend was involved in these fights. He remembered the conflict but subsequent experience had put it into perspective for him:

Scott: Occasionally go to the youth centre... but I found it a place where trouble began. Fights, arguments, just stupid stuff, between two different sorts of people, blacks and whites¹⁰⁵. But I have noticed the last few years the place has gone through a lot of changes. The local Aboriginals have calmed down severely, heaps, you know. Going back to when I was going to school, we didn't get on too well with the blacks. There was a lot of trouble, nothing real serious you know. It was a bit bad.

JP: Young people?

Scott: Young people, silly stuff. Saying the wrong things.. Stupid stuff. Compared to other schools, minor stuff. I never seen a knife at this school.. [goes on to talk about a school he attended in the Eastern States].

The Lads were a group of nearly all Wongi boys who were entering their adolescence in the mid to late eighties. Their families were local residents although a few parents moved around the region, living with other households or at the Village when in town. The significant caregiver was usually the mother or grandmother, but as the Lads entered the teen years they often took up residence in friend's or kin's households (see Birdsall 1988). The Lads were the dominant group when local Aboriginal youth were in the ascendancy for a period from the late eighties to the early nineties, and they are discussed in more depth later on in the chapter.

A young man Matt, who was one of the few non-Aboriginal Lads, described the town when he first arrived, as being when the oval was just dirt, the pool was just finished and there was the one big store. He believed there were about 2000 people, with the school 'pretty full with both white and Wongi' and with a bus bringing in children from Mount Margaret. He said that there were about 30 'local boys' the majority of whom were black and a couple of whites. He named six aside from himself who still lived in the town (Tim, Leo, Lee, Sam, Tommy and Alex) - 'not many left, everyone gone their own way... rest all gone'. A Wongi friend, Lee, also remarked on the exodus 'better then [when he first came to town in Year 5], big mob of kids, all the same age. More kids, mainly all the white kids. All took off'.

Since the later eighties and with the decline in the town's population, many of the young adults commented on how the town's spaces had become more 'controlled' and the 'kids' more 'civilised'. A young white woman, Grania, described the physical and spatial changes from 1982 onwards as being 'additions' to what was

¹⁰⁵ Later on in the conversation Scott made a comment which suggested the fighting between the young people had to be understood in the context of conflict between black and white adults - 'when people first coming into town there was conflict between blacks and whites.. Something might go down at the pub'.

already there, using the example of housing on the southern edge of town, a car park, and dongas at school. In recent times, however, erasures occurred with the closure and removal of the single men's camps, the sale of Western Mining housing, and the demise of Laver Place with the re-opening of the main road through town. Significantly, she commented on the fencing of boundaries and the better behaviour of contemporary teenagers:

Grania: ...now fenced everything off. No, it's not the same now. Like the Year 10 students now.. we were horrors at school, always swearing at someone. All my friends were black, only a few white ones.

Another young man, Martin, also remarked on the recent restrictions in access created by physical barriers and demands for payment.

Martin: Access to things weren't so complicated as they are now. Everything is getting fenced off and you have to pay for things and when money comes into things, people tend to lose interest in it because they'd rather spend their money on something else than go play basketball or something.

JP: Why do you think the fencing was put in place?

Martin: ... people got tired of graffiti and having to fix broken rings...

In a conversation, two white women called the current group of teenagers at school 'yuppies':

Kelly: I went to school with yucky kids, white hat boys and manager of Windarra (indistinct) all those kids

JP: Sounds like its got better

Becky: It's got better since I left too... There's no kids that muck around now

JP: Kid's have changed

Becky: Yeah, I think so. All yuppie kids there now

Kelly: Yeah, yuppie kids. Kids that have discipline or are too scared to do anything, more or less, in case Mum and Dad find out. So I didn't worry if Mum and Dad found out cos they knew what I was like.

The School Group felt virtuous in comparison to their predecessors:

Alison: I told her she [the principal] was lucky we did any work at all. Like my cousin said before last year none of them did work, some of the kids came to school stoned in the morning.

[Simultaneous comments 'Wow' 'Malcolm and Jack' 'Boy's toilets used to have cones in there' 'Mr Hawke used to..' 'She should be happy that we work']

Jenny: This Year 10s, and last year's, are the most respectable they've had for a long time.

The tough in-crowd

Since most young people arrived from elsewhere, I asked them about their experiences upon arrival and the reaction of the local kids:

JP: What kind of reception did you get from the kids here?

Gena: Teased, threatened, bashed up once. That was alright. It wasn't too bad, I don't know, suppose we're all like that when we're younger. I became one of them for a while. It's just a normal thing, I mean you expect that at any school. No-one knows you anyway.. Not too much, it died down after a little while you know, what we'd try to do is push, see how far you could push someone before.. Once you knew that was it.

Grania: ...We got teased at first, pommy kids and stuff like that. Didn't really bother us. Mainly the Aborigines teased us most cos we were so white. And we talked different. And we had different

sayings for different things. But they all got used to us in the end.

Scott: Had a bit of trouble [with Aboriginal people when first arrived] cos I had long hair. Bit funny about that for a little while. But then I started to get on with them, sort of, they were my friends after a while. I started staying over their houses and meeting their families and became like them.

Martin: I didn't get along with the kids cos I was, to them, I looked different and acted different. They didn't like me all that much.

JP: What do you mean look different, weren't there other kids from New Zealand there?

Martin: Yeah, but they'd been in Australia for longer than me. They got the language, they spoke differently, the accents, the words they used.

JP: What about the way you dressed?

Martin: It was different yeah. But they dressed shitty and so did I. But I wore shorts all year, while they wore jeans during the winter and shorts in summer. I didn't like jeans so I wore shorts here all year round. And they used to give me shit about it.

Later on I asked Martin what he thought annoyed the Lads about him:

Martin: I don't know. Back then Matt and that used to be real hard heads, there were always fights and shit like that. But they've calmed down pretty much now. But generally a new kid comes in town and they just say, oh let's test them out and stuff like that.

According to Martin, he was ostracised by the Lads and the girls in his class for three years after he first arrived in town. It was only when he started to play basketball that he began to be accepted. A sign of this was when 'all of a sudden they say do you want to come over and get drunk afterwards and stuff like that... Yeah, for the guys if you're a good basketballer you're pretty much a cool person'.

Since it was a small town and the number of young people always low, new arrivals to town were quickly made aware of whom was in the in-crowd.

Becky: Everyone told me as soon as I got to town, eh, don't hang around with her or her or her she's a slut, she's a mole, she's up herself, she's a backstabber

Kelly: Like who you were supposed to hang out with

JP: Did it leave anybody to hang out with?

Becky: Oh yeah

Kelly: All the hoods. All the troublemakers mainly

Becky: This one's cool, you gotta hang around with him. This one's good time.

According to one white young woman Hannah the in-group was 'mainly Aboriginal boys [the Lads] and their girlfriends who were young white girls'. She was never part of the group when she attended school in Laverton, and had a quiet social life with one or two friends outside of school.

Hannah: The only time sort of.. I had anything to do with people was through school. And I used to work at [the supermarket] after school so it was, I found that I spent a lot more time with older people than with kids my own age because they just ran amuck. Used to spend time with my friends when I went to Perth and that was about it.

Overall, there were activities and behaviours that were unpopular and would be generally condemned by adolescents, irrespective of changes to the dominant youth scene over time. For example, very few young people older than 11 years old would borrow books from the library and, according to a recreation officer, only two or three kids from the entire high school would participate in organised sport after

school because *'there was this thing that it was too embarrassing to do sport. And the kids would just be going 'shame'*. Similarly, most teenagers would be self-conscious and not overtly conscientious or obedient to authority figures such as parents or teachers. For instance, Gena commented on how they would have a 'ball' at discos and that they were not *'nerds, brownnosing up to the teacher. Shame!'*

In contrast to many white kids or Wongi children from Mount Margaret, who kept to themselves, belonging to the in-group in town involved being tough, a 'hard-head' and this was associated with doing certain things (smoking, drinking, crime, basketball, acting out at school, dressing a certain way, listening to certain kinds of music, hanging out in public places and the youth centre), all of which attracted the attention and condemnation of most white adults. The behaviour of the in-group was epitomised by the phrase 'running amuck' with boredom cited as a reason for this behaviour.

Kelly: In Laverton that's all you got to do, smoke, drink, cause trouble, that's about it
Becky: Pick fights

All of the 'tough kids' by the time they reached their mid-teens either performed poorly at school or did not attend regularly. By age 14 or 15 very few Aboriginal young people would still be at school, and they had high rates of absenteeism even if they were still formally enrolled¹⁰⁶. For example, Alex left school when he was 14. He found school *'alright, then got boring in Year 8'*. His explanation was that the headmaster was *'stupid'* and *'picking on him'* and gave an example where he was put in 'time out' for laughing at some of the other boys. He claimed he was not really encouraged to stay on and his mother did not care as she had already moved to *'the Ranges'* (the Ngaanyatjarra Lands). His sister, Lily, said she did not work that much at school *'you'd get all the Aboriginal kids put in one corner, and the teachers would concentrate on the white kids'*. She said that being put in the corner translated into less attention and easier work. The non-Aboriginal young man, Martin, claimed that the school was powerless to prevent, and the staff resigned to, the withdrawal of local Aboriginal youth from education by their mid-teens.

Martin: ...Quite a few Aboriginals used to be away a lot. Sam waggged most of Year 10.

JP: Did anyone do anything about it?

Martin: Sam was helping out with the basketball courts. The Principal came out and asked him Sam aren't you meant to be at school and Sam said I don't feel like it and the principal goes that's alright then. That was all that was said about it.

JP: Pretty well accepted then

Martin: Yeah. Cos they couldn't really like force them to go. Like at that age, a lot of kids left school. Cos Sam had turned 15 and at that age, a lot of kids had left school and then just gone their own way. And I think the principal at that time had seen quite a few people do that.

The white young woman, Hannah, said that when she did Year 10 there were only five or six kids who used to turn for classes *'[we] had one Aboriginal boy in the class who never used to turn up. I think he turned up for about 20 days throughout the school year. Rest of us attended regularly'*. She recounted that a social studies

¹⁰⁶ An exception was Tommy who said he found school *'pretty easy... and got all average grades...white people registered a bit higher than me. Made sure I kept up with them, didn't want to lose my grades'*. Tommy was supposed to go to college in Kalgoorlie but when his cousin was unable to gain entry he never went explaining that *'I wanted someone close, in the family, to come along'*.

teacher had promised 'the Aboriginal boy' (Leo) a bucket of ice-cream if he came to school for a whole month. According to Hannah, he did manage to attend except for the last day, when he had to go to court, so he never received the ice-cream.

In the Yuppie era, 'wagging' school was boasted about by the School Group. Some gave the impression that they regularly deceived their parents about their school attendance and their activities after school. A few stated that it was easy to 'wag' especially if both parents were working or away in Kalgoorlie.

?: *I lied big time now I'm not allowed to go out*

?: *Your mum's more gullible*

?: *You're allowed to get away with murder*

Jenny: *My dad's never asks us if we went to school or not. Even if he found out we didn't he wouldn't give a shit.*

Belonging to the 'tough' crowd entailed frequently skipping school, as well as being disruptive or inattentive when at school. Most had been in the basic classes in school from an early age, and found in high school that they only liked classes such as manual arts, home economics and sport. Kelly was in the basic class at school along with Matt, Tim and 'all the other Wongis'. Social divisions were apparent in school:

Kelly: *...There was a lot of favouritism. Because.. like in high school there were kids coming from Perth who'd had the proper education system. I been at the Laverton school since Grade 2 and I still don't know my times-table. If you were like in a basic class they made it very clear to the rest of the kids in the class that you were stupid... I wasn't only treated as a basic person, I was always told I was an idiot or I was silly or I was stupid.*

A Lad, Lee, left school when he was 14. Most of his friends went on to Year 10 so he used to sit around and watch videos at Fred's place at the Village or went bush. He thought school 'stupid' and was often in trouble for swearing, throwing things around and fighting, including punching Malcolm for 'getting smart' in class, and he was threatened with expulsion for 'running amuck'. He believed he was 'sort of picked on by some teachers' although he admitted to liking some of them.

Another Lad, Matt, said that 'school was the best time I had when growing up in Laverton. Mess around with mates, in class after school... School was good, I met a lot of friends, sort of stopped all the boredom, have fun, mess around, keep away boredom... we didn't really listen, we get kicked out all the time'. He claimed he was known as a troublemaker and was suspended twice, for hitting a teacher and for swearing. Matt said that there was one teacher who 'got on with us, gave us a chance. Talked to us if see us in the streets, had time for us... most other teachers didn't take the time'.

There was peer prestige attached to suspensions and time-out, and to showing indifference to formal education.

Becky: *[The teachers] tried to shame us by making us stand on the oval*

Kelly: *But the others think you're lucky cos you don't have to work.*

Martin: *... but people were too hard-headed. Like they'd go to school and stuff like that to learn. But they just, it's like, they can't avoid going there, they have to go there. If they got taught anything about cultures they'd probably just think oh yeah, whoopy do, yeah.*

Talking and acting tough

White kids demonstrated they were tough and a member of the in-crowd by talking like the local Wongi youths and using Wongi (particularly swear) words. Martin said there was status in 'swearing in Aboriginal' and in adopting 'the accent' for instance going 'la' after doing something stupid and going 'ini' as a form of punctuation. Contributing to the appeal of learning some Wongi for the white adolescent was its status as a 'secret language', which was not understood by most teachers and which was effectively forbidden in specific situations. There was a long history of the school banning the use of Aboriginal languages in class. In more recent times this was not an official policy although there remained a tendency to repress the use of certain words, mainly because teachers suspected or knew they were swear words.

Kelly: Like if they'd said something in Aboriginal, because like at one stage they'd banned Aboriginal from being spoken in the school. They used to kick the kids out for the day if they spoke Wongi.

JP: Why? Cos they thought they were swearing?

Kelly: Anything. They don't speak another language when they're in white person's school, more or less, basically what they're saying.

In a subsequent conversation Kelly and Becky discussed contemporary school policy on the Wongi language.

Kelly: Still throw kids out of school for talking Wongi?

Becky: Sent out of class. Swearing when talk Wongi. Only some of the teachers knew what they were saying. They just tell them to stop saying it, you know. Other teachers, if they say something like 'gwarda', wait or something, get out the room cos they didn't know the fuck they're saying. They think every Wongi word a swear word or something. I just listen at time out.. on radio too. I thinking, oh shame. Time out.. I was in that a lot.

The use of Wongi words and the local Wongi inflection to talk by non-Aboriginal youth was also a way of marking distinctions between the local tough 'in' group and the rest of the teenagers. In addition there was intra-group status amongst the local non-Aboriginal young people in being able to demonstrate more command of the language than others.

Kelly: Like white hat kids, when they first come into town, all the upper class kids, they wouldn't know what we were talking about half of the time because we'd be talking all slang, half Wongi pidgin English. You see Matt now, you listen to the way he speaks. I spoke twice as bad as him, no-one could understand what I was saying except the kids around me. But Mum used to go spastic cos she couldn't understand me. But it was English mixed with Wongi, you'd just get the accent from Wongi. It was really hard to kick, it took me nearly three years to get rid of that pidgin English.

Martin: Like some kids they always say I know more Aboriginal words than you. Like Malcolm, he'll say I know more Aboriginal words than you. And someone else would turn around and say, no I know more Aboriginal words than you. And someone else would say no, I know more than you.

Cigarettes were desirable commodities for young people and for the older Aboriginal people who begged in public places. When asking for information or guidance from certain Wongi people, it was commonplace for the non-local interlocutor to proffer cigarettes. The majority of young people had started smoking by the time they were 13 years of age. Although non-Wongi youth often had access to cigarettes and the money to purchase them, there was typically more censure from their parents even if

the adults smoked themselves. Having started to smoke when she was 11 going on 12, Gena said she was encouraged by an older sister and, although 'smoking was not a big deal', it was seen as tough to smoke. She remembered at discos sitting in the toilets having a cigarette to see if they got caught. When Becky was at school she said kids were suspended all the time, mostly for smoking. Playing a cat and mouse game, where they endeavoured to evade being caught out smoking, was a major pastime for the School Group despite a few of their parents having said they accepted the practice.

Karl: We used to go down there [public toilets] and have a smoke all the time at lunchtime. When Mum never let me we used to go to the public toilets, have a cigarette and then we used to go back to school. Used to lock ourselves in the shower or the toilets.

Alcohol consumption also became more frequent as young people approached their mid-teens. When she was at school Gena, for example, went out bush a couple of times and drank alcohol but she had a strict father, so that she said she only really started to drink when she left home. In contrast, the tough or in-crowd were regular drinkers by the time they were in their mid-teens. Becky reported that she first got drunk when 12, and that she was 'slowly drinking all the time' in Laverton, but that her consumption increased dramatically when she went to Perth. As the police did not realise how young she was, Kelly used to go to the pub from the age of 13 and she would buy a flagon and then 'we'd sit on the oval and get totally blotto. Or go up to Billy Goat hill'. Grania said that each person would contribute five or ten dollars and then ask an adult to buy them beer or Jack Daniels. After participating in a spate of break-ins, Grania said that 'the drink set in. I used to drink every weekend, me and [?] [?] Nelson Sharpe, few other friends. Used to go to dongas at the end of the caravan park. Sit down, drink all day, drink all night. Then marijuana started coming around, never got into that'. Once they turned 16 or 17 they could have drunk at home 'but we thought it was more fun to drink behind their backs so that's what we did'. Martin said his friends (mostly the Lads) would drink at the basketball courts, the oval or at Fred's place at the Village on Friday nights. According to Martin, Fred or Neil Sharpe would supply the Lads with alcohol or there were 'other Aboriginals who'd probably go and get it for them'.

Limits were imposed by parents on white teenagers to be home by set times at night, and transgressions were likely to be met by 'groundings'. At the first meeting of the School Group there were seven participants in the discussion and most of them said they were allowed out in the evening to 10 or 11 but that they had to say where they were going. However, as the year progressed they appeared to have all night sessions of drinking.

JP: Any other highlights of the year?

Karl: There's the amazing discovery of deodorant sniffing

Emma: And drugs

Karl: Alcohol

Bronwyn: Marijuana

Di: I haven't done any of this stuff

Alison: I've only tried it [deodorant] twice, and Mersentile [?]. That doesn't give you a high, just a really bad headache

Karl: Gets you really really tired

Alison: Gets you a bit cranky too [indistinct]

Di: Most I've done is get drunk, I've never touched all this sniffing and drugs

Alison: I haven't tried marijuana

[Background discussion about 'zippo stuff' glue kerosene. Conversation about effects of deodorant sniffing, and about buying deodorant from the supermarket]

JP: Where idea come from?

Alison: Martin tried it

Karl: Don't know

Emma?: One of our friends

Di: I never did it

Karl: Got to do something when you've got nothing to do

Emma: When you're bored

[Break - talk of the unpredictable and sometimes 'scary' and 'freaky' effects of alcohol and deodorant sniffing]

JP: What's the best thing about getting drunk?

Di: Waking up next morning and remembering what you're doing

Karl: Takes you beyond the place where you can act..

Emma: ..Act yourself

Bronwyn: Probably a bit stupid but..

Karl:..Takes you to a place where you can't go sober

[Interlude talking about a cartoon]

Emma: What's not illegal that we've done that's good?

[Chorus of replies - 'Just being out' 'Being together' 'Having immature spurts all the time' 'Just talking and laughing and remembering things that happened' 'They've been really really good times, better than being drunk, being out, just us']

In another conversation drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana were recognised as teenage 'issues':

Teresa: About 85% of teenagers smoke ganja [talk about cigarette brands]

Karl: Marijuana sucks

Greg: Underage drinking is on the increase too

Teresa: So, what do they expect there's nothing else to do for the kids so what else are they going to do

Greg: Fucking oath.

The availability of, and experimentation with, a range of drugs appeared to vary over time. In the mid eighties, Scott claimed that it had been easy to the pub or go drinking out bush but that it was hard to obtain 'hard drugs', the kind that were pushed in big city schools, because the people in town who had them kept the drugs to themselves. Gena said that 'dope' was not commonplace then and Scott had only tried for the first time when he was 18. Those who had long histories with the tough crowd and Wongi youth, such as Becky and Kelly, knew how to get hold of marijuana which was grown on pastoral stations in the region, through men from Kalgoorlie who would visit town to sell it. Kelly and Becky said there used to be 'speed' around then too, although according to Kelly 'you knew of all the drugs that were around, it's just mainly pot, piss'.

By the late eighties and early nineties, several of the young Wongi people such as Alex and Jimmy had reputations as heavy marijuana smokers. A Wongi man who moved around the Goldfields and who had family in town, reputedly acted as the major supplier. Martin said his contemporaries would not touch needles, a few of them had taken speed, and that there had been 'trips' going around but the woman dealer had left town. He thought that they might take ecstasy but he did not think anyone had seen it at that point in time (1993). None of the Lads admitted to trying

glue (after Tommy commented on the plastic bags at Adeline in Kalgoorlie), although Lee said he had tried petrol. The younger Wongi boy, Rory, admitted to using petrol in the company of others, and both he and the Wongi boy Connor were caught sniffing glue in town. The probability of experiencing, and knowing about, different kinds of drugs appeared related to age and to the places young people had resided - for example Martin had boarded in Perth for several years, while Connor and Rory moved around the Goldfields and the Ngaanyajarra Lands.

When there were more young people in town in the eighties, the young adults reported greater sexual activity amongst adolescents and between female teenagers and the older single men. Sexual experimentation between peers was generally seen as normal in the early teens and such activities often occurred in youth specific spaces such as the abandoned mine Marymac.

Gena: Week later we'd all swap boyfriends. Change boyfriends like we'd change pants.

*Kelly: It's like when we were kids, I was saying to Grania, don't know who's got bloody AIDS by now
JP: Were you young when you got into sex?*

Kelly: Yep, they were just free and easy. Anywhere, at anytime, with anybody sort of thing.

Jenny: Were you here when all these other kids here like grown-ups, like Patsy Foster or John McGovern. I heard that their local hang out was Paradise Hill, Billy Goat..

Emma: Marymac

Karl: Yeah, they had a mattress down there with springs..

Di: They all used to go down there and play hide and seek in the mini-mines and they'd get in the shafts and everything..

Karl: And then they'd play the game called sex (laughter)

Di: Roxy White and Jimmy, no it wasn't Jimmy, it was Jezz Doncaster

Alison: Oh my god

Di: They were going out

Teresa: In [another country town] there's a cat hole only this big and everyone goes in there to do their business, guys and girls do their little business [goes on to tell a long, confusing story]

Alison: We're up to the mature years

Jenny: Mature

Karl: Speak for yourself Alison (laughter)

Alison: Now that we're in year 10, we don't go up to Billy Goat..

Teresa: And play hide and seek

Alison: Yeah, I like this year better

Jenny: There's not enough boys to do that (laughter). I mean you know not to do that, I mean honestly, I wouldn't want to play hide and seek with you girls (laughter)

JP: So did you use to do that Alison? Go up to Billy Goat hill?

Alison: Yeah I used to, you know, when I was going out with Alex. We used to go up there, sit, talk..

Jenny: Play (laughter)

Alison: We did not. Don't say anything but I'm still going out with him but no-one knows. Only us guys.

JP: Why's it got to be secret?

Alison: If Mum found out, if Martin found out..

Jenny: Martin didn't want them to see each other because of Mum's sake, Dad's sake.

As the above excerpt from a School Group discussion indicates, certain liaisons were frowned upon and sometimes forbidden by parents or other family members. In particular, liaisons between young non-Aboriginal women and older single mining men¹⁰⁷ or with Aboriginal youths were acknowledged by the white young people as

¹⁰⁷ A young white woman, Grania, referred to offers of money to have sex from single white men - 'I didn't have much to with the single men when I was at home. Once I started going to the pub I

most likely to attract parental disapproval. It contributed to a self-assessment by many local young people that they were more broad-minded and less racially intolerant¹⁰⁸ than their parents or other adults.

JP: So at night a group of you would go round to the single men's quarters?

Kelly: I never did. I was never interested in older blokes, only guys like my own age or blackfellas. I was always told... at home, my brothers because I got four big brothers, they always used to always call me coon lover so I deliberately used to go out with blackfellas just to piss them off. Like I went out with Danny Lake, I went out with Bob Walker, I went out with Jordan Walker for two days but I was too scared of him..

JP: Two days?

Kelly: I been out with blackfellas but like Jordan he was really black to me (laugh) and that scared me more than anything. Like my brothers knew I was going out with Jordan. He told Corin [Kelly's brother] and that's his best mate and Corin just started laughing, he couldn't stop laughing.

JP: Why didn't your brothers want you to go out with blackfellas?

Kelly: Four big brothers, younger sister, the youngest. They hated me going out with anybody but it just hurt more when it was somebody who was darker than I was, and that really pissed me off.

Sex education at school was either regarded as 'joke' or as a source of embarrassment. One white young woman (Kelly) said they had known 'everything' anyway but that it was a difficult experience for the Wongi kids who were 'bashful' and uncomfortable with the subject matter. Martin said that most of the teachers knew that a lot of the kids were having sex by the age 15 so that most of year 10 would be about safe sex. The latter subject he said was not talked about much outside of class.

Martin: That didn't get much attention from the kids. When diagrams were put up and condoms were brought into class and put over cucumbers and stuff like that. Oh shame, shame, chuckles would go around the class.... It was school and that was it. Not brought any further, they wouldn't talk about it any further after school unless they're talking about I don't know, going and having sex one day and so and so would say you're going to wear condoms, nah, and that would be it.

According to Kelly, practising safe sex in a small town was inhibited by the boys not wanting to buy condoms in the supermarket because 'they're shamed... everybody knows they're buying condoms'. She explained that the older men could order them in bulk, by mail, through a Kalgoorlie chemist. In the heyday of the Lads, Martin reported that there only three boys who were known to not practice safe sex and their behaviour was seen as reprehensible by their male friends.

Martin: It didn't really worry me [kids having sex at a young age]. You know Angela, how she's got a baby. It didn't really worry me that she was like getting into sex at that age. It's just the fact that they weren't practising safe sex. Cos its, I'm not trying to put down her baby or anything, but it like has restricted her life now. And she's got a baby and another one now. I 'on't suppose.. I reckon it's alright now that she's settled right down with Tim. Their relationship is pretty serious, not like boyfriend, girlfriend, see you after school sort of relationship... I think there was only three I think who didn't practise [safe sex]. Everyone was telling Sam to wear a condom. But he said no, no, no

started looking at things there. They came and said hello, sleazed and stuff like that when I started getting interested. When I was living at home it didn't bother me. Some of my friends when they got older were more interested in them. JP: You didn't get hassled? Grania: When I used to go out I did a bit, some of them offer you money to go sleep with them but I've got no shame. I told them where to go, straight out.. That's the way I've been brought up, you don't sleep with people for money.

¹⁰⁸ This assumption that the younger generation were more tolerant was also reflected in a comment by an Aboriginal young adult, Fred- 'we wouldn't mind having whitefellas work with us, they're alright. Half the young blokes in town hang around with the Wongis, makes no difference'.

it'll be right. And Angela came into class one day late and she sat down next to Sam and she said I'm pregnant. And Sam just hit her and that pissed off all of us guys. We thought it was pretty irresponsible.

Working at the youth centre provided an opportunity to witness young people's activities. Many of the children and older youth were the local 'tough' kids and for the worker, when there was large numbers, the level of noise, squabbling and disregard for property could be galling. Considerable levels of swearing and teasing were evident between the young people, which sometimes erupted into physical fighting. The following excerpt is taken from my diary record of a day at the centre when about 25 young people came in during the course of an afternoon:

The most popular pastime was the trampoline and I had to referee a number of squabbles over 'who's turn it was'... Sam and Lee watched television, they never seem to talk to each other. Alex and later Art oversaw the small kids on the pool table, Cherry played with the accordion and I noticed at the end of the afternoon the straps were busted. The younger girls drew pictures with me for about three quarters of an hour... I played basketball with Connor and a girl... The worst incident was when Connor threw a pool ball at Randy, and the Randy mob stalked off in high dudgeon. Zachary was the biggest pest, always trying to jump the queue for the trampoline, bumming lollies off me and fighting with Joey over pool rules... The younger kids got a kick out of putting a piece of paper between the spokes of the fitness bicycle and creating an awful din. I closed up at six pm weary from the noise. The female toilet was blocked.

For some tough kids at least, teasing or 'giving shit' was a way of asserting their local dominance despite the fact that by external standards the others had an advantage. Kelly's depiction of childhood teasing of 'white hat' girls suggests the awareness of class differences and a desire to humiliate those that were better off and who thought themselves superior.

Kelly: Mainly the young girls chasing the older men that're working, the single men's quarters and things like that. Cos access to the single men's quarters.. [baby crying]

JP: Was there status and prestige with going with older men?

Kelly: Yeah, lot of group pressure. Specially like as I call them, the communists having a bet or teasing one of the white hat kids to the extent that they'll go and do something totally stupid and they get into serious trouble for it (laugh). But we used to like doing that because it was our way of saying, sort of see, we're not as stupid as you are because we wouldn't done that even though there was so much pressure (laugh).

JP: So how did the teasing go? What sort of things would be said to the white hat kids?

Kelly: Oh, we used to tell them they were virgins. And they'd get really upset. And then we'd set them up on a blind date with some horrible bloke, like there was a kid at our school called Dudley Neilson who had warts and he was really fat. And we'd set them up with him, something like that and leave them on the oval in the middle of the night and we'd go and lay down on the oval and turn all the basketball lights off. Or they used to shanghai the lights out because the Shire got to one stage where they lock the metre box so you couldn't turn the lights off. So we'd shan'zhai them out, something like that. And we used to go and lay on the oval and we used to watch these girls on the oval. And then we'd get up and start laughing and carrying on. Except where they'd just go home crying.

When Martin came back to town, after spending some time away at a boarding school, he claimed he was teased and baited by the local Lads:

Martin: Yeah, cos the way I dressed after I came back here. They always like shit on you for being a Perthbreed. Like there was a couple of guys went to boarding school from here. When they came back they would be marked Perthbreed. That's what they always give you. They say oh Perthbreed Perthbreed. Like especially me, cos I came back and started dressing real differently. And they just

shat on me. They say try hard Negro and stuff like that. But after a while they probably got sick and tired of giving me shit. It just wore off

JP: Do you think there was jealousy there?

Martin: Sometimes, sometimes I think it. Sometimes I just say you got a nice shirt on, you got a nice pair of shoes on, like sarcastically. That's when I think they're a bit jealous. Yeah, I think it sometimes, it's like that with some people. Like Sam he likes to think he's pretty good looking and likes to think he looks pretty cool. Like when he gives me the shit I think its you know jealousy. When it's like Tim gives me the shit I think he's just plain trying to get under my skin.

To much of this teasing there was an element of 'testing out' in order to provoke a response. As noted earlier new kids to town, teachers and other authority figures were subject to a barrage of derogatory remarks and 'cheek' to see how they would react.

On one of the first days of working at the youth centre, I announced I was closing the place half an hour early which was greeted by comments such as 'can't keep us under control', 'need a new manager', 'need to go to bed earlier'. When I asked an older Wongi youth, Jimmy, if he would like to help with the cleaning up he just laughed. Another diary entry reflects how wearisome the behaviour could be:

...Zachary kept on trying to take a bike even though all the tyres were flat. Barry [the usual worker] had banned Buzz for a day after he threw a bike onto the asphalt in a tantrum because it was not in working order... Wrappings and empty bottle are just left where they are and Lisa and Di made no effort to clear up after they grabbed the crayons and papers. Buzz distributed the icy lollies after I was told by Barry to give them away for free - soon after Nathan tried to take more from the freezer... Zachary was subject to gentle teasing by the trampoline mob after he bummed the rest of my drink from me...

Teasing or ridiculing authority figures to their face was a way of demonstrating 'toughness' to peers as well as to the subject of the verbal attack. Much of the teasing, however, was directed at peers¹⁰⁹. A white young woman, Gena, believed that one of the Aboriginal youths, Tim, did not do too badly at school but implied he would have performed better if he had not spent so much time needling teachers or girl students:

Gena: Oh yeah, I suppose, as well as you'd expect. He tried. But no not really (laugh). He was not so much easily distracted but like he was picking on us, he was there to make our lives hell. Then after school we were all friends again.

JP: When you say 'us', who do you mean?

Gena: Girls.. or teachers. Pick on the teacher and get thrown out or something like that.

Interactions between peers often involved friendly taunting and the exchange of insults. These kind of exchanges appeared to reflect a desire to ensure there was 'equality' between peers, and that no-one would suffer from an inflated sense of worth or authority. The terms of insult revealed an awareness of disparaging labels that wider society might apply to them. Most of the following exchanges were overheard at the youth centre:

Nathan and Alex were playing pool and Martin laughingly called Nathan 'a nigger'.

¹⁰⁹ Martin (1993:35) describes teasing amongst Wik children as not just a matter of aggravation, ridicule and competition. It also comprised "derision and sarcasm used against someone not conforming to established norms".

Becky came in and she became angry when Nathan called her 'a fucking dog'.
Martin and Tim took it in turns to say 'nigger' 'you're a nigger'.
Alex and Lee teased each other 'Warburton bastard' 'Cosmo bastard' 'Can't even write your name' 'I finished Year 9 at school'.
Nathan, Lisa and Art called Willy a 'gin jockey'.
Fighting over the Nintendo games, Connor called Ali a 'motherfucker' and Ali pushed Connor off his seat. Connor stalked out, crying, and grabbed stones outside the centre. He threw a few at the roof but I yelled at him to stop.
Jeremy and Peter [hostel residents and notorious petrol sniffers] called each other 'poofter' 'AIDS boy'.

Several teenagers were quick to point out that there were no enduring leaders in their group. An impression was created that there was an underlying competitiveness and aggression to many of the interactions within the male peer groups. For instance, one of the Lads (Matt) when talking about how his mother used to worry about him said that she was mistaken to assume he was one of the 'ringleaders'. He said:

Matt: I just followed everyone else

JP: Who were the ringleaders?

Matt: Nobody was a ringleader, trying to be better than each other, trying to be the boss, all trying to outsmart each other. Nobody was the ringleader.

Fighting and crime

Local young people admitted to fighting quite frequently, usually linking it to teasing or feelings of jealousy, and displayed aggressive forms of masculinity and femininity in the early years of adolescence. It was the males, however, who were more likely to physically wrestle or attack each other¹¹⁰.

Gena: We used to have fights one on one. I had a punch up with Nona, she's Aboriginal, one on one. Not group fights or anything like that. But two days later we were fine, not even two days later. Tiffs, squabbles whatever you want to call them, nothing that I'd call a real fight."

Kelly: Like most of times only reason we went out at night times was for punch ups. We used to fight all the time. Grania never used to fight, she used to sit there and watch and referee (laugh). There was a lot of fights between whites and blacks. Like me and Ingrid we went to school together. And her and her cousin one year at Christmas they stole my boot skates. And I went and asked for them back. And I got them two days before [indistinct] So there was Ingrid, Catherine, her sister, Anna and two other girls and I'd fight the lot of them for my boot skates (laugh). [Baby crying] I only ended up with a perforated eardrum. [Baby]

JP: You must've learnt to fight pretty young

Kelly: Yeah, I got four brothers. Yeah, up here you gotta learn to protect yourself, you've really got no choice.

Martin in several conversations focused on aspects of fighting. In the following exchange, he gave an account of the Lads fighting:

Martin: Yeah, they like to give each other shit and if someone goes too far, they end up having a fight.

[JP: witnessing the teasing of Lee years before, who'd become riled easily]

Martin: I don't know what they get out it. Cos if Lee got wild they all shit themselves. Cos like Lee will go to the extent of grabbing a bottle or grabbing a rock. Or like just plain knocking out the other guys cos he was always, I don't know, he wouldn't care if he hurt them whereas other guys when they

¹¹⁰ Martin (1993:50-51) refers to the "high degree of physicality" and "playful aggression" amongst young men's groups with their jostling, fighting and punching.

fight like, a friend they wouldn't care but they'd have in their head that like if I hurt this person, he's my friend or so and so's my friend. I don't want to go that far. Whereas Lee wouldn't care, he'd knock you down and wouldn't think twice about spitting on you
[JP: comment on not such a scary proposition when younger and smaller, and that they might have known that someone would intervene]

Martin: But even like when we were by ourselves at the courts or anywhere else, they'd like give him shit and no-one would want to stop him. One problem, cos they don't want to get involved and two, they want to see a fight. No matter who it's between. That's what they were like. So and so is having a fight, let's all run down and have a look. They wouldn't care about stopping it like if someone was fighting with their best friend. They wouldn't go down there and like have it in their minds to like stop them. They'd go down there and like and go, yeah, punch him, punch him harder, yeah, he's on the ground, knock him over, kick him harder.

On another occasion Martin concentrated on the racial dimensions to fighting:

Martin: ...The Aboriginals did get quite offended. Like if I was an Aboriginal and I went up to another Aboriginal and pulled the piss out of him they'd sit there and laugh. But if a white person went up and said exactly the same thing, they'd say oh, you're getting cheeky and they you'd start in, and then you'd go out in the middle of the street and have a fight.

JP: What about vice versa. If a whitefella is sitting around and a blackfella comes up and starts giving them heaps?

Martin: Oh, the white person would be really scared. Just the thought of an Aboriginal getting angry. He could be smaller than him but just the thought of the Aboriginal getting angry and if you beat him up then his father or his brother going to come, cos that's the way they fight. But not too many.. quite a few white people would want to get along with an Aboriginal person, because they're scared the Aboriginal person may turn against them one day.

JP: So who was known as a bad fighter, you mentioned Lee?

Martin: Matt didn't mind a fight [interlude to light cigarette] I don't know whether they liked fighting but they weren't scared to go and have a fight. They probably weren't scared to go for a fight cos they always had the other guys to back them up.

JP: Who was it? Matt, Sam, Lee..

Martin: Tim

JP: Leo?

Martin: Leo is and I think always has been pretty mellow

JP: Looks pretty mellow. Alex too

Martin: Jimmy, but he wouldn't go out and look for a fight. If the fight was happening he'd jump in as well. Nelson, when he was here

JP: Get the whole lot of the Sharpe family

Martin: If.. Neil gets hurt, then Fred'll jump in. Likewise with the Walkers, if one Walker got hurt then the rest will come in.

JP: So it wasn't as if anyone in particular went looking for a fight?

Martin: No.

A critical distinction for Martin, in relation to fights or disputes involving Aboriginal youth, was the way family became involved in the conflict.

Martin: Bob the bouncer at the pub, he bumped Lee and Lee realised he wouldn't be able to beat up my uncle so he thought he can't get my uncle, he'll get his son, Simon.

JP: Wouldn't people be put off attacking any member of your family as well?

Simon: Lee isn't, I'd say Sam is. Sam is slightly smaller than Lee (laugh). But everyone else, they know that if I get in a fight I won't drag my family into it. Like wise with Simon. So they're pretty much safe. If I get beaten up, I won't go home and tell my parents I got beaten up and I won't go and tell my uncle, come on, let's go and get this kid over here. No they're not really worried. Not that they know that, they feel that cos of the type of people me and Simon are. Me and Simon don't drag our family into it, cos the Aboriginals here got slightly bigger families than ours.

Those that had been part of the in-crowd in their early teens, and who identified as local youth, exhibited a measure of pride in their toughness and hardness, which was

connected to a capacity to fight and to act aggressively. Becky, for example, boasted that *'city kids scared of the country kids.. cos they get harder'* and Martin was disparaging about a recreation officer *'and she shows a lot of fear when we had discos because she doesn't know what to do if a fight breaks out'*.

Nearly every young adult recollected committing at least one illegal activity when younger. Minor thefts and shoplifting were the most common kinds of property crime. Fighting which could have resulted in assault charges was not mentioned as a 'crime' which indicated that certain kinds of interpersonal violence amongst peers was not defined as a form of illegal activity. In the main, the stealing was laughed about by the young adults and they would sometimes ruefully refer to how they were in 'trouble' once they were caught:

Scott: When I was young I did get into trouble with the cops stealing car badges. Bit of a rage you know (laugh).. emblems. Got into trouble for that. That was just something stupid and silly for a 15 year old to do.

Tommy: ...police got us and took all the toys back to the shop. Albert knew my parents, my mother used to iron his clothes and do his housework.

For shop staff, the most well-known local shoplifters over the years were a few younger Wongi boys (such as Zachary, Rory and Connor) who were also inclined to ask for food and 'change' from approachable whites. These boys were mostly offspring of Village residents or of drinking visitors. Their actions were widely perceived as motivated by chronic need, in contrast to the opportunistic and less common actions of other young people.

Young male and female adults who were part of the tough crowd when younger, admitted to daubing graffiti on public surfaces. Becky said she and others had done *'spraypainting and that... Put black texta everywhere. Browns' walls, everywhere. Spray paint out at Billy Goat, anytime, didn't care'*. Grania said that 'lots of graffiti' was a big phase, during which they used to draw over everything, including the Shire Hall.

Certain kinds of minor property damage and graffiti were largely perceived as the province of children and younger teenagers. As they became older some started to break-in to shops. These sort of age distinctions were never absolute, however, as often an incident might involve a group of young people of differing ages. Unquestionably, the prime instigators and the most regular participants in break-ins were male and in their early to mid teens. Becky said she did one break-in. She and three girls were drunk and went for a walk down town where they *'met some others breaking in and joined in'*. She said that the main things that were stolen were *'chips, smokes and cool drinks'* and that none of them were caught.

Grania: When school finished we used to sneak out at midnight. Got more serious, started breaking in to shops and that. Me, I was the lookout. Got quite a bit. Broke into [a shop]- cigarettes, videos, cool drink, chocolate ice-cream. Went and sat on welfare lawn over there. Broke into kindergarten, don't know what for, got a polaroid camera. All showing off, took photos of each other and a little tape recorder. Broke into swimming pool chucked [indistinct]. Couple of weeks after that someone broke into the Shire. They got caught and dobbed everyone else in, except for me and two other girls. They got fined, went to court. Didn't stop the break and enters. Matt [her brother] got caught a

couple of times. I never got caught for doing anything (laugh).. no-one had the sense to dob me in.

In another conversation Grania explained how she had been working in a particular shop at the time, which was why 'everyone' knew how to break into the place. She said it was a time when the shops lost a lot of money with 'everyone breaking in and taking stuff'.

Grania: ... mostly on weekends. Sit on the court, go home, have dinner, go to bed, someone come and wake us, tapping on window at midnight. Last time I did it, I got caught, got kicked out of home for two days just before Christmas. Mum thought we'd been around the dongas with the single men. I wasn't going to tell her we'd been breaking into shops and that. Oh, we was terrible. Half the stuff we didn't even keep, just threw it away. Too scared of getting caught. I was pretty good, only did it a couple of times, thought this is stupid, not worth, get caught one day and probably go to jail, never did it again... the supermarket went through hard time. Some of our old friends came back from Kalgoolie and Leonora and Leinster and that for a long weekend, broke into the supermarket and stole video recorders, TV... I think if there'd been more to do around here we wouldn't have these sort of things. Just nothing to do. Make our own fun.. started getting into trouble. Matt more than me [indistinct] I was just too frightened of getting caught.

Martin said that the 'hard headed crowd' used to break in a lot. I asked whether they would boast to the other kids:

Martin: No, cos they'd know if they talked too much about it, they'd get caught. So they didn't like say too much about it. but you just know cos when they did they'd walk around giving out smokes. When usually they don't.

JP: Was that the main thing they were after?

Martin: Yeah, they'd go straight for the smokes and then they'd go for like the food.

One of the Lads, Matt, admitted that (with an older crowd including his sister Grania and Nelson Sharpe) he used to sneak out and break into shops and he got caught a few times. They took smokes and cool drinks 'only. We had money. We got a rush out of it, sort of, just cos you know, not allowed to do it. Smart, tough guy, trying to prove a point. I can do this, sort of thing'. He said they used to hide stolen goods at Marymac, and sold the smokes to the other kids. At one stage they stole two shotguns, and shot at fences and birds around the bush. A local Wongi youth, Alex, said that some Aboriginal youths broke in when there were hungry 'mainly for food, drink, smokes and money', but that the Lads got into trouble a lot of the time because they were 'bored'. He explained he had avoided 'trouble' because he was never around when they did it and they had never asked him to go along.

Experiences of policing and the justice system

Relations between young people and police have been discussed at length by several Australian writers (see Beresford and Omaji 1996, Blagg and Wilkie 1995, White and Alder 1993). The School Group expressed negative views of the police in several conversations and this was their response when I asked them directly what they thought about the police:

JP: What do you think of the role of police? What should they do?

Karl: Protect people more. It's ridiculous

Teresa: The cops down here they don't do nothing

Karl: In some senses it's alright they're just doing their job. I know people don't like cops much because they're real..

?: 'Pigs' 'Dickheads'

Di: Some think they've got like all the authority that they want and they can do what they feel like

Emma: Like one example Doug Howard, he tried to get someone for riding on the back of the car but he lets his kids do it

Teresa: The cops in Geraldton they confiscate alcohol they drink it instead of putting it away somewhere. If they confiscate marijuana or something they smoke that as well. That sucks. Cos they drink.

Karl: They think they are the law and they can break it. Some think they can break it. Then you get the crooked cops..

Emma: There's that one law that breaking in law, you're not allowed to hit the person breaks in or anything otherwise you get done for assault

Teresa: That sucks

Karl: You're not allowed to touch them because they can put you in for physical abuse

Teresa: They can break in and steal all your gear

?: That's fucked

Karl: Stuff that, I'd kill the person if they did anything to me

[Teresa tells a story about her uncle breaking into their house and Nicole says 'our friends bashed the shit out of him' Teresa 'cops wouldn't do anything']

Bronwyn?: I think it sucks that you're not allowed to swear at police

[Simultaneous comments 'We do' 'So do I' 'Over the fence'. More about Teresa's uncle and about looking after Roy's kids]

JP: Police should be offering more protection?

Teresa: Yeah, to like.. Roy when he gets drunk he goes off his mind. He goes round bashing people. Take him to court, he always forces them to drop the charges and the cops can't really do anything about him.

JP: What else could the police do around here?

?: Shit all

Karl: They go around bloody telling people they're disturbing the peace for playing music

[Teresa provides an example of a party near the club which the cops did nothing about and her Dad couldn't sleep. Same when the band playing at the youth centre]

JP: Bronwyn and Emma, you haven't said anything about the police?

Bronwyn: I don't like the police

Emma: I don't like the Laverton police

Teresa The Laverton police are poxy

?: Some of them alright, OK

Teresa: I knows of people got mull [marijuana], and get the police to water it

Nicole: This person gets the Sarge to water his plants when he's at work or goes away on holidays. Pretty fucked.

Emma: Who's the cop?

Nicole: The Sarge, lives in Sue's street, don't know his name, Beckett, Maggot..

[Teresa tells a story about a guy told off for riding his motorbike]

Di: Some police use their authority like they're king..

Teresa: When they're out of uniform they still boss you around

Emma: They can do jackshit when they're out of uniform

Teresa: Yeah, I know

Nicole: In Geraldton when off duty driving around they still pick you up and give you a speeding ticket

Teresa: Think they're really tough

JP: Bronwyn, you were saying you don't like them

Bronwyn: They're racist against the Aboriginals. Don't reckon they pick on them, they pick on white people. Like if there's a white guy down the street drinking alcohol and there's Aboriginals drinking down the street they'll pick on the white guy.

JP: A double standard

Emma: [indistinct, Teresa talking] ..policeman once, drunk Aboriginal they used to haul in, this guy used to manhandle them, he'd hook their arms up around their back and pull them really hard. He was just a real pig to them. And one day Colleen punched him, man. That was funny.

JP: And she laid him out?

Emma: Nuh, cos he was just manhandling her that much, she just turned around and biffed him one.

According to the white young adults, the police had not really disturbed their 'extra-curricular' activities when they were younger:

Kelly: We used to wag school. So easy to do up here, you can walk down the street here and the police say what are you doing, you're supposed to be at school and you go oh, I'm sick, I've got the day off. And that was it. They wouldn't ask you have you got a note, why are you downtown...

JP: What did the police do when you were hanging out after school late at night at basketball courts?

Kelly: They used to come past and they'd say move along, move along. We'd move along, yeah go stand by the side of the pool or in the pool, like doorway there, wait until they go, then go back.

I asked Becky and Kelly if they had been picked up by the police in Laverton for drinking:

Becky: Yeah, trashed the can and get home. We'd have to pour it out in front of them, put in the bin and go home.

JP: Then what?

Kelly: Just back track

Becky admitted she got on well with the police after she stopped hanging around with the Aboriginal youth.

Becky: You're one of them, we're treat you like one of them, you know. Ever since I stopped hanging around with them. I'm alright now, I'm right in with the cops really. I drink with them sometimes when they're off duty [interruption from Kelly]. That's another thing the cops do they take their time. Things like when Matt was going off over there...

To a large extent the police response seemed to relate to a young person's reputation and his or her history of relations with individual police officers. The local Wongi youth, Alex, who was never really one of the Lads, had never been hassled by the police, only told to go home when standing outside the shops. Like the white girls, the police had told him and others in the group to stop drinking (which Alex said they were not doing anyway) and they just moved 'down to the oval'.

In contrast his older cousin, Stella, was quite vehement in her opinions of the local police:

Robyn: Have you ever been in trouble with the police?

Stella: Yeah, I was really scared when I first got picked up for sniffing petrol, they made me sit in a room really quiet for ten minutes and hit me again and said if you ever do it again we'll kick you up the arse.

Robyn: Do you reckon the police have a good relationship with the Aboriginal people in Laverton?

Stella: Nah, not really

Robyn: Why is that?

Stella: Because they keep arresting Aboriginal people for nothing

Robyn: Do you think they are a bit prejudiced?

Stella: Yes, and they arrest you for any thing like if you are drunk and minding your own business. They try and get things out of you that you haven't done, they say you've done it but you haven't.

Based on their interviews with Aboriginal youth, Beresford and Omaji (1996: 73) found that some youths acknowledged individual police officers were reasonable and helpful. Most of them, however, bore resentment against police in general and one youth was quoted as saying the police 'frame it on you' and another said they 'listen to one side'. Hutchings (1993:355) states that in Port Augusta "most Aboriginal children see themselves to be under constant police surveillance...Many of these

Aboriginal children resent attempts by particular police officers to befriend them” as they assume the police only wanted to elicit information.

Certainly the older Aboriginal man, Fred, with whom some Lads stayed, complained of the way the police came to see him whenever one of the Lads was assumed to be in trouble, although he was prepared to help out up to a point:

Fred: When the young blokes get into trouble they always come and check my place out. They said my place, they reckon I'm the ringleader cos all the young blokes hang out with me, most of the boys living at my place. They go Fred you done this, you done that. You don't come up, we'll lock you up. If something's happened they'll ask me. I go you get paid for the job, find out for your bloody selves. I don't mind helping out sometimes if I know the person did wrong, but they got a job, they get paid, they can find out.

Lads, who of their age mates had the most contact with the police and the court system, expressed dislike of the police. Lee, for instance, only liked the police aides 'because one of them my uncle'. He referred to the last time he was in court, which was for hitting a police officer:

Lee: He said I bit him. But I never. He took a swing at me and hit me on the teeth. Trying to chuck me in the back of the van. Cos Sam fighting with this one Wongi bloke. He grabbed me after first grabbing Sam. He was trying to push me and I was holding on the side of the van. Took me to the lock up... all of my uncles were in there, George James, Jonas, they talked to me all night.

None of the resident Lads told me directly of rough handling by local police, and several went out of their way to stress how they were not intimidated by police and boasted to each other about how they told various police officers to 'get off'. The visitor, Tommy, who had only become involved in drinking and crime in his mid-teens when he moved in Kalgoorlie, said that a 'frightening' experience with the Kalgoorlie police, when they had grabbed him by the throat, slammed him against an office cabinet door and shaken him up but had subsequently dropped charges against him and his cousin, had deterred him from further 'trouble'. His view at the time was that 'if the cops going to be like this waste of time getting into trouble'¹¹¹.

Where there was unanimity, amongst teenagers and young adults who were resident in the town in the early nineties, was their dislike of a particular police officer. Fred had this to say about the officer:

Fred: The main one I want to get out of this place is Doug Howard, don't like him. He thinks his shit don't stink. He's number one, he's the boss, he's got things going at the drop-in centre, the recreation stuff. He's got all the wrecked cars parked outside his place, and we're not allowed to touch them. He gets them off the Wongis and then he's got the cheek to run them down.

A non-Aboriginal youth, Simon, said he had a few unpleasant encounters with the police officer and condemned him for his attitude towards young people 'he looks down on us, treats us like shit and as if you're always doing something wrong'. Another youth Martin gave a longer exposition on shortcomings in the officer's

¹¹¹ Tommy also talked about how the Kalgoorlie police had 'murdered' a young man (whose case was considered by the RCIADIC), and who had been in the lock-up at the time with one of Tommy's uncles. The reason for his death, in Tommy's opinion, was that the police 'had a grudge against him because he knew his rights'.

attitude, and on how he compared unfavourably with other police¹¹² in town:

Martin: I think he just has that thought that the ones [kids] in town are all no-hopers

JP: And people pick that up

Martin: That's what he's run into because he's a policeman, he always sees that side of the kids. He won't hang around kids when they're like doing homework inside but if the kid is doing something bad, that's when he sees them

[JP Refers to earlier comment by Martin about adults generally having a bad attitude towards kids]

Martin: I think Doug is worse because he's a policeman, because that's plain what he sees, he's just seen that one side of them. Whereas parents they see it because they walk around town and they continuously see kids, those guys, drinking somewhere or swearing at someone, I don't know or just plain doing something that the parents don't approve of.

JP: [Unclear]

Martin: We seem to get on pretty well with the other cops. There's a new cop Joshua, me and Simon get on pretty well with him, he's pretty cool. Like if he has to talk to us about something he wouldn't talk to us as if he's a policeman. Like if we ask him something he'll tell us straight out. Not like Howard, he'll make you feel so uncomfortable. Like you're here and he's there.

Only four of the non-Aboriginal youth and young adults had formal contact with the legal system. Three had appeared for a single incident either before a panel or the court, and the remaining one, who was one of the Lads, had been to court over the years for a series of charges. The young adult, Scott, said he had been into 'sport and girls' and hung around with a 'pretty mellow crowd' but that he had gone to panel once which had put him off further crime and ever since he had tried to stay on the good side of the police. With the School Group, only Teresa had been to court after she was 'docked in' for stealing cartons of cigarettes at the Speedway.

This limited experience of the system was in marked contrast to the experiences of the Lads, and several Wongi girls. The white youth Matt said he was nervous and crying at his first interview with the police. He had a panel which his mother and 'welfare' attended. He was scared beforehand but not afterwards and, unlike Scott, the experience did not deter him from further offending 'they didn't do anything to you, just warn you off... just a slap on the hand. Lasted a week, back into it, the same thing'.

The Aboriginal youth Tommy was never one of the Laverton Lads. When younger, he attended a panel with his mother and said he was frightened by the experience and stopped for a while. It was when he was living in Kalgoorlie in his mid-teens that he, and his cousins, started to steal, to vandalise, and to break into houses - they were 'running amuck' because it was 'something to do'. He said that 'I started drinking when I was 16. Just like a trend, all the young fellows drinking, all get together'. His first court appearance in Kalgoorlie was for shoplifting for which he was fined, and he stressed that he made sure he paid all the fines he had. He also used to be arrested for being drunk and disorderly 'I used to get rowdy, used to fight my family all the time, not just my family, but my cousins as well'. After he gave up drinking and smoking, for health reasons and because a cousin he was very close to had died, he found that a lot of people assumed he was Christian because of his abstinence.

¹¹² A white young adult Kelly implied that the police had improved over the years. She referred to when 'they had all the idiots on the police force' who she suspected took grog up to the Ranges to bribe Wongis. It was then that a police aide, Emil, was dismissed for 'beating me up'. Her account was that Emil had punched her in the stomach after she had reported that one of his children had taken a new bike belonging to a 'little white kid'.

More characteristic of male youths who grew up at the Village, and a few who were considered to be 'at risk' because the mother or caregiver was involved frequently in the drinking lifestyle, were the kind of experiences reported by Lee. He and his brother were placed with a foster family near Kalgoorlie when they were young, stayed in a hostel and were reunited with their mother in the mid-eighties. With their mother they first lived at Cosmo Newberry for a brief period then moved to the Village.

Before being reunited with their mother the 'welfare' were responsible for arranging where and with whom they lived. Even when they were older and with their mother, they experienced some forms of assistance from whites in the town, because of where they lived. Sam described how when they had the 'old Village' they used to have *'sisters and schoolteachers pick us up, pick up Jackson, Reid bothers, that's all really. Not many kids...Never really stopped picking them up, staff changed but most of them didn't think of it. Just depended on the teachers or sisters'*.

Lee first got into trouble when he was about 11 or 12 for breaking into cars parked at the shops, and stealing money *'for cool drinks and lollies'*. Along with Ali and Sam, he got *'hours'* for the crimes, which involved working at the Laverton hostel cleaning the yard and mowing the lawn. At his first court appearance, his mother attended and *'told him off'* but he relied on 'welfare' to give him directions as he did not really know what was happening in court. This first appearance did not stop him from taking money again and other 'trouble' had included assaults, hitting a policeman at the swimming pool - *'me and Matt were fighting. Cop came and started choking me, got a piece of pipe and hit him'* - and breaking into houses *'that's all. For money. By myself'*.

Lee said he stopped breaking into houses in 1989 when he got sent away to an outstation near Leonora. He claimed that they *'starved you there. Came back real skinny... Told the welfare that Oliver' had been giving him, Cameron and Otto Hamilton a 'rough time, giving us shit all the time, for nothing'*. Although he and other Lads were less inclined to commit property offences as they became older, they continued to have the occasional court appearance, usually for assault charges. In the early to mid nineties, it was the younger boys like Rory and Connor (see Chapter Seven), who were responsible for a large proportion of the juvenile property crimes in town.

Hutchings (1993) asserts that Aboriginal children in Port Augusta took the existence of the welfare and legal systems for granted. She describes the children as gaining knowledge of the system through contact with particular police, magistrates, lawyers and welfare personnel. Since these personnel had different perspectives, the information which informed the children's interpretations of the system, was distorted and fractured. The children's interpretations of the system are not fully articulated within her article, but it is worth testing her claim within the Laverton context.

Aside from complaints of individual police and of specific places such as hostels, outstations and detention centres because of harsh or unjust treatment, I never heard any of the Wongi youths talk of their experiences in terms of a 'system'. Only a few

talked of their 'rights' and those that did (like Fisher who was referred to in the previous chapter) had lived elsewhere, typically Kalgoorlie, for a considerable period of time (for example, Tommy in Kalgoorlie, Robyn in Kalgoorlie and Esperance).

As youngsters the source of information on key events was the 'welfare' but as the youths grew older, and more familiar with procedure and widened their experience of practitioners and places, this dependence declined. In addition, their knowledge of what to expect and what to do was informed by what their older relatives or someone like Fred Sharpe told them. Many local Aboriginal men had extensive experience of the criminal justice system, and were able to advise and assist in particular situations.

Gendered differences

When observing young people around town, and from young adults' recollections of past and recent events, it was apparent that girls were not as rowdy and as aggressive as the boys. The boys had a more prominent collective physical presence, literally in public spaces, and figuratively, in indicators for 'trouble' such as juvenile court data, youth centre and school records for disruptive incidents.

This was evident prior to the onset of adolescence, with males remembering very active play with their 'mates'. For example, Matt described his younger years thus - *'when I was young we'd build cubby houses, play houses, shoot birds with shanghais, just all the boys. Boys did their own thing, girls do their own things. I wasn't interested in girls then'*. At the youth centre, it was usually the local Wongi boys in their primary school years who were the most noisy and more frequently destructive of property. They were often inclined to spark disputes, which resulted in jostling, yelling and the throwing of objects, and to draw attention to their exploits and daredevilry on the trampoline, bikes and so on. Noticeable differences in play and pastimes between the sexes is not a peculiar feature of Laverton, with Martin (1993:20) describing at Aurukun, bands of boys from seven or eight years of age and into their early teens, moving around looking for excitement and stimulation, which would include fighting, firing shanghais and other forms of loud, visible and often disturbing play.

Females, however, who were part of the tough crowd, were more likely to be involved in childhood and teenage activities that were traditionally associated with boys. So for instance, Grania said that she and Kelly *'were the tomboys, same as the boys. Muck around in the bush, smoke at Marymac. Quite boring really'*. However, there was never the same degree of involvement, and it appeared that though girls joined in with male group activities, their participation was partial and intermittent and was facilitated at an early age, by kinship, and when older, by relationships with boyfriends.

Girls did have their own same-sex groups, but the groups were smaller and tended to be constellations of friendship pairs. Conflict would arise between groups and individuals but again, the fighting was not as public or as severe. Martin observed that *'the girls weren't into fighting and the guys were'* but did acknowledge in another conversation that they would resort to aggression and physical violence over certain issues:

Martin: My sisters never fought with anyone and didn't like to see anyone having a fight. But the other girls.. if someone was fighting, like there was a girl Fiona, she'd stand there and say, yeah yeah, bash each others heads in. But the other girls they'd say you guys are just dickheads, you're fools and stuff like that

JP: Did they fight each other too?

Martin: Yeah, over guys. Over rumours. Like a girl would start a rumour about another girl and the other girl would come and beat her head in. Or if another girl was playing around with another girl's boyfriend. That girl would go and give the other girl a hiding, just have a fight, or they'd just mouth at each other.

Martin believed that one reason for girls' less intense and only sporadic participation in 'trouble', such as offending and drinking binges, was the greater parental strictness exercised towards girls. His parents were stricter with his sisters because they were afraid of the sisters becoming pregnant. White young women, too, reported that they were subjected to more parental limitations from their early to mid teens than brothers, especially in relation to staying out at night.

Until more stable and serious intimate relationships were formed, notably from the mid-teens on, there was a reasonable degree of segregation between male and female groups outside of school hours. Martin, for example, said that the boys and the girls would hang out separately but on Friday nights they would always 'come together and get drunk'.

The segregated character of many activities largely went unremarked, and there were no claims of 'mixing'. This was in stark contrast to the claims made by those, who were predominantly in the 'tough crowd', of racial mixing in early adolescence and of a stated tolerance for the 'other' by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. To a large extent it seemed that it was taken for granted that girls would drink less, make less trouble, and certainly have less involvement in the formal justice system. For example, Gena offhandedly remarked that when she was younger '*me and Grania didn't drink that much, the guys used to of course*'. Again, the 'silence' on gender differences in terms of fighting and trouble has broader application. Despite growing interest in the gendered nature of criminality, primarily by feminist scholars, male dominance of adult and youth crime still tends to be taken for granted (Carrington 1993).

One young white woman felt she had paid a price for being 'tough' and 'hard' in her youth:

JP: What did you feel you were missing out on as a teenager?

Kelly: Everything. To grow up like a lady (laugh) In this town girls can't be ladies because they have to fight for their dignity. Because you'll get run down no matter whether you're new to town or not. I still get called a slut by the Wongis, if I don't give them money or a smoke.

Growing up

For the School Group the past year had been significant because of their experiences related to substance use (alcohol, smoking in front of parents, deodorant sniffing, marijuana). This seemed to indicate they had undergone the kind of experiences that were appropriate when approaching adulthood. They did not see themselves as necessarily mature or responsible yet, but as capable of exploring and enjoying

certain experiences which invited disapproval from adults, and which they expected to refrain from or to act more moderately as they grew older.

Di: I reckon it's been a good year, good experience from what we usually did in the last two years in high school and that. Basically it's been good.

Bronwyn: Become closer

Karl: Matured

Di: Some of us (laughter)

Bronwyn: I wouldn't say we've matured but I'd say we'd matured from what we were like in Year 8 and 9.

Emma: More experience and all that crap

Alison: Tried different things that you wouldn't try (laughing) knowing what things are like. This is out of school too by the way (laughter).

Karl: Been a good year

Alison: Other than the teachers

JP: Want to elaborate further on what you've experienced? (laughter)

Alison: Well, last Friday I got drunk not for the first time but this was the drunkest I've ever been, it was sickening, so I sicked up quite a lot up, it was not nice.

[Discussion about her drunken antics]

Bronwyn: Have any of us been drunk before this year?

[Chorus of replies] 'Five months ago' 'First time was this year' 'When was I caught by Betty?'

[Another story about Jenny getting 'maggoted' [drunk] first at Billy Goat then moved to the oval after Chuck was bitten by a millipede. Dog ate her sick, 'like pineapple'. Drinking UDL cans of Jim Bean and coke..]

In their conversations with me they expressed their pleasure in the irresponsibility of youth. This was summed up by Karl in the following fashion 'I don't take much notice of what she [mother] says, I don't really think about it. I try to live for the moment. I don't think ahead of anything, I just do it, if it's wrong it's wrong, if it's right it's right'. In a discussion about maturity, the School Group indicated that they thought full adulthood and 'maturity' were some time distant in the future.

JP: ...I was going to ask about maturity

Alison: When we are mature we understand the facts of life

JP: And what are they?

Alison: Like we know the difference between right and wrong. We know what's right and wrong, we know not to do things that are against the law kind of thing but we do it anyway (laugh)

Emma: What's going to help us in the future

Alison: We know what to look for

Jenny: We're maturing into the age where we're starting to look for a job, or raise a family sort of thing. Some people are

Alison: If we weren't maturing we'd be like acting like the age five or six like kiddies age.

Jenny: Like Karl

Karl: Can't be bothered commenting

Alison: I'm being stupid and sarcastic

JP: When do you become an adult do you think?

Karl: When we're old to vote

Alison: 20

Jenny: No I reckon we're mature adults

Karl: We become a young adult at 18, we start to vote and we get to go to pubs and stuff. But I reckon we become a responsible adult when...

Emma: After we've had kids and settled down

Karl: Between 20 and 30

Alison: I don't reckon

Jenny: You become an adult to me when you turn 20, soon as you're 20 you're an adult. Because at 18 you still act like an idiot

Karl: People have different levels of maturities

[indistinct conversation about particular individual]

JP: Related to experience, to having a family

Emma: Yeah

JP: Not such an age thing

Emma: No, don't think so

JP: What kind of things does it teach you when you have a family

Bronwyn: Respect, love, responsibilities and all those kind of things

JP: What do you think Emma how'd you define maturity?

Emma: Yeah, what Alison said, difference between right and wrong [indistinct]

JP: Would you feel mature at 15?

Karl: No, I don't feel mature

Emma: No, there's still...

Karl: I don't know, if there's a chance to be stupid I'll take it [laughter]. I don't want to be a responsible adult at the moment. No way.

The School Group referred to changes in the way adults treated them during the year. Parents were more inclined to openly acknowledge their smoking (even if they disapproved), and they had noticed they had some status as Year 10s because they were 'leaders' of the school and '*teachers will sometimes listen*'. For the white young adults, the ages of 15 and 16 were remembered as watersheds when they were allowed more freedom and trusted more by their parents, and when they made the transition from school into the workforce.

From his school days, the white young adult, Scott, knew of five peers who got work in mining, one of whom was female. Although his 'best friends' had left town he said he stayed because of his job, as the 'money' was much better than in Perth and Laverton was one of the few places where a 16 year old could get a job. His girlfriend, Gena, was the only local white young woman that I knew of who had a job with the mining company, which occurred after her father, an employee at the mine, arranged for her to do casual work. It was more commonplace for young women, if they stayed on in town once they had finished Year 10, to work longer hours in the shops, where they already had experience as part-time workers. Grania for example had been working at the supermarket when she fell pregnant at the age of 17. Two other young women who had remained on in town were both young mothers, although one married a white mine worker and the other a local Wongi youth. Most of the white young adults regretted not completing high school and stated an intention to go back to study 'to complete' their final years of schooling.

None of the Wongi youths, except for Stella, expressed interest in undertaking study. Aside from Lily, none of them had worked for long in a full time job although the majority had sporadically been involved in work experience. The Lads had participated in several programs run by a youth centre manager and organised through Wongatha Wonganarra. Several of them (for example Lee and Tim) had a few months experience out on a nearby station with the Aboriginal family, the Higgins. Two started apprenticeships, Tim as a mechanic and Matt as a butcher, but neither lasted for very long in the positions. As well, a few had stayed for several months at Tjirrkali where they had received CDEP money, although this experience did not appear to result in any further work experience or skills development for either of the young men concerned. When I asked the Lads about working in the mines, there was universal distaste at the idea - one said he would he never work at the mines because it was '*too smelly*' and another said he hated the thought of going underground.

From their mid-teens on, the Lads group became increasingly splintered, in the sense that fewer were in town at any one time. They were more inclined to spend periods of time away, individually, in other locations - Tjirrkali, the detention centre in Perth, Kalgoorlie, Mount Margaret - and this movement was accelerated as they gained their driving licenses and obtained cars, and formed relationships with young women from other localities (for example Matt moved to Mount Margaret and Lee visited Tjirrkali). Several people commented on how they had 'calmed down' after they began to trickle back from Geraldton in mid-1993. Originally a group of the Lads had gone with Fred to Geraldton for a short visit to attend a basketball carnival. They had problems with the car and were gone for months. When I asked Matt why he had come back to Laverton, he admitted he was 'homesick'. The non-Aboriginal young adult Martin said that after the Geraldton trip the Lads had gone their 'different ways'. He also believed they were less involved in property crime because 'I suppose they've just grown up. They say to themselves I'm too old to break-in. This time go to jail instead of community hours'. Another factor in his view was the installation of alarms in the supermarket and other shops. Fred believed work reduced the likelihood that the Lads would get into trouble - 'young blokes haven't been in much trouble lately cos they been at work. Now the work's finished, don't know what will happen'.

Drinking alcohol remained a significant part of the adult Lads' lifestyle. Their behaviour when drunk could still result in 'trouble' with others and with the police. For example, at a party at Stella's place, Leo smashed the sound system because nobody would play the cassette he wanted. His cousin, Lily, observed that 'he's silly, he doesn't know how to be happy when he's drunk'. There was a greater risk of violence when in an inebriated state, and Becky referred to a recent incident where one of the Lads was violent 'Matt he can, gets real violent, he can get real violent when he's drunk. If there was a knife nearby he probably would've stabbed Grania'. A sign of the Lads growing older, according to Martin, was the way they drank - 'they still get pissed by it's not something they're going to organise'. Police intervention was most likely when drunken fighting occurred in certain places, for example the pub or out in Laver Place (see Chapters Four and Eight).

I asked Martin what he thought the Lads would be doing in ten years time:

Martin: Hopefully they'll get out of the habit of alcohol. Cos that's just going to take all their money and it seems like they like getting drunk. Probably want to stay that way. I don't think they've got much of a future, if they stay the way they are now.

JP: What do they talk about doing?

Martin: Quite a few of them talk about getting out of town. As soon as they get the money they're going to go somewhere else.

JP: Like where?

Martin: Geraldton, Esperance, sometimes Perth

JP: They have a hankering to leave

Martin: Yeah. If all of them got given a chance they probably would. If they got given the money and were told they had certain accommodation they'd probably go

JP: Why do you think they like the grog so much?

Martin: Probably thinks its fun

JP: Like getting smashed, like binge drinking?

Martin: Yeah, I think so. None of them sort of like go home, drink a Jim Bean and coke and that's it. They probably take the whole bottle and a couple of cartons with them. I think they like getting really pissed, continuously, continual drinking, drinking, drinking.

[JP comment on how Matt looked terrible most of last year. Asked whether they wanted to go to the pub]

Martin: Yeah, they like going to the pub I don't know why. I went in the pub and it's a dropkick place. It's so boring. I'd rather stay home and get pissed than stand up and watch someone play pool. And go there and get pissed too much and watch someone play pool. Oh yeah, I think they all want to go there. I don't know what attracts them besides the alcohol. Before it was even a bigger issue, like if you went in the pub and you were underage you were tops, you know, wicked. Now quite a few kids like Alex doesn't drink, he's turned off completely from drinking which I think is good. I think Lyle as well. I think its because they found marijuana. Unless they change what they want, like all they want is to get pissed, unless they change I think the pub will be the place to go. Before like, it was the youth club, I think when you get older it's now the pub. If you go to Perth, it would be the nightclub.

Differences which emerged between non-Wongi and Wongi as they entered adulthood, were indicated by a meeting I witnessed outside the pub on a Friday night. When younger, Malcolm and Lee were friends with the latter participating in some of the Lads' exploits. However, since school Malcolm had worked at the service station and for the Shire, while Lee had only participated in short-term bouts of work experience. When they met outside the pub Lee was quite drunk and kept poking Malcolm in the chest. Lee explained that the pub would not let him in his dirty track suit pants and he wanted Malcolm to lend him a pair. Malcolm laughed and kept walking, leaving Lee to talk with his former welfare officer.

The non-Aboriginal young adults tended to refer laughingly to their behaviour when they were young. For instance, Gena said that they were '*little shits when we were little kids. Used to do anything that would get us into trouble*'. Their perspective on the town and their peers, and their behaviour, had changed because of growing older and because some of them had spent considerable periods of time living in bigger places. They implied that the more recent adult experiences had enabled them to see Laverton and their youth in context. Both Martin and Scott had gone to city schools and they stressed that the kind of fighting that went on in Laverton, between teenagers, was not such a big deal. Thus Scott compared the Laverton school with the large high schools he had attended in the eastern states where there were '*Greeks together, Italians together, you're in your own sort of race. Here.. no, black people were my friends, white people were my friends, Asians. It was pretty good. Had good three or four friends did same sort of things.... This school is pretty tame*'.

Martin believed he found the town more congenial since returning, because the place had improved and because he had broader experiences of Perth on which to base his judgements:

JP: So do you think Laverton is a reasonable place for teenagers?

Martin: Now it is. Before they were too worried about images, about themselves, about being tough. Being tough was really important then. But now, I don't think being tough, well actually fighting is too important now.

JP: Did the kids get really nasty when they fought?

Martin: No, not really. They just punch each other and whoever would fall down first and would not get up was the loser. But they wouldn't cut each other up or stuff like that. I suppose Laverton now because all that tension has died down, I think it would be a pretty good place for someone to grow up. Unless the person wants to do different things and go different places all the time. But you'll hear them complain all the time but they seem pretty well off to me. If they were down in Perth they'd probably do the same thing. Oh, they might go shopping, meet each other in town. But basically they'd be doing what they'd be doing here. Except in Perth they'd be doing it to a different extent.

Here they're more limited.

JP: Do you think you would have thought that before you went away to Perth?

Martin: Yeah, I think it's because I went to Perth. That's why I think that way.

JP: Seen the good side of things

Martin: Yeah. If I'd stayed here and not have gone to Perth I probably would've thought it was just a dump all round. But now that I've gone to Perth, cos I have had shit times there as well where I didn't do anything at all.

On another occasion he indicated that he liked having a break from Laverton and being in Perth - *'quite pleased to be away from this crowd. Like, not that they'd pissed me off, just that, different crowd, different scene, something better. It wasn't always necessarily better, sometimes it was'*.

Growing apart

Despite white young adults saying that black and white kids used to hang out together when they were at school¹¹³, their comments showed that a racial divide became more apparent in the years after they left school. Scott mentioned several Aboriginal young adults, although no longer resident in town, who he continued to stay in touch with. More generally he observed *'[I] never had any problems with [the local Wongis]. Nor Gena. They sort of know us¹¹⁴, they do their own thing'*.

His girlfriend, Gena, revealed that she had no contact with anyone from her school days, though she called those days the best time of her life. For her, the gulf that now existed between her and local Wongi young adults was epitomised by the changes to a particular Lad:

Gena: Tim's just a prick, dirty horrible.. never used to be like that, used to love himself. We used to.. at school only Aboriginal used to love himself. Now, ugh, makes my skin crawl. He's let himself go, never used to be like that. Never ever. Used to be better than half the white people at the school...I've just got no time for him, not anymore.

Two other white young women talked at some length on how they did not maintain their friendships with the Lads after they all left school. They attributed their self-confessed racism to flaws in the behaviour and outlook of most of the Wongi young adults. For Kelly at least her negative attitude was part of a much bigger disenchantment with local Wongis:

JP: Are you friends with Sam, Lee and the others?

Becky: At one stage. Really haven't had anything to do with them for about two years now

JP: How come?

Becky: I just haven't got time for them

Kelly: We grew up and they haven't. Always stoned (indistinct) Not as blind as when you're hanging

¹¹³ The mixing between different groups, although more commonplace in relation to the in-crowd, tended to be exaggerated as the following comments by Martin indicated - *'At school the Aboriginal kids felt comfortable around with their own, yeah, like around Aboriginals. They didn't tend, like you didn't see an Aboriginal girl have a best friend was white. Except for the Walkers, the Walker kids, they were pretty easy. But most of the kids came from the Mission. They tended to have their own racial group. But it wasn't because they didn't like the other races, it was just they felt more comfortable. If there was a bunch of white kids there they'd probably go and sit with them'*.

¹¹⁴ To demonstrate how he was accepted by local Wongis, Scott underlined that he had a nickname, and that, having lost his kneecap in a car accident, the 'Aboriginals' who were in the car that hit his vehicle *'have all been nice to us'*.

around with them

Becky: **They always want something.** Money or smokes

Kelly: When you were at school you didn't care if they asked for a smoke or a loan.

Becky: That was the in-thing, sort of.

Kelly: Cos you live on your own now, you got to support yourself. And they asked for cigarettes and that and you get really angry and say, you get money off the government (indistinct) why don't you buy your own smokes. I get really angry with them when I go to the shop. I used to work with them, go to school with them now I'm a bit racist now.

Becky: Me too that's what I said to Grania last week, I'm starting to get prejudiced. The only one I keep talking to is Lily¹¹⁵, and Jordan.

Instead of focusing on their appearance, Becky and Kelly chose to highlight the social distance between themselves and the Lads by reference to the latter's criminal activities.

Becky: Like Sam he was in jail. He got back to town after being sent away in one of those homes thing

JP: And he stole a wallet

Becky: The other night, Friday night, he went into the pub stole all this money off [?] stole this bloke's wallet and everything. Then he went to Pullets, broke into their house while they was asleep in the bedroom. Had a feed and fell asleep on the floor

[Discussion about whether he's still in jail]

Becky: As soon as he come back to town he's getting himself into trouble again. It's like Ali he must like it in that place.

Kelly: When did Leo get out? Or didn't go in?

Becky: He's not in

Kelly: Did he go in for attempted rape? Or was that Ali?

Becky: Ali

JP: Did Ali try and rape someone?

Kelly: Louis's [police officer's] missus. Right here in the alleyway next to this house (laugh)

[more on this incident and conversation about flu].

JP: He's got into heaps of trouble has he?

Becky: Yeah, apparently he's got one filing cabinet to himself

JP: Wasn't too bad when I knew him

Kelly: He was still young. See, **they all go bad because they've got nobody to look after them.** Like Lee, he knows he shouldn't drink because of his condition but he does. And his father used to really beat him. And then he was a really nice bloke when he was sober. I had a lot of time for Harry and Pam

Becky: Yeah, I knew Harry just before he died. And Pam's really nice.

Kelly: See I spent two years at Wonganarra so I got to know them all when they're sober as well as when they're drunk. And now.. [indistinct] steal shops, clothes. I've sort of gone racist. **I never see anyone sober...**

In a conversation with just Kelly, she had forthrightly stated to me that she had stopped liking the local Wongis¹¹⁶. Her antagonism was mainly directed at practices that were a common source of complaint amongst white residents, so that she too referred to drinking and begging. As a 'local', however, her complaints had a slightly different tone, in that they expressed personal disappointment and referred to ingratitude and a worsening situation:

Kelly: I don't like Aboriginals here anymore. And I grew up with these people down here. I grew up with these people here. Like Bert and Rita I used to go over when I was five. Five o'clock in the

¹¹⁵ Becky said that Lily was different because she worked at Wongatha Wonganarra and always gave back what she borrowed.

¹¹⁶ Kelly was also critical of the people at Warburton -they don't respect anything even up there. They don't respect what you're trying to do for them'.

morning, every morning. I used to disappear out of the house go over, this is when they had little Proctor, when he was newborn. Go and cook the damper and do all the nappies and clean the camp up. This was when they were living on the flat in a humpy. That was good. Now they sort of say yeah, you're my sister, you're this. But I don't respect them anymore, because they're alcoholics. They never used to drink. Like most of them. Like I used to be great friends with the Browns, don't get on with any of them anymore... Like Muriel she lent me two dollars when I was about 10 and she still remembers it. Now ever since that day I've been giving her bloody money. Now the other day I flipped my lid because I'm not doing it anymore. Now that was when they never used to drink. I got no respect for them anymore because they're not trying. They're ungrateful for what people are trying to do for them.

JP: Why has the drinking got worse, like Muriel?

Kelly: I don't know [end of tape].

For the non-Aboriginal young adults, upbringing was the major explanation for the increasingly apparent divide between Wongi and non-Wongi peers. A young woman, who was never one of the in-crowd and who did not seem to know well any of the local Aboriginal youth, saw all of them as victims of low parental expectations:

Hannah: It's a pity he [Tim] didn't go to school.

JP: Most Aboriginal kids don't seem to complete Year 10

Hannah: I think it's got a lot to do with their parents and their relatives because.. Like with me I probably wouldn't have wanted to go on and do any other schooling other than year 10 if my parents hadn't of been the way they are. Cos they wanted me to do something with my life, not that I have (laugh).

In contrast, Martin who was a friend of the Lads for years (after he started to play basketball) recognised variations in their family backgrounds and home environments. Nevertheless, he still saw the influence of parenting as the principal cause of these variations:

Martin: Tim may seem the same as everyone else but he's got, he has higher expectations of himself than all these boys do. He'd rather be out working, he'd rather have the money rather than sit around and like wait for the money. He'd rather go out and work for it

JP: Why do you think he's different?

Martin: Cos his parents, his parents, they weren't really really strict but they like knew what was wrong and right. And they knew that if they didn't tell him not to go somewhere, he'd go there and he'd like do something stupid. Like he'd always get pissed and stuff like that but if his father wanted him to do something he'd do it. Whereas like with someone else, if their father wanted them to do something they'd say get stuffed or [indistinct].

Only one young adult¹¹⁷ expected to stay on in Laverton, and did not express a wish to visit or stay elsewhere. Other local Wongis who were interested in going on trips or wished to move away for a while (for example Lee to see his father's people in South Australia, and Lily wanting to go where there was a beach, like Esperance) implied that they would continue to come back to the town. In contrast the white young adults wanted to leave, mostly to Kalgoorlie, and expressed no interest in returning at a later date. Only two of the School Group were expecting to stay in town the following year:

¹¹⁷ This young man Alex seemed to find everywhere equally boring - Tjirkali was boring because 'people just sit down, mainly playing cards', Perth was 'boring.. mainly played space invader machines, nothing to do there', and Kalgoorlie was 'a bit boring there too, hard to find a place to stay'.

JP: Who's coming back to visit Laverton?

Karl: Have to. Parents probably be here till 2025

Jenny?: No

Emma Probably

Alison: Don't think so after move to Perth

Karl: After I finish Year 12 hopefully I'll never have to see this dump again

Alison: I'll miss this place

Emma: I will for a while

Karl: I will too

Jenny: Two years and two days since I've been here

Conclusion

Over the years, for a young teenager to belong to the 'in-crowd' involved earning the sobriquet of being tough and hard. Attitudes and behaviours associated with being tough were influenced by practices and beliefs associated with the local Wongi residents. The most obvious incorporation of local Wongi practices by local non-Aboriginal youth was the use of certain words, speaking 'lingo' and expressing adolescent feelings of discomfort through the use in quite specific ways of the word 'shame', that mimicked the way Wongi people employed the term.

However, this did not translate into wholesale acceptance or identification with all things Aboriginal or Wongi. It did not produce an intellectual curiosity about Aboriginal life and the School Group and white young adults lacked knowledge and experiences related to 'traditional' Aboriginal life. Nor did it result in a politicised consciousness of racism, although they were inclined to see themselves as more tolerant than their parents and other adults in town.

With local youth there were certain practices such as smoking and underage drinking that nearly everyone experimented with or participated in, although there were significant gender differences in the degree to and manner in which they were practiced. Primarily there were same sex friendship groups, with the girls involved in offending as secondary participants rather than as instigators. Being in a relatively isolated mining town contributed to a repertoire of styles, tastes and behaviours, related to the dominant modes of masculine bravado.

Before making the transition from school and into more stable relationships with the opposite sex, there appeared to be a common recognition and identification amongst the tougher young teenagers which transcended race, culture and gender. This sense of solidarity appeared to be reinforced by their small numbers and the experience of being problematised by adults. The tougher kids too shared a not dissimilar class background despite the disparity in income between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, as their parents predominantly held working class occupations if white or were unemployed if black.

What was remarkable was the divide that opened up from the mid-teens on between local white and Wongi young people. For the majority, they 'grew apart' to the extent that by the time they were in their late teens their lives very rarely intersected in a meaningful way.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Administering justice

Foucault (1977) asserts that historically, in western societies, the bad economy of arbitrary power and the irregular nature of justice created an impetus for reform. Pre-modern societies had large margins of tolerated illegality. Foucault characterises modernity as requiring a rule of certainty so that the power to punish occurs within a climate of irrefutable certainty. The rule of certainty demanded open hearings, publication of laws and the organisation of surveillance. The aim was to establish the truth of the crime, which had to be completely proven, based on empirical research. However, Foucault acknowledges that this mechanistic paradigm had humanistic elements inserted within it, primarily in relation to the sentencing of convicted felons. He refers to the principle of moderation - a 'discourse of the heart' - a sensibility of those with the power to punish. This discourse has been most prominent in relation to responses to children who offend.

Inter-cultural contexts such as country towns like Laverton offer an opportunity to explore the margins of tolerated illegality in the administrative practices of juvenile justice which aspire to conform to the ideology of 'rule by law' and 'equality before the law'. One aspect to the parameters of tolerated marginality - discretionary power - will be examined in the next chapter. This chapter begins with accounts of the juvenile court and how it differs to the adult court. The different components to the 'system' are then described, with an emphasis on key participants in the process. Local information is presented based on mainly police records and from observations of court proceedings. Major issues include distinctive characteristics of offenders and offences, and differences between local and Ngaanyatjarra youth. As the police play a crucial role their work is explored through an examination of briefs prepared for court. The court process is described and analysed in terms of it providing a 'space' to ascertain a young person's comprehension of events, to negotiate placements and outcomes, and to make judicial statements.

Juvenile justice

Children are by law in Australia defined as dependants and under the guardianship of their parents or caregiver. A key principle underpinning the formation and continuing existence of the juvenile court is that children are not as responsible for their actions because of their age. Although children over the age of criminal responsibility¹¹⁸ are assumed to be able to differentiate between wrong and right, it is believed they are 'immature' in that they do not have the social capacity of adults. Through the court, the state seeks to regulate and protect children in their 'best interest' which has led to welfare concerns becoming inextricably bound up with criminal law proceedings.

¹¹⁸ The minimum age of criminal responsibility varies across Australian jurisdictions. During the period of 'fieldwork' (1992-1994), the minimum age in Western Australia was 10 years of age.

Although a foundational premise of liberal ideology is equality before the law, since the turn of the century with the establishment of the children's court, children have never been equal before the law, in the strict or formal sense of adherence to principle, as individual assessment is required of their maturity and social circumstances before the court can make an 'appropriate' disposition. Designed to have a salutary effect and depending on the assessment, the outcome may have several ambiguous intentions - to educate, to 'help', to punish¹¹⁹. Because the judicial process of the children's court transfers attention from the offence to the character of the child and his or her 'social background' there is a range of normative concepts which inform the practice of juvenile justice - for example indicators of maturity, good parenting and family structures. These concepts have been challenged for class, ethnocentric and gender biases (Carrington 1993).

With individual cases before both the juvenile and adult courts it is common practice in sentencing to refer to 'sociological' reasons for individual actions as mitigating factors. Arguably there are two reasons for doing so: firstly, they may explain why the crime was committed (for example the need for money or a response to a racist slur) and secondly, they may indicate appropriate penalties (for example, are they in a position to pay a fine, is such a sentence culturally relevant¹²⁰). This may involve the defence counsel fleshing out individual circumstances.

With the sentencing of juveniles it is useful to consider the personal details which are typically construed as pertinent to the sentencing process. For instance, an individual's level of income and residential arrangements would seem important at face value, when considering a fine or community work. With children, most are economically dependent on adults at least until 15, so the most popular penalty of the adult court, the fine, is not usually a viable option as something which will affect the child¹²¹. If the child is transient and without a reliable source of income, for example not reliant on a particular 'family unit' or adult for money or where the latter are unreliable providers, then the commission of an offence, such as theft, is more explicable. Certainly in such a situation, where need is the explanation given by the offender, the defence counsel would more than likely introduce the 'circumstances' in expectation of a reduced penalty. The danger, recognised since the seventies, lies in the imposition of a more onerous penalty (restrictions) under the guise of 'helping' the child in these circumstances. Two broad conceptual models have been used to capture the tensions within the juvenile system - the welfare and the justice models - and some commentators have tended to see them as separate and contradictory approaches. Implicit within the welfare model is the view that children's criminal actions have to be understood in terms of their past and

¹¹⁹The orthodox reasons for a sentence are usually to punish, to rehabilitate, to deter individuals and the public from crime and to protect the public from further harm by 'incapacitation' (detention) if necessary.

¹²⁰The impetus to create more 'culturally appropriate' sentencing has accelerated since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. South Australia has taken the step of stipulating through legislation that 'cultural factors' have to be taken into account when sentencing juveniles, but no such legislative or formal requirement operated within Western Australia during the period under consideration.

¹²¹One response to this was already mentioned in Chapter One, that is the increasing trend for juvenile courts to have the power to punish parents for their 'culpability' in the commission of the offence.

current social circumstances, and that their actions rather than being deliberate and culpable in the sense of a mature adult's actions, indicate they need help. In contrast, the justice model places emphasis on children as rational and responsible beings who deserve the same legal rights and share similar responsibilities for their actions as adults (Beresford and Omaji 1996, Naffine 1993). As a result, the justice paradigm places the stress on a sentence being proportional to the offence with prior record being taken into account.

As indicated in Chapter One, the trend of the past two decades in Australia has been to introduce a more justice focused approach into the juvenile system, with sentencing having moved from treatment (medical roots) to rehabilitation (impact of social psychology) to punishment fitting the crime. Nowadays, except for a custodial sentence and through breaches of court ordered sentences, the only way for a child charged with offences to be coerced into residential care in Western Australia is through the setting of bail, with the condition of residence in a hostel. Where this is the case, or where the child is remanded in custody or has been detained in police custody, the sentencing court takes the period in residential care or detention into account when deciding upon the disposition.

There is a rough tariff of penalties employed in the children's court. In ascending order of seriousness they are: dismissal, the fine, the good behaviour bond, the community service order, probation, the conditional release order, and detention. Local arrangements, however, for penalties can differ widely¹²². For example a probation order can involve a wide range of restrictive conditions but the child and his or her caregiver have to agree to the conditions and, should something occur or not occur which may constitute a breach of conditions, the responsible supervising officer has the discretion to decide whether a complaint should be lodged with the court. Another example is the community service order - the court sets the number of hours but again there is considerable discretion with regard to the nature of the 'work' and how the hours are completed. Similarly, with bail conditions, local practices and conditions can vary widely. In Laverton for instance, a condition of bail may include residence in the local hostel, residence at an outstation or at one of the Ngaanyatjarra settlements. The difficulties associated with 'supervising' a teenager are rarely touched upon in the literature, or how supervising officers reach a decision to breach a court bail or sentence order.

Carrington (1993) states that the children's court is not necessarily the centre of the justice process, and may only be peripheral to it. She argues that the opposing models of punishment (judicial) and welfare (non-judicial) overlooks strategic alliances between

¹²² As noted in Chapter One, in Western Australia the *Young Offenders Act 1994* which came into force in 1995 subsumed and altered some of these sentencing alternatives. Community service orders and probation have been amalgamated under the category of youth community based orders; conditional release orders have been replaced by two kinds of intensive supervision orders, and the sentencing court can now stipulate a period of supervised release post-detention. The essential hierarchy remains unchanged, and the overall argument, that the actual administration of community based/supervision orders varies from place to place, still remains applicable.

welfare and justice, thereby marginalising judicial logic and the concomitant de-centring of the children's court. According to Carrington, the nexus between child welfare and juvenile justice still exists because the mundane daily management of the abused child and the abusive child relies on similar forms of knowledge and power. She points out that 95% of young people plead guilty and that the primary function of the court is to determine outcomes. She claims that it is not the magistrates who determine outcomes, but the social work, psychology and educative agents who supply the court with the necessary information. She depicts the court as 'an assembly site for an array of assessments', not a judicial site for testing evidence (Carrington 1993:114).

Carrington (1993) argues that to construe the court as being at the centre or at the top of the process vastly over-estimates the importance of judicial forms of decision making. The court she claims has an administrative role which shifts the focus from the nature of the offence to the nature of the individual child. Decisions commonly rest on assessments of the family, and the magistrates are typically not in possession of the knowledge required to make an order appropriate to the individual child and have to rely on the 'gatekeepers' who provide the assessments. Deficit discourses (moral, psychological and social) underpin the forms of knowledge used in the courts. She divides these forms into three categories - inquisitorial (home report), classificatory (psychology report), interpretive (home and psychology reports used for assessment). Hence, deficit discourses predominate because the traditional juridical logic of the penalty tariff is dissolved in favour of a decision-making grid which incorporates social work as a mode of inquiry and psychology as a form of calculus.

Carrington (1993) is much influenced by Donzelot, who in his seminal work *The Policing of Families* acknowledges his debt to Foucault. Donzelot (1979) coined the term 'tutelary complex' to capture the forces which are brought to bear on children and their families. He uses the juvenile court to exemplify aspects of the complex, by portraying the processes as 'an infrastructure of prevention' and 'an educative machinery' directed at children believed to be at risk of becoming criminal. He underscores the difference to the adult court where there is a formal opposition between prosecution and defence. The juvenile court, by transgressing the distinction between assistance and the penal, widens the orbit of the judicial to include all measures of 'educative' correction. Thus the court places minors in a mechanism of interminable investigation and perpetual judgement of their 'progress'. He asserts "the juvenile court is not a minor jurisdiction for minors but the mainstay of a tutelary complex that also encompasses pre-delinquency...This central importance of juvenile law is due to the pivotal position it occupies between an agency that sanctions offences (the retributive justice of ordinary law) and a composite group of agencies that distribute norms" (1979:112).

Having noted the rise of social work as an occupation, he argues that the effects of social work should be examined as strategic dispositions of three agencies: judicial, psychiatric and educative. Social inquiry reports (which were brought into general application in France in 1912) he argues perform the obligatory function of relaying knowledge between the judicial setting and surveillance practices. Referring to the homogeneity of

reports, Donzelot (1979:117) claims that they are the "results of an inquisitorial, investigatory knowledge (the social inquiry) and those of a classificatory knowledge (medical-psychiatric examinations and psychological tests) are unified by an interpretive knowledge inspired by psychoanalysis". He claims that there is an ordering of discourses staggered according to a hierarchy of expertise, with the social inquiry being the chief technical instrument for regulating the logistics of social work. Hence assessments are made of the minors' 'educability', of the 'risky' family to indicate whether appropriate socialisation is occurring.

Donzelot (1979) highlights the legacy of nineteenth century philanthropy which created new forms of positive power - effective advice rather than humiliating charity, the preserving norm rather than destructive repression. The consequence was the new deployment of de-politicising assistance that sought to exercise legitimate moral influence, by providing advice instead of or with material aid. It contributed as well to discourses about the neglect, exploitation and dangerousness of children from 'morally deficient' families, which threatened the quality of the population and the strength of the nation.

I would argue that welfare concerns permeate throughout the Australian administration of juvenile justice, informing the conceptual and technical instruments of classification. This was most noticeable in explanations for Aboriginal offending and legitimisation for intervention, a theme picked up on in the next chapter. In Laverton it was, however, the police and magistrate who made critical decisions in the process, with the rest of the justice practitioners only seeking to influence these players, most notably the magistrate.

The police are powerful gatekeepers who can influence all subsequent events. In Western Australia the police power to apprehend offenders or suspected offenders is limited to those committing offences defined by the criminal code and under the Police Act 1892 (s43) including acting in a disorderly manner, using obscene language or otherwise disturbing the peace. Having apprehended a suspect, police decide on whether to lay charges and the type of charges that may be laid. Another aspect to police discretion is whether to proceed by way of caution, summons or arrest. A young person can be summoned to appear before the court on a specified date, for example in Laverton to appear at the next listed magistrate's court, but if he or she is arrested then he or she should be brought before the court within a short period of time (this was 48 hours during the research period from 1992 to 1994). Once an arrest occurs the police determine, based on criteria set out by legislation, whether to keep the young person in custody or to release him or her on bail until a listed court day.

The young person's first court appearance does not necessarily result in an outcome, as the matter may be remanded by the magistrate to a later date with the court determining whether the person will be released on bail (and the conditions of bail) or detained in custody until that date. At the first or subsequent appearance a plea from the young

person is usually taken for the charge(s)¹²³. Where a guilty plea is recorded or a hearing has been held and guilt determined, then the magistrate has to decide upon an appropriate disposition. In the Laverton juvenile court it was this issue, negotiations over appropriate dispositions, which took up most of the time before and often during court. This subject will be pursued later in the chapter. First, though, local information on offenders and offences is presented for what it reveals about juvenile crime in the district.

Local information

Statistics are the product and a representation of complex processes. The numbers are collected, categorised and interpreted by different agencies for their own organisational imperatives - to monitor, to manage, to predict - for local and central purposes. Different pictures of juvenile crime for the area, of the levels and the kinds of offenders and crimes were generated by the DCD statistics and statistics extracted from police briefs. Table 4 presents data, from DCD records, on appearances for the Laverton children's court from 1990 to 1993.

Table 4: Laverton's children's court appearances, 1990 - 1993.

	1990/1991		1991/1992		1992/1993	
Number of appearances	84		35		31	
% male	89%		86%		77%	
Ethnicity	Aboriginal	88%	Unavailable		Aboriginal	81%
	Non-Aboriginal	4%			Non-Aboriginal	6%
	Unknown	8%			Unknown	13%
Age	10-12	1%	10-12	0%	10-12	13%
	13-15	23%	13-15	17%	13-15	6%
	16-17	64%	16-17	75%	16-17	74%
	18	11%	18	6%	18	6%
			Unknown	3%		
Most serious offence per appearance	Good order	13%	Good order	40%	Good order	55%
	Against the person	4%	Against the person	6%	Against the person	10%
	Theft	21%	Theft	31%	Theft	35%
	Drug	32%				
	Other	19%	Other	23%		

Source: WA DCD

From this data, it would appear that there is an overall decline in juvenile offending with a dramatic decrease in appearances from 1990 to 1993. Other trends that suggest themselves include an apparently consistent proportion of Aboriginal appearances, an increase in female juvenile appearances, an increase in younger offenders, and a narrowing in the range of offences for which juveniles were charged, with a large increase in the proportion of good order offences and an increase in the proportion of theft offences over the three years. It also appears there was a fairly consistent

¹²³ Before a plea was taken the magistrate sometimes first checked that the young person had an opportunity to talk with an legal representative or DCD officer.

proportion of offences that was against the person and that drug offending ceased after mid-1991¹²⁴. Certainly, anecdotal evidence from young people and from the police suggested there was a decline in offending by local young people. However, the police stressed that more serious offences were being committed by young people while intoxicated by petrol fumes. An examination of the police briefs¹²⁵ for 1992 and 1993 revealed some interesting information on the numbers and the identity of young people who appeared in the Laverton court, the nature of the charges, and the process including outcomes.

In 1992¹²⁶ a total of 29 individual young people appeared in the Laverton children's court (some of these appeared on more than one occasion). All of the young people were Aboriginal and two were females. Of the 29, 22 (76%) were residents in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, of which nearly all of them (20 or 91%) appeared in court on petrol sniffing related charges or were identified as petrol sniffers. A similar picture emerges for 1993 with 35 individual young people appearing in court of which 33 were Aboriginal and eight were female. Once again, the majority (26 or 74%) were from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, including all of the young women. With the Ngaanyatjarra youth 22 (85%) faced petrol sniffing related charges or were identified as petrol sniffers.

From this data we can conclude that only about one quarter of the young people appearing in the Laverton court might be termed 'local'. Of the seven 'local' young people who had court appearances in 1992, six of them were male. Three of the seven were residing at Mount Margaret (including the young woman), one was listed as having 'no fixed place of abode' and one was currently resident in Kalgoorlie¹²⁷. Three of the seven (Lee, Ali and Larry) also had court appearances in 1993. Aside from these three, in 1993 there were six other 'locals' with court appearances, two of whom were non-Aboriginal youths. The four Aboriginal youths were from Mount Margaret, a visitor from Esperance/Roebourne who had taken up residence in Laverton for nearly a year

¹²⁴ The abrupt cessation in recorded drug offences in mid-1991 was probably the result of changes to the way petrol sniffing was defined as an offence. Up until 1988 young people inhaling petrol were charged with the possession or use of a deleterious substance. However, in 1988 the Western Australian Supreme Court ruled that unless substances carried warnings, that they were deleterious when not used for its prescribed purpose, then the substance was not deleterious. In 1989 by-laws were promulgated in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands which made it an offence to supply or use specified substances for the purpose of inhalation (Brady 1992). As a result, young people were bringing brought down to Laverton court from the Lands for breaching a by-law rather than a 'drug offence'.

¹²⁵ Police briefs were prepared on charges, and filed alphabetically for the year under individuals' names. The briefs contained personal information about the person charged, a short description of 'the facts' which led the police to lay charges, and notes about the court process and outcomes. A person charged with an offence or offences usually had at least one appearance in the Laverton court before the circuit magistrate. The other main courts where he or she might have appearances were the Warburton and Kalgoorlie courts. As explained in Chapter One, by 1992 all juvenile matters were remanded to the magistrate for determination, who as the circuit magistrate for the region would cover the three courts named above.

¹²⁶ Police briefs were filed under each year, whilst DCD figures were collated for financial years. As a result the numbers are slightly different for the period 1992-93.

¹²⁷ One of the Mount Margaret youths, and the Kalgoorlie and the 'no fixed place of abode' youths, had spent many of their earlier childhood years in Laverton

(Lyle) and intermittent Laverton dwellers (Connor and Keenan). Of the total of nine, none were female.

In 1992 there were 25 charges laid against local youth (Sam 7, Mark 5, Ali and Lee 4) relating to 13 distinct incidents whilst in the following year, 1993, there were 49 charges laid against local youth (Lee 10, Ali 10, Connor 16) relating to 25 separate incidents. Over a two year period there was a total of 38 'criminal incidents', 33 of which occurred in Laverton¹²⁸ which did not constitute a great deal of local offending. In 1992 each person was involved in a maximum of three incidents while in 1993 the range was between one and ten incidents per person with the majority (six of the nine) facing charges relating to only one incident. Significant variables related to the extent and nature of local juvenile crime was the frequency of incidents, along with the seriousness of the incidents and who was affected by them. Over the two years, most incidents by local youth related to drunken fights (about one third) or property offences (either burglaries or theft made up just over a half). With violent crime, the most serious charge was assault occasioning bodily harm and there were three of these over the two year period, plus there were three assaults against police officers. Less serious charges included threatening behaviour and disorderly conduct. Six incidents related to group fighting amongst Aboriginal people, which resulted in a number of charges including assaults against police when they intervened or in two instances, individual complaints of assaults from family members. Other victims of assaults were a white car owner, white men outside the pub, and a schoolteacher. A significant 'hot spot' was the pub and its environs with several melees resulting in charges of assault, disorderly conduct, and resisting arrest. Other places where brawling was more likely to occur varied over time, depending on where certain key people were residing. In 1993, at least two places attracted large drinking parties - a house at the Village, and a house on the ring road - and several arrests of young people occurred at these locations.

With property offending, seven incidents involved cars with the majority of charges being for the theft or attempted theft of the vehicles (the others were theft from and damage to a car). 'Hot spots' for property crime were the shops and the single men's camps with four car thefts from the car park outside the single men's camp, and a series of break-ins into the sports club, the mess, the delicatessen, the pool kiosk, the post office, the Ironbar clubroom in the single men's camp, and on two occasions, the supermarket. Private residences were not major targets with only two incidents of burglaries (a caravan and a house) recorded for the two-year period.

Nearly every incident involved co-defendants or occurred in the midst of a more generalised disturbance. Most of the burglaries were committed by a young Aboriginal boy, Connor who turned 12 in 1993, in the company of one of several 'renowned' Aboriginal juveniles who belonged to the same age cohort and who had similar backgrounds to older 'renowned' offenders¹²⁹. Most of the co-defendants and 'associates'

¹²⁸ Of the remaining six incidents, one was at Mount Margaret, one at Warburton and four in Kalgoorlie.

¹²⁹ It usually did not take the police long to become familiar with the local youths who made up the bulk of the local youth appearances. Several local youths were clearly disliked by some officers. One in

were related. As an example of repeat offending by a younger boy, the following summaries are based on the police briefs¹³⁰ for Connor, the boy responsible for most of the burglaries in 1993. There were 10 incidents, which resulted in 16 charges for which he had appearances in the Laverton court in that year.

27/2 Late at night, with Keenan, gained entry through an open window into the Ironbar clubroom at SMQ camp. They played with the boxing equipment, damaged a plaque and took a set of headgear valued at \$100. The headgear was recovered but the gloves were not recovered.

20/5 Early hours of the morning broke into supermarket with others by gaining entry via the roof. They removed cigarettes valued at \$28 before decamping when the alarm was activated. Explanation provided to police by Connor: 'We went in looking for something to steal'.

27/8 In Kalgoorlie, with Cherry, 11, removed chrome paint, valued at \$4.05, from Kmart. They attempted to leave without paying and had no money on them to pay for the paint.

9/10 In Kalgoorlie, on a Saturday afternoon, with Sat Ellis (13) stole paint in Kmart. A short time later Sat sprayed the police van outside the station. Connor was heavily intoxicated from inhaling the paint from plastic bags. Restitution sought of \$100 to remove the paint.

14/10 In Kalgoorlie, was told by Sat to steal a purse from a 10-year-old girl. Both boys apprehended by the girl's father. The boys' explanation was that they wanted money. The purse was recovered and contained \$1.60 in cash. Complainant was uninjured but distressed.

22/10 At 6 pm threw several rocks at a window of a car in the supermarket car park. Restitution sought by car owner of \$200. Explanation given by Connor: 'Rory made me do it, he kept fighting me'.

28/10 At 8.25 pm, with Rory, broke into a Boulder shop by smashing a window. Connor climbed inside and removed a quantity of spray paint cans. Explanation given by the boys 'we wanna go to Longmore'¹³¹: Restitution sought of half of \$100 to replace stocks.

14/12 Early hours of the morning, broke into the DCD office by smashing a small window. Found nothing and moved on to the post office, where he again gained entry by smashing a small window. Removed a pair of shorts then left. Next morning he readily admitted offence in front of father. He was unable to offer an explanation other than to say he had been sniffing petrol.

25/12 Broke into a caravan with Isaac. They removed a small quantity of foreign money which he tried to use the next day to purchase items.

27/12 With Isaac James, late in the evening, broke into a house in Cable St and stole three bottles of beer, a sausage, a bottle of cool drink and \$6 in change. Took two bikes valued at around \$500, rode about and then dumped them in the bush (recovered slightly damaged). They next went to the pool kiosk where they removed ice-creams and confectionery. After eating some of the items, the rest were thrown away in bush near Skull Creek. Total value approximately \$30. In the early hours of the 28/12 went to the supermarket and made a hole in the wall with a pipe. From the deli they took large quantities of cigarettes and tobacco. In the main section, they tried to smash open the office safe with a sledge-hammer. They took cigarettes, tobacco, computer games, music CDs, clothing and foodstuffs. Some were eaten but the majority was opened and strewn about the yard and roofs of the buildings. At 08.20 when police attended, the two boys were seated outside the supermarket. They admitted the offences and assisted police in locating the property they had stolen. Costs - damage to building and safe \$2800, property stolen \$1000 most of which was recovered, with about \$200 worth of goods wasted or damaged.

particular, Ali, was singled out as requiring 'surveillance' whenever he was in town as several years before he was convicted of sexually assaulting a police officer's wife. When Ali appeared in court on a stealing charge (of a torch) a police sergeant made a point of standing at the back of the court to hear what the outcome was. There were opportunities for the police to improve their knowledge of individual Ngaanyatjarra youths when the youths were resident at the Laverton hostel or on the Breakaway camps. Sometimes quite friendly relations were established between individual officers and youths, though this was predominantly with desert youth.

¹³⁰ As the records could not be removed from the Laverton police station or photocopied, I sat in the station and took notes of the briefs for the years 1992 and 1993.

¹³¹ Located in Perth, Longmore was the name of the main juvenile detention centre in Western Australia. The other centre, Riverbank, was for older and more serious offenders.

These briefs for Connor over a one-year period highlight several features of offending by local youth, especially the younger ones. Younger boys (and to a much lesser extent girls) might steal or break-in for fun and to steal food and drink. However, the more persistent younger offenders (and nearly all of these were Aboriginal) were those who often committed such property crimes to gain items associated with various kinds of substance abuse (glue, paint, and less often petrol unless they had resided in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands), and might be under the influence of one of these substances when they perpetrated the crime. The value of stolen goods (cigarettes, foodstuffs and so on) was usually not great, and they were either consumed immediately or thrown away. Often the cost of the property damage associated with breaking in or while on the premises was greater than the value of the goods. What I had observed over the years was that, as these youths became older, they were the ones most likely to become involved in stealing cars, which were again used and then disposed of. In addition, as they become older, they were more likely to be charged with offences related to fighting or damage while intoxicated by alcohol.

Another issue, illustrated by the Connor briefs, was the mobility of some of the youth, and the likelihood of them being apprehended by police in various places throughout the Goldfields region. For instance, over the two-year period, several local youths had charges which related to incidents in Kalgoorlie.

By contrast, the overwhelming majority of charges against young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands related to offences that were committed while in the Lands. However, a sizeable proportion of these young people were also charged with offences that occurred in Laverton. In 1992, seven of the 22 desert youths who had court appearances had a total of 10 charges that related to eight incidents that happened in Laverton. With three of the incidents, the Laverton hostel manager was the complainant as the offences were committed by youths while resident at the hostel.

In 1993, five of the 26 desert youths had charges that related to a total of eight incidents that occurred in Laverton, none of which were hostel-related. With the Laverton incidents, most of the charges were connected to drunken behaviour (disorderly conduct or assaults) and to a lesser extent, theft and joining in break-ins. There were also several charges relating to the theft or attempted theft of vehicles in Laverton and Kalgoorlie.

In the late eighties there were frequent complaints amongst Laverton people both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about the crime and the trouble caused by desert visitors (see Chapter Four). There was not the same level of disruption by 1992 and 1993¹³² but the two examples below illustrate how visitors, and young people who pass through or were brought down originally for court and who stayed on, could become embroiled in disputes or embark on a spate of trouble.

¹³² I was told various explanations for the reduction in numbers and length of stay including - changes to the management of funds to avoid people being stranded, police giving lifts to people back to the Lands, better communication, other places such as Kalgoorlie increasingly popular for extended stopovers.

Griff Hamilton, aged 15

Unlawful wounding, damage x 2, reckless driving

14/8/93 At 11pm defendant at the Village at Ewan's place drinking with a group of others [four adults from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were named]. Argument between defendant and complainant (21 year old Aboriginal female from a desert community). Defendant went to the Toyota trayback and produced a knife (approximately 15cm in length). He chased the complainant but he was unable to catch her. Defendant got into the Toyota and drove erratically around the Village. He drove recklessly around one of the houses and ran through a cyclone fence at the rear of the house, passing through the yard and crashing through the front fence. The yard was being used by adults and children, all of whom had to run to avoid injury.

The defendant stopped and chased the complainant on foot. He caught her and hit her on the leg with a stick. The defendant then produced the knife and stabbed the complainant in the left upper thigh causing a 4cm wound. The complainant's husband hit the defendant with a stick and he ran to the Toyota and drove off. The complainant received stitches in hospital.

At 1am on the 15/8/93 the defendant smashed a window and two bowers with stones at the BP garage. Sometime later the police located the defendant and he admitted the offences. His explanation: 'She was talking cheeky to me'.

Milly Chichester, aged 10? [conflicting records of her age]

Damage

23/11/92 At 10pm [in Laverton] for no reason at all, the defendant picked up rocks and smashed three windows of the Uniting Church. The police spoke to her and no explanation was offered.

[Note on the face sheet] The defendant rarely comes to Laverton but when she does it seems she is not supervised and she does not take any medication which she is on as she is not maturing physically or mentally. On other occasions whilst in Laverton she has also roamed the streets unsupervised and has damaged numerous premises including the church but she has only been cautioned. Relatives in Laverton have stated to police that they will not have her as she is trouble. Her parents also do not want to look after her. An aunt in Warburton seems to be able to control her when she is residing there.

Disorderly conduct x 2, breach of bail

1/12/92 At 9.20pm police while on routine patrol in Weld Drive, observed a disturbance at No... The defendant came out of the house and shouted abuse and obscenities at another Aboriginal female. Defendant threw approximately four stones. Police asked her to stop, but she didn't. Other person stood at driver's side of the police van and dared the accused to throw another rock. Accused did so and the police had to move the van. As the result of an unforeseen incident¹³³ the police were forced to retreat from the premises before being stoned by an angry group of persons. Accused and group of persons went to police station and yelled and abused police who were back at the police station. Accused then threw rocks at the police station windows. Recalled police arrived and saw her throw a stone. Defendant was arrested.

Possession of petrol x 3, damage; possession of petrol x 2, disorderly conduct; possession of petrol x3, damage

27/3/93 4pm Defendant unravelled mesh security fence at the Warburton police post. Police arrived, and she ran into the bush but as the police were loading prisoners, she was not apprehended then. Defendant arrested on other matters on 17/5. Admitted this offence. Explanation: 'I wanted to talk to the people inside'.

¹³³ This was the incident, where the girl Dora was allegedly hit by the police vehicle, that angered the Brown family and increased negative attitudes towards the police officer, Doug Howard (see Chapter Five).

14-15/5 Defendant sniffing petrol, observed by elders at Wanarn.

16/5 Seen sniffing petrol by elders at Warburton.

21-22/6 Defendant seen sniffing by Warburton elders.

23/6 11.30pm Defendant and another person wanted to see prisoners in custody. Defendant started shouting and swearing when this request was refused. Police warned her but she carried on. When arrested, defendant smelt strongly of petrol. She said she'd been sniffing all evening and the past two days.

5-8/8/93 [in Warburton] The defendant inhaled petrol. She admitted offences and she was informed by police she would be summonsed to appear in court. The defendant threw a rock at the Oka and smashed a window valued at \$150. Restitution sought. Explanation: nil. [She appeared in Warburton Children's Court 9/8/93 and was remanded to the Laverton Children's Court for the 12/8/93]

Burglary, stealing, damage

11/8 At 9pm [in Laverton] the defendant entered community health via a closed unlocked rear door. She ransacked the offices, overturning furniture, records etc. She removed a camera and smashed it outside. Camera valued at \$100. Restitution sought by community health.

11/8 At 9.20pm the defendant put a pressure pack in the bin outside DCD office. She set the bin on fire, the can exploded and the bin remained on fire. The defendant readily admitted the offence and was arrested. Explanation: nil. The defendant had been sniffing from a paint pressure pack during the evening. Restitution sought of \$100 for bin. Complainant: the Shire.

The sheer volume of charges for breaching the by-law on the possession of petrol demonstrated that desert young people were appearing in court almost exclusively because of their sniffing. In 1992 there were 219 charges for possession (and eight for supply), in contrast to 67 charges for other offences and in 1993, there were 307 charges for possession (and one for supply) and 65 for other offences¹³⁴. This means that, over the two years, 34¹³⁵ young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands who were clearly petrol sniffers, appeared in court for a total of 667 offences that were committed on the Lands, of which 80% were for the possession or supply of petrol. In other words, each desert petrol sniffing defendant on average had 20 charges during the two years.

From 1992 to 1993 there was an obvious rise, of 17%, in the number of possession charges. For most other offences there were comparable levels across the two years except for the following changes shown in Table 5.

Of the recorded violent acts committed in the Lands in 1992, three separate incidents involved threatening the adviser with a knife in three different communities, two incidents involved the discharging or pointing of a firearm at groups of people and an attempt to hit a police officer with a hammer. In 1993, there were five reported incidents involving the police - an assault with a hammer, threatening with a rock and a firearm, another threat to kill with a firearm, throwing petrol over an officer by a young man who

¹³⁴There were a handful of other offences where there was no indication that they were connected to sniffing. These offences are excluded.

¹³⁵In both 1992 and 1993 there were 22 individual sniffers who were apprehended by the Laverton police, giving a total of 44 persons for the two-year period. But as 10 of them appeared in both years, the actual number for the two years is 34 individuals.

then threatened to set himself and the police officer alight, and a threat to injure with a knife. Other reported assaults or threats of violence were directed against an adviser, a project officer, a community warden, a brother and a girlfriend.

Table 5: Non-possession offences for Ngaanyatjarra youth by charges, 1992-1993

	1992	1993
Supply petrol	8	1
Burglary	2	19
Disorderly	37	7
Damage	2	9
Firearm related offences	2	6
Resist arrest	1	4
Assault police officer or to prevent arrest	1	2

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

With the reported property crime on the Lands, in 1992 there were only two reported burglaries, both of which were committed by the one youth. With the first one, he tried to break into his sister's place to take food and money, and in the second one, he managed to enter and search the community workshop but stole nothing. In 1993 there were 19 charges relating to 14 reported burglaries on the Lands and two incidents of stealing. However, 11 of the burglary charges were laid against a pair of brothers who were responsible for a total of six, or nearly half, of the break-ins. During the year over half of the 14 burglaries or attempted burglaries were of the community store or workshop (five and three respectively), two were of the school, two were into community member's houses, one was of a teacher's place and one was in an unspecified building. On six occasions, a video player or television or cassette player was taken but all of these items were returned undamaged. Most of the time food, glue or petrol were stolen and 'consumed' almost immediately. In one case, \$700 worth of clothing was taken.

Police had indicated in conversations with me and others that offending in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands was becoming more serious, and that the offenders more dangerous especially in their dealings with police. Several incidents had heightened these perceptions. For example, on a number of occasions, police recounted the story to me of the confrontation with the Swan brothers (see below for the police brief on the incident). The above figures would seem to support these claims with a jump in burglaries and firearm related offences.

In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the police, in conjunction with community advisers and 'known elders', had enormous discretion in terms of determining the selection of youths that would be charged and the nature of the charges laid against them. This is not to suggest that the offences were fabricated, only that there had to be consensus amongst key parties that the young person should be dealt with by the court (and removed from

the community¹³⁶). The police frequently mentioned their own and the community members' frustration with many court outcomes, with the young people being returned to the communities after receiving dismissals, community service orders or fines. One response from the police was to lay charges that would highlight the seriousness of the young person's behaviour, for example a charge of supplying (in addition to using) petrol. Another strategy was to emphasise the impact of the young person's behaviour on family and community, and to stress that it was the wish of the family or community for the young person to be 'removed'. The following excerpts from police briefs provide examples of how the police emphasised interventions by community and family and their role in witnessing or being affected by the individual's actions:

Eliot Durrell: During the day and night from the 25th February through to the 4th March 1992 the accused has inhaled petrol fumes constantly. Whilst under the influence of petrol the accused and others have walked around the community harassing and annoying anyone in their path. As a result of their actions a large group of the community have been unable to sleep at nights due to the accused and the other petrol sniffers constantly swearing and shouting at people and throwing things around. At 3.40pm on 4th March the police attended the community and located the accused in an aggressive state in a house within the community. At the time the accused was heavily affected by petrol. He struggled violently when arrested and had to be forcibly placed in the van. After the accused was arrested several members of the community thanked police for taking him away as they had been fearful that elderly people and children would have been hurt had the accused continued to stay in the community sniffing...[after an escape] During the whole incident the accused continually shouted at members of the community stating that he would be back soon to get them all. The accused is a chronic petrol sniffer who is starting to get an extremely violent nature.

Jeremy Swan: Between 24 - 30/11/91 at Wingellina every day the defendant observed by his family and community members to be inhaling petrol fumes from a tin can. The defendant's family and community members attempted to stop the defendant only to have him become aggressive towards them...

Carla Cusack: Each and every day whilst she was sniffing she has been approached by community wardens who have attempted to stop her from sniffing and on each occasion the defendant has yelled and screamed at whoever approached her causing disturbances with the community among family groups. When spoken to by police on the 14th of April the defendant readily agreed that she sniffs petrol almost constantly and that she will not stop until she dies.

Blair Cusack: Between 1-6/3/92 accused and others sniffing within Warburton. Whilst under the influence he and others have walked around the community creating a disturbance as they go by annoying people trying to sleep, and by causing arguments with parents of youths he and the others have tried to entice to join them. Located 7/3 and arrested. The accused is a chronic petrol sniffer who does not care what effect petrol has on his brain and health. After the accused was arrested police took him to his parents to advise them and they told police to take him away as they are getting ill from too many sleepless nights.

Billy Burns: ...Night of the 26/8/91 the accused and several others observed walking around the Jameson community inhaling large amounts of petrol fumes from can. During the night the accused and several others went on a fighting rampage around the community. As a result of their actions the whole community had to take refuge in their house for fear of being assaulted. Note to prosecutor: Due to Burns's recent behaviour the community is on the verge of taking violent tribal action if the accused is not removed from the community.

¹³⁶ In police briefs and in everyday conversations amongst justice practitioners, the settlements in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were referred to as 'communities'.

Ewan Taylor: At 7pm on 10/4/92 defendant got his father's firearm (.22 calibre) and loaded it with a bullet he found in the community. He fired in the community causing considerable fear among persons in the community (very dark, minimal street lighting). 2-13/4 observed by wardens and his father (local justice of the peace) sniffing petrol from cans. All attempts by his father and the wardens has led to the defendants becoming more and more uncontrollable to the point where his father requested that he be removed from the community for the safety of the community as the defendant refused to stop sniffing petrol and his behaviour is generally becoming more and more unpredictable and violent.

Daryl Ryan: ...Information for prosecutor: when arrested by police on 5/5/92 the accused was seen to be sniffing from a can. He was obviously affected by petrol and aggressive. For approximately 20 minutes he suffered a fit in the rear of the police vehicle, and had to be attended to by medical staff and sedated. It is obviously a problem to this individual and will have to be addressed before he no longer exists or the person he attacks in the future no longer exists.

Frank Wood: At various times of day and night between 23/2 -7/3 the defendant was observed sniffing petrol from a container within the Warburton Aboriginal Community. The majority of these offences occurred whilst the defendant was in company with other sniffers and whilst under the effects of the petrol the groups have continually wandered through the community throwing stones, calling out and swearing and generally causing a disturbance. As a result of these actions many people in the community have become angry and upset and many arguments have been caused amongst families. The defendant was removed from the Warburton community at his and his family's request as neither they nor he could control his petrol sniffing habits and they are looking to police and the judicial system for help.

Danny Stone: At 2pm on 6/6/92 defendant and others observed sniffing at the old mission within the Warburton community. A community warden attempted to stop them sniffing and to move them on but they refused and a disturbance involving numerous threats towards the warden occurred. At 8pm on 8-9/6/92 defendant and others observed in grounds of Warburton school. They ran off into the darkness when wardens approached. The community has gone to great lengths to try and stop people sniffing petrol. Employing wardens has been one approach, another has been to make all members of the community aware that the school grounds are off limits during the hours of darkness. Note to prosecutor: the adults sentenced by Warburton justices of the peace for this offence received three months imprisonment.

The police briefs recorded information such as name, age, place of residence, and appearance. With many of the briefs for desert defendants, there were warnings about their substance abuse. In 1992 there were 25 warnings, of which 18 stated that the defendant was a petrol sniffer or chronic petrol sniffer. Five other warnings related to their sniffing habits - 'poor health', 'potential coffin liner' and three lock-up warnings. The remaining two warned of potential negative reactions to arrest - 'may resist arrest' and 'will assault police'.

Despite the increase in charges and therefore briefs, there were only five warnings in 1993, two of which indicated the defendants were sniffers. The reason for the abrupt decline in the practice of issuing a warning on briefs is unknown, but might possibly relate to the superfluous nature of the warning - in that all desert youths should be treated with caution because of the effects of sustained petrol inhalation. Another reason might be that as several police officers, who had been newcomers to the area in 1992, became familiar with the Lands' youths and the routine of patrols, they no longer felt the need to issue warnings.

On the briefs there was a category for 'personality', which was not always filled out. Based on those that were completed, it appeared that assessments of a young person's personality depended on the identity of the individual police officer who filled in the category, and the kind of experience he may have had with the defendant. With Milly's briefs (see earlier) her personality was described variously in different briefs as 'vague', 'cooperative', 'normal', 'troublemaker', 'aggressive/moody', and 'liar'. On two of her briefs there were warnings - 'very moody/psychotic tendencies' and 'petrol and glue sniffer'.

The 'personality' category was filled in 33 briefs in 1992 and 30 briefs in 1993. The distribution of attributes are listed in Table 6:

Table 6: Personality attributes of Ngaanyatjarra youth in individual briefs 1992-1993

Attribute	1992	1993
Co-operative	20	18
Normal/quiet	1	5
Spaced out, vague, vacant, vacant premises, non-comprehensible (sic)	4	1
Liar/evasive/sly/cagey	6	1
Aggressive/arrogant/unpredictable/troublemaker/uncooperative	2	5
Total	33	30

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

Over the two years, therefore, 70% of the characterisations were either neutral or positive, and 22% may be interpreted as a signal for careful handling because of a potentially unhelpful or negative response to the police¹³⁷. The rest, the attributes seem to imply, would be incapable of understanding what was going on (an important point which is discussed later). An extreme example of how this category and section might be filled out by police (and an officer's morbid, dismissive sense of humour) is as follows:

Current address - undarock (sic), Warburton
 Business address - roundarock (sic), Warburton
 Occupation - fuel sampler
 Type of personality - vacant premises
 Warning - chronic sniffer, potential coffin liner

These characterisations were for internal police purposes and would not be referred to during the court proceedings. In the police briefs it was sometimes indicated that an explanation for an offence was proffered by the accused at the time of arrest and these would be conveyed in court. With briefs for charges laid against both local and desert youths, there was usually no mention of an explanation or 'hil' explanation recorded.

¹³⁷ With local youths, there were six warnings on briefs in 1992 and one warning in 1993, which were applied to a total of four youths, mainly because they were assessed as likely to resist arrest or to assault police. Over the two years the personality category was completed on 15 briefs, of which nine were negative (liar, violent, uncooperative, cocky, evasive) and four were positive (co-operative).

However, youths' explanations were given for 24 charges and some of these corresponded with theorising by academics, practitioners and the public about the reasons for juvenile offending, such as boredom and peer pressure. Examples include:

[the brief mentions that] '... when he was asked for an explanation the defendant said nothing other than he sniffed petrol for fun'
[the brief mentions that] '... he admitted the assault but stated he only did it because all the others were'
'We wanna go to Longmore'
[the brief mentions that] '[in relation to his petrol sniffing] he states that he does it for something to do'
'Bored'

Over the two years, half of the charges where police recorded explanations were where the accused had 'explained' their actions in terms of the provocation of others' actions. Examples, which nearly all relate to assaults or damage, include:

'She was talking cheeky to me'
'[Brother] took my money'
'He wouldn't give me a drink'
'He asked for it, he'd been wanting to fight all night'
'[Community manager] has been saying things about me and getting at my family'
[the brief mentions that] '...the defendant readily admitted to driving 'silly way' because the others had made him wild.'

Very practical explanations were given for the theft or attempted theft of cars:

'I was told to go steal a car'
'I wanted to get to Parkston with the others'
'I wanted to get home'
'I wanted to go for a drive around town'

These sort of explanations may be found in briefs for urban youths but they contain nuances that indicate the locale and the identity of the defendants, as Aboriginal young people from the western desert region. Earlier, in Chapter Five, various themes were discussed – personal autonomy, and the emotional state of being driven 'wild' – which were relevant to explanations given for offences such as property damage and assault. In addition, the reasons for the taking of vehicles and food indicate an instrumental response to an immediate need.

These recorded explanations when recounted in court were rarely discussed and even more infrequently challenged. A DCD social worker, Seth, was critical of the court's formality because he saw little or no opportunity for a young person to explain himself or herself. He gave the example of where a person had hit somebody who had insulted him or her in the pub but there would not be the chance in court to expound on the reasons for the assault - *'the magistrate does not have clue about an individual's circumstances... Assault can mean so many things'*.

With the more trivial offences and with petrol sniffing related offences, there was little consideration of the immediate motives in court. Typically there was a reading of the

police facts from the brief, the taking of a plea which was quickly dealt before moving on to the critical business of the disposition. Only if there was a plea of not guilty would there be a challenge to the police version of events but there were very few of these pleas.

Geertz (1993) depicts western legal proceedings as being an 'as/therefore' ritual, yet this did not really apply to the Laverton (and Warburton) proceedings as the bulk of young people entered pleas of guilty and second, it was a juvenile court where the overriding objective was to determine an appropriate outcome for a young person. As a result, many other factors aside from the actual offence came into play, and what gave these factors their saliency was that in a country area many of the main players were familiar to each other (although this was only the case for the practitioners where they had been in their jobs at least several months).

In court

Once a month, in Laverton, Laver Place became¹³⁸ a hive of activity. The place had a sense of occasion and excitement. An uninformed observer may have concluded that something momentous was happening, perhaps a fair or some other public community event. The observer would see by 10 o'clock in the morning, a steady gathering of people, many of who would perch on a wall outside the police station or on the rocks scattered around Laver Place. Around this time, several vehicles, most of which were four wheel drives, would drive up and park outside the DCD building or outside the police station. People would bustle in and out of the station and some would wander in and out of the DCD office. Mostly Aboriginal people sat around in Laver Place and mostly white people arrived in vehicles and moved in and out of buildings. Just before 10 o'clock a car would pull up outside the police station and at least three white men, in white shirts and ties, would descend and disappear into the station. The magistrate, accompanied by a clerk and a lawyer, had arrived.

The magistrate would take up residence in the anteroom to the courtroom while the clerk would set up in the courtroom proper. The magistrate might talk with the police prosecutor, a local police officer, about the matters listed for the day, or to the DCD hostel manager. The lawyer would talk to the police, the local ALS field officer and endeavour to talk to as many defendants as possible. If juveniles were listed to appear, the lawyer might also chat with the DCD hostel manager or local officer. The community corrections representative from Kalgoorlie would talk with certain people in the open or go into the cells to talk with specific prisoners.

Around 10 o'clock, the magistrate's court would officially begin with a police officer opening up the court door at the side of the building. This was the signal for everyone to take up their positions inside. Once everyone was seated the police prosecutor would announce 'all rise' as the magistrate entered the room. A police officer would then call

¹³⁸ With the re-opening of the main road through the town in 1994, Laver Place was bisected and effectively erased.

out, either to the courtroom or outside (depending on where the named defendant was presumed to be - in the 'run'¹³⁹, outside or not around) the name of the first person on the list, typically a juvenile because children's court was usually held before adult matters.

If the young person was not present, then the magistrate had to make a decision whether to re-list the matter, to wait until the end of the day or to issue a bench warrant. The former normally occurred if the police presented a reason for doing so, for example a series of non-appearances or the seriousness of the charges. If present, the young person would enter the room, and if new to the courtroom or the process, would be shown where to stand. The charges were then read by the magistrate and for each charge, the defendant was asked to enter a plea. If a plea of not guilty was recorded then the magistrate would decide on the date and location for the hearing. If there were guilty pleas, the defendant would be asked to sit down by the magistrate. The police prosecutor would read out the facts from the brief, then the ALS lawyer would present information on the offence(s) and the defendant¹⁴⁰. The DCD officer or hostel manager might be asked for information or a report by the magistrate. If a parent or caregiver were present they too might be invited to speak by the magistrate. The magistrate would then announce the sentence for each charge. The young person would then be either escorted to the run or outside depending on where he or she entered from, and on the outcome. It was a reasonably restrictive environment as there are only certain matters which can be mentioned in the formal context of the court. Informal discussions occurred between different practitioners outside the courtroom before, during and after individual cases. The significance of these discussions was most evident at the Warburton court, which was held in a room adjacent to the police lock-up located nearly one kilometre from the community.

When I attended on one such occasion, the adviser talked to the police the night before court whilst the ALS field officer and the Kalgoorlie ALS lawyer (a civil lawyer) had a brief chat with police the day before and on the morning of the court, read the briefs and interviewed the people in the lock-up. The police prosecutor, the magistrate and Mel (who was there with a Kalgoorlie representative from the Ministry of Justice) went into a huddle before court about the non-appearances. There were three representatives from community based corrections (all male) none of whom participated in the juvenile court proceedings, but who were there to obtain special dispensation from the magistrate for their clients to go to Blackstone for Law business. One of the men from community

¹³⁹ The 'run' was a narrow passageway connecting the police cells to the courtroom. Those who had been detained in police custody were kept in the 'run' until their court appearance.

¹⁴⁰ Hutchings (1993) claims that the police interpretation must remain the official and dominant interpretation of events, not that of the Aboriginal kids and relatives, because it is not in the interest of the defence counsel to express greater intention by the defendants. According to Hutchings, if the defence counsel did challenge the police version then s/he would present a reconstruction of the defendant's actions which would reinforce the view that Aboriginal crime is normal. With the many cases I observed the ALS lawyer rarely felt impelled to challenge the police account, primarily because he or she had not been told anything by the defendant that constituted a contradiction to what was said. However, the lawyer did often describe the young person's background based on what the person had said - his or her income, place of abode and so forth and would check the police record with the young person to see if it was correct.

based corrections approached the magistrate soon after he arrived to ask if he would have time to meet the Aboriginal couple who were running the mentor scheme. The ALS Laverton field officer spoke with the adviser after the court session was finished, and the adviser, who was unhappy about a remand, asked me at lunchtime what I thought of the new magistrate and new ALS lawyer.

Although the young person was centre stage and everyone was ostensibly gathered to discuss his or her behaviour, defendants were minor participants in the process¹⁴¹. Nevertheless valiant efforts were sometimes made by the magistrate to ensure that the young person comprehended the proceedings, or to ascertain at least that he or she was a capable 'witness' to the proceedings.

In the legal literature (Kearins 1991) the issue of comprehension in an inter-cultural context has mostly been debated in terms of language differences and difficulties. Beresford and Omaji (1993:110) refer to the likely language problems of youth from country and remote regions but claim that interpreters may not resolve communication problems. They note that "the significance of 'guilt' is outside the experience and comprehension of some Aboriginal youth and language, itself, is intimately bound up with the culture of the people who use it". They appear to be sensibly pointing out that the translation of words does not necessarily convey the meaning of concepts or practice.

Local practitioners were virtually unanimous in their views on the ability of Ngaanyatjarra and local youth to understand English. In relation to the issue of 'understanding' the proceedings, a magistrate, Bevan, was of the view that they did comprehend what was going on. He believed most people were bilingual and had considerable experience of the court system. He had met one youth at the hostel who the manager said had poor English skills but the magistrate had found him easy to talk to. His view was that *'we can't treat them like cave people anymore'*.

The ALS field officer in Laverton, Tessa, who asserted she could understand the mixture of 'lingo' and English if people talked 'slowly', had only encountered one fellow who could not speak English. Where Ngaanyatjarra Lands' youth (the 'sniffers') did not say anything she endeavoured to make a joke or tried sign language. When I discussed this issue with two Laverton police officers (Terence and Ken), on patrol in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands at the time, they said the teenagers sometimes were not always sure what the magistrate had said. Ken said they were often asked by the young people from the Lands what they had got in the way of sentences, but he said that this also happened when the youths appeared before local Aboriginal justices who explained matters in Ngaanyatjarra. Terence referred to the parody of court, which all three of us had seen, by the Ngaanyatjarra people in the police van on the way up from Laverton to Warburton. During a break for lunch they were let out of the van (eight adults and three juveniles) to have food and exercise. One man grabbed another and said *'I arrest you for...'* and another one said *'I give you one year for driving without a licence'*. This mimicry

¹⁴¹ O'Connor (1990) describes the juvenile court as treating young people as 'passive objects'. His research found that young people often misconstrued the process.

caused much merriment and one of the police dryly remarked to me *you can see they're really scared of us*.

In court the magistrate would frequently ask questions of the youths but they were usually met with silence or a monosyllabic 'yes' response. On one occasion in court the magistrate, Ian, indicated that he was unsure about the ability of the chronic users of petrol to comprehend the proceedings. He had this to say about Lex Stone:

ALS lawyer: He is not clear in his thinking. He says yes to everything

Magistrate: I have expressed concern about the understanding of kids in the past. Lex is very unwell.

This longer set of notes from another court day shows how the magistrate tried to communicate with Neil Swan, a youth with a long history of sniffing petrol:

Magistrate: How long in custody?

Department of Justice: One month

Magistrate: You know what happens if sniff? Soon be deadfella. Why do you sniff? [No answer] You are liable to be locked up for a long time. You've been involved in sniffing for some time and soon, at this rate, you'll be gone. I have dismissed the matters because of the time in custody. Do you know Elaine Walsh and Hamish Voss [victims of the thefts]? Were they very angry? You have to be very careful in the future.

Police prosecutor: No order for costs?

Magistrate: No, it's academic. I'll make a formal order for the return of the goods, though again it's academic especially in regard to the television. Mr Patrick, his English does not seem too bad, just reticent to speak. Are other folk here?

Police prosecutor: No

Magistrate: End of the matter. Stand down.

A newly appointed magistrate, Bevan, within a short space of time, developed a style which involved delivering exhortations on the dangers of sniffing, the seriousness of the offence, and the consequences of further offending. An illustration was the following exchange between Neil Swan and the magistrate (charges including pointing a rifle, four charges of petrol possession, assaults against two police officers and a resist arrest):

Magistrate: Who owned the gun?

Neil: [No answer]

Magistrate: Who owned the car?

Neil: Me

Magistrate: Where did you get the car? Mr Barton, ask him how he had a car.

[ALS lawyer whispers to Neil]

ALS: A Mr Garland?

[Everyone looks blank]

Magistrate: Pointing a gun is very dangerous. You were heavily influenced by petrol fumes. You need to be taken off petrol for a couple of months. Do you understand?

Neil: Yeah

[Magistrate imposes custodial terms for each charge]

Magistrate: You will be in custody for two months. No more guns and no more petrol

Few parents or caregivers came to court in Laverton and all of those that did were regular visitors or residents in Laverton. They mostly said very little and answered

questions from the magistrate in monosyllables. The exceptions were the father of Connor and the parents of Rory, who could be quite aggressive in their attempts to explain or interject.

The following notes were from when Rory appeared in court on 10 charges, two of which he had already entered not guilty pleas at an earlier appearance. Both of Rory's parents - Boris and Ursula - were in court but their involvement in the proceedings was discouraged by all other participants, as they knew the family well from previous occasions in court.

Magistrate: [Reads out two charges which he had pleaded not guilty to]

Rory: Guilty

Police prosecutor: [Long police account of the events] At the pre-primary he and others stole ice-cream, Emu Export cans and food. They tipped out alot of toys. At the school they tried to force the door in the computer room. They broke into the swimming pool.. They also smashed the door of a caravan and stole a firearm. On the 12/2 they went into a house in Laverton and stole a video remote control.

[Boris loudly muttering to the ALS lawyer; Ursula gesticulating at the lawyer]

At a caravan on airport road he with others smashed a window with a rock and took a pair of sneakers. They ransacked the caravan and consumed food and drink. Rory was interviewed with parents and readily admitted offences. Rory had explained 'I didn't want to stay in Laverton, I wanted to go somewhere else'.

Boris: I want to speak. He never bought food to my house.

ALS: Sssh. I am instructed that he did steal food but he didn't take the video remote control. At the school he admitted taking cushions and throwing things around. At the pool he did break in and took one lolly. He didn't participate in creating havoc in the caravan. The other boys were playing with the gun more. He is only 11 years old and he hasn't been in trouble for three months since he was placed with Petal Murphy at Leonora.

Police prosecutor: I have trouble with the submission because of the date of the offences.

DCD: I explained in the pre-sentence report why Rory is back in Laverton.

Magistrate: It seems that he should go back to Petal

ALS: His parents may not allow that. His father wants him to go to Lex, at Cosmo Newberry.

Magistrate: Mr Brown, stand up.

Boris: [Stands up, head down]

Magistrate: The best thing is for Rory to go to Petal, where he is looked after. He is getting into serious trouble with his mates.

Boris: Yeah, but I've got to have an operation.

Ursula: [at the back, murmurs then loudly] Want him to go to Cosmo [reluctantly stands up] I am going.

Magistrate: There is no evidence that you are going there.

Ursula: I want to take him now. I don't want him to go to Leonora. He'll hang out with boys smoking marijuana.

Magistrate: This is the choice - he goes to Mrs Murphy or he goes to an institution [Ursula and Boris both start talking loudly] Sit down. Quiet.

Rory: Get fucked.

Magistrate: I will adjourn this matter for one month for negotiations with the Department.

DCD: Would the matter be reconsidered when Boris and Ursula move to Cosmo Newberry?

[DCD officer follows Boris, Ursula and Rory from the room. Five minute adjournment]

DCD: Rory won't get in the car with us.

Police prosecutor: We're seeking a bench warrant.

[Magistrate issues a bench warrant so that the police can apprehend Rory and take him to Leonora]

The above exchange also illustrates how difficult it was for the magistrate and other justice practitioners, as well as parents and caregivers, to nominate 'safe places'. Town,

city, desert - all were potentially unsafe because of the availability of certain kinds of drugs, with different drugs - alcohol, marijuana, glue and petrol to name the most common - being associated with different places.

There was a sense of a rite in progress when young people just brought down from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands by the police were presented in the Laverton court, whose dishevelled and abandoned appearance could be juxtaposed to the neatness of the young people who were brought before the court after a period of residence at the Laverton hostel¹⁴².

To some extent, the court proceedings appeared to offer a stage where practitioners could demonstrate to others their 'expertise' and 'local knowledge', or articulate their viewpoints on particular issues, most frequently on the appropriate handling of Ngaanyatjarra youths who were notorious sniffers. A new ALS lawyer, up from Kalgoorlie, in adult court made her views on petrol sniffing known:

ALS: ... is aged about 20 years of age and only had his first conviction in 1991 for petrol sniffing. The first time he was in court he went to jail for four months... Under the community by-laws there are only two choices with petrol sniffers - a fine of \$100 or imprisonment. I question whether to put people in jail is the solution but look at the alternatives. I question the Communities Act, the by-laws and the penalties. How can one impose a meaningful sentence on a petrol sniffer who is away with the fairies.

In some instances these soliloquies were in effect a dialogue between the ALS lawyer and the magistrate, not in terms of the substance of the offence, but in terms of the appropriate responses and policies in relation to petrol sniffing in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. In other instances, it was an opportunity for the magistrate to make his position clear and to explain his decision, not so much to the young person but to the justice practitioners gathered in the court. The magistracy could not make public comment other than through journalists reporting on speeches in adult court, but a key audience for their opinions within the local context were the police and to a lesser extent the legal, justice and welfare practitioners who were in court.

The following excerpt is taken from my notes of a children's court session held in Laverton in 1992:

The magistrate in the course of the morning in a debate on sentencing between him and the ALS relief lawyer (private Kalgoorlie lawyer contracted by the ALS to work on this one circuit) clearly expressed his opposition to the communities' policy of expulsion. The police prosecutor had argued for imprisonment but the magistrate, Ian, dismissed this alternative for three reasons - because it was 'culturally inappropriate', because institutions were crime schools and because rehabilitation did not happen. The ALS lawyer at one stage shrugged his shoulders and admitted to ignorance and to being at a loss; he saw 'welfare concerns' as being paramount, and not the conventional disposition for a crime. It was this remark which caused the magistrate to explain why youths are brought down to the Laverton court. He outlined how the people want them to be removed from the community, and how certainly, where people's

¹⁴² This happened quite often, as the magistrate, Ian, favoured setting bail for Ngaanyatjarra youth with the condition that they reside in the hostel. They would then re-appear in the court some months later to demonstrate they had successfully completed the remand period and the outcome would invariably be a discharge of the charges.

safety is at risk, then some form of disposition is required. The prosecutor after reading out the police facts for this particular case concluded 'and so nobody, fortunately, has yet been killed'.

When the magistrate gave reasons for his decisions, the explanations were not directed at the defendant but to the other adults in the court, as the following example illustrates:

[According to police facts, at midnight Lyle was found by police searching vehicles at the rear of the pub for things to steal]

Magistrate: This is a situation where there is lack of supervision given that he was rifling things at midnight. I'm inclined to dismiss the matter, but I don't want the matter to be considered a joke.

DCD: To his credit he appeared before a justice of the peace last week and he has stayed around. I have found someone who can supervise a community service order.

Magistrate: I will dismiss this under s.34 (1) (c) not because I approve but to give Lyle another chance.

At various times I witnessed the magistrate reprimand or interrogate agency representatives (the only person not to suffer this experience was the Laverton hostel manager). For instance, a relieving magistrate asked the police why two listed desert youths had made no appearance and why they were not brought down to Laverton like two other defendants he had already seen. The police officer who had returned from patrol the day before was called in to explain. He stated that when the Warburton justices of the peace remanded matters to Laverton magistrate's court they sometimes expected the family or kin to bring the defendant down if they had the means to do so. In this instance, it appeared that the adults responsible had failed to do so.

The magistrate clearly became frustrated at times by delays and confusion for which he either held various agency representatives responsible or expected to resolve. The confusion was more marked when court was held in Warburton with the magistrate demanding to know where defendants were and annoyed by missing paperwork. The atmosphere could become tense if there was insufficient time, paperwork was missing, or defendants did not appear or did not act in a fashion that was expected of them. For example, when a new magistrate Bevan was presiding over the Laverton court he became increasingly irritated by delays and interruptions during the day. Initially, court had to be postponed until the police vehicle bringing people down from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands had returned to town. The vehicle had become bogged and while everyone was waiting for it to turn up, an edgy atmosphere was created by Rory's parents fighting in Laver Place. They were waiting for Rory to go to court and were loudly yelling abuse at each other. Ursula endeavoured to re-break Boris's leg and Boris, having called out to me to restrain Ursula, called out *'what do you do with the cunts?'*. Eventually, Ursula walked off towards the pub with her sister, calling a reluctant Rory to go with her, but further altercations broke out between them during the rest of the day.

In turn, the practitioners such as the police or DCD officers were annoyed when the 'settled' routine of monthly court proceedings were subverted by a new or relieving magistrate. Once, when a relieving magistrate was in town, both the DCD officers and the police complained about the length of time it took to deal with the listed matters and the more formal approach of the relief magistrate. One DCD officer said that the usual

magistrate accepted her word when she stated that the defendant had admitted an offence, thereby circumventing the awkwardness frequently created by asking the defendants directly. For example, Lex Stone was in court and he maintained his silence even when the magistrate rephrased his questions a number of times and the ALS lawyer attempted to intervene. As a result, the magistrate did not take any pleas and the matter was adjourned until the next month's court day, with Lex placed with the Department. Ivan also asked Ali the awkward question of 'what days did you or did you not use petrol?' unlike the standard practice of reeling off the charges and the magistrate just asking for the plea for each one.

The previous magistrate, Ian, had quite a routine worked out in terms of sentencing, with the majority of Ngaanyatjarra youths on petrol sniffing charges being dealt with via an adjournment followed some time later by a dismissal under s34(1)(c). DCD were frustrated when the new magistrate, Bevan, did not do what was expected. Jeremy Swan had already been in the hostel for five weeks and DCD had lined up a mentor back in his home community. However, because a firearm was involved, the magistrate remanded his case for another month and asked for a DCD report on his suitability for the mentor scheme. During his remand, he was required to stay at the hostel. In court, the DCD relief hostel manager looked displeased with this decision.

A mutual source of aggravation for the magistrate and other practitioners was the non-appearance of defendants. An example was when Griff Hamilton did not show up for a hearing on a charge 'set down' because he had pleaded not guilty.

Magistrate: He has not appeared in Leonora, Laverton and Warburton. I am going to deal with this in a way that I never have before. I usually fine people who do not appear. But it is endemic, people go off and do not come to court. I will impose a custodial sentence unless Griff Hamilton has a good reason for not attending court.

[A bench warrant is issued]

The police briefs for 1992 and 1993 reveal that, with local youths, on six occasions there was no appearance of the defendant. Where it was a non-appearance by a local youth, the matter might be stood down and efforts would be made by the local justice or welfare officer to find the defendant around town. If he or she was located and appeared in court before the end of the day, then it would not be recorded as a non-appearance. Unless the police had brought the youths down from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands to Laverton, or the youths had been in custody or resident in the hostel, then it was unlikely that an individual would make an appearance in the court. According to the police briefs, with desert youths 15 no appearances of defendant were recorded (involving nine individuals) in 1992, and the following year, 19 no appearances were recorded involving 10 individuals. At least four of these 19 non-appearances were where a hearing was listed. Nevertheless, there was considerable co-operation amongst local practitioners to ensure defendants would appear at a convenient time. For example, before court in Laverton one day, the police prosecutor (a local police officer) consulted with the local Department of Justice representative and the magistrate about the police, in the following week, rounding up the youths who had not appeared when they were listed.

The resolution of matters was hampered by non-appearances. Although they were not commonplace, not guilty pleas increased the probability of delays between incident and a final court outcome for a charge. The police briefs indicate that very few hearings were actually conducted, as in most instances (at least for Ngaanyatjarra youth) the police offered no evidence and the charges were dropped. Over the two years four charges were recorded as having not guilty pleas for local youth appearances, which were dealt with on average over three months. With Ngaanyatjarra youth in 1992, for eight charges (that is only 3% of total charges) there were pleas of not guilty. For these charges the determinations took from 10 days to three months but with all pleas no evidence was offered and the charges were eventually dropped. In 1993 for 14 charges there were pleas of not guilty (involving eight individuals), a perceptible increase. For most of these pleas the outcome was not recorded, although it appears at least four hearings were listed.

If the charge was regarded as serious it seemed that rather than withdraw by not offering any evidence, the police would proceed and the magistrate would list a hearing. Where hearings were listed there was a delay of at least a month before the next court appearance. During this time, the defendant may be remanded in custody or set conditional bail, which in effect, made it likely the charge would be dismissed even if the defendant changed his or her plea (this happened on at least one occasion) or the defendant was found guilty. From the papers attached to the briefs, it seemed with only one hearing did the defendant appear and a hearing actually occur.

The following example occurred in the Warburton court when Lex Stone entered a plea of not guilty to a charge of supplying petrol:

Magistrate: You've been here before, what for?

Lex: Sniffing

Magistrate: [reads out charges - possession of petrol on a series of dates, threatening behaviour and a charge of supply]

Lex: Guilty [after each possession charge] Sniffing on my own [to charge of supply]

Police prosecutor: Should I read the facts?

Magistrate: Yes

Police prosecutor: On 26/9 observed by police wardens with jerrycan of petrol which he was sharing with others

Lex: Plastic. Sniffing on my own

Magistrate: Seems to me it's a plea of not guilty

Police prosecutor: We don't have hearings in this court

Magistrate: [Reads out each charge to which Lex says guilty, except for the supply charge]

Magistrate: All facts the same?

Police prosecutor: Yes, ongoing situation. In and out of custody. The defendant picked up a steel pipe and chased the community warden for a while

Department of Justice: Lex constantly sniffing. Nothing in way of programs in view that he's 18 on the ... of next month.

Magistrate: Lex stand up. What does the community say?

Department of Justice: Everything been tried. Sniffs by himself. The community is just fed up with him.

Police prosecutor: Could have the hearing on the in Laverton.

Magistrate: What should I do to you? I don't know. Chasing ... with a steel pipe is a serious matter.

Lex: [nods] Yes

Department of Justice: [shows Lex his record]

Magistrate: Lex, you've been in custody before. Did you like it?

Lex: Yes

Magistrate: Good food?

Lex: Yes

[The magistrate goes on to sentence him to a period of detention and sets a hearing date in Laverton. After the end of court session the police prosecutor withdrew the supply charge as the listing date was after Lex was due for release. According to the police prosecutor, the police would have to organise witnesses and the magistrate had already sentenced him on the possession charges which in accordance with 'natural justice' should have been remanded for sentence with the outstanding charges for possession].

Three factors which were meant to influence the decision to grant bail or to remand in custody before the next court appearance were the likelihood of re-offending, the seriousness of the charges, and the likelihood of re-appearing at the next listed court date. A substantial proportion of local and Ngaanyatjarra youth were remanded in custody. In a few instances the magistrate remanded the youth to a later court appearance for sentencing and ordered pre-sentence reports. The 1992-1994 police briefs record that the court asked for four pre-sentence reports with local youths (that is 15% of final court appearances for the two years) and four pre-sentence reports for Ngaanyatjarra youth (3% of final court appearances).

The briefs also show that with remands for local youths, four remands in custody were recorded, and six involved conditional bail (three were placements at DCD hostels, and three involved residing out of town, at outstations or pastoral properties). With remands for Ngaanyatjarra youths, in 1992 at least 14 (50%) were remands in custody ordered by the court and at least 12 (43%) were conditional bail that entailed staying in a DCD approved facility (a hostel). Only one summons and one unconditional bail was recorded¹⁴³. During 1993 there were 55 remands where the conditions were recorded in the brief. Of these 11 were where the court released the defendant on bail (three unconditional, two involving residence at Cosmo Newberry, and six unspecified). There were two summons issued and in 14 cases (25%), the defendant was ordered to reside at a DCD approved facility. The bulk of the 55, 34 (62%) were remands in custody.

Having a court session provided an opportunity for key agency representatives to be in the one place at the same time, and to therefore negotiate and settle dates and arrangements for remand. The excerpt below is taken from notes of a court session:

When the magistrate tried to set a hearing date [by a desert youth for a charge to which there had been a not guilty plea], he asked the court for recommendations as to where the hearing should occur. The police advocated Laverton because the prosecution witnesses include police and they were short-staffed. The DCD officer, at one point, tried to recommend Warburton as a venue but the police were adamant that Laverton was the best alternative... It was quite extraordinary the way the placement of youths whilst on remand, and the magistrate's concern over how they would get to their next court appearance, were

¹⁴³ Beresford and Omaji (1993:107) refer to evidence that demonstrates Aboriginal youth are more likely to be arrested than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, who experience a higher proportion of summonses. Gale et al (1990) research showed that the decision to arrest had a flow on effect, in that it decreased the likelihood of pre-court diversion.

debated in the court, with arrangements for the youths seemingly decided on the spot. For instance, the hostel manager asked Merlin¹⁴⁴ in court if he would take Roy out to [a camp some 10 kilometres from town], once he had a medical check up in Kalgoorlie. Bail conditions (which the hostel manager had emphasised should be made and not left open) had to, it appeared, take into account medical check-ups, the Breakaway camp the following week, and whether the youth was in favour with hostel staff. Ewan Taylor was remanded to [a Kalgoorlie] hostel where he had been an 'exemplary' resident before. On the other hand, Frank Wood was welcomed back by the Laverton hostel manager in court, with smiles and nods of the head.

Reaching an outcome

Where there were delays caused by non-appearances, or where more than one appearance was required (for example where there was a hearing was required because of a not guilty plea) then a considerable period of time could elapse between the initial incident and the final court determination. Based on the police briefs for 1992-1993, the range and average in times between incident and final outcome are presented in Table 7 and the distribution is indicated in Table 8.

Table 7: Time between incident and final outcome, 1992-1993.

	1992	1993	1992-1993
Range (local youths)	3 days - 3 months	Same day - 6 months	Same day - 6 months
Average (local youths)	20 days	42 days	35 days
Range (Ngaanyatjarra youths)	1 day - 8 months	Same day - 10 months	Same day - 10 months
Average (Ngaanyatjarra youths)	37 days	35 days	36 days

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

Table 8: Distribution in length of time before final outcome, 1992-1993

	1992 (Ngaanyatjarra youth)	1992 (local)	1993 (Ngaanyatjarra youth)	1993 (local)
2 weeks or less	22	6	40	8
1 month or less and more than 2 weeks	7	5	13	8
3 months or less and more than 1 month	11	1	12	5
6 months or less and more than 3 months	4	1	8	4
12 months or less and more than 6 months	2	0	2	0
Total	46*	13**	75***	25

* 1 unknown**2 unknown*** 14 unknown

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

¹⁴⁴ A former police aide and from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Merlin was employed by DCD to develop the mentoring scheme for sniffing youth out in the Lands. He sometimes acted as an interpreter in court.

Over the two years 51% of incidents involving desert youths, and 37% of local youths were finalised within two weeks. The tables suggest that there were more extreme instances of long delays before finalisation with desert youths, but that overall, the courts dealt with desert youths more expeditiously once they had been apprehended by police.

After nearly two years in the job, a DCD officer Seth, was less than happy with the delays between incidents and a formal response in terms of an outcome. He believed it was important to react and generate a 'tangible consequence' as soon as possible. This was why he endeavoured to ensure that where children's panels were required they were held straight after an arrest and not delayed by paperwork. He was also pessimistic about the efficacy of the court's sentences and disheartened by the lack of 'appropriate alternatives' to detention. In his view there were 'no options that will work. No easy tangible consequences from sentencing except for the hostel or detention centre.. If there's a bond, a fine or probation the problem is that they think there is no punishment'.

With many of the youths appearing in the court, there was a fair measure of consensus amongst the practitioners in court that a geographic 'solution' was required. This typically meant for desert youths that they would be kept out of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for a period of time and for local youths that they be sent 'out of town' to outstations or, less frequently, to communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. In court there was often lengthy negotiations over placements and dates.

An example was when Ali, a local youth, pleaded guilty to charges of assault police officer, damage, and two assaults, one of which occasioned actual bodily harm. He pleaded not guilty to a resist arrest charge and a disorderly charge.

Police prosecutor: With the damage charge, Ali knocked out an asbestos wall which is government property. The boys [the police] tried to stop them [Ali and others] and they had to be chased. They were forcibly placed in the van. When the door was opened to put them in, Ali struck out at a [police officer]. With the assaults, the defendants were in an empty block outside the pub. They had been asked to move on a number of times. Three men were walking across the block. An argument led to a fight during which Ali kicked one of the victims. Next day he was spoken to and he admitted the offences, saying that he only did it because the others were doing it [check police brief].

ALS: The facts are admitted. Everyone was drunk. It was a free for all. My client was placed on a good behaviour bond in June and he has acted well since then, I'd recommend another bond. He is going to be 18 in another four months. He is single and receives no benefits, although he recently filled out a form. He resides in Laverton.

Magistrate: I regard these matters very seriously. It's no excuse that he was drunk. He hit out at a police officer and he kicked a man when down with steel capped boots. He needs time out from Laverton, not sure where he can go.

DCD: He sometimes resides at Tjirrkali.

Magistrate: If I place him on bail can you then put him on a bus to Tjirrkali?

DCD: No, it's not going for four weeks, but he could be booked on a plane.

Police prosecutor: I've been told Tjirrkali don't want him back, as he is offending when in Tjirrkali. There were the matters in July and October.

Magistrate: The record runs out in June

DCD: He is currently in the middle of a community service order.

Magistrate: I have been given the wrong record. This says Sam James

Police prosecutor: The statements from the boys make the matters look worse

Magistrate: ALS, do you want to stand it down so you can consult with your client, as you were looking at the wrong record. I am considering detention or an alternative.

[Stood down and then recalled later in the day]

ALS: I've taken instructions

DCD: I contacted Tjirkali and they don't want him. I've tried to contact an aunt at Wingellina. The adviser at Wingellina says it is alright for Ali to stay there.

Magistrate: How would he get there?

DCD: Unlikely to be tomorrow's plane. The day after the plane calls into Laverton from Kalgoorlie.

Magistrate: Can Ali pay the airfare or work it out?

DCD: If he can get work at Wingellina

[Stood down for another hour]

Police prosecutor: I suggest a hearing today on the charges for which he pleaded not guilty

ALS: Happy with that

Magistrate: After lunch

[Recall. It was announced by the ALS lawyer that Ali had changed his plea to guilty for the two charges of resist arrest and disorderly conduct. Police prosecutor read out the facts in relation to these two charges]

DCD: Aunt is happy to have him at Pilpyatjarra, which is over the border. He can stay with his grandmother in Laverton until Wednesday when he can leave for Wingellina on the plane.

ALS: DCD is not prepared to supervise Ali, therefore I recommend a good behaviour bond.

Magistrate: I'm not prepared to impose a good behaviour bond because of recent experience. I placed a boy in Kalgoorlie on a \$700 good behaviour bond as long as he went interstate. He never went. The sentence was appealed, and the Perth Children's Court asked who was the idiot who imposed such a large good behaviour bond. I don't want to look stupid again.

DCD: Our statutory responsibilities do not extend over the border.

Magistrate: Stand up, Ali. I'm remanding you on bail till ... and as part of your bail conditions you have to reside with your aunt, Mrs Voss, at Pipalyatjarra community. You are to travel as soon as practicable.

Police prosecutor: We would like a curfew to be imposed while in Laverton

Magistrate: Where is he living?

DCD:Street

ALS: No problems with a curfew

Magistrate: What hours are you asking for?

Police prosecutor: 6 pm to 8 am and not to go near the [pub]

[Magistrate imposes these conditions].

The difficulties of determining a disposition for a defendant from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands convicted of petrol related offences were illustrated by the following discussion about a young woman's sentence. Carla Cusack appeared in court on four counts of petrol possession, to which she pleaded guilty. These are the notes of the debate about the disposition:

Magistrate: A community service order?

DCD: Difficulties with community service orders in the desert. While at [a Kalgoorlie] hostel she did a couple of hours but by all reports it is difficult to get her to do work.

Magistrate: It is difficult to get any orders done in the communities. But separate to that she already has had the opportunity do community work.

ALS: Only option a fine. She has an income of \$45 a week

Magistrate: In my experience she has never paid fines

ALS: She had already had two nights in the lock-up and nine days at the hostel

Magistrate: Carla is a veteran, hard-core sniffer. What is being done?

DCD: Merlin has located two mentors in Warburton

Magistrate: For her specifically? She won't pay a fine. I'm inclined to dismiss and hope the programs will have an effect.

DCD: I'd like to retain the integrity of community service orders, it's not fair to kids who do complete them

Magistrate: Fines are not fair to the crown prosecutor, just creates paperwork according to the Kalgoorlie sergeant.

Police prosecutor: Yes, it does create paperwork

ALS: It is something she is doing to herself. It is not appropriate for her to be punished.

Magistrate: All matters are dismissed under s.34(1)(c).

The following discussion highlights how the magistrate believed there were limited options for sentencing desert youth, and how the final outcome revolved around a suitable and available placement in a hostel.

Magistrate: How old are you?

[No answer from Danella Crean. ALS lawyer gives her age]

Police prosecutor: [Charges read out, include four charges of petrol sniffing and damage to the windscreen of a Toyota, a community vehicle] She was observed on numerous occasions by community members sniffing petrol. On the ... she was walking about, sniffing. When she was growled at by community members for sniffing she became wild and picked up a rock and threw it at the adviser's vehicle.

ALS: I've heard that there have been attempts to stop her sniffing, obviously unsuccessful. She is clearly not well. The community's solution is to put her in custody and take her to court.

Magistrate: Where can I put her? A sanatorium?

ALS: Not achieving much. Obviously the problem is affecting her health. She had numerous offences. She could do community work.

Magistrate: Are there other means for dealing with her? To some extent to respond to community needs?

ALS: I am representing Danella not a community

Hostel manager: We've got boys at the moment. Girls go to Kalgoorlie

Magistrate: The sins of the city in Kalgoorlie

ALS: Does present problems

Magistrate: There is no doubt that there is a link between offending and petrol. The community needs relief. Caught in a [?] fork, a Catch 22. I suppose she is 17, could expand her horizons.

Hostel manager [speaking to Danella]: You've been to [a Kalgoorlie hostel] with Mrs Bannister. Would you stay with me, you won't run away? [Danella nods]

Hostel manager [to the magistrate]: She could stay one month. Neil is leaving so we have an empty bed. [The magistrate places her on remand for one month at the Laverton hostel and imposes community service orders for some of the charges which are to be completed while at the hostel]

Magistrate [to Danella]: Petrol makes you extremely sick. You are probably very sick now. If you don't stop sniffing, you will die fairly soon. The community offences, by breaking the Toyota window, you will do community work at the [Laverton] hostel. You have to do what you are told. For the other matters you have 60 hours community work. You can bring them back in a month and I will dismiss them if you have gone well at the hostel.

Due to the perceived lack of options, the decision to dismiss charges under s.34(1)(c) and to release the defendant can be very attractive, as the following notes on the appearance of Vinny Ryan demonstrate.

[Charged with four counts of possessing petrol and stealing a motor vehicle in Kalgoorlie]

Police prosecutor: He becomes aggressive and disorderly while under the influence. In company when the vehicle was stolen, the defendant was a passenger. I'm relying on my memory, but I think the car was involved in a pursuit with the police and the vehicle was written off.

ALS. An adult female..... had the principal role in the theft and drove the car. My client wanted to get back to Parkston. On the possession charges, my client lives in Jameson and has been engaged in the Law business. He does sniff with... andHe does it in the bush so you won't catch him in a house and his

siblings do not sniff. He gets \$100 a week and he works in a garage. I submit his record [which Vinny had glanced at]

[A DCD officer slips into the back of the room and in a whisper asks the hostel manager whether Vinny can stay in the hostel. The manager whispers an emphatic 'no, read your file' and says that he is not allowed back because he stole and wandered through the bedroom. The issue of Vinny's non-payment of fines is raised by the magistrate]

DCD: Community service orders are not being supervised in the communities. Only about 15% of community people are working, the rest are on 'sit down' money. It's hard to find people who will supervise young people on orders.

Magistrate: He has been in custody for some time

ALS: Vinny is in the same position as [who had already been dealt with]

Magistrate: How could he return to Warburton?

DCD: The police can take him tomorrow

Magistrate: Time in custody has been taken into account so I will dismiss these matters under s34(1)(c). I also dismiss the summons for the non-payment of fines because of the problem of organising work orders. [Later on, as it had become known that Vinny was now 18, a penalty of detention orders was imposed for the non-payment of fines].

All of the magistrates I observed or appeared before in court over a total of four years made it apparent from their statements and decisions that they viewed detention as a 'last resort'. However, with young people who had become 'notorious recidivists' (notably in relation to alcohol or petrol abuse) and renowned as uncooperative recalcitrants amongst practitioners then it was more likely that they would be sentenced to detention. If the hostels in Laverton and Kalgoorlie refused to take an individual from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands then this would increase his or her chances of being remanded in custody or sentenced to detention. In addition, if a young person kept re-appearing before the magistrate on fresh charges then he was inclined to view him or her as having exhausted his or her chances. This happened to Peter Forest, a Ngaanyatjarra youth who appeared before the court towards the end of 1992. Whilst on open remand at the Laverton hostel, he had stolen a car in Laverton and driven it the 200 kilometres to Warburton before the car ran out of petrol. The following discussion occurred in court:

ALS lawyer [new from Kalgoorlie]: Admits everything but states that the other boy encouraged him to do it.

Magistrate: I find it difficult to be impartial about Peter. I know him well - he commits offences on his own. I have a vivid memory of him stealing a motor vehicle and driving it to Menzies [Takes up the DCD pre-sentence report] I do not accept the recommendation that Peter stay in [a Kalgoorlie] hostel. He will not stay put as he has escaped from this hostel before. What is your advice Mrs Blunt?

Hostel manager: He needs one to one supervision and staff can't keep a constant eye on him. When the other boys are there he gets restless.

Magistrate: He would be best at home but his mother has no control over him.

ALS: There's the breach of probation.

Magistrate: I remember the offences for which he got probation - for stealing from a woman in Warakurna.

DCD [Kalgoorlie officer]: What about the other Kalgoorlie hostel?

Magistrate: He doesn't stay there either.

ALS: I haven't spoken to Peter regarding the breach of probation [Bends down to whisper with Peter] [The magistrate reads out the complaint regarding the breach of probation and takes Peter's plea of guilty. The magistrate announces that Peter will be remanded in custody to appear in the Kalgoorlie court in four days time]

Magistrate: Unless a satisfactory option is found, he will be sentenced to custody. He is not travelling happy at home, nor when he is away from home.

Table 9: Local youth - outcomes by charges, 1992-1993.

Outcomes	1992	1993	1992-1993	
Referral to panel	0	2	2	3%
Dismissal	3	2	5	7%
Susp/Disqualified	2	2	4	6%
Fines	1	11	12	17%
Good behaviour bond	1	15	16	23%
Community service order	11	8	19	27%
Probation	0	6	6	9%
Detention	5	0	5	7%
Total	23	46	69*	100%

*excludes 9 unknown

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

Table 10: Local youth - most serious outcomes by incidents (n=38), 1992-1993.

Outcomes	1992	1993	1992-1993	
Referral to panel	0	2	2	6%
Dismissal	2	2	4	11%
Susp/Disqualified	0	1	1	3%
Fines	1	5	6	17%
Good behaviour bond	1	5	6	17%
Community service order	6	7	13	37%
Probation	0	2	2	6%
Detention	1	0	1	3%
Total	11	24	35*	100%

*excludes 3 unknown

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police

Table 11: Ngaanyatjarra youth - outcomes by charges, 1992-1993.

Outcomes	1992 (n=297 charges)		1993 (n=376 charges)		1992-1993 (n=673 charges)	
	Referral to panel	0	0%	6	2%	6
No evidence offered	7	2%	5	1%	12	2%
Dismissal s.24	31	11%	37	11%	68	11%
Dismissal s.34	122	44%	133	41%	255	43%
Fines	33	12%	34	11%	67	11%
Good behaviour bond	0	0%	6	2%	6	1%
Community service order	79	29%	9	3%	88	15%
Probation	3	1%	18	6%	21	4%
Detention/prison	0	0%	74	23%	74	12%
Total	275*	100%	322**	100%	597***	100%

*excludes 22 unknown** excludes 54 unknown ***excludes 76 unknown

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police.

Table 12: Ngaanyatjarra youths - most serious outcome by court appearance for sentencing¹⁴⁵, 1992-1993.

Outcomes	1992		1993		1992-1993	
	Referral to panel	0	0%	3	4%	3
No evidence offered	1	3%	0	0%	1	1%
Dismissal s.24	1	1%	11	15%	12	11%
Dismissal s.34	13	34%	26	36%	39	35%
Fines	12	32%	14	19%	26	24%
Good behaviour bond	0	0%	3	4%	3	3%
Community service order	9	24%	3	4%	12	11%
Probation	2	5%	5	7%	7	6%
Detention/prison	0	0%	7	10%	7	6%
Total	38*	101%	72**	99%	110***	100%

*excludes 4 appearances where the outcomes were unknown** excludes 10 appearances where the outcomes were unknown*** excludes 14 appearances where the outcomes were unknown

Source: Laverton briefs, WA Police

¹⁴⁵ There was rarely a 'single' incident for which charges were laid, instead there was usually a series of charges for incidents over a period of time, that were considered together at the time of a court appearance for sentencing.

As Tables 9 and 10 show, the most common sentence for local youth was the community service order. As Tables 11 and 12 show, such orders were imposed on a significant proportion of Ngaanyatjarra youth for incidents in 1992 (29%) but very few were handed down by the court in 1993, probably because by then it was accepted amongst local practitioners that the orders were rarely completed or supervised in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Community service orders could range from 10 to 70 hours and in 1992 the average length was 29 hours whilst the range narrowed from 10 to 20 hours in 1993 which produced a smaller average of 12 hours. Along with good behaviour bonds, fines were the next most common outcome for incidents involving local youth. An equivalent proportion of incidents involving Ngaanyatjarra youth (24%) resulted in fines though the amounts were never great. In 1992 the range was \$10 to \$200 (average of \$65) and in 1993 the range was \$20 to \$350 (average of \$89).

Only one incident involving a local youth resulted in a period of detention, whilst 14 final court appearances involving Ngaanyatjarra youth resulted in either detention or prison. As a percentage of incidents the figure is quite low (6%) but when s.34 dismissals are taken into account (35% of appearances for sentencing) then the proportion could be seen as much higher. All of these charges were likely to have been dismissed because the young person had already been in police custody, detention or resident in a hostel. The latter is not the same as custody or detention, but did represent an intervention designed to keep young people out of their home communities.

Conclusion

Close examination of police data on offences and offenders over a two year period revealed that of 64 individual juveniles who appeared in court, 95% were Aboriginal, 84% were male, 75% were from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Over this period, 49 incidents occurred in Laverton of which half involved Ngaanyatjarra youth. 13 local youth faced 74 charges related to 38 incidents, the majority of which related to property crime (burglary or theft made up half of the incidents) followed by drunken fights (over one third of incidents). Seven incidents related to motor vehicle theft, while break-ins were mainly of shops and non-private amenities (sports club, the mess and so on) with only two burglaries of private dwellings. The prime location for interpersonal violence was the pub and its environs. Group fighting between Aboriginal people accounted for nearly half of the assaults, some of which were of police when they intervened, and in two other incidents, of family members. On three occasions the victims were white but not the police. More persistent young offenders were involved in thefts and break-ins to gain items associated with substance abuse and the value of stolen goods was not great, although the cost of associated damage could be high.

Over the two years 34 young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands appeared in court for 667 charges committed on the Lands of which 80% were for the possession or supply of petrol. During this period there was a rise in the number of possession charges, and there were indicators that offending had become more serious with an increase in burglaries, firearm related offences, and assaults against the police. After the police, the

next most common reported victims were community advisers, and nearly one third of victims were community members. In contrast, most burglaries were of community property - schools, workshop and so forth, though one fifth of incidents were of community member's houses. Police stressed that in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands they responded to community demands in their accounts of incidents by referring to individuals' deteriorating health and behaviour, the impact on family and community and their wish to have the individual sniffers removed.

Police warnings were primarily aimed at alerting arresting officers of the likelihood of attacks or 'resistance', or of safety and health concerns arising from the chronic use of petrol. For some youths with long standing petrol sniffing habits, their personalities were characterised by police in a negative way which implied the youths suffered from diminished comprehension and capacity to function normally. Local and Ngaanyatjarra youths' explanations for offences recorded by police included boredom, peer pressure, a desire for goods or a means to travel, and with violent offences, the provocation of others' actions. In court defendants were minor participants and as there were guilty pleas for the vast majority of offences, scant attention was paid to the explanation for offences. There was virtually a complete consensus amongst justice practitioners that local and Ngaanyatjarra youth understood English, but there were doubts expressed about some youths' ability to comprehend events in court because of adverse effects wrought by prolonged inhalation of petrol.

There were extreme instances of long delays before finalisation with desert youths but overall desert youths were dealt with more expeditiously than local youth. Delays were caused by non-appearances of defendants and not guilty pleas. A substantial proportion of local and Ngaanyatjarra youth understood English, but there were doubts expressed about some youths' ability to comprehend events in court because of adverse effects wrought by prolonged inhalation of petrol. During court, a magistrate frustrated by delays or missing paperwork was observed reprimanding or interrogating agency representatives, thereby indicating his control of proceedings within the formal context of the courtroom. Outside of court, agency representatives were heard to complain of delays and disruptions to established routine by new or relief magistrates.

A large part of court time was taken up with settling arrangements and negotiating placements for conditional bail and sentences. The magistrate did not request pre-sentence reports very often, instead relying on information supplied verbally in court and his own knowledge of the defendants and local circumstances. Detention was viewed by magistrates as the last resort, but was meted out to those perceived as recalcitrants and recidivists who had exhausted alternative options such as residence in a hostel. The most common outcome for local youth was community service orders, but these were handed out sparingly to Ngaanyatjarra youth in 1993, apparently because such orders were infrequently completed or supervised. A considerable proportion of Ngaanyatjarra youth, 40% of cases, were 'kept away' from the Lands for a period of time either by being detained in custody or detention or by residence in a hostel, as a sentence or on remand.

Most of the local justice practitioners acknowledged that there were limitations to the juvenile justice system because it was not addressing underlying problems and secondly the application of western law and values was viewed as problematic within the local context. This was brought to the fore when Ngaanyatjarra youth were brought before the court on petrol sniffing related charges. An ALS lawyer, Hugh, remarked that *'the legal service doesn't really address the underlying causes of crime and the associated destitution of crime. All the legal service can do is ensure the law is implemented as parliament intended'*.

For many years there have been debates about the feasibility of developing alternative or more appropriate outcomes and processes. It was noteworthy that in 1993 for the first time a local boy's offence was dealt with using the principles of restorative justice, in that a meeting was arranged by a local DCD officer with the boy and the plaintiff (a shop manager) present. However, an indigenous justice model was never mentioned by local practitioners. Instead the focus was on the recognition of 'traditional law' and the incorporation of local Aboriginal people as practitioners into the system. So for instance the ALS lawyer Hugh cited a recent case where 'tribal law' was taken into account during court proceedings, and some practitioners referred to the justices of the peace at Warburton as an important innovation. Hugh believed there had been great progress in increasing understanding of a lawyer's role and of western legal principles because of the appointment of local justices. In his view, it was *'a positive step towards making people feel the parliamentary system of justice is their own system of justice'*. However, a magistrate was more cautious saying the system was *'not very accountable or flexible'* and that his role was to advise justices of the peace, not supervise them.

Several dimensions to the administration of juvenile justice have been highlighted in the course of this chapter, including the need to bring a young person to court as soon as possible and ensuring he and she will appear in court, the need once in court to establish whether the young person understood what was going on, whether he or she admitted having done wrong and whether he or she had an explanation. It was the magistrate who determined the outcomes based, in principle, upon the nature of the crimes, the person's prior record (including whether the person had successfully completed court orders in the past), and the person's age and relevant welfare issues. In the main, however, the magistrate had to depend on the police version of events and to a lesser extent, the input of the lawyer, when it came to a consideration of a disposition. There was circumscribed participation of the young person in the actual court process, and even less by other family members given that they were rarely present. Mostly in the court itself, it was the magistrate who controlled the proceeding and who would, at the end of a particular matter, often deliver an exhortation to the defendant. Prior to the decision, though, it was common to have negotiations over outcomes which might include a statement by hostel staff over their willingness to take particular individuals. There was, significantly, considerable talk between agency representatives before and after court, which only sought to underline the importance of local knowledge, especially the identities of young people appearing before the court, and it is the familiarity with locales and locals and between practitioners which is explored in the next chapter.



CHAPTER EIGHT

The practice of justice

In their analysis of South Australian juvenile justice statistics from 1972 to 1986, Gale et al (1990) found geographic variations across the state in the over-representation of Aboriginal youth which could not be accounted for by differences in population size. The authors speculate that the variations may be due to differences in Aboriginal offending behaviour or to differences in the administration of juvenile justice and then conclude, based on their previous research and experiences, that they favour the latter interpretation. They stress how workers in the juvenile justice system can be strongly influenced by community expectations, especially in small rural centres where the workers face social ostracism if they do not conform. The authors believe therefore that the regional variations are probably related to the degree of prejudice held by the white community because, they assert, police and welfare are limited by their own attitudes and by those held by the community in which they operate¹⁴⁶.

Although this speculative conclusion might be considered unsatisfactory, particularly as it poses an either/or option for the explanation of the variations, it is interesting in that there are unstated assumptions about what is so different in rural communities to the urban milieu. The first set of assumptions are those related to the attributes of small-scale communities, particularly where they are reasonably isolated from other different kinds of settlements such as cities. The statutory officer residing in such a place is assumed to be embedded within a network of social relations and hierarchies, where the person is known independently of his or her official standing, and where there is on-going interactions with local residents. As a consequence, the officer is characterised as being subject to greater pressure or to becoming unself-consciously incorporated into the prevailing practices and beliefs of the rural community. The second set of assumptions relates to stereotypes of race relations in rural Australia, where the dominant elite and/or the majority of white residents are portrayed as sharing a negative, intolerant attitude towards Aborigines and a fundamentally conservative political stance on indigenous issues. It is the force of this socio-political perspective rooted in racial prejudice which is assumed to adversely affect the fair application of the law and administration of justice by local practitioners.

As with all generalities these assumptions carry persuasive weight as common features broadly applicable to many rural settings in Australia. Nevertheless they gloss over the local specificities of race relations, of the subordinate and dominant groups, and practitioners' experiences and responses to the local context. Laverton itself did not conform to a 'traditional' country town in that for the past 20 years its primary economic base had been mining and the majority of the white population, short-term residents. As discussed in Chapter Four, the notion of a rural gentry had

¹⁴⁶ Although it is acknowledged that conventional urban program-based approaches to youth issues are not effective in small communities, relatively little criminological work has been undertaken on the specific issue of young offending in a rural context. A study of a Victorian rural setting found that certain families and neighbourhoods were subject to constant stigmatisation. Some communities, usually larger ones, were more 'inclusive' in their responses to young offenders (Mounsey 1997).

little relevance except for vestigial involvement of the few remaining local pastoralists in shire politics. Significantly, it is the location of the town that provides the opportunity for non-Aboriginal residents to have contact with local Wongi people and the residents of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

This chapter will focus on local welfare and police representatives who were the principal statutory agents in the town involved in the day to day management of juvenile justice and who, aside from health and education workers, had a statutory duty to take an interest in the activities of local youth and children. In much of the literature on criminal justice there is a reliance on reified concepts which create the impression of monolithic 'vertical' institutions, mechanistic processes and a system of undifferentiated agencies working in concert, with for example uncritical references to the criminal justice system; uniform service delivery; and organisational 'culture'. However, the administration of juvenile justice has been characterised as having a degree of flexibility unheard of in the more formal legalistic arena of the adult court imbued by practices associated with the systematic handling of deviant adults. Thus, it could be hypothesised, welfare and police practitioners might have a high degree of latitude to exercise discretion when considering decisions related to offending and disadvantaged young people in a rural setting.

Within the sphere of juvenile justice, police become more involved in welfare issues than is normally the case in their work. Conversely, although the scope of social workers' practice is also broadened, their work often takes on the character of policing, with the supervision and investigation of children and their families. The situation for local practitioners was complicated by the political sensitivities surrounding the way welfare and police had performed their jobs in relation to Aboriginal youth. The RCIADIC report on underlying issues in WA (Dodson 1991) singled out the welfare and police as having a woeful record in the field of juvenile justice, and since the Royal Commission places such as Laverton with high rates of recorded juvenile crime and of juvenile detention have been subject to periodic reviews to assess whether there has been progressive change.

Outsiders' interest, however, has tended to concentrate on the local practitioners' responses to petrol sniffing by Ngaanyatjarra youths and their relations with Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements, rather than on relations within the town precincts. For some it would seem, substance abuse by the younger generation of Aborigines in Ngaanyatjarra Lands and in Laverton itself, symbolised the ravages of modernity and the flawed outcomes from government policies of self-determination.

For local justice practitioners the work has a spatial dimension and cultural nuances which foster a sense of uniqueness about the location. They are responsible for a huge territory inhabited by a small number of people so travelling around to ensure 'coverage' was seen as integral to the work. Since there are large spaces between settlements 'geographic solutions' of moving young people to other places has long been favoured as a temporary solution to a perceived problem. Not that this was peculiar to Laverton. Beresford and Omaji (1996:97) were told by some Aboriginal people that in country areas it was more likely that police and magistrates would use "punitive measures for welfare issues", and that it was the inclination of magistrates to "get troublesome kids out of the community". But the perception of a boundary

between the Lands and the Goldfields contributed to the impression of movement between two different 'zones', as well as the removal of young people to a place many kilometres physically distant from their usual place of residence. A further axis was discernible in the distinction between town and bush, with local town youth more likely to be ordered or encouraged to stay at outlying (to the town) stations and camps.

Here I will cover a number of issues related to the effects of experience and the processes by which individuals acquire local knowledge and practice. Following a description of police and welfare work, including patrols and responses to the public, I will examine discretionary power, resisting and accommodating local practices, tensions between practitioners, claims to local knowledge and constructions of difference.

Police and welfare work in Laverton

The police station and the welfare office were adjacent to each other and on the edge of Laver Place. On the other side of the welfare office was the pub and it was positioned on a slight rise, with only dirt tracks leading up to the building. In contrast the police station faced the bitumen road and had a reasonably spruce appearance, with a strip of neat lawn out the front. Both had counters¹⁴⁷ on entering the building which prevented further access unless a door or hatch was opened. Both had small foyer areas with displays of pamphlets and posters advertising the functions and initiatives of the respective organisations. Here the similarities ended.

The police station was really a complex of three separate spaces - the core station comprising the foyer area, a communal space where police typed up briefs and answered phones, kitchen, storage area and interview room. On one side were the police cells and the fenced in yard and the other side was the courthouse and an adjacent room for the magistrate when he was in town. The station had a busy, cramped feel to it and lacked privacy, whilst the yard was sometimes a lively place with games of cards, the cooking of kangaroo and guitar playing. A colourful mural executed by an inmate extended along one wall of the yard. The cells were concrete Spartan narrow spaces. Parked outside was usually at least one 'paddy wagon' clearly marked with insignia and the blue and white colours of police vehicles. The courthouse was mostly closed with windows high in the wall so that no-one could easily look inside. An increase in police numbers from the mid - eighties to the mid-nineties was paralleled by an expansion in the complex - with a demountable placed out the back which was used for social purposes, and the renovation and extension of the station proper.

The DCD building had an uninviting exterior and for some years had only a solitary dusty sign to indicate the identity of its occupants. The front desk area was flanked by two wings of four rooms each, and several were used as a kitchen, a conference room and an individual offices. There was an abundance of space for three workers

¹⁴⁷ The DCD counter was transformed into a more secure barrier in the late eighties because of concerns for the safety of the person manning the front desk, and because of concerns about the confidentiality of information. Previously people had occasionally wandered in unseen to the offices where files were kept.

and much space was filled by old files spare parts and camping equipment until a spring clean in the late eighties. Space was further reduced around then when community health moved in and occupied one wing of the building. Parked outside were usually one or both vehicles - a sedan and a Toyota four-wheel drive with only government number plates to indicate they were official vehicles. The traffic of people declined in the nineties once the office no longer functioned as a social security sub-agency (which was moved to Wongatha Wonganarra centre)¹⁴⁸ and policy changes restricted the accessibility of emergency assistance ('food and clothing vouchers').

The department owned two other buildings in town - the youth centre building and the hostel which was located on the other side of town on the outer side of the ring road. The hostel was surrounded by well-tended gardens and was well designed inside with a light, open plan living area and a kitchen for residents, laundry and pantry, bathrooms and two dormitory rooms. There was an office and a small flat attached to house the resident manager and family. Another Toyota four-wheel drive was assigned to the hostel staff. On the outside of the building there was no sign to indicate its name or official function. For over five years the hostel was run by a couple who stated their intention of fostering a 'homey' atmosphere for the youths who stayed there. After they had been in situ for a while, and because of their status in the community and involvement in district politics, there was a steady stream of official and personal visitors for the couple.

In the welfare office in the eighties and nineties there were two field officers and one administrative officer¹⁴⁹. The field officers were responsible for substitute care, child protection, financial assistance, community development and until 1993 juvenile justice. However, one field officer, a male, was allotted the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and was expected to make regular visits to the communities. The other officer, always female from 1987 to 1994, was expected to help local town residents and nearby mining and Aboriginal settlements. It was not a division strictly adhered because desert people were often in town, and the male officer worked in town as well, although typically more on juvenile justice issues.

An extra position was created in the late eighties for an assistant to aid the couple who ran the hostel, and had a male incumbent up until the time when I last visited the town in 1994. The hostel couple and a field officer in the early nineties were non-local Aboriginal people and in about 1993 one of the field officer's positions was specifically designated as an Aboriginal position. Relations between hostel and office staff varied over time, but were in the main co-operative with both groups being answerable to a divisional manager based in Kalgoorlie. Various specialists were based in Kalgoorlie such as a child protection worker and a clinical psychologist who were available to assist field staff in Kalgoorlie and in the Goldfields division, which included the towns on the north-south road between and

¹⁴⁸ A separate space was created for the justice department field officer (formerly a welfare field officer) when this department became responsible for juvenile justice matters in 1993. An office was established in the old WMC demountable opposite the supermarket.

¹⁴⁹ Up until the nineties there was also a part-time position of family resource worker (called homemakers in an earlier era) but these positions were phased out throughout the department and the state.

including Laverton and Esperance. Every three or four months meetings would be held of the region's field officers while hostel staff had support and administration provided by a central unit in Perth.

For nearly all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal visitors and residents of the town, and in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, 'welfare' was an agency that worked with Aboriginal people. Its image was a legacy of the past, but was also reinforced by the contemporary clientele of the agency. Few non-Aboriginal people entered the portals of the welfare office, even to seek assistance with social security matters. It was telling that a regional politician, in the early nineties, was quoted as arguing that DCD local officers should hang around street corners because white people did not want to go into the offices of a black agency.

In the late eighties white women residents who were engaged on a campaign for child-minding amenities were publicly critical of the hostel's inability to cater for their needs. They argued that it should be a 'community' facility (and therefore operate part-time as a creche for their young offspring) and not only have Aboriginal residents. These complaints subsided somewhat when the criteria for admittance were circulated, which restricted access to young children, in times of crises, who needed care which their usual caregivers were unable to provide. Anyway, from 1987 onwards the hostel increasingly functioned as an auxiliary of the justice system - taking in youths on bail or on sentences who chronically used petrol. Irrespective of whether the work of welfare officers was portrayed as a form of policing or of helping disadvantaged children, families and communities, it was widely accepted by the non-Aboriginal population that those most in need and those most in trouble were Aboriginal persons.

Considering the size of the town, there was a large and visible presence of police in Laverton. In 1993 there were 15 police officers two police aides and an office clerk¹⁵⁰. To the best of my knowledge, all of the police and aides over the years had been men. A senior sergeant believed that female officers were undesirable because the officers' wives could not handle their husbands going away on patrol with women. Up until 1994 none of the officers had been Aboriginal and even though the aides were, the majority of men who had held this position were non-local. Aside from nurses, police were the only occupational group in town to don uniforms while at work, although those employed in the service sector - such as teachers, welfare workers, shire and mining office staff - were as a general group usually recognisable because of their neat but casual attire during the day. Individual police also had their rank displayed on their uniforms, denoted by stripes and so on, and the lines of authority were obviously hierarchical with the Senior Sergeant known as the local boss.

Like the welfare authorities, the police work was largely perceived as involving contact with Aboriginal people, primarily in their capacity as enforcers of the criminal law. Non-Aboriginal residents, however, did routinely patronise the police premises, to lay complaints of incivilities and crime and to pay traffic fines, gun

¹⁵⁰ Of the 15 officers, the station had one Senior Sergeant and two Sergeants. In 1993 a female constable, the first ever in Laverton, was employed on a part-time basis but she never went on patrols. Around this time the position of police aide was renamed statewide to Aboriginal Liaison Officer.

licences and the like. For many non-Aboriginal residents it seemed that the police were regarded as an organisation working on their behalf and they would therefore subject the police to pressure to act in accordance with their demands. Similarly, some local Wongis and many Ngaanyatjarra Lands people would approach the police and expect them to respond to their complaints or demands. Nonetheless, despite the personal relations with individual police, there was an element of caution to such approaches, no doubt influenced by memories of past confrontations and uncalled for interventions. In addition, there were quite hostile and derogatory opinions expressed about the police in some quarters - as a universal category rather than about local practitioners - notably amongst single mining men, local young people and the local Aboriginal visitors/drifters who were heavy drinkers.

Unlike other white town residents, justice practitioners regularly undertook excursions into the 'other world' of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The non-local practitioners who would undertake visits were the magistrate, an ALS lawyer and the clerk of the court every three months or so to Warburton¹⁵¹. The local DCD hostel staff and the ALS field officer might go up to the communities every so often but it was the local DCD field officer and the local police who routinely went on 'patrols' to most of the communities. In 1993 a Laverton constable would in a year undertake on average six patrols to the Lands, which were frequently called the 'Ranges' or the 'Central Reserves' by local people. Two police officers and sometimes a police aide were rostered on for each patrol, which over 10 days covered at least 3000 kilometres

Patrolling

In 1947 the solitary police officer then stationed in Laverton rode on horseback to just beyond Warburton to apprehend a man suspected of committing murder. The round trip took over three weeks and was written up as an epic experience by the officer in the magazine *Walkabout* (Anderson 1948). Not long after, in the 1950s, Middleton became chief commissioner of native welfare and introduced across the state a network of district officers, modelled on the colonial administration then favoured in Papua and New Guinea. A long-term Goldfields resident and former departmental officer, Kev Sattler, remembered first starting his employment at that time with the department. Based in Kalgoorlie, as a field officer he would travel miles in the region visiting pastoral stations to check on conditions of Aboriginal employment. Much of his working week would be spent on the road and the basic requirements were a vehicle, maps, Jerry cans and so on.

There was and continues to be glamour and prestige attached to going on patrol into the rugged bush and traversing huge distances of unoccupied hinterland. When I arrived in Laverton in 1987 the local welfare office had a Toyota four-wheel drive with special long-range fuel tanks, which would be equipped for the Ranges patrol with Jerry cans of water, bed 'swags', spare parts and tyres, a small fridge and a two-way radio. By the nineties, visits were still made to pastoral properties and small former mission settlements, but it was the tour of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands that represented a challenging journey - because of the distance and limited white

¹⁵¹ In the late eighties the Goldfields circuit magistrate first began the practice of holding court in Warburton several times a year.

presence - but primarily because it was exotic 'blackfella' country. The celebration of the adventure is captured in the tone of media articles on the police patrols, which typically refer to them as the 'longest' patrols in the world¹⁵².

Back in the sixties there were two welfare field officers stationed in Laverton, a number unchanged since then, but with the dispersal and movement of Aboriginal people from the ex-missions and the growth of the outstations and Ngaanyatjarra Lands' settlements in the 1970s, it became a matter of visiting the current congregations of people to the point where patrols to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands became an established event. By the eighties both the Laverton police and the local welfare field officer were undertaking regular patrols, although the latter's work was never publicised like the police 'beats'. Back in the eighties, the police patrols were for four to five days every fortnight and people were either picked up on an honour system or kept in the van until it returned to Laverton. By 1994, the number of police officers stationed in Laverton had nearly doubled, two police posts with lock-up facilities were built at Warakurna and Warburton, telephone and fax had replaced the radio as the main means of communication, ten day patrols were introduced and a specially designed vehicle (the Oka) was used for patrols.

In the fifties, Kev Sattler was visiting stations in order to check on relations between Aboriginal employees and their non-Aboriginal employers, while in the sixties local welfare officers in Laverton were involved in developing training and employment programs for local Aboriginal people. With the growth in juvenile crime in towns in the seventies, and the increased prevalence of petrol sniffing amongst Ngaanyatjarra youth, the focus of welfare work locally and in the Lands shifted to the management of convicted young offenders and 'at risk' young people and children.

In 1987 a tour of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands was to some extent a goodwill exercise, an opportunity to meet people who might be encountered intoxicated in Laverton, and to have face to face contact with key intermediaries like the advisers and health workers. However, there remained particular individuals resident in the Lands who were on file, young people who had been placed under the control or care of the department. There remained a statutory obligation to seek out these young people and their significant relations. By 1993 these kind of court imposed responsibilities had evaporated, though young people were still subject to the solicitous inquiry because of prolonged contact through their court appearances and periods of residence in the hostel for offences related to petrol sniffing. By 1993 the main rationale for talking with people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for the local field officer was endeavouring to encourage a mentoring scheme where adult Ngaanyatjarra Lands' residents would 'look after' youths who habitually used petrol.

Over the same period that the profile of welfare and its officers' ostensible duties narrowed and diminished¹⁵³, the expectations and presence of the police increased.

¹⁵² Titled "on patrol in the land of the Wongi", the *West Australian* newspaper ran in 1984 a feature on what was referred to as "one of the world's longest police beats (20/4/84). An article in a 1986 issue of *Geo* elevated it to the "the longest beat in the world", a *Kalgoorlie Miner* article called it the "loneliest and longest patrol for policemen" (17/6/88), and the *West Australian* carried an article recently, titled "on patrol in the biggest police beat in the world" (14/2/99).

When officers were interviewed by me, and in the courtroom settings, they laboured how they acted 'at the request of the community'. The following are excerpts from police interviews:

Saul: [How they conduct their business] We're based in Warakurna and Warburton usually. We drive into other communities, talk to the adviser and some of the elders and ask them who they want us to apprehend and we go and look for them. Sometimes we just drive in and see people that you've been after for a while, got complaints against or warrants and go after them straight away... Just because somebody's petrol sniffing you don't always take them away, they might want to do something else with them, nothing is black and white, just kind of worked out between us and the community people, what they want to do... [how he knew who the elders were] I didn't really, I still wouldn't know all of them. They come up to you. You just get to know them after a while. You ask the other copper who's been around for a while. They make themselves known to you because they are obviously interested in what is going on in their community...

Doug: [Demands of the patrol] No real break. You've got seven day, now 10 days, 24 hours a day. You've got people knocking at the door all hours of the day and night. While we're up there, they expect us to be guardian angels, to sort out everything from somebody calling them a name they didn't particularly like to stabbing to a murder basically.

Brad: You're dealing with all of them, the men and women. The women will just as readily come up and talk to you and tell you what's been happening and try to help you. In some cases more so than the men, especially if it's with their children... The only reason that we basically take anybody out of the communities.. it's when the majority of people asked for our assistance. And we have to be satisfied that that's the case too... Because personalities come into it and just petty arguments... You would go to people that you know are respected and can actually voice the community's opinion on the matter...

Despite modern telecommunications, there continues to be a desire and a sense of obligation to personally visit places so that one can be aware of and appreciate the people's concerns and demands. Thus the patrol continued to play a role for welfare and police practitioners who believed they had to witness or hear face to face to establish the 'truth' of the situation. Not only does the visit provide perspective - an overview of the context - but supplies, in the shape of conversation and dialogue local representations of events and issues. More symbolically, the effort of the travel to make the visit, communicates vigilance and a shouldering of one's responsibilities as a departmental representative, and of having experienced the 'remoteness' and 'difference' of the place by taking the trouble to 'cover one's territory' by travelling the distance on land to reach the scattered populace in an area of 447,000 square kilometres (the Laverton police district). The mystique of distance traversed remains potent even though the inconvenience of travel and accommodation in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands has declined, with the swag unnecessary unless one wishes to enjoy camping out.

Surveillance implies systematic and continual observation. A more apt metaphor is that of the regular examination by the doctor of the patient, listening to what the patient has to say but requiring a face to face observation by, and the independent scrutiny of, the authoritative expert. Visits from senior departmental officers, or politicians, to the local base and to the places that are patrolled occur sporadically

¹⁵³ This was the general trend. However, it was interesting that in 1993 there was a series of notifications of alleged child neglect in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

and are a disruption to routine activities and a truncated version of patrols¹⁵⁴. More unsettling are the visits from official 'investigators' or 'experts' in the justice field who are engaged in an inquiry on behalf of some central authority. Curiosity may underlie some individual trips but both varieties of visitor appear to justify their 'tours' on grounds that echo the rationale for the patrol. They wish to hear and see for themselves and in the case of the senior bureaucrat or politician, to demonstrate governmental interest, responsibility and support to local residents, including local practitioners. Such visits reinforce the image of the centrifugal force of state power with the origins (the legislature) and framework (policies) for local practices being determined in the hub.

Localised responses

Patrolling the town of Laverton did not take very long. The circumnavigation of the town by driving around the ring road took no more than 10 minutes. The police did regularly drive around the roads, but not with any great expectation of stumbling across or preventing serious crime. At night, and at the weekends, they also regularly walked over and toured the pub, and called in on large social events where trouble might erupt. Depending on who was in town and the time of day or night, they might anticipate needing to intervene in potentially violent situations or to pick up someone lying unconscious in public spaces. A police aide characterised town work as being 'busy dealing with drunks' and admitted to finding it boring at times. He referred to a previous Saturday night at the pub when the police arrested about 10 white blokes for fighting and drunkenness and said it was a relief to pick up 'the whitefellas' for a change. One in particular, a New Zealander with a heroin habit, had a very anti-police attitude and caused a lot of problems.

According to Edmunds (1989:108) much of the police work in Roebourne was taken up with the "imposition of petty disciplinary action" against Aboriginal people. She found that the police saw a contradiction in their work between carrying out their duty and their involvement in welfare work, epitomised by the phrase "looking after the drunks". It was the latter role which generated some resentment amongst the police. On the other hand, it was the welfare role which they appeared to see as contributing to their sense of good relations between them and Roebourne Aborigines, and of performing an unique service.

An English former policeman turned anthropologist, Young (1993) refers to the belief, held by English police, in a constant fight to stem an incoming tide of mayhem, and claims they draw on an intensive set of metaphors of enemies and wars against subversive hooligans.

"Following the historical dictates of their own thinking, they focus on a range of dichotomies of good and evil, and using an imagery and symbolism of crime waves, battles with burglars, and the resulting belief that patrolmen are - in essence - the foot soldiers of the company, they make the concept of belonging and cultural identity a part of a vanguard action" (Young 1993:14).

¹⁵⁴ The change in pace and time-scale of the administrator's visit is indicated by the fact that the Chief Protector Neville, would take three months each year to tour the north of the state, and the more leisurely nature of the expert's tour by Elkin of the Kimberleys in the thirties (Jacobs 1990).

He agrees with Heidensohn (1992) that this conflict model of the police role has a mythological quality, and is a continuous social construction which is less than accurate. It was quite apparent to the Laverton police that they were not pitted against a professional or organised criminal class or were they surrounded by the richer, more variable and unpredictable tapestry of the stereotypical urban scene. However, several of the Laverton police expressed the view that they were performing tasks that no other agency was prepared to take on - that they were engaged in an unpopular but essential service - and they did go out of their way to highlight the dangerousness of their work in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements, where youths high on petrol or angered community members might attack them. Their accounts conveyed the impression of a threatening but exciting situation tempered by expressions of sympathy and affection for the perpetrators of these kind of incidents. In addition, the legitimacy of their actions was in their eyes unquestionable as they were only responding to 'community wishes'. Even their welfare role was more accentuated because as one police officer claimed - they were saving the lives of some youth by removing from the community.

Joshua: I heard about the violence from people in the communities and I'd thought 'yeah, yeah' but it does happen on a regular basis. I did six patrols up in the communities last year and only on one patrol someone didn't want to do some damage to me. Most high on petrol, several just angry because their freedom was being taken away for whatever reason...Guns are fairly common with the border not far away, easy to get a gun. When confronted with a gun, just talk, talk... I've never contemplated firing at anyone though we carry guns [in the vehicles, not on the person].

Abraham: [Concerns for officers' safety] Not really. They think about it, they get scared sometimes. We've only had one injury since I've been here [three and half years]... The guys have had guns pointed at them, spears thrown at them, rocks thrown at them, all that sort of thing. They've managed to.. back off and come back later... our blokes don't carry guns or batons. They got them in the vehicle but they don't wear them on their person... All of us, we often discuss it and they prefer not to... It can get people more excited if you walk around with guns and batons, I guess. They're more appropriate in the city.

Terence: I think a lot of them have got it in the back of their minds that if they ever touched one of us, they'll be in trouble from their own people. Because we're here basically to police their communities for them, we're only there because they want us there.

Reece: [why police arrest and remove petrol sniffers from the communities] We are the only ones willing... The fault lies, in fact, that we only have the avenue of imprisonment to save people's lives...the people that we've got in the back of the van are put there because Aboriginal people wanted them there.

Patrolling a populace, albeit scattered in small settlements, is one thing and policing the local territory is another. It was stressed to me by police and welfare workers that they respond overwhelmingly to individual complaints and requests in the town. Whereas in the past, welfare and police may have entered into Aboriginal 'social spaces' with impunity, there was a deference and respect for 'private' and 'community' boundaries that were ignored in earlier years. There were claims of undifferentiated, even positively discriminatory, practice in the seeking of permission to enter homes, the Village, Aboriginal settlements, in comparison to standard procedures for accessing the general public's homes and community events.

Notwithstanding the stated adherence to standardised approaches to access, it should be noted that wherever there were 'disturbances' in public places or in residential

premises, the police knew they were within their 'rights' to take, if warranted, swift action without having to obtain permission. Such action was mainly directed at Aboriginal people, notably local young children and visiting drinking adults. Moreover, wherever DCD had received a notification or the police a complaint then they were duty bound to investigate.

The work had taken on an increasingly sedentary dimension in town, where the welfare office and police station were located. There was a prevailing attitude that by 'staying put' within the office and station buildings, then the onus would be on the public to come to the workers for advice and help. Partly this stance could be attributed to feelings of deference and defensiveness, in that there was less risk of accusations of having imposed on unwilling or unreceptive subjects. Partly too it was linked to broader policies that highlighted individual responsibility and initiative as a means of addressing dependency assumed to be rife amongst the Aboriginal people. Inculcating individual and collective responsibility for general 'well-being' were interpreted as complementary aspects to self-determination. An example of how this attitude affected practice was when a defendant did not show up for magistrate's court and the ALS lawyer, Mr Barton, told me outside court he thought the defendant was in the pub but that he would have to make the effort to appear if he wanted his help.

Addressing welfare dependency was a central tenet of how the welfare department should conduct itself, and hardly an issue for the police, who tended to regard themselves as pragmatists who only responded reluctantly to many of the matters brought to their attention. Cowlshaw(1988:190) quotes a Brindleton welfare officer who asserted that the department's function was "educational, to help them survive in the long run" in contrast to past practices that fostered a "welfare mentality" amongst poor whites and blacks. Certainly in WA, the practice of welfare in relation to Aboriginal clients had changed, at least on paper, from direct and immediate help in the form of commodities to the more diffuse role of broker and supporter of locally generated initiatives that conformed to relatively unspecified notions of 'self-help'. Thus when a regional politician and various 'do-gooders' around town, including Aboriginal residents, advocated a return to the 'breakfast program' for children resident at the Village there was a stiff disapproving response from the local welfare representatives. A field officer said he was reluctant to involve the department in such a scheme as it could be construed as a return to welfare paternalism, a relapse which was contrary to departmental philosophy.

In 1987 the welfare office still issued blankets to local Aboriginal 'campers'. There was also the practice of providing assistance to Ngaanyatjarra Lands' people stranded in town, by issuing food and fuel vouchers and acting as the main channel of communication with community advisers so that the visitors' departure could be expedited. A standard form had to be filled in for what was called financial assistance, and if the applicant was assessed by the local officers as being in dire straits a voucher for a reasonably small value would be issued which could then be used at the local shops to purchase food and other essential items. To many, it appeared to be a more refined and contemporary version of the ration system except that it was not quite as reliable. In the summer months there were larger numbers of people passing through the town from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements and many

in the nineties would continue to call into the welfare office if they had run out of provisions and the like. The incumbent field officer at the time closed the office over one Christmas for a week to demonstrate that people should not depend on 'welfare'. Soon after, after he had spent an entire day sending faxes and making telephone calls for Ngaanyatjarra Lands people, he said in a frustrated tone that he was again trying to get Wongatha Wonganarra to act as a contact point, and not 'welfare'.

At the DCD office, people often came in intoxicated and made varied demands - phone calls, flights, and in the past, food vouchers. A stock response was to say 'come back when sober'. One day an Aboriginal client who had staggered in was asked to leave by the clerk. The client, a man, said 'white cunt, you don't want to help'. The new Aboriginal field officer came out of his office and said the man should leave and that 'you got to help yourself first' to which he received the reply 'you black cunt'.

At apparent odds to the policy of waiting for the public to take the initiative, was the local workers' involvement in community and 'outreach' projects in town. A distinction appeared to exist between what might be called 'core duties' and the extra-curricular participation in community projects. Of course, with welfare, there was a more explicit tradition of working with local youth and the poorer residents but the police had a tradition, which was increasingly endorsed by head office statements, of being involved in preventative and consultative work. The reasons for such involvement may be personal and cultural. There were practical reasons to become involved - fostering better relations with local residents, acquiring more information and understanding of the local situation. In both professions, however, there is also a strong ethos of bettering the environment and of looking for ways to contribute to solving social problems in the longer term, instead of just reacting to the immediate crisis, hence the interest in helping the disadvantaged younger generation. Participation in civic projects, they seemed to believe, provided enlightened leadership and educated the public in progressive mores and policies. For some, such activities were interpreted as a cynical attempt to win recognition and accolades from bosses and therefore promotion, rather than motivated by feeling the need to 'do something' because of the direness of the situation.

Doug: [referring to poor relations in the past] Unfortunately you'll always get that. You'll get blokes that want to come to Laverton for one reason or another, not always the right reasons, they want to move into town and make a difference in a week.

Local police and welfare workers frequently complained of the amount of time spent recording and representing, in official formats, their activities. As institutional practice, written accounts and the completing of forms communicate adherence to organisational goals and policies, and the fulfilment of the bureaucratic ideal. Accountability, equity of access, apolitical and impersonal staff are enshrined as the idealised values that underpin the structures and processes of the public service. As a representative of a specific bureaucratic organisation, the worker's authority is defined, legitimated and circumscribed by legislation and regulations and their capacity to act constrained by the hierarchical organisational structure.

The supposed difference between the country and the head office bureaucrat has an almost legendary quality. The literal and metaphorical distance from the centre is

portrayed as weakening lines of authority and corrupting loyalties to organisational imperatives. Lax and idiosyncratic procedures and informal decision making are the more extreme criticisms that might emanate from the central office. The country town influence is caricatured as affecting all sorts of deviations from prescribed procedures and normative codes of conduct, presumably influenced by the rural resentment of outsiders and disrespect for central government and bureaucracies evident in places like Smalltown (Dempsey 1990). The DCD field officer, Seth, found that most Kalgoorlie departmental people appeared to 'pity' him for his appointment to Laverton and there was a general perception that it was a 'wild outpost', a 'bit mysterious', a 'hillbilly' place where there was a lack of proper casework and adherence to normal departmental procedures and standards. With hindsight, he believed these perceptions were misinformed.

As an agency representative a person is supposed to embody of a much larger project than one's self and suppress the self in favour of the persona of the 'faceless' bureaucrat. At the same time, the local statutory representative is meant to be attuned and appreciative of the local context in which she and he works, and the image of being one of the few representatives for a large area, in a politically sensitive climate, is fraught with connotations of responsibility and vulnerability. The greater autonomy of the local worker was underlined and appreciated by one policeman:

Saul: You're not under pressure from co-workers and bosses, left to do your own way... Not as bound by the rules, not by the book as much. Corners are cut but everything eventually gets done ... not harder, very different to anywhere else. Different style, way of policing. You can't be trained for it, just happens, you adjust to it.

For the police at least, it was the experience of going on patrols to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands which constituted the colourful and testing dimension to their work. They stressed self-reliance, diplomacy and a phlegmatic outlook:

Brad: I couldn't believe the distances and the fact you are so far from anywhere. And you are responsible for every decision you make. You can't get on the radio and ask somebody else's advice, on what to do in a situation, because they're not going to know what the situation is no matter how well you describe it.

Terence: I think it's the sort of experience every police officer should have because... it's completely different from policing in the city... You've really got to keep your wits about you the whole time that you're up there. Because there's two of you and probably five thousand of them and if anything went wrong, and you had to rely on help in a hurry, you'd be in big strife... In two years I've probably only ever been in one situation where I'd wished I wasn't... It was simple incident which turned really nasty because of the way one of the officers treated the person that we were trying to arrest... I don't think that's bad in two years, to have one incident that sort of made the hair stand up on the back of my neck... we have a lot of instances with petrol sniffers with spears and axes and weapons, I mean firearms, but you can't let it get to you. I mean if you do you'd never go back up there.

Despite claims of uniformity of service, there is oft-mentioned need to judge the appropriateness of action by reference to the specific situation. There might be discretion built in to all positions but it appears more pronounced for the coalface worker. Moreover, the importance of flexibility and the ability to respond to unusual situations is found in the discourse of 'bush' police, most notably when the Laverton police discuss their work in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

From the senior local officers I was more likely to hear references to official policies and the current corporate rhetoric. A particular senior officer, Brad, was at odds with his colleagues because he referred to the principle of uniform service applying to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. He stated 'it's to provide a policing to the people in the Central Reserves as you would provide a policing service to anywhere in the world'. His colleagues talked of different practices and techniques with for example, Doug claiming that you have to forget everything else, and Terence calling it a 'unique situation... You're dealing with a completely different type of person here and different type of work... you've got to be completely different type of policeman which is great'.

Town, in contrast, was where the principle of 'treating everyone the same' was theoretically meant to apply. While extracting information from police briefs in the station, I witnessed the following:

Over the radio it became apparent that the police van was chasing a car, where the driver refused to stop. Norman Stone (a Warburton councillor, who had called in) knew the people in the car and assured the police present that there were no children in the car. Norman argued that they should not chase the car but wait until they were in a fit state to account for their actions. He sounded very angry when he heard the car had crashed. The senior sergeant's wife responded quite angrily 'you can't make an exception, everybody has to stop when asked to do so, a drunk driver is a danger to others' and so on. Fortunately no-one was hurt and the culprit was brought into the station, where he had trouble even sitting down. The police had a \$20 wager over his breathalyser reading, which turned out to be .23 (that is very high). Once the chase was over, everyone in the station seemed quite buoyed by this piece of drama.

Learning on the job

As a result of the 1976 Royal Commission into the Skull Creek incidents at Laverton, the Special Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal-Police Relations was formed. One of the major recommendations of the Royal Commission was for the training and selection of police (Edmunds 1989). Since the Royal Commission, I was told, police were carefully selected for postings to Laverton.

Saul: Blokes who come here are selected for their demeanour and the way they operate. You could not have a hot head and be a bit of an idiot because of the situations up here especially in the Ranges without back-up.

Abraham: ... got to be careful who you have. Everyone who's here now has been pretty well vetted by me and the Chief Superintendent.

Edmunds (1989:111), having found the careful selection of police for Roebourne had had a beneficial impact, claims the problem remains the same because police are posted to a town for usually no more than two or three years, which means "even the best police are essentially transients and neither departmental policy nor practice gives any encouragement for people to stay longer".

In a bygone era, the local welfare of police officer might remain for years in a rural town and become a local 'identity' appreciated for their personal manner and relations with local residents. Modern administration inhibits such personalised relations and the build up of local social capital. Two related trends have altered bureaucracies across the board in the past 20 years of so in Australia - professionalisation and mobility (in terms of location and in terms of expectations of

upward mobility in the corporate structure). Professionalisation has devalued experience on the job and promoted formal training and qualifications, and the concept of an interchangeable, homogenous equally qualified band of workers at an equivalent level has facilitated movement across locations. There is however a pronounced difference between city and country in the management of mobility. The optimal posting in a country location is two to three years and incentives are built in to encourage people to stay that long, and disincentives to deter longer ensconcement in one place.

A police officer, Saul, was forthright about his motives for coming to Laverton, which were material and experiential. He listed the overtime and consequent financial rewards and the promise of a good posting after '*doing time in the bush*', as well as being drawn to the place's reputation. He had heard that it was a fairly busy station and stories of the fights and violence on patrols and of how you '*get to do things you can't do elsewhere*'. In contrast more senior police downplayed the distinctive character of the work, and referred to their previous experience as having prepared them for the work. What of course was being referred to as distinctive or needing preparation was '*work with certain types of Aborigines*'. They stressed their prior policing experience outback and/or their growing up in country towns:

Abraham: At... in 1976... the start of this type of thing I'm doing now... started to learn about tribal Aborigines, but more so in Derby. I became familiar with tribal punishment, spearings and things... Never been here but I'd know enough about it to know it was similar to other places I'd been to. Didn't worry me.

Reece: [growing up with Aboriginal people in the country, which gave him his] ...understanding of Aboriginality... I suppose I was never taught it ...it's like riding a pushbike I suppose. Once you've learnt how you never forget... It's something that I've had with me for years. I've never been sort of fazed by going into a sort of cross-cultural situation. Basically it's picking up the ground rules, what's the taboos with them, what don't they like, what is common to this particular people. And it's only a matter of asking a couple of questions to pick that up. But basically it's throughout... 90% would be the same.

Brad: [a boss in a small rural station taught]...the right way of doing things... [which is] the social skills required [which are] to be understanding and not to judge, try and help, to use a bit of compassion, to treat them as you would want them to treat you... courtesy.

In contrast to the police, the DCD field officers were, at least in the period between 1987 and 1994, a series of new recruits to the department. In 1987, within the Goldfields division, about half of the field officers had social work qualifications but the more unpopular and far away locations like Leonora and Laverton were still staffed by welfare officers. The latter typically had social science degrees (three had degrees in anthropology), were reasonably young and had experience or interest in travel to foreign parts and inter-cultural situations. By 1994 welfare officers were virtually an institution of the past, with social workers being recruited to places like Laverton. They continued, however, to be newcomers to the department even if they were mature and had work histories in other occupations.

Their status as 'novices' was a source of disparaging assessment by some town residents, with for example several police voicing their disrespect for the idealistic, inexperienced welfare practitioners. The veteran field officer, Kev Sattler, was of the view that the Department lost control of juvenile justice because it placed

inexperienced female staff in the field and let them deal with crusty old male sergeants and local justices of the peace, who knew everybody before the bench.

It was not easy to arrange a proper induction or handover for the new welfare officer. When I first started in 1987 both field officer positions were vacant and a relief officer stayed for a day before departing for Kalgoorlie. Fortunately the administrative officer had lived in the town for some months. By 1992 more care was taken in preparing new staff and the then local officer had a period of orientation in Kalgoorlie for a few weeks and was assigned a mentor who could be contacted by phone. Even when I was employed, short trips to Kalgoorlie were arranged every three to four months for training in departmental responsibilities and procedures. These visits were also regarded as an opportunity for an officer to have contact with other departmental staff and to have 'time out' from their place of work.

Most welfare and the legal field officers noted their ignorance, and lack of preparation for the work but portrayed themselves, after the initial shock had worn off, as being prepared to 'stick it out' for a while and to take up the challenge. Lynn, the DCD hostel manager, said she had learnt from experience '*there's was just here, do it yourself*'. The ALS field officer said she had no training, and was just told to '*find something to say nice about the person*'. She could ring Kalgoorlie or Perth for advice and after three months in the job she participated in a short training course in Perth.

The sheer size of the police presence in Laverton, and aspects of what has been summed up as police culture, contribute to a different scenario for the recently arrived police officer. There was an acceptance of peer teaching and influence, and the role of the most senior officer in setting the ground rules for practice. Beresford and Omaji (1993:78) state that there was evidence that differing practices across suburban police stations were influenced by the attitudes of the officer-in-charge and this may apply even more in rural towns.

Abraham: They learn very quickly. If anyone came here with any gung-ho type attitude it's soon belted out of them by the rest of the guys... By the same token you've got to be firm and if a fellow comes here and he's too soft they'll take action of you...

Edmunds (1989:117) identifies a very important feature of police culture - "police culture is very strong and persistent and socialisation of recruits into this culture is generally effective. There are a number of elements of this culture which spring from the predominantly white and *masculine* character of the force, some which relate to its hierarchical and authoritarian structure" (my emphasis). Beresford and Omaji (1996:74) note that the police bring to the job prevailing social prejudices, but stress that police culture is calculated to exaggerate negative attitudes because of its emphasis on masculinity, aggressiveness, authority and use of force.

Young (1993:12) claims that police indulge in "little reflection on the way the history of social policy and practice has influenced policing is encountered in the day-to-day, hands-on experience of policing", it is lived simply as a "habitus of inculcated practical mastery" (Bourdieu 1977). Indeed, it was the kind of image the Laverton police liked to project, as pragmatists 'who got on with the job' and who were not prone to reflection

or intellectual pursuits, naive in the mysteries of politics. Referring to cultural identity or sense of belonging, Young (1993) writes that:

"It is one transmitted across time, and is passed on in those vast oral histories which policemen have always used to situate themselves. Embroidered and handed on to new members and tribal neophytes, these stories say how things should be done here. Their cultural truths define the ways 'we' properly approach those myriad occurrences that can see an officer dealing with sticky accidental death one minute and something as prosaic as a lost umbrella in the next. Any singular way of doing things denies the variability of social behaviour, and the local history of how things are done. Yet it is crucially important that an official version of events be sustained, even as these oral lessons continue to emphasise the variations in cultural practice" (Young 1993:6-7).

Certainly Laverton police, to themselves and to outsiders (other police, and to official visitors), recounted stories of their experiences in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, some of which sounded like war stories¹⁵⁵. I was not privileged to directly hear conversations between local officers but heard the tales recounted for the outsider audience. For example, having just returned from a patrol of the Lands, a tired aide over a beer or two recounted stories and scenes from the trip - of domestic violence, of horrendous injuries, of the violence of the sniffers and described certain individuals (young men who were long term abusers of petrol fumes) who looked like '*madmen... wild, unkempt, homosexual*'. Yet he noted with sadness and puzzlement that a former hostel resident, John Stone, and a former Laverton resident, Gary Foster, had died recently.

Of the police I talked to over the years in Laverton and other places in Western Australia, Brad Curtin was the only one who supported specific training prior to a posting like Laverton. He argued for training on the grounds that it would counteract the effects of learning from other officers, some of whom might pass on misguided knowledge and practice.

Brad:...other people's biases and bigotries...You must have some knowledge of their [local Aboriginal people] customs, traditions and they way they expect to be treated and the way they are going to treat you... you should be able to get some sort of orientation course specifically for this area... [learning from other officers] It's not necessarily providing the correct procedure... what could happen is that from then on you get a continuation of bad habits, bad policing methods.

Learning how to do things is related to learning about the place and its residents. A few local justice practitioners had already personal contact with a few local residents - for instance a welfare officer had worked in Perth at the Longmore juvenile detention centre and the hostel staff had lived and worked in Kalgoorlie. Most, however, had never resided in Laverton before nor did they know any local people before arriving in the town.

It was the university graduates who resorted to texts for information to enhance their understanding of local issues¹⁵⁶. Social workers had already or went out of their way

¹⁵⁵ According to Chan (1996) the work of Shearing and Erikson (1991) focuses on the processes involved in the construction of culture, and argues story-telling creates the 'vocabulary of precedents' which is at the heart of passing on information to guide practice.

¹⁵⁶ It was the tertiary educated who were also more inclined to want to write about their experiences with petrol sniffers. A magistrate, two local doctors, and a DCD field officer had indicated plans to write articles, even in one case a book. I remember in my second year as a welfare officer receiving a phone call from a Federal Minister's adviser. The adviser, who had once worked in Laverton, had

to read general anthropological tomes on 'Aborigines' and the magistrate and the local doctor consulted various reports and books on petrol-sniffing. Except for one police aide, the police and the Aboriginal welfare staff never referred to texts as a source of their knowledge. Instead, the emphasis was on prior personal experience and the cultivation of local informants.

Saul: [learn] ..from other coppers talking amongst ourselves about what we've heard... so know what's going on, why it's happening.... learning on the job... mainly here just for Wongis so do take more of an interest.

JP: What have you learnt?

Saul: Just their lifestyle, the way that they think, some of their stories. Just their traditions.

JP: Who have you learnt from?

Saul: Everyone, other coppers, from people around town, people up there, in the streets, in the lock-up.

Aside from hearing the views of the more experienced local or senior officer, the police highlighted how their comprehension had been enhanced and developed through a process of listening to indigenous authoritative voices.

Doug: [Patrols are]..definitely different, definitely a challenge. Bottom line was to forget everything you'd learnt about policing and start again.... procedures the same but the approaches and attitudes are entirely different... a whole different ballgame - tribal things that happen out here never come across before. For people to come out here they really need the patience to sit down, look and learn. The big thing out here, the people won't give you respect until you earned it... they won't respect you until you spend time with them and find you basically honest... If you come in and try to push your way into it, you won't get the respect and you'll be disliked like some blokes are... I made the time to go and sit with the old blokes while they were cooking, sitting around fires. I made the time to go and sit on the ground with them and talk to them, listen to them.

Terence: ... you hear a lot about their customs and beliefs but to be able to sit down and talk to them first hand about some of these things, it's great...They're pretty reluctant to talk about it actually. To outsiders. But you hear snippets every now and again...

During a posting of several years duration, a local practitioner does not have a great deal of time to establish enduring social relations nor develop a sense of confidence over his or her knowledge of the socio-cultural field and local politics. Yet theoretically, he or she is supposed to perform work well by being sensitive to the local field of power and status markers and to inspire respect for being well-informed and acting appropriately.

As a form of performance, the audience is not a homogenous nor unified entity and the way that people and places were differentiated by local practitioners is explored below. To become appreciative of the complexities and subtleties of the local field of relations involves primarily the fostering of *personalised relations* with identified leaders and brokers, through work and play. Where this was most advisable was in the acquisition of knowledge of those defined as non-familiar and belonging to a different cultural group. In the day to day practice of their work, practitioners were constantly re-ordering or consolidating what they took to be significant beliefs and practices about local Aboriginal people. The process of acquiring understanding was depicted as slow and laborious as trust took a while to develop, as did one's capacity to judge the veracity of a representation of an incident and to comprehend the

written a short story about his contact with youths who sniffed petrol, and wanted to ascertain if the practice was still commonplace.

underlying 'true' story underpinning the event. For example several police officers remarked on the significance of knowing about the complicated nature of family 'stuff' or conflict.

The length of time it took to develop personalised relations with individuals in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements was stressed by the police:

Reece: ... six months to start talking. It'll probably take you longer to get trust. I'm only starting to get it now after 14 months, that some people will talk to me confidentially. And will ask for you and only deal with you and no-one else.

Brad: ... if you're only new at the police station and you go out with somebody who's been here for a while, they'll actually walk right past you to go and talk to the other person. Because they're known to them, and it's a big difference, that acceptance. They're gauging the whole time what the other person is going to be like and how're they're going to treat them before they'll be accepted. If they accept them. They're quite astute really in their opinions of people...They're very good judges of human nature, really good.

To a limited extent, everyday camaraderie was established by police and other local justice practitioners with local townspeople and regular Aboriginal visitors to the town. There was a distortion in who was actually 'known' to local practitioners, corresponding largely to the nature of their work. Thus the police were more likely to be on familiar terms with local men and male youths, who were more inclined to become entangled in criminal matters, a smaller number of women (complainants and perpetrators) and those (again mostly men) who were singled out as 'recognised' leaders of the white and black communities. Similarly welfare workers soon learnt to recognise the regular visitors to the office and who would seek or demand help on the streets. As this constituted a reasonably small group of 'clients' a wider perspective was imparted through involvement in social and sporting activities outside of work, and consultations with brokers and local 'experts' around town as part of work.

In principle at least, the assistant or aide was supposed to act as a translator or interpreter but most of the local police expressed dissatisfaction with aides they had worked with in the past. One police officer, Terence, said they were '*useless in the Ranges because they don't know anybody*'. He acknowledged that it was '*not an easy job*' if the aides were local and therefore involved with local families which created the problem of '*which side do you go on*'. He could identify with the situation because it was '*hard for us even now. I don't like arresting people that I know or I'm friendly with*'. It was implied that the social distance between whites and Aboriginal people eased the situation for non-Aboriginal police when arresting Aboriginal people.

Martin (1993:178) states that police aides at Aurukun were often placed in "an invidious position, one factor which underlay regular turnover of Wik in these positions". Usually the Wik police aides were younger people from elsewhere with little legitimate authority, and who were embedded in particular networks of kin. A Laverton local police aide was quoted in the newspaper, the *West Australian* (12/5/86), as saying he gave up his job because of the 'pressure' - "it didn't come from the whites but from my own people. They thought I was getting too good for them so they'd come around drunk at night and throw rocks at the house. It upset the wife and the kids so much I couldn't take it". At that time he lived at the Village

with his wife, his elderly and infirm father, two of his children and four nephews and nieces.

Statutory representatives may develop strategies to meet local conditions which do not fit in with bureaucratic ideologies and contemporary policies. Local practitioners appeared to be constantly struggling to balance their responses to local demands so that they accorded with organisational and professional dictates, and the exigencies of the immediate, local environment. A degree of accommodation with established local practices seemed to seep into their self-assessments of progress in adapting to the job. Local administration of justice and to local socio-political relations became more normative over time, in parallel to the growing sense of familiarity and recognition with many individuals around town and out in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. This was more marked for welfare practitioners who tended to commence their jobs in Laverton with idealistic expectations and who felt a stronger detachment from political and racial attitudes held by many white residents in town.

At a structural level, local practitioners were unquestionably instrumental in reproducing inequalities and local status distinctions. Edmunds (1989: 108) distinguishes between the police role as agents of the state who enforce the laws by maintaining law and order and protecting the public good, and their role as agents of the community who enforce community norms held by the dominant group. To describe local practitioners in Laverton as passive pawns of a local dominant elite does them a disservice. Unlike the majority of white residents, justice practitioners did have personal relations, albeit often superficial, with many local Aboriginal people. For the police at least there was a perceptible 'softening' or 'blurring' of absolutes, which created a more tolerant and understanding outlook towards particular individuals, based on their insider knowledge. For example, during a break when the magistrate was presiding in the Laverton court, the police prosecutor (a local police officer, Reece) told the ALS lawyer (from Kalgoorlie) that he thought a particular case might be related to a family dispute but people had been told no payback in town. With another case, the police prosecutor provided the lawyer with information which he called 'mitigating circumstances' but the lawyer took the hard line and said that it was 'their decision'.

Of course, the opposite can apply with the singling out of particular individuals for negative treatment. The response to a demand for a lift or voucher, or the decision to arrest someone from a drinking circle are concrete instances of discretionary power, and were related to the identities of the individuals. Upon scrutinising the figures for arrests, Martin (1993:178-182) comments that they understate the extent of particular behaviours, and that a relatively small number of Wik men account for a significant proportion of the arrests. He argues that most of these men are the heavier and more problematic drinkers who are more prone to commit offences, but that there is also targeting of "certain more marginal men" for arrest.

Part of learning on the job and the effect of local experience involves learning to categorise individuals or to modify pre-existing broad classifications such as 'welfare cases', 'real crims', 'troublemakers', 'reliable sources of information', and 'to be respected'. Beresford and Omaji (1995:74) refer to studies which have shown the influence of other than strictly legal factors on police decisions, for example

socioeconomic status and general appearance of suspect. They also mention the tendency of police to stereotype certain groups. Cowlshaw (1988:168) discusses how police discretion can lead to the victimisation of certain individuals and families, and the converse, a lenient approach towards the influential and important town residents. She concludes "of course the police are resocialized into the realities of Brindleton by their colleagues who explain who should be watched, who should be shown leniency and the unofficial basis for keeping the peace". The personal application of the law, as she calls it, is seen as sensible policing by the police and by those who benefit from it in a small town where "we all have to live together".

In town, and in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements, it was interesting to see how marginality was connected to constructions of how 'their own people' viewed them. For young people in particular their marginality was assumed in many instances to result from the way they were treated or regarded by their adult consociates and relatives. To lend credence to assertions of internal forces generating marginality the local practitioner would sometimes talk of 'abandoned' youth or refer to the punitive approach taken by local justices of the peace in Warburton. The local ALS field officer said that Aboriginal justices of the peace '*knew the troublemakers*', and therefore were not neutral. She had found that sometimes when she gave a plea of mitigation they would not listen because they had already made up their minds.

In some respects the statutory agents want to keep their social distance to protect themselves from allegations of nepotism and favouritism, and from the intellectual and material demands made of them. The demands are intellectual because of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding each 'situation' and material, because people will ask for money, lifts, phone calls and so forth. In an attempt to negotiate and head off immediate demands individual workers take refuge literally (in their cars, houses, and enclaves like the club) and metaphorically behind the protective facade of the dutiful, impartial public servant. It was a delicate balance as personal relationships and personal authority may be weakened by the refusal or avoidance of certain requests and 'situations'.

The magistrate, Ian Drury, characterised his position as being one where '*you have to know what is going on without getting into the ring*'. When he began he intended '*not to change*' and to not develop the '*Jekyll and Hyde personas*' of other magistrates '*but it is impossible to be the court jester. The occasional joke is acceptable as you do not want to be isolated nor remote, yet at the same time you do not want to encourage the kind of intimacy where everyone will approach the local magistrate in the pub*'. He originally thought he would be a 'hands-on' magistrate with meetings in Menzies and Leonora and so on. Then he realised that '*you can get too close, you run the risk of losing objectivity and being seen as no longer as impartial. You go to a meeting and next day you may have to sit in court deciding on an individual case*'. He had found there were constraints surrounding who he could talk to and he said he would have preferred in some respects to have been an ALS lawyer who was in a position to chat with regular clients and to document '*family trees*'. To enable him to retain a sense of independence and distance, he preferred to rely on the couple who ran the Laverton hostel for information and an informed perspective.

Ian said that although he wished to be sensitive to local needs and wishes, he did not want to react without question to '*community feelings*' in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Retaining objectivity and adhering to the principles of confidentiality were stated concerns for the welfare workers. This affected how they interacted with local residents, by imbuing a sense of caution and inhibiting participation in gossip. It aggravated a feeling of social isolation, because of the lack of local work colleagues. According to a social worker, Seth, one of the hardest things in the job was the pressure exerted by different groups and agencies, without any support through local colleagues. He did not share experiences with others in the town because of confidentiality and limited talk about work to colleagues in Kalgoorlie. The magistrate, Ian, said that he lacked opportunities to meet work peers, and instead had to rely mainly on the annual magistrates' conference.

For the sake of confidentiality and for one's 'standing' it seemed social distance was advisable with the bulk of local white residents and an element of circumspection was advisable with work colleagues who were not in identical occupations. Ian portrayed his social life as limited by his occupation saying he had two circles of friends: work related where he might join justice practitioners for a beer while on circuit, and a small group through his family. The social worker Seth's main lament was that, socially, he had no peers in town unlike teachers, police, nurses and miners who have big groups to mix with. He chose to base his social life on the pub-centred single mining scene, but he was aware that the more conservative and older white residents frowned upon his private life. He said he was aware of the town's '*disapproval*' but saw himself as aligning himself with the clients.

Police could remain fairly self-sufficient and insular in their socialising and where they wished to 'let themselves go' and become drunk for example, in the safety of the enclosed police mess or one of their homes. Cowlshaw (1988) describes the Brindleton police as achieving a degree of social self-sufficiency because they formed a large enough group and as isolating themselves in part because both the black and white communities complained about them. She states that the police interpretation of their role, as outsiders, was somewhat different to the views held by older residents including councillors. In Laverton, in the early nineties, there was a very active and civic minded coterie of police and their wives, who involved themselves in sporting activities, voluntary committees linked to for example the youth centre and school, and shire politics. They tended to be regarded as operating in concert and their dominance of certain spheres attracted condemnation from some local white residents, with one woman caustically remarking that the '*same gang of police wives*' dominated the school council. Cherished as part of the police tradition, the value of 'sticking together' was carried, it seemed, beyond the work sphere into social and community activities.

Some local practitioners keenly felt the lack of anonymity. There were hints that some believed themselves under surveillance and gossiped about in a way that fostered an uncomfortable feeling of being objectified and studied. However, others such as the police officer Terence acknowledged the identification of themselves with their occupation, but believed that in some respects they were made more accountable to the local public. Terence was positive about country policing despite the fact that he was always seen as a police officer, and claimed he went out of his way to bring his

personal life and police work together. The impression of intimacy and at the same time transparency was conveyed in a statement by the magistrate, Ian, who explained why he favoured country circuits to metropolitan work. He said *'you are closer to the concept of a total package. You impose dispositions on people that you know, you are closer to seeing how the system works in its different parts'*.

The hardening process and the resocialisation of 'soft-line blow-ins' in Brindleton was described by Cowlshaw (1988) thus:

"Resisting the dominant view would invite enmity and anger, and involve fighting entrenched interests and accepted priorities. The purveyors of the new enlightenment theories are struggling in the pool of their middle-class mores. The modern notions of equality of opportunity, individuality of aspiration and even a limited cultural relativism, are asserted against those, both black and white, for whom such notions are foreign or socialist" (Cowlshaw 1988:219-221).

In Laverton, as the practitioner became more knowledgeable and initial impressions faded, there were modifications to thought and practice that was talked about by them. They viewed themselves as increasingly sympathetic to orthodox local practices, and common local beliefs and opinions. They were more inclined to 'understand' white majority opinion regarding race relations although not necessarily agree with it. The exception were the police who almost overwhelmingly saw their attitudes as having been softened by their contact with the Ranges people in their own environment, though not with the same people or local Wongis in Laverton.

Terence: You definitely learn what they'll [in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands] accept and what they won't accept. And so that it is in your best interest... you don't do things that are going to upset them... you learn you can't do certain things, you become a lot more tolerant of things people do because you know there's no point in getting upset or riled about it, you just got to sit down and talk with them. I think I've become a lot more patient and tolerant with the people... I think I've become a lot more sensitive to their Aboriginal customs, beliefs and customs, and the way they do things and the reasons they do things... Basically living for two and half months of the year up in the Ranges with them, you get to understand a little bit of what goes on... we're in a real unique situation here.

The DCD social worker, Seth, when his two years were nearing completion, mused on changes to himself and the implications of the experience. He believed there was an advantage to having new workers *'unjaded perspective... See things freshly, that people may have grown to accept'*. Whilst he acknowledged that there were benefits in people staying a long time he was concerned that there were significant dangers, especially in terms of professionalism. He had found that:

Seth: In a small community it is so easy to become accepting, to take the path of least resistance. The sensibilities are deadened and new people are criticised for being too exuberant. The smallness of community means that locally there is no other perspective of police, school, community... no other humanistic or other perspective.

The changes to personal outlook and practice were characterised as an erosion of principle, and dissipation in emotional affect and energy, which inevitably led to a reduced willingness to be open, inviting, inquisitive. Instead, practices became more defensive and restricted, and were imbued with an air of a slower, more considered pace, almost to the point of a metaphorical immobility. For instance, the hostel manager Lynn said that *'we used to chase them [hostel residents] in those days in the street, we don't do that anymore. If they run away, they run away'*.

In the first phase, the new arrival was more inclined to be involved in resisting or criticising existing practices and in the first burst of enthusiasm and energy there may be a commitment to or the embarking upon a 'new' initiative - a personal journey which is expected to last no more than a few years. For Seth the experience was like going into another country because it was the first time he had met 'traditional' Aboriginal people, and he was, at first, affected by the 'horror' of petrol sniffing and conditions in the Laverton police lock-up.

The very visible interpersonal violence around town could also be very upsetting for the new arrival. Another DCD field officer, Mel, said that the desert people were *the 'nicest people out, mild mannered in the communities'* but found it sad to see them in Laverton *'going wild and half killing each other'*. The ALS lawyer Nicolas admitted to finding the violence very distressing when overloaded with work *'it just gives me a shudder I think how am I going to cope. I'm part of everybody's nightmare all the time. It does disturb me when I hear who's been stabbed who's done this and that'*.

The development of a more pragmatic attitude to change and the circumstances was linked to progressive stages of emotive reactions - from anger and horror to resignation, from compassion to frustration and pity. In regard to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, orthodox justice practices were characterised as pragmatic and were those promulgated by local police and several advisers and councillors. The administration of justice in town was accepted and routinised and there was less inclination to want to challenge aspects of its administration. After a while, when there had been a change in staff, there was a settling down where the various agency representatives learnt to accommodate some of their differences and work out a reasonable though far from ideal way of working together.

For many local practitioners they appeared to start off feeling that their was ample time to tackle issues and to embark on projects, but as they became more 'involved' and they were recognised by local people, they experienced increasing demands and pressures of over-commitment. To prevent feeling over-stretched, jobs become prioritised and core work took precedence, with community work receding into the background.

The social worker, Seth, was dismissive of a local youth worker's advice when, soon after he arrived, he had told him not to take it too fast otherwise he would get worn out. He assumed the youth worker had been in Laverton too long but later on he recognised that he was right, stating that *'it's a fine line keeping one's enthusiasm and not getting burnt out... You need the background knowledge and understanding before you do much. By that time you are ready to leave or you've run out of ideas'*. At his induction talk into the department, Seth had heard a former Goldfields divisional manager depict the evolution of field staff as *'an initial interest, to people knowing you by name, to planning a big trip overseas'*. Just before he left to go abroad, Seth repeated these words of warning to his replacement.

Seth was not happy about the effect of experience on his attitudes since he believed he had become more *'realistic'* and more *'racist'* towards Aboriginal people. Another time he admitted with an element of pride and wonder that he found it easy to be tough now. He said he was *'pissed off'* that once *'you help someone before you*

know it they're pushing for further favours'. The tempering of an idealistic and progressive perspective was referred to the regional magistrate Ian who, nearing the end of his time in the field, gave an account of Aboriginal white relations in the Goldfields:

Ian: There is a more honest prejudice, franker than in Perth. My kids at school report that other kids use terms like 'boong'. You have to appreciate that in Kalgoorlie the Aboriginal community has visibly and appreciably lost their way. That they are drunk, do break and enters, steal cars and have a chronic dependency on social security features in the prejudice of whitefellas, I hear it all the time. Whereas in the city, you don't see Aboriginal people much, you don't meet them. There is not much discussion of Aboriginal people, lots of people are very sympathetic but they don't have a lot of contact. You have to consider the prejudice in the context of seeing what people complain about. It's a terrible indictment that the real experts on Aboriginal culture are all white. They are so researched yet you cannot sit down with a bloke in Wiluna and discuss with him Aboriginal culture, for example the stories about the sky. The tragedy is that if that person does he is likely to be smashed.

Factors which contributed to the hardening up of local practitioners fell into two broad categories - those that related to interactions with local Aboriginal people, and those that related to occupational 'hazards'. Practitioners with a touch of despair would on occasion allude to the demands made of them by the Aboriginal people, and how they in effect felt they were badly treated by them. The Wongi 'hardness' towards non-familiar was disheartening for them as they strived to foster relations that approximated a superficial friendship.

One day I was at the lock-up and a young Aboriginal woman asked if I could arrange for her wages to be sent down from her home community in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The police sergeant, overhearing this exchange, remarked in a world-weary voice '*they always want to get something from you*'. A priest was surprised, when he had arrived in Australia and visited fellow priests in the north, to find that they discouraged visits by Aboriginal people on the grounds that they were then subject to harassment and begging. When he commenced work in the Goldfields he had sometimes given people of cup of tea and food when they called on him, but after a year he stopped answering his door at night because drunken people had bothered him at all hours. A nurse who had worked at the Warburton hospital angrily summed up her experience as 24 hours harassment and no appreciation saying '*they hate you, they use and abuse themselves, each other and you*'.

The unpredictability and mobility of many Wongi and Ngaanyatjarra people was a source of frustration, and an impediment to the implementation of community based, indigenous controlled initiatives. A Kalgoorlie based representative for community based corrections, who often followed the magistrate on circuit, said he had money which was allocated for the payment of local probation officers in small towns and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlements but he expressed regret that he could not find 'suitable candidates'. The DCD field officer, Mel, said he had encountered innumerable difficulties in identifying 'appropriate' mentors for petrol sniffing youth in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. His work colleague, Seth, was of the view that '*you invest time and resources in one person then he or she gets pissed and tries to shoot the community adviser. And the plan is put on hold*'. He then seemed to remind himself out loud that it was '*not relevant to blame community members who are battling apathy and hopelessness. There's less impetus to do things*'. Related to unpredictability, and interpreted as a cause of and a rationale for do-gooders

frustration, was the lack of participation in certain activities and the frequently poor turn-outs at meetings. That this could have a discouraging impact on the initiator or sponsor was suggested when a youth worker commented that *'you require somebody to support them, and another person to support the somebody'*.

Several practitioners commented that the Ngaanyatjarra Lands people remained *'unknowable'*. After two years on circuit, the magistrate Ian said he still had not the slightest idea whether he was understood or whether what he said in court had any significance. Claiming that the situation was *'so artificial'*, he remained uncertain whether a telling-off could be viewed as *'culturally appropriate'*. He emphasised that it was not just a 'language' problem as such, but one of interpretation and understanding. He concluded that he would never fully appreciate the significance of a problem, and that only local indigenous people would have that. A DCD field officer had found that he, along with other Nyungars, were looked down on by people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for having *'lost their culture'*. After being in the job for a while, the social worker Seth said he was bored by the driving and the *'superficial'* contact with people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Just before he departed from Laverton *'for ever'*, he admitted that he *'still don't know what the fuck the kids are thinking. It's all from your own perspective'*.

Cowlishaw (1988) mentions that many in the service sector of Brindleton suffered from a sense of martyrdom, as their efforts were not rewarded by recognition and gratitude. She was mainly referring to the lack of recognition and gratitude from Aboriginal clients. Working in Laverton, in daily contact with local and visiting Aboriginal people, did encourage this kind of martyrdom, but it was partly affected by the conditions of work. Insufficient time and resources were a recurring complaint, along with the level of application and commitment that seemed to be expected of them by their clients, their employers and local residents. A magistrate explained that he had the busiest circuit in WA, covering a large area from Esperance to Warburton, and he did not have the time to address things fully. He regretted that there had not been time to have wider discussions with 'elders' in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. A DCD field officer and a hostel worker commiserated with each other about their phone phobia on their days off, as they were apprehensive that they would receive calls to return to work. The former said he was made to feel *'materialistic and ideologically unsound'* by his superiors and other field staff when he firmly declined to work extra hours without compensation. In his view it was incomprehensible why so many welfare workers accepted without complaint the unpaid, additional workload that was taken for granted.

A further grievance, in relation to organisational mores, was the apportioning of official recognition and credit for achievements. A pervasive perception was that the 'field staff' were under-valued, and in a subordinate position that prevented them publicising their contribution and asserting themselves in a wider field beyond the local context. The DCD field officer, Mel, believed that if the mentor program was a success then the regional manager would take the glory, if it failed then he would bear the brunt.

After a few years in the job, the lack of perceptible change to justice practices and to 'clients' behaviour had a depressing effect on most practitioners' evaluations of their

contribution as an agency representative and of their personal achievements. A DCD field officer said he had '*learnt a lot*' yet he had been frustrated by the lack of progress, with the communities continuing to send youths away. After five years, an ALS lawyer based in Kalgoorlie had observed a high rate of recidivism '*all the counselling and good advice comes to nothing*'. The hostel manager, Lynn, spoke of the heartache of witnessing the deterioration in the Ngaanyatjarra youth they came to know well. To illustrate this, she mentioned a particular youth known to me - '*the slurred words when he first comes and he can't walk straight, drags his feet so you can hear him coming, can't hold the fork and knife. And we have to start all over again. And yet we had Danny for eight months. Good, nice and fat, shiny. And within the last three months he's been back three or four times*'.

The DCD employee Seth was struck initially by the cynicism of 'old timers' in Kalgoorlie, such as Kev Sattler. The latter admitted his cynicism which he ascribed to the circularity in departmental policies, most notably in juvenile justice and sentencing. In an interview with me, he remarked that despite the name changes the Aboriginal people still called the department 'welfare'. He saw himself as a member of a rare species, a veteran with a very long-term view, and he did not hesitate to express the unfashionable (by departmental standards) opinion. He said he thought the missions should have been supported for longer as the problems would not be so serious today and gave the example of '*feral children*'.

The 'burn out' suffered by people involved in certain service occupations may be linked to ambiguities and constraints surrounding their exercise of power, and uncertainty about how to proceed notably in relation to Aboriginal people. University courses, and the prescribed texts, tend to focus on negative but powerful images of statutory power and its effect on the Aboriginal population. As statutory representatives, the local embodiment of bureaucratic power, practitioners may arrive with illusions of irresistible power that they, however, remind themselves should be harnessed to the pursuit of social justice and exercised in accordance with the precepts of cultural relativism and indigenous self-determination.

In terms of access to personal information local welfare workers had access to case and family files which affected the level of privacy afforded to Aboriginal people. Theoretically, in terms of authority vested by statutes, they had considerable power but decisions that were made once upon a time and which affected Aboriginal people were no longer made with the same moral certitude. The most formidable coercive tool of welfare control were powers under the *Child Welfare Act* that enabled officers to apply for a care and protection order, but this was tempered by departmental policies which advocated non-interference wherever possible and all sorts of legal requirements had to be met for an application to be successful in court.

A case in point, which demonstrated the reluctance to take action, were the recurring complaints and enduring concerns for the local Wongi boy, Rory. Virtually from his birth locals (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) expressed their worry for him. As he grew older his behaviour attracted attention and many comments centred on the need to 'control' him (see Chapter Four). After much internal agonising and 'family conferences', an application to have Rory made a ward of the state was first initiated in 1987. Many dramas followed, including agreements with parents and relatives and the

withdrawal of the application, until another application was lodged which was eventually successful in 1993. By this time Rory was a regular sniffer of various substances and to an outsider's point of view decidedly 'wild'. Having tried to talk with Rory, a white clinical psychologist said he had never encountered anyone like him before. By this stage, none of Rory's relatives wanted to look after him because his parents would cause too much trouble. Past placements in another town had worked for a while then collapsed (see Chapter Seven). He served his first period of detention when 10 years of age.

Hutchings (1993) asserts that the strategies of resistance enacted by Aboriginal youth result in further bureaucratic control, but most of the local DCD officers did not seem to feel they were 'controlling' much. On one occasion Rory's parents had agreed that he should stay for a period of time with a relative in a nearby town but within a few days the parents had taken him back to Laverton. According to Seth, the department did nothing for some time which made '*welfare look like a paper tiger*'. Being 'ineffectual' was compounded by the limits on resources, and the noticeable absence of support from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The 'resistance' of Aboriginal people, felt by the workers as disregard or disinterest, engendered frustration, a sense of purposelessness and an anger towards the client(s). Other justice practitioners, particularly the police, were by and large critical or dismissive of welfare workers especially on the grounds that '*they did nothing*'. For example a police officer, Doug Howard, when asked by a visiting academic about his impressions of the mentor scheme, laughed and asked rhetorically '*what scheme?*'. Criticised by many local white residents for their work with Aborigines and treated instrumentally as a source of resources by local Wongis and visiting Ngaanyatjarra people, it was hardly surprising that local practitioners began to feel incapacitated and bounded by a lack of real authority, and poor social standing in the local context.

Police and the magistrate did not suffer from quite the same self-realisation of ineffectuality, nor did the locals deride their potency. To make significant change was not possible but they did in the daily practice of their work make decisions that were respected. Their actions were interpreted as powerful in the local domain.

Internal politics

Over the years tension between different justice practitioners had been brought to a head, in a very public fashion, over the 'removal' of Aboriginal children and youths from their 'home' environments, through the aegis of the juvenile court. In the main local justices of the peace and police had aligned themselves together, while the magistracy had tended to be aligned with ALS and DCD¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁷ A further issue is the tension between remote and central authority. An example in the police briefs were recorded comments of a Perth magistrate about the actions of Warburton justices of the peace. Two young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (on two separate occasions), charged with possession of petrol charges, were remanded in custody by the local justices and appeared in the Perth children's court several weeks later. It was recorded on the respective briefs that the Perth magistrate had instructed the ALS and DCD 'to take steps' because it was 'inappropriate for welfare issues to be addressed in this manner'.

Back in 1986 the Laverton justices of the peace went on a month long strike. I heard about this dispute soon after I arrived in Laverton but it is interesting to see how it was represented in the media. According a newspaper article (*Kalgoorlie Miner* 31/7/86), the dispute erupted when a local justice of the peace handed down a judgement on the recommendation of the DCS district [local] officer, which involved "removing an Aboriginal child from a disadvantaged environment". The DCS regional office refused to remove the child and overturned the recommendation. A local justice was quoted as saying that his or her reputation "lay in tatters...they have made a liar of me. It makes me wonder why they bother holding the court". This justice reportedly said the rejection had left the justices and their families, who were 'well known in Laverton', open to public ridicule. His concern was that judicial decisions were being overturned by government employees.

The article reports that the Goldfields magistrate had held meetings to resolve the dispute and that the DCS Minister had asked for an explanation from her department. Quoted at length, a local member of parliament attacked 'white do gooders' for provoking the row and attacked the departmental policy of keeping Aboriginal children with parents wherever possible. Having alleged that the DCS department was stacked with the Labor party faithful, he reputedly said;

"The whole situation is appalling. We are not talking about Party [sic] dogma, but the future of children. White do-gooders think the answer is to treat them as something different to a human being. I've had a gutful of the do-gooders who leave kids with drunken parents and promiscuous teenagers instead of removing them to a more subdued, but cleaner environment like Mt Margaret Mission. It needs a nation-wide outcry to help lift children from the coke and potato chip diet and get them away from these appalling condition" (*Kalgoorlie Miner* 31/7/86).

The New Zealand newspaper article about Laverton (Gosling 1987) has already been referred to several times in previous chapters. The journalist's main informant was a DCS social worker, and the article presents a different picture of the dispute and its protagonists. The strike was said to have occurred because a Kalgoorlie magistrate had told the local justices of the peace that they could not run children out of town as they had tried and that there were two laws, state and federal, and not a third for Laverton. The local justices were described as having no legal training, as being drawn from the local ruling class and as exercising "absolute rule". They were also criticised for calling court at a moment's notice so the social worker had little time to prepare "the defence of a lad".

Treated more leniently in the article, the police were complimented for their "skills in Aboriginal lore and diplomacy", but the police cells were compared unfavourably with a dog pound. Inmates of police cells were described as lurching on the grass, but it was underlined that no-one escaped because "there's nowhere to go and, besides, the police are the ultimate authority". It was also claimed that prisoners who were arrested while police were on patrol in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were kept in the 'paddy wagon' for up to a week.

As part of the local outcry against the article, the Laverton officer-in-charge of police responded by stating that he was "laughing it off and treating it with the contempt it deserves. It was completely false reporting. There were so many things which were just not true" (*Kalgoorlie Miner* 4/7/87). The letter from a long term resident (and

health professional) stated that there were lock-up facilities at the 'Central Desert outstations' and that prisoners were not confined in the vehicle for any longer than absolutely necessary (*Kalgoorlie Miner* 2/7/87).

Since 1987 the role and authority in the field of juvenile justice of local justices of the peace and DCD has been circumscribed¹⁵⁸. It struck me when I returned to Laverton, in 1992, how the significant contestants in the inter-agency battle for local dominance of the practice of juvenile justice had become the police and the circuit magistrate, as the ones who exerted the most influence in key decisions and who were at loggerheads over tactics to address petrol sniffing. Nevertheless, there remained an underlying animosity between other local agency representatives, because of fundamental differences in their respective corporate policies and ethos, and the philosophical and ideological leanings identified with their occupations.

Both police and DCD field officers claimed to distance themselves from each other while on desert visits. In town this was not possible though relations were reasonably harmonious as far as the management of local offenders was concerned. Personal antipathies did appear to develop when the police believed they were being rebuked, or attacked publicly, especially if the protagonist was female or a young man who was not conforming to conservative notions of frontier masculinity. Once again the lock-up cells were the cause of ill-feeling. A community health worker recounted how she had a run in with the officer in charge over towels and blankets in the lock-up and was told to 'butt out'. At the local meeting of justice practitioners for the visiting State Advisory Committee on Young Offenders, a DCD field officer had raised concerns about young people who were detained in the lock-up. Soon after, just before an impending magistrate's court, the officer went over to the police station and asked about the medical condition of a youth in the lock-up. The sergeant replied that was 'where he had been beaten up', and sarcastically asked if he and the other youths should be sent on remand to Perth for two days¹⁵⁹. In a subsequent conversation I had with the sergeant he said there were three groups traditionally detested by police - lawyers, journalists and social workers.

Given the pervasive police suspicion of these occupations, it was remarkable that the ALS field officer said she had no problems with the local police, asserting that they recognised that she had to do her job. When people came to her with police complaints she posted them off to Perth and it would take a month or two before she had a response, during which time the complainant might think she had done nothing or they would just forget about it. ALS in Perth would send the complaint to the police department in Perth and only once, during the two years she had been in the job, had an inspector of police come up to investigate the allegation. Possibly she was not perceived as a serious threat to the police or as not publicly unsympathetic towards them.

¹⁵⁸ The DCD 'old timer', Kev Sattler, blamed the department for losing the responsibility for juvenile justice, saying that it had encouraged field offices to believe 'they were running the court, and not the bench'.

¹⁵⁹ This was a continual source of irritation and dispute. It was a legislative requirement that all young people should be kept detained separately wherever possible. It was not feasible in the police lock-up to keep young people and adults apart yet the cost and inconvenience of transporting young people from Laverton to Perth for short periods of remand ensured this rarely happened.

Overall, in the Goldfields region, the magistrate Ian revealed that he had not found much co-operation and liaison between departments. ALS he described as underresourced and the personnel well meaning but not terribly helpful. DCD was subject to various divisions with the Kalgoorlie workers '*dominated by Perth psyche and traumatised by Perth directives. The field officers have been hamstrung and there is a high turnover amongst staff.*

Petrol sniffing

The only people involved formally in the administration of justice who inhabited places where sniffing was rife were local justices of the peace in Warburton. Like so many who become embroiled in the politics of the petrol sniffing, I never lived with the phenomenon, only observed it from afar. The closest contact I had with youths was when they were at the Laverton hostel and rarely practiced sniffing. However, I can recall vividly the first time I drove into a Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlement and saw male and female teenagers openly sniffing from cans. A more recent event is etched in my mind.

Concert at Warburton at night, with a stage made of pallets in the centre of the community, with a backdrop of a mural representing the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. A flock of children close to the stage, family circles and people in cars in the shadows, packs of young men. White man with a video camera seated in a chair. Lighting near the stage and a few pools of light near the hospital.

A white man was playing the blues. Suddenly the crowd murmured in fear and moved back. At first we did not know what was going on but then saw Lex Stone approaching the assembly of people. He disappeared but reappeared soon after near the hospital... Everyone cowered behind vehicles or moved back...Lex ran forward carrying what looked like a gun. He threw stones at the vehicles and stalked through the crowd with everybody backing away and hiding as much as possible. He returned to the lighted area by the hospital and when he was circled by two cars and several men, he took off his trousers. He threw more rocks... Fiona was yelling 'why don't they stop him, do something'...Fiona and a man...finally followed Lex, with the man grabbing him from behind as the police van arrived.

Once again, though, it was the removal of Aboriginal youth from their 'own environments' that stirred up the most controversy and opposition amongst the local justice practitioners. The politics over the appropriate response to and sentencing of petrol sniffers was bitter and often passionate. Since the seventies there has been a history of dissent amongst government agencies over the best way to tackle petrol sniffing and who should take responsibility.

A Laverton doctor was convinced that the 'sniffing problem' should be analysed using a disease model where it should be viewed as a form of social contagion amongst Ngaanyatjarra youth. A DCD social worker and a previous doctor had questioned whether sniffing was physically addictive but the hostel manager, some advisers, some police and an ALS lawyer were of the view that it was. The hostel manager said the youths went through 'withdrawals' when first admitted to the hostel, and several others referred to youths who 'sniffed alone' as those who were addicted.

Irrespective of whether it was regarded as an addiction, many employed in justice and welfare agencies believed that sniffing was a health issue and that it should be dealt with by the health authorities. There was a shared belief that these authorities had been avoiding their responsibilities in relation to petrol sniffing, and there had been intermittent attempts to involve mental health services with the more chronic users of petrol. In the late eighties some of the more incapacitated youths were remanded for psychiatric assessment but little came of such assessments. However, it was the purportedly poor response from local and regional hospitals, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, that were the main subject of complaints.

Back in 1986 the matron of the Laverton hospital alleged that the flying doctor service was reluctant to carry petrol-sniffers because of the danger of a patient becoming aggressive while in the air (*Kalgoorlie Miner* 1/8/86)¹⁶⁰. The Matron was cited as saying it was impossible for small hospitals to treat sniffers, because there was insufficient staff, especially at night, to provide one-to-one attention and to deal with them should they become violent and aggressive. In the late eighties and early nineties the Laverton hostel manager had found the local doctor supportive and helpful but complained that the hospital '*never wanted to take the petrol sniffing kids in there because they said they run amuck*'. The doctor said he believed that practical medical care was being ignored largely because of bureaucratic bungling and gave the example of what he saw as an inadequate response to the prevalence of hepatitis B. He also referred to what he regarded as a fudging of figures when a report claimed there had been a decrease in sniffing because hospital admissions had declined.

DCD policies reflected a community development approach and community based solutions to juvenile justice. The department was generally supportive of preventative measures advocated by the State Petrol Sniffing Working Party which, when it had operated in the late eighties, emphasised recreation and education for young people. In addition, the department as a response to individual sniffers tried to create the mentoring scheme. Many local practitioners (police and hostel staff) were dissatisfied with these initiatives, claiming that they were of limited use. To back up their position they referred to the support for a law and order approach amongst Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities, especially the influential advisers. The sole preventative strategy, which appeared to have unanimous support, was an opportunity reduction strategy where Avgas was introduced in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands as a replacement for petrol.

An adviser in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands believed that there were only two points of comparison - what was happening in the Northern Territory and South Australia. He had heard that there was a younger generation of sniffers starting in SA so he believed this showed that the community development approach adopted in that state had not prevented the younger generation taking up sniffing. His view was that the community development model was first formulated for third world countries where '*their culture was intact*' but in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands this was not the case. He believed the model was an easy paradigm for westerners to grasp, and therefore

¹⁶⁰ The main thrust of the article was to complain about the St John Ambulance service as there was a reluctance to take any patients by ambulance to Kalgoorlie. There was just the one ambulance in town, manned by volunteers.

convenient for them, but that it was inadequate for the purpose of understanding what was going on in Aboriginal settlements.

In general, the police seemed to have had cordial relations with the justices of the peace in Warburton and Laverton. A police officer, Terence, said he liked them and found them *'aware a lot more... how [the offenders] behaved in the community... It's good to see that your own peers if you like are dealing with the problems'*. He referred to a Laverton justice of the peace, a shop owner whose premises were often the target of burglaries, who in passing sentence on adults was getting *'a little of his justice back'*.

Where the Warburton justices of the peace or advisers in other settlements were more inclined to be punitive and judgemental towards chronic users of petrol, to take 'action' by sending these youths 'away', then there was a compatibility of outlook between them and the police. In contrast, an adviser who adopted a reintegrative approach, by endeavouring to reincorporate sniffers into wider community events and activities, was sought out by DCD workers and was praised by them for her efforts.

The advisers were crucial intermediaries for the police and welfare workers, as they were for other bureaucratic visitors to the Lands. Occasionally, where their gatekeeping function was made explicit and they did not assist in a fashion which workers found helpful, then this dependency was highlighted and sometimes resented. For instance, a DCD field officer involved in setting up the mentoring scheme, had written to all the communities asking for lists of male and female young people and of those who sniffed petrol. His pessimistic prognosis, that he was unlikely to receive much information, was proved correct. The officer had also asked the advisers to nominate possible candidates to act as mentors but received no response. One adviser, Basil, rang the officer and demanded to know why he needed the information. The following year, when up in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, I was approached by the same adviser, Basil, who had just come from a discussion with the police, and asked for my impressions of a newly appointed magistrate. Like the police he placed great value on maturity, as a desirable characteristic of any justice practitioner, presumably on the grounds that age and experience usually fostered a less radical and ambitious perspective than that of the younger, raw recruit.

A police officer, Terence, when describing the administration of justice in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands emphasised that the statute laws applied to the communities, just like anywhere else in the state, but on top of that they had the by-laws, to deal with specific issues primarily arising from the policies of quarantining the area through the prohibition of alcohol and the use of petrol for inhalation. He believed there was a crucial difference, though, between the local justices of the peace in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the magistrate in terms of their interpretations of how the law should be enforced and in sentencing practice. In his view, the magistrate had pressure to conform to peer mores since he was *'bound by accepted practices and what his brother magistrates do elsewhere'*. To illustrate his argument, Terence gave the example of a previous magistrate, who *'everybody respected'* and who the Aborigines were *'absolutely terrified'* of, but who was moved to another location because she was too controversial, and *'overstepped the mark'*.

A senior police sergeant, Abraham, expressed nostalgia for this magistrate, who had imprisoned 'sniffers' for three months after a doctor had informed her this was the minimum period of time required to overcome the 'habit'. According to Abraham, her successor was far too lenient as he often dismissed charges after the juveniles had been in custody for three or four days. He admitted that the Laverton police had experimented with a number of tactics to ensure youths were kept out of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for longer periods, including arranging for the release of defendants into DCD custody in Laverton, and laying more serious criminal charges (for example, assault and disorderly conduct). Most local police believed that, not only should the young people be removed from the Lands for some time to give the communities a break, but that they should receive detention, because of their actions while high on petrol, especially their attacks on police. One day, in between a court session, a police sergeant complained to me in the delicatessen, where we were buying lunch, that nobody had yet received a 'penalty' in that no-one had been sentenced to detention. He said that the 'guys get jacked off' with the magistrate's approach to sentencing, when they have had rocks thrown at them on patrol¹⁶¹.

According to one magistrate, his predecessors had too closely identified with police and he acknowledged he had been criticised by community members and the police for not locking up petrol sniffers. He portrayed the police as enforcing the by-laws, by accepting what they were told. He questioned the worth of the Communities Act and how it operated in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, as he thought it perpetuated binge drinking in towns and a continuation of 'institutionalisation'. On the other hand, he was displeased when a 'departmental expert' (DCD) had sent him an abusive letter after he remanded a petrol sniffer to the Longmore detention centre for a medical examination. In the letter the expert had told him that it was 'culturally inappropriate' to send such youths to detention centres and that they should be dealt with in the communities and not remanded in custody. His observation was that 'community initiatives' were great in theory, but '*in practice you have to take out repeat offenders. People come out with stock responses. In reality there are not a lot of alternatives*'.

From what various lawyers with the ALS said, they tried to remain aloof from the struggles over appropriate sentencing, and clung to the defining tenet of the defence lawyer. For example, Hugh said he represented the client not the community and '*the court will ordinarily take into account the community's interests... it's not ALS that imposes the penalty, it's the court. If the communities feel the court is too slack, then they can complain to the courts*'.

One day, waiting outside the Laverton courtroom, a relief hostel manager was declaiming about petrol sniffing being a community problem and the need for '*them to take responsibility*'. She could not see why the petrol sniffing charges could not be dealt with up at Warburton by the justices of the peace or the magistrate. A DCD field officer, Seth, said he used to think like that but he had come round to the police

¹⁶¹ Local police attitudes to the magistrate have to be considered within the context of a wider campaign to address what was believed to be the soft sentencing philosophy of the children's court in Perth. Police were vocal critics of the court in the early nineties, and there was a widespread perception amongst them that the children's court was too lenient towards serious offenders (Beresford and Omaji 1993).

way of thinking - to take the youths away did '*break the cycle*' and provided relief to the communities. Later on, in a conversation with me, he said he only achieved a '*middle position*' after spending time out in the desert. In his view taking kids away was the most effective short-term solution. For DCD workers community based solutions may be the best approach but he now thought it unrealistic that jails would ever be empty. He observed '*it is easier for those apart from the situation to take that position when they are not at risk*'.

Local knowledge

There was a common refrain from those practitioners that had been in the town for at least six months that '*people down in Perth*' did not comprehend or appreciate the issues. A DCD field officer, Mel, believed head office had '*no idea what it is like*'. He thought it had been very ill conceived of the State Petrol Sniffing Working Party (PSWP) to attempt to address the issues from Perth and the view of the Laverton hostel assistant manager was that the PSWP, after two years, considered themselves experts and all they had done was waste \$3 million. He also believed that a ministerial adviser had avoided the hostel on his visits to the district because he was a '*mate*' of the PSWP chairperson. Such statements indicate the political struggles by people wishing to claim the glory for their work, which a Laverton doctor said characterised the petrol sniffing field.

On several occasions that I knew of, local practitioners had contacted politicians about their concerns. Hostel staff had gone to see a Minister in Perth which was viewed in a poor light by the local member of parliament and the regional manager. Another time, a police officer had phoned his Minister because he was '*sick of picking up dead bodies*'. There were also visits from regional and Perth based senior bureaucrats and politicians, and these visits were used as an opportunity for practitioners to convey their local representations of the situation.

An illustration was provided by a visit from the State Advisory Committee for Young Offenders in 1992. The meeting was attended by hostel staff, police, community health, DCD officers, the youth centre manager, and a woman who was a shire councillor and a member of the youth centre committee. At the meeting the discussion almost exclusively centred on petrol sniffing, with only a police officer mentioning not knowing how to handle the alcohol related violence when Aboriginal people '*visit*'. There were several comments about all the local youth '*drinking*' but a few people said they had not been in trouble while working with the youth centre manager.

The principal interlocutor was the judge of the children's court who was interested in legal process, the youths' understanding of the process and the efficacy of the Warburton justices of the peace. As a consequence, a considerable amount of time was spent discussing issues like children in police custody and placing youths on open remand in the Laverton hostel. Below are summary notes of the meeting, selected on the basis that they indicate participants perspectives on ontology and dimension of '*the problem*', and clustered under various themes rather than in the order that the comments were made. The explanations were mostly provided by DCD hostel managers and the police officers:

Hostel (Lynn): The kids attitudes are that you can't tell us what to do, the parents can't tell us what to do... If the aunt, nana turns up the kids leave.

Police officer: The kids stand over their parents, pensioners

Police officer: It's my body and I'll do what I like with it.

Police officer: The kids don't want to stay here, they want to go home. They know what will happen - they say I will die. They call them jellybrains

Aboriginal woman from Perth: A prevalent attitude amongst Aboriginal children they will die. In prison, in a car chase. They know they won't get a job, they lack self-worth.

DCD (Seth): Lack of self esteem may be having an impact on parents

Hostel (Kim): After about nine, the boys take up petrol. We need to educate parents. Parents like....., they're educated, they're been over east. Smart people. But the tribal system of three wives, six grandparents. Can look after the girls, not looking after the boys. Old men take the young girls. Mostly boys sniff, old people are protecting the girls.

Police officer: Lots of girls sniff but they do it quietly

Hostel (Kim): But girls looked after

Police officer: If the kids considered unworthy they are not put through the Law, they're excluded.

Police officer: Some sniff to draw attention to the issue. You can't punish a child until been through the Law. That's the traditional custom.

Hostel (Kim): The kids go around in a pack. If one is kicked out then they grab a little kid, to have power over somebody.

Police officer: Do take them to outstations with the intention to teach them things but kids won't concentrate, they won't paint, listen to a story.

Hostel (Kim): So they leave the kids behind.

Police officer: They sit around while the silly white man does the work

Hostel (Lynn): It's the families problem, not welfare

Hostel (Kim): Only one family has come to visit their kid here.

Police officer: [in relation to wardens] A... kicks a ... and then family conflict breaks out.

Community health (Bev): The communities are avoiding the responsibility.

Police (Abraham): The communities have their own power, you can't just walk in and make changes as outsiders

Police (Abraham): The police are the only government department that goes there all the time. If the police presence is permanent, may only be a bandaid but it does help, the kids are less likely to upset the community.

Police officer: Violence is on the increase, the police are being attacked. Since 1989 each year it's gone up 100 times each year. The offenders are older and they used to be taken out for three to six months. The system is better now in that they are dealt with quickly. About 18 months ago we tried to put it back on the community, but then they really went berserk.

Hostel (Kim): All very well to send them out but where to?

Police officer: We're risking our lives to bring them down here and then the matters are dismissed.

DCD (Mel): We're all risking our lives if something happens to them

Police officer: Last month we were trying to arrest an adult petrol sniffer and he poured petrol all over himself and set himself alight.

DCD (from Kalgoorlie): The conclusion is that there is a lot of frustration. We're offering short-term solutions.

This meeting exemplifies a contemporary technique of addressing social issues where a team of senior representatives¹⁶² seek submissions from the public and embark on a range of consultations, which nowadays usually includes a tour of the more remote parts of the territory. The Young Offenders team met the magistrate for dinner in Kalgoorlie and also went to Warburton, where reportedly three people turned up for

¹⁶² A judicial head is usually favoured because of their experience in determining the 'truth' and their independent and respected status which makes it more probable their findings will influence government and policy.

the meeting. By and large, after the team's 'swing through the province' the local practitioners were sceptical of achieving much, and bemused by what they saw as an ill-defined purpose for the exercise. For instance, one of the police officers said he saw it as an exercise in damage control, to check whether the situation was getting out of hand. Despite their suspicions that meetings of this ilk were probably futile, local practitioners still wanted to ensure that no particular vision or interpretation of issues was dominant. Thus a DCD worker, who had intended to remain silent, said he had felt impelled to intervene in the meeting because the police '*were taking over*'.

In her article on juvenile justice in Port Augusta, Hutchings (1993) claims misinformed stereotypes of Aboriginal youth were generated and reinforced through discussions amongst juvenile justice workers in official and social settings. She describes these discussions as being part of the cultural discourse among the non-Aboriginal population, a discourse summed up as the 'homogenisation of otherness', and states that "the police, lawyers, welfare personnel and magistrates acquire 'expert knowledge' of what constitutes Aboriginal offending behaviour and the Aboriginal social contexts which produce it" (Hutchings 1993:352).

The process of generating a discourse, and the substance of that discourse, about Aboriginal offending youth by juvenile justice practitioners who worked or resided in Laverton cannot be so easily simplified. There were non-local and a few local Aboriginal people who were engaged in working in juvenile justice so that the discourse was not solely amongst the 'non-Aboriginal' population. Furthermore, I think it is important to distinguish between the local practitioners' assertions about their professional roles and expertise, and their local knowledge, which constituted another form of expertise. Within a local context, the dissonance and conflict amongst government agencies was linked to the fundamental tensions in the policy and professional orientations of the respective agencies. However, in the on-going political struggles between agency representatives contradictory or alternative perspectives were constantly being legitimated by referring to individual practitioners' local knowledge of the problem.

As local practitioners had working and informal relationships with each other and with other local residents, this did tend to generate a local discourse about Aboriginal issues, in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participated. Whilst there was not a complete consensus of values and disagreements and more serious disputes were not uncommon, there existed a set of practices and discursive paradigms that became 'taken for granted' through the acquisition of local knowledge and engagement in the local administration of justice.

As the social theorist Rose (1987) has underlined, we need to be aware of the forms of power flowing from claims of knowledge concerning family life, child rearing, the management of race relations and so forth. The power of expertise installs a new type of relation between authority and its subjects. All of the local practitioners, as public servants, had faith in their capacity to rightfully exercise their statutory power on the grounds that they were capable and skilled at making impartial and objective decisions. This in itself was a way of distinguishing between their expertise and other local residents' views.

Because of their experience and training for their various occupations they could also mark out particular fields of knowledge that were their areas of expertise. Therefore, the magistrate, the lawyers and to a lesser extent local justices of the peace and the ALS field officer could refer to their expertise in law and legal procedure, whilst the police could highlight their singular expertise with crime and criminals and to some extent, the law and legal process. Social workers and welfare workers could privilege their expertise, depending on their academic background and previous experience, in social and family relations, individual psychology, adolescent-parent conflict and community work.

According to Cowlshaw (1988:170) the Brindleton police defended themselves against complaints from Aborigines and from local white councillors by claiming superior knowledge of the law, more serious crime elsewhere and their understanding of discretionary power. She also describes the police as feeling more enlightened concerning Aboriginal problems than the local councillors. In Laverton local practitioners were inclined to consider themselves more enlightened, more concerned, and more knowledgeable of Aboriginal problems, especially as they related to young people, than the majority of white residents. Local Wongi residents and a few white residents may have had more intimate and long-standing experience of the place but their perspective lacked the breadth and depth of the practitioners' 'bigger picture'. The local practitioners' status as an 'expert' was conferred by experience with Aboriginal people, particularly the more 'traditional folk' in Aboriginal settlements. Their 'expertise' was thrown into high relief when compared to other non-Aboriginal residents because of the separate domains and the lack of personal contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in town

What the newly arrived practitioner lacked was local knowledge, which could only be acquired through social interactions and the development of personalised relations. As a form of experiential knowledge, in contrast to intellectual learning and professional expertise, its value accorded with existing police norms that stressed the practical and the concrete. Inherent to the process of acquiring local knowledge was learning how to do things and how to categorise different people and events.

At one level, there was a tendency to formulate differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal person and to ascribe typical characteristics to each. But in practice, at the local level, statutory agents (some of whom may be 'Aboriginal') recognised and responded to certain categorisations of difference amongst the Aboriginal population. These categorisations were premised on understandings of local race relations and their contact with local Aboriginal people. Over time, the confident holder of local knowledge of difference could incorporate and reify their classifications into absolute statements about universal attributes of the Aboriginal population and the essential features that characterise race relations in Australia.

The practitioner with a year or two of experience was in a position to assert their superior command of and access to local knowledge of Aboriginal issues when outsiders or new practitioners came to Laverton. Having developed personalised relations with local Wongi residents was one basis for the claim but even greater legitimacy for claims of local knowledge was familiarity with the 'authentic'

Aborigines from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands - the wise men and to some extent the wise women who can explain 'the problem' and whose imprimatur was required for intervention. The police, for example, continually asserted their superiority in the local field of juvenile justice politics based on their contact with a diverse range of Aboriginal people elsewhere and in the locality. They also relied on their knowledge of specific cases (events and individuals) and of criminal justice matters (law and procedures). An instance of a police officer demonstrating his expertise on petrol sniffing was when Doug Howard claimed he could tell when sniffers were dying from personality and behavioural changes and referred to a particular young man who he said was dying, because he had recently become placid when high on petrol, whereas he used to always be violent. Doug did not think Laverton hostel staff would be as aware of such transformations, as they did not spend much time in the Ranges and did not see youths high on petrol. The magistrate, as well, had a very circumscribed experience and contact with a limited number of local and Ngaanyatjarra Lands people, which explains why he sought out the Laverton hostel managers for their accounts of local events and to access their local knowledge of people and politics.

The importance of local knowledge was illustrated by the discourses on Aboriginal law. In contrast to the pervasiveness of western legal mores, the Law, as it was referred to by non-Aboriginal people, was not widely acknowledged and was often referred to only obliquely by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Being an Aboriginal person did not guarantee understanding of the Law. For outsiders - women, new arrivals to the district, young people - not even being a resident entailed knowledge of this 'secret' subject. Therefore most people had to rely on others who claimed to know and on their personal networks to find 'authoritative' opinion on the subject. It was very noticeable, however, when local justice practitioners had been around for a while, they talked about the Law as if much could be taken for granted, either because it did not impinge upon them or because they believed there was a 'working understanding'.

Chan (1996:113) refers to Sackmann's cognitive model of cultural knowledge and Bourdieu's theory of cultural practice, singling out the notions of field and habitus as useful concepts for exploring diversity within police organisations and for situating multiple cultures within the political and social context of policing. According to Chan (1996:113) Sackmann "classifies knowledge in Organization into four dimensions: (1) *dictionary knowledge*, which provides definitions and labels of things and events within an organization; (2) *directory knowledge*, which contains descriptions of 'how things are done' generally in the organization; (3) *recipe knowledge*, which prescribes what should or should not be done in specific situations; and (4) *axiomatic knowledge*, which represents the fundamental assumptions about 'why things are done the way they are' in an organization". In her discussion of habitus of police work, she employs Sackmann's four classificatory dimensions of cultural knowledge. Dictionary knowledge is summed up as "the rough and the respectable", directory knowledge is summed up as "look for the unusual and take shortcuts", recipe knowledge is "cover yourself and don't rat on others" and axiomatic knowledge is "the war against crime".

Chan (1996) is interested in policy-driven change, where the organisation's management under pressure from the government and/or the public, actively seeks to transform police practice. In contrast, my interest lies with the distinct characteristics

of the administration of juvenile justice in rural settings and the impact of experience on individual officers when stationed in a town like Laverton. As a novel experience for the majority of justice practitioners, they had to learn a new lexicon for the local environment and, as a result, they develop a unique repertoire which informed their daily behaviour and outlook and thus had the potential to be at odds and therefore alter previously acquired aspects of what may loosely be termed police, legal or welfare culture. The most significant changes or additions, I would argue, were to dictionary knowledge and directory knowledge.

The police were the most outspoken about what they saw as the distinction between Aborigines 'here' in comparison to 'elsewhere'. The colonial practice of conceptually and administratively distinguishing between full bloods and half-castes, survives into modern discourses (see Merlan 1998), often in public fora in the more subdued nomenclature of remote and urban. A local police officer compared Aboriginal people in cities and coastal towns to the 'locals'. He characterised those that lived in bigger cities as *'knowing their rights a little bit more... smarter and cheekier'*. In contrast, he respected the locals for their honesty and for being down to earth *'maybe naive and misinformed but doesn't create problems... Smack you in the mouth and next day say sorry'*. When I asked him to elaborate further he highlighted three significant aspects of the district and the local Aboriginal people, that were different from other places he had worked. There were in his view less dishonesty offences because the Wongis were *'basically honest'* and except for a core group who stole the rest did out of desperation, second was the people *'the personalities'* and third was the policing in the Ranges where one had to *'keep your wits about you the whole time'*.

The appreciation of Aboriginal people, and valorisation of their beliefs and practices, was most marked when discussing the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Merlan (1998: 169) observes that what is worthy about Aborigines is assumed to be distinctive and traditional forms of social relations - to place, a dependence on countryside and an intimacy with it. This was muted in police officers discourse, rather it was the singling out of the Law as a body of beliefs and practices that deserved respect, and what was seen as worthy was the life of people in the Ranges and some local people's honesty and their loyalty to family¹⁶³.

The police officer who was disliked by local young people, Doug, was the one to be most disparaging about local Aboriginal people, who he portrayed as sharing the negative qualities of the 'half-castes' and 'quarter castes' he went to school with as a boy. In his view, they were *'no different from white man... live in houses in towns apart from... want to call themselves Aboriginal... This belief they're Aboriginal and lower caste citizens... their belief and nobody else's'*. Later on he said he did not bother with the Laverton Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal people when they visit because *'they're mostly drunk... 24 hours a day, seven days a week'*. He found the young Aborigines in town *'angry about a lot of things... so angry about being black or being Aboriginal... a lot of them don't respect police anyway'*. He went on to praise the *'tribal*

¹⁶³ Merlan (1998: 237-238) discusses how indigeneity is valorised as essentially non-artificial in comparison to western life, but underlines there is a corresponding unequal attribution of agency.

full-blood people... different people altogether' who he claimed had a completely different attitude¹⁶⁴.

The lack of respect for 'half-castes' by police officers was epitomised by their unpleasant descriptions of non-local police aides. According to a senior police officer the only Aboriginal people who would work in the area were 'half-castes' from other areas, but they were afraid of the Law. This officer said he had had enough of working with Aboriginal people, because he had seen the Law weaken in the Kimberleys and people become more '*integrated*'. His view was that the aspects of Aboriginal life which were worthwhile, which he called 'the traditional', were disappearing.

Broadly speaking most practitioners quickly learnt or already knew that they should conform to some 'rules' of etiquette when interacting with Aboriginal people, but were not really sure of the specifics that might apply to interactions with local Wongi people or the Ngaanyatjarra Lands people. As these general precepts for behaviour have a prohibitive character they did not engender a sense of confidence in the newly arrived non-local practitioners that they will ably overcome social distance between themselves and Aboriginal people. The precepts included not using a dead person's name, avoiding eye contact, avoid speaking of and going to places which have secret sacred significance or where Law business is going on. There was a vague understanding that 'elders' should be consulted and their permission sought for access and before acting, but again the identity of 'elders' and the way to initiate such interactions were unclear. This appears to correspond to a wider trend in Australia where Aboriginal people in the middle to older age group are most sought after as participants in increasing processes of consultation (Merlan 1998:44).

Although it was not articulated in quite this way, an appreciation developed amongst new practitioners that they would have to develop personalised relations with Aboriginal people, especially in relation to work in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The police officer, Doug, stressed that '*a uniform means nothing to them*'. The police at least, and some DCD workers, believed the traditional Aboriginal people of the desert to have status differentials that ascribed seniority and authority to older people, the elders, particularly the males. Another police officer, Terence, portrayed gender relations as follows - '*they're probably seen as an inferior part of the culture, women are second rate citizens sort of thing*'. He also used a cliché I had heard local mining people use, which was supposed to crystallise the social hierarchy within Aboriginal society '*with the distribution of food it was men, dogs, women, children*'. It was generally assumed that a weaker version of the authority and status hierarchy operated amongst local Wongis.

The 'family' as the foundation of social life was a central tenet of constructions of Aboriginality. Sudden moves, travel to other places, mostly to attend funerals, was explicable in terms of the need to maintain and demonstrate family solidarity. Terence,

¹⁶⁴ Another police officer bemoaned the scarcity of '*trusty half-castes*' in Laverton. By 'trusty', he meant detainees who could be entrusted to satisfactorily undertake the job of looking after the lock-up by cooking meals and keeping the kitchen clean. He said that most of '*the Ranges mob*' made a mess. In other places he had worked, in the north-west, he had found there were usually one or two detainees in the lock up who could undertake these tasks well.

the police officer, approved of what he called Aboriginal people's '*very strong family base*' and gave the example of where everybody was fighting but as soon as one gets locked up '*family comes from everywhere to show support... That's great, don't see that in white people not to the same extent*'. Many incidents involving attacks on the police (except by sniffers), and violence between Aboriginal people, could be rendered meaningful by reference to intra-family solidarity and inter-family feuding. It was thus vital to know individuals' affiliations to particular families although a detailed knowledge of kin networks was only really thought essential for certain kinds of welfare and legal work. For example, negotiating substitute care arrangements for children could involve a fairly extensive knowledge of who was, and how they were, related to the children. In addition, some effort was made to understand the socio-cultural significance of the relationship with, for instance, a DCD field officer indicating to me that she intended to ask a female relative if she would look after a Wongi boy, but she expected the relative to care for him without payment because of the nature of their relationship.

In much of the police discourse, there were sympathetic statements and applause for family ties, honesty, sense of honour, and the immediate and swift justice of the people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The police officer, Terence, outlined a list of what he called their '*strange ways, very strange ways. But you got to respect them for it, it's their ways*'. Included in the list were 'their' interpretations of wrong-doing, retribution for wrong doing and apportioning blame for the causes of death.

Terence...[they] become cranky if seen to do something to them that wasn't deserved... You definitely learn what they'll accept and what they won't accept... [for example] rough handling upsets them... they flogged the fellow who attacked Saul [a police officer] and the group of sniffers who attacked the van. Everybody did the flogging - old men and women, young men... Blame plays an awful big part in their culture... Someone is always responsible for someone else's death... It's something we don't know a hell of a lot about but death is very mysterious to them... nothing seems to have a logical explanation.

A dominant theme in local practitioners' discussions about crucial Aboriginal 'customs' was the ramifications of 'payback' for their work. The way it was practiced appeared to be seen as a defining characteristic of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities. The ALS lawyer, Hugh, expressed the following view - '*we all know about the tribal system of payback... Let's face it Aboriginal tribal law is really harsh. Eye for an eye that sort of thing, not compassionate*'. In the main, knowledge of the process and who might be involved was hazy, but it was a principle and a practice that was assumed to underpin many events within the local Aboriginal domain and to potentially pose a threat to practitioners themselves. An example was, according to the police, the widespread reluctance to intervene when the young man from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Lex Stone, became seriously affected by years of petrol inhalation. The police officer, Doug, said people did not want to go near him because they sensed he might die anytime and they did not want to be linked with his death. To illustrate Doug said that if a warden grabbed him, and Lex died soon after, then the warden would be seen as the cause of death through '*cursing*' him.

Practitioners speculated about the consequences of the deaths of several well-known individuals, and referred to a few individuals who were known to have suffered 'payback', and to the on-going trouble between the Chichester and Hamilton families.

For instance, local Wongi people had complained to the police about two *kadaichi*¹⁶⁵ men in town watching particular people, and a police aide found that 'they [people in town] are really worried. It's interesting, really interesting'.

The local policing policy, which it was implied had been followed since time immemorial, towards payback and 'other tribal stuff' was to actively discourage such practices in Laverton proper and ignore them if they occurred at places distant from town or in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. This policy was seen as complementing the spatial ordering of drinking, where locals and visitors were expected to know where they were allowed to drink in the town's public places without police interference.

The risk of becoming a target of payback was viewed as affecting agency and practitioners' responses to young people who were likely to die from the damage caused by prolonged and heavy petrol sniffing. As a previous section indicated, there was a perception amongst local practitioners that hospitals would not admit, nor the flying doctor service evacuate, chronic sniffers because they might become violent or wreak havoc. A further reason, according to the DCD hostel manager, was the fear of payback. She referred to a youth, Otto Hamilton, who she said had been a petrol drenched wreck on the fringes of Laverton. Her account was that she tried to have him admitted at the local hospital and her husband tried to get the police to take him to Kalgoorlie. She claimed everybody was scared he would die in their care or custody. The local doctor in a separate conversation with me said that Otto had been turned away by the hospital staff until the doctor had insisted on his admittance. He was finally taken to Kalgoorlie and died the next day. Although usually a resident in an Ngaanyatjarra Lands settlement, local practitioners assumed Otto was in town because none of his own people wanted to go near him as they knew he was near death.

Since Laverton hostel looked after youths who were chronic sniffers of petrol, the manager saw herself and other staff as being at risk of payback, and gave the following explanation for her anxiety:

Lynn: And because it's a culture thing, because we are from the different area, cos we're Yamadjis and they're Wongis, we have to be very careful that things don't happen like death occur at the hostel while we're here. Cos in our culture they have a payback system and that used to worry us. ...if they die from say a disease or liver failure or kidneys or whatever, our people don't understand that. They just think somebody killed them. So there is always that there [?], which is hard.

The police were quite upfront about deviating from standard procedure in their style of policing in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. This was conveyed in two main ways - by characterising themselves as instruments of the people, and by indicating how they 'accommodated', by not intervening in, 'tribal punishments' out in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. As an illustration of how the police response differed between Laverton and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, one officer, Reece, referred to a woman who had a damaged eye. The police were prosecuting the perpetrator, her defacto, because they were aware of the incident which had happened in Laverton. Reece said that if the assault had happened in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands it was unlikely to have been reported. According to another officer, Terence, the police did not get complaints about tribal

¹⁶⁵ More commonly referred to as 'featherfeet' by town residents, no local practitioners used the Ngaanyatjarra word 'tjinadarra' but if they had worked and lived in other places where 'payback' was practised, then they were inclined to use the term 'kaidichi'.

punishment in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, probably he thought, because the complainants would just 'cop more later'. The following comments were made by other police:

Abraham: We usually keep out of the tribal punishment business. Some of my blokes actually witnessed spearings. Depends on how you want to look at it. Bit of a strange situation really, to stand there and witness a grievous bodily harm and stand there and do nothing about it. The best course of action is not to do anything about it.. Most of the men who get speared accept their punishment.. No-one ever complains.

Terence: I think they're putting themselves in the situation where they want the best of both worlds. They still want to hand out their own tribal punishments but us to be involved as well... There is.. that conflict.. they want us there and they don't want us there.

Doug: [You need in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands] ... a warped sense of humour.. and a very broad sense of reality. [which are useful for] ...spear fights where we are the targets. Tribal punishment system and ramifications which flow on.. paybacks and the rest of it. If you're not very careful you can get tangled in. You've got to be very aware of that sort of stuff.

Local residents and practitioners saw grog and crime by Aboriginal people as inextricably linked. Reasons given for most of the crime in the town by local practitioners were for theft, need and for violence and damage, inebriation. The senior sergeant, who stressed his 20 years in the service, saw these motives as universal to Aborigines in country areas, saying that a lot of stealing was because people were hungry whilst other behaviour was due to drunkenness when 'they don't know what they are doing'. He believed Aboriginal people across the board acted differently to non-Aboriginal people when drunk because of 'differences in values and upbringing'.

An ALS lawyer explained crime and alcohol abuse as emanating from a 'crisis of values' which was caused by the dreadful poverty and misery in towns like Laverton.

Hugh: I see the crisis, the crime crisis. Alcoholism and alcohol abuse is implicated in the vast majority of cases, probably 90%. What is desperately needed is some sort of spiritual regeneration, in morality and ethics. If one looks at the crimes I deal with they are invariably against the person or the proprietary rights of the other person, that is breaks, thefts and so on. Really the internal values, the ethics and morals which act as restraints to the temptations of the moment, to violate the rights of another person. I think there is a chronic absence of those personal values which restrain that sort of conduct...the people have a chronic emptiness... the fact that a lot of the traditional culture has been destroyed... [The most serious crime was] intra-Aboriginal crime and that indicates a crisis of values which govern wholesome human relations... The people have to feel themselves and understand why it's worthwhile not to go smashing each other with flagons and this sort of thing... Crimes of violence are very common. ...we had cases where women have been stabbing women, men have been stabbing men and vice versa. Total madhouse when people are drunk... Alcoholism is destructive of reason and brings out the animal instinct. It destroys the ability to reason and to foresee the consequences of conduct.

He spoke of an emptiness and an absence of personal values amongst the Wongis in the Goldfields. Using the westernised language of human rights, the values he saw lacking were those that enshrined the right to individual property and ownership, and the right to freedom of choice and values which would have ensured that the preservation of life was believed desirable.

Whether discussed as a 'crisis of values' or 'different values and upbringing', when it came to more specific topic of offending or sniffing youth, then the local practitioners discourse invariably focused on the lack of discipline imposed on the youth by their caregivers, and the absence of self-discipline, motivation and sense of responsibility in the youths. The causes of the youths' irresponsibility were associated with a range of factors attributed to intrinsically culturally different techniques of parenting/bringing up children or the effects of outsiders' interventions on parenting and who took responsibility for dealing with misbehaving children.

In respect to local town youth, a DCD officer, Seth, towards the end of his stay expressed regret that he had not had more time to undertake community development aimed at addressing alcohol abuse in Laverton. He would have liked to have assisted in developing work programs for young people, and to manage a youth band to give them a *'wider view, a sense of motivation and discipline... The hardest thing is to impose discipline and commitment to long term goals, which they've never had before'*.

According to Merlan (1998), European notions of personhood imply that a person remains the same wherever he or she goes even in strange and unfamiliar situations. More importantly there is a western emphasis on building up internal mechanisms of renunciation, of disciplining and denying a 'self' conceived as autonomous and ideally stable through time. Merlan (1998:200) contrasts this to the Katherine Aborigines' constant monitoring in social action of the self responding-to-others in a way consistent with recognition of the collectivity. As a result she concludes the western view of the 'self' has limited application to Aboriginal notions of self except for perhaps Aboriginal concepts of self-direction of being boss for oneself.

Mostly, practitioners wanted to talk about the Ngaanyatjarra youth who were involved in petrol sniffing. After over five years of having such youth reside in the hostels, some individuals staying for months at a time, the DCD hostel manager, Lynn, passed this judgement - *'these kids got no discipline, they are [?], they don't like to be told what to do, it's very hard to get them into a pattern like showers, help to put the jamas on them at night time, put them to bed'*. She described them as being used to roaming around in packs at night, and how the people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands did not like to take sniffers and put them through the Law, so that few were recognised as having the social status of adulthood. *'They'*, she said, *'behave quite good in the hostel... but when they go home they're different kids and you can see them, they are different. They don't take any notice of nobody'*. Lynn had found that when the youths came to the hostel for the first time they had in *'their minds that the hostel is for little kids and they to... take the world on their shoulders'*. She mentioned a youth who I knew had elderly parents *'they try to help him but he's the boss'* and when he first met Lynn he told her *'this is my body and I'm taking this body to town'*. This phrase appeared to have entered local lore amongst practitioners, as I heard it heard it repeated by several people including the police officer at the meeting for the State Advisory Committee for Young Offenders.

The manager's husband, Kim, elaborated on how it was important not to be intimidated by the Ngaanyatjarra Lands youth when they were upset or fighting in the

hostel, to ensure they were aware that they were responsible for their actions. To paraphrase:

Kim: You treat them like children, get them to sit by himself or together in a quiet corner until they are ready to apologise. Whatever happens you should never walk away as then they believe they have won. That's the problem when they're back home - they create the trouble then run away and leave the adults to fight over their actions. And the situation gets wilder and wilder with the boys not being responsible for what they've caused.

The hostel manager explained that it was hard for the caregivers to impose discipline, notably when the children or youth had separated or deceased parents.

Lynn: Cos you got your Nana and your Pop, and your little uncles that stick up for him. So Mum can't really discipline him. But you'll find that a lot of those kids up there, they've got split parents. Not many that really are still together, so Dad's got two wives or mum's got two husbands and they've got separate kids.

At one stage, the hostel managers had tried to involve the primary caregiver in their activities with the youth at the hostel, in order to encourage the youth to listen to the caregiver. Only one person, the mother of Lex Stone, had come down from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and stayed at the hostel.

Lynn: ...came down and she spent a month. So what we did, instead of us telling Lex what to do, we used to try and get his mum to tell him so she would be the boss of him when he goes home. So Lex went home after so much time with us, stayed out of trouble for quite a while but now he's back in the system again. Because as you're aware he's got older and gone through man's business, which changes a lot of kids because the mum is nothing, cos they're man.

I asked Doug, the police officer, about the incident involving Lex in Warburton when only two people appeared willing to intervene. He had heard that the missionaries told the Aboriginal people not to physically discipline their children. As a result, only the 'family' now had the right to discipline a misbehaving child. He described it as a constant problem for the community wardens who only intervened when one of their family was sniffing. The other factor mentioned by Doug, and already referred to previously, was that Lex was dying.

The ALS lawyer, Hugh, who had probably the least sustained contact of the justice practitioners with individual youths, though he mentioned them and their upbringing, moved on to a broader canvas to convey his understanding of the underlying causes of sniffing petrol. He again focused on a 'breakdown of social values' which resulted in 'parents hopeless in knowing what to do... perhaps its so hard because it wasn't a parental role to chastise and discipline kids... it was mainly aunts and uncles'. Having described 'the kids' as 'quite aimless, there's nothing for the kids to do', he sketched their surroundings as a harsh social and physical environment.

The country from his perspective had little to offer:

Hugh: If you look at these Central Desert communities, you wonder why people are living in them in the first place. I guess if there wasn't some sort of tribal connection to that landscape, they wouldn't be living there. It's often an extremely harsh environment, water's scarce. I, you, have certain non-Aboriginal values, like you value going to shops and that sort of thing then you obviously would find places like the Central Desert extremely unattractive.

Like the country, he portrayed the people as hard and sometimes violent, what he called a '*destructive tendency*', and provided the example of a man who, because he '*felt angry about something*', drove a grader over a settlement oval, thereby ruining it. He had encountered '*a lot of damage and loss of property from people just being self-destructive*'. He believed there was a need for a '*higher level of individual responsibility*' with for example people locking petrol caps on their cars.

External factors, such as family breakdown, lack of parental guidance, youth's lack of individual responsibility, are the reasons police give, according to Beresford and Omaji (1996:77), for the breakdown in Aboriginal/ police relations. Carrington (1993: 52) asserts that new strategies of welfare governance are related to deficit discourses about childhood, health, education and psychology. Within the local context, deficits that were articulated by justice practitioners were connected to notions of self-discipline, and most importantly, social and human capital.

Local discourse about the underlying causes of petrol sniffing and offending by local youth did hinge on factors external to their practice, but there was implicit recognition of their contribution to the 'issues' in debates about the efficacy and appropriateness of responses and interventions. Seth was the only practitioner who analysed the situation in terms of the practitioners manufacturing (as against responding) to the 'problem'. He called it a '*moral panic*' about sniffing which he was caught up in and stated that '*here there are no prostitution rings or amphetamines so they worry about smaller problems*'. He equated sniffing to other adolescent substance abuse, as a developmental and experimental phase, with more males than females engaging in such behaviour, but with most growing out of it. He did add that as a substance 'petrol' was different because it was more available and the use was more constant.

Like other practitioners, however, he did dwell on aspects of the social environment. He explained a change in how he construed the 'problem'. He originally saw sniffing as the issue but over time he had come to recognise it as related to issues specific to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands - the '*lack of work ethos, cultural breakdown with no substitute of traditional roles*'. Seth had read the book *Heavy Metal* and said he agreed with Brady (1992) that there was a high degree of tolerance (which he thought was akin to attitudes to cigarette smoking) because older people had grown out of using petrol without any visible harm. Other explanatory factors he mentioned were peer influence, excitement and the lack of availability of other intoxicating substances.

Many explanations offered by local practitioners for Aboriginal youth offending and substance abuse echoed major strands of delinquency theorising. The focus was on factors that at an abstracted level approximate 'deprived' environmental factors associated with low socio-economic status and 'dysfunctional' family backgrounds. Instead of discussing peer gang formations amongst working class boys in urban areas, the local practitioners were referring to Aboriginal youth from marginal town backgrounds and from desert settlements. As a result, the discourse about causes and solutions, predominantly amongst the university educated and urban-bred, was interlaced with the language of social justice, and of the pan-Aboriginal socio-historical experience of dispossession and discrimination.

An example was where the ALS lawyer, Hugh, referred to the legacy of the past and the imposed relations with the state. He had this to say about the Goldfields Aborigines:

Hugh: ...people caught up in poverty, their expectations are so low. They're just totally degraded humanity.... They probably don't perceive it as such a negative thing, but if they keep on living like this they're going to get hepatitis, AIDS from promiscuous living which is very rampant out here. The consequence is suffering whether they realise it or they don't... I think people experience the grief [of deaths] but there is still the old legacy, these people weren't even Australian citizens until the late sixties and there's been particularly the semi-tribal people who often aren't fluent in English and have had no cultural precedent for organisations like ATSIC the concept of a company or an association. Those concepts just didn't exist in their tribal culture. They are necessary to give legal form to a collection of people if they want to act in the community or relate to government. There's a great, lingering still, sense of disempowerment... So these people have not been exposed to the tools of material and social progress... I've seen photos of them 30 or 40 years ago, just naked people walking around in the tribal state. There's a great deal of disempowerment.

Despite the rhetorical stress on self-discipline and responsibility, it was perhaps understood, but not articulated, that such notions may have limited application and relevance to the local scene. This was suggested by the advocacy by Hugh of a radical non-material solution, for spiritual regeneration instead of just spending millions of dollars which he saw as *'a very superficial and materialistic approach'*. It was suggested by Seth's acknowledgment that conventional wisdom, that centres on prohibition and deterrence, did not apply. He recognised that prohibition could contribute to the attraction of an activity by virtue of its illegality but he would not support decriminalisation. He commented that people advocate *'deterrence'* but in Warburton after a youth died there was a binge night of sniffing and *'surely a death is the ultimate deterrent'*. Similarly, he questioned whether imprisonment in the Longmore detention centre acted as a deterrent and he recalled police taking away people and bystanders calling out *'you're going to the place where there's a good feed and you use a knife and fork'*. He admitted that it was *'hard to know how such incidents are representative'* and his frustration was apparent when he added that he did not understand *'why when kids long to go home when at the hostel, they did not stop sniffing when they return to the communities'*.

What gave much of the discourse a local flavour were the specific attributes of the place that were seen as contributing to substance abuse and offending, and specific cultural differences and forms of cultural *'disintegration'* which were associated with the people who *'belonged'* in this place. There was a pervasive sense of resignation amongst *'do-gooders'* that the type of intense and long term community development and support that was assumed necessary to achieve *'discipline'* and *'responsibility'* was highly unlikely to occur in a town dominated by white transients and where the wider structures and practices inhibited large scale and enduring investment. With the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, practitioners who had been in the area for some time were less inclined to refer to community responsibilities and development. Rather, they concentrated on the practical management of disruptive and often ailing youths, and refrained from grander designs, primarily because their local knowledge of the youths was so partial and mystifying.

Conclusion

The question arises as to whether the administration and practice of juvenile justice in Laverton and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands constituted a 'local sub-culture'. Certainly local justice practitioners contact with local Wongis and their visits to the Lands set them apart from the majority of non-Aboriginal town residents. Several practitioners stressed the distinctive character of their work and the effect of local experience on practice. However, it is more problematic to reify these claims to the point where an analysis assumes common if not shared beliefs and interpretive frameworks across a range of practitioners.

Within the formal context of court proceedings, the magistrate exercised control over process and made decisions about the outcomes of individual cases. Nevertheless, in many respects, it was the police who dominated the practice of justice, and contributed to gendered and pragmatic representations of the juvenile crime. The police were inclined to portray themselves as active agents, engaged in and performing 'blokey' activities with mostly other males, which entailed appreciating and managing the 'reality' of the situation without being unsettled or disturbed by this reality.

All local practitioners recognised two kinds of work - that which occurred in town and its environs and that which occurred in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands - which mirrored a distinction made between town and desert people. People who lived in the Lands were seen as traditional, practising their Aboriginal Law. The fundamental aspects of work in the region were patrols and intervention upon request. Orthodox or standard practice was regarded as being of limited relevance to this environment and to interventions with petrol-sniffing youth. In contrast, orthodox practice was adhered to wherever feasible within the town context and efforts were made to discourage 'payback' and 'dependency', and to enforce spatial ordering of public drinking by local residents and Aboriginal visitors. Personal relations were fostered between some local Wongis and justice practitioners, but several police were very negative in their evaluations of town Wongis.

Most practitioners reported changes to the way they worked and to their outlook, which was attributed to local experience. It was observable that the newcomer over time adopted more defensive and circumscribed approaches, and revealed diminished expectations of their power or influence over events and individuals. Their emotional responses to what they encountered or witnessed, notably drunken fighting and poor or inadequate amenities, were blunted by familiarity and the prevailing normalisation of certain kinds of violence. Police revealed that their experiences on patrol had enhanced their capacity to be accommodating and flexible, whilst welfare and legal professionals remarked on how everyday interactions with local Aboriginal people, in town and in the Lands, had wrought attitudinal changes in that they have become 'harder', less tolerant, and more racist.

For the police, the process of acquiring knowledge of local practice and identities, and of inter-cultural differences, primarily centred on 'learning on the job', and through socialising with fellow officers. As a significant proportion of their duties involved patrolling in their Ngaanyatjarra Lands, they also emphasised the relations

they cultivated with key brokers in the Lands. Due in part to their smaller numbers, the magistracy, legal and welfare officers were more dependent on textbooks and personal relations in town with local Wongis and a few non-local Aboriginal practitioners. Magistrates and social workers were also conscious of the need to maintain social distance from local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in order to retain 'objectivity' and 'confidentiality'.

Amongst practitioners there was a clustering of opinion around two disparate responses to the removal of young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands because of their petrol sniffing and related behaviour. This clustering was affected by professional and policy orientations of different occupations and departments, and length of residence in the town. Having been in town for a while, a local practitioner was more inclined to claim that removals were appropriate because 'no-one' else was dealing with the problem, and to distinguish and single out 'troublesome' and marginal families and individuals in town and in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Local Aboriginal values and practices which were identified by justice practitioners and some local white residents included honesty, loyalty to family, the significance of the Law and the commitment to payback. Local discourses about the reasons for juvenile offending and substance abuse mainly focused on a range of individual and collective deficits - lack of self-discipline, lack of hope, and breakdown in traditional life. Practitioners were more likely to refer to 'trouble' and substance abuse as active responses - as manifestations of anger and frustration, and of family obligation - which had been shaped by imposed external authorities, most conspicuously the 'missions'. Amongst practitioners, the most powerful explanatory concept for local Aboriginal behaviour was 'family'. Allegiance to family and family connections explained intra-cultural politics and conflict, and an individual's history of offending or substance abuse could be understood as a product of their upbringing, as being marginal to any particular family household or as being part of a marginalised familial group. As such, 'family' relations signified inter-cultural difference in the local context and were a defining feature of pan Aboriginal difference. This has serious ramifications for the administration of juvenile justice because as Carrington (1993:78) observes, "the juvenile justice authorities regard the family as both the source and saviour of juvenile delinquency".

CONCLUSION

In the Commission's report on 1993, it is stated that the Commission has been successful in its mission to reduce the number of people who are unemployed in the EU. The Commission has also been successful in its mission to reduce the number of people who are unemployed in the EU. The Commission has also been successful in its mission to reduce the number of people who are unemployed in the EU.



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CONCLUSION

In the Laverton district in 1991, Aboriginal people constituted approximately 20% of the population, yet local police data on arrests and court appearances for 1992 to 1993 revealed that Aboriginal youth comprised virtually all of the young people who had contact with juvenile justice system. Over the two-year period of the 64 individual juveniles who appeared in court 95% were Aboriginal and 84% were male. In addition, many of these youths as a condition of remand or as a disposition, were kept away for periods of time from their usual place of residence. These figures, along with the reputation Laverton has had for several decades as a district with high rates of Aboriginal youth crime, confirm that it was a suitable locality to examine and explore why there were such high rates of over-representation in the criminal justice system.

Aboriginal youths appearing before the Laverton court constituted two separate groups. There were local Wongi youths who had resided for a significant proportion of their lives to date in Laverton, may have experimented with the inhalation of petrol or other substances, but whose criminal behaviour was not specifically related to petrol sniffing. The other group of youths had grown up in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and were brought before the Laverton court for breaching community by-laws by sniffing petrol and for crimes typically committed while under the influence of petrol. Less than one quarter of the 64 youths who had court appearances in 1992 and 1993 were local Wongis. In addition, over the two years, of the 49 recorded incidents of juvenile crime that occurred in Laverton, half of them involved perpetrators who were from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

This means that local Wongi youth were not as over-represented in juvenile justice data as might first be thought. Nevertheless, they were still appearing before the court at much higher rates than their local non-Aboriginal peers. A consideration of why both local Wongi and Ngaanyatjarra youth were appearing in court has to factor in underlying issues that might apply to both groups and issues that pertain to the specificities of two different kinds of locales in which they grew up. Although this thesis has focused on race relations in Laverton and on town teenagers, the significance of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands could not be ignored because of the impact on practitioners of contact with youths from the Lands, and visits to the settlements.

An aim of the research was to consider how well the concept of an oppositional culture explains juvenile offending by Aboriginal youth in Laverton. However, an issue, which can only be speculated upon within the context of this research, is whether this form of analysis has merit when applied to the actions of the Ngaanyatjarra youth. The Laverton police data suggests the answer for both groups of youths would appear to be 'yes' and 'no'. The affirmative answer is suggested by charges for assaults on police and of resisting arrest. An answer in the negative is suggested by characteristics of the recorded offences and victims, the youths' explanations recorded by police, and the fact that so few girls were charged with offences. In terms of victimisation, non-Aboriginal people were not necessarily the singular target of attack. Even with property crime, the places broken into or stolen

from were predominantly non-private buildings, shops, the mess and community amenities, that held items of interest such as food, cigarettes, and other goods. More persistent young offenders - local Wongis and Ngaanyatjarra youth - were involved in thefts and break-ins to gain items associated with substance abuse and the value of stolen goods was not great, although the cost of associated damage could be high. Local and Ngaanyatjarra youths' explanations for offences recorded by police included boredom, peer pressure, a desire for goods or a means to travel, and with violent offences, the provocation of others' actions.

Local Wongi youth over the two years were recorded as being involved in 38 incidents over half of which related to burglary or theft and a third to drunken fights. With the property crime, white owners of vehicles were the victims of the seven incidents of motor vehicle theft but the thefts and break-in were primarily of shops and non-residential buildings such as clubs and the mess. The prime location for interpersonal violence was the pub and its environs. Group fighting between Aboriginal people accounted for nearly half of the assaults, some of which were of police when they intervened, and in two other incidents, of family members. On three occasions the victims were white men but not the police.

Most of the charges over the two years laid against the 34 young people from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands were for the possession or supply of petrol. However, for the remaining one fifth of the charges, with violent crime, the most common reported victims were police followed by community advisers, but nearly one third of victims were Aboriginal residents in the Lands. In addition, most burglaries were of community property - schools, workshops and so forth- and only one fifth of incidents involved residential dwellings (in some instances occupied by Aboriginal families).

This equivocal conclusion, of both an affirmative and negative answer, is based on recorded data, in itself a representation and product of complex processes. It was important to scrutinise these processes within the local context to see how these official representations of juvenile crime and the offenders might be generated. It could be argued that biased processes had inflated the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal youth before the Laverton court, in particular over-policing (Cunneen 1992). The whole issue of 'visibility' and extraordinary scrutiny are of great relevance to small towns and settlements.

A critical dimension to police work, and to a lesser extent welfare work, was patrolling. The police routinely patrolled the town and conducted lengthy patrols to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and periodically visited outlying mining settlements and pastoral properties. It was the patrols around the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, celebrated in newspaper and journal articles, which were stressed by local police as a unique aspect to being posted to the district, and a form of policing which challenged standard or orthodox approaches to their duties. Whereas in town, police and welfare workers portrayed themselves as responding to individual complaints and requests for help, in the Lands the police highlighted in conversation and in their statements before the court how they only intervened and arrested young people at the request of the *community*. From accounts by the police of what they did, and on the basis of what was said in court, these community requests were conveyed to the police by advisers, known 'elders', and

family members. These requests were not necessarily calls for punitive action, more akin to demands for removal of the young people from their usual place of residence to a controlled or restricted environment where there was little chance of them continuing to inhale petrol fumes. Hence, there was a pronounced emphasis within the local discourse about petrol sniffers on intervention as appropriate for the sake of the young person's health and welfare. In addition, though, and no doubt influenced by the trend within juvenile justice towards a formal justice model that underlines the criminal behaviour, there were also references to the impact of sniffers' behaviour on their families and community in terms of specific criminal acts and risks to safety.

Within the town context, a different and detailed picture emerged of the dynamics between local justice practitioners and their fellow *residents*, which affected the probability of apprehension by police for certain groups within the town. The policing of open public spaces was more likely to involve monitoring the activities and deportment of those people who were just 'hanging out' such as young people and Aboriginal people in particular places and at different times of the day. Intervention, however, was usually precipitated by complaints from white residents, of noise and aggressive or unruly drunken behaviour, and reports by Wongi residents, when gatherings of drunken people were out of control or someone was injured. Fighting in open spaces between Aboriginal people or between white people in the pub may have resulted in the police taking action after they themselves had observed what was going on, but intervening in fights at the Village, in houses or in the camps was often precipitated by complaints.

White residents were inclined to complain to the police when there were larger numbers of Aboriginal people in town, drinking in public spaces, and when there was a spate of car theft or property extensively damaged. In contrast, local Wongi people rarely complained of property crime, but did sometimes ask the police to intervene when there were disturbances or attacks or threats of attacks on themselves or on others they felt responsible for. These patterns of reporting produced a definite bias in the kind of offences for which people were charged with, and in the kind of people who were charged with offences. Amongst themselves local residents talked about trouble, but this did not translate into passing on information to the police about such matters as certain kinds of domestic violence, fraud, petty theft or drug use. Another factor was that police, as local residents, were conscious of *community relations* and their own visibility in a small town which affected how they cultivated personalised relations with fellow residents and responded to perceived status meanings within the local context.

Practitioners were aware that many local residents and outsiders were critical of their actions although it seemed that no-one, least of all local residents or the young people themselves, disagreed that wrong-doing had been perpetrated and that a response, in the broadest sense, was legitimate. For Aboriginal people who had frequent contact with the administration of justice, their criticisms of local practitioners tended to centre on their refusal 'to help' and their perceived favouritism, rather than the abuse of power. The magistrate was sometimes criticised when a particular sentence was believed to be severe. Local justices of the peace were probably regarded with a greater degree of wariness when they meted out prison sentences but the decline in their role had lessened their public profile and influence. In contrast, many white

residents expressed dissatisfaction about the handling and ineffectual response to the behaviour and situation of younger children by welfare and the courts.

For local residents, both black and white, the most powerful practitioners in the justice system were the police, as their presence was ubiquitous and their actions and inaction impacted on people's everyday lives by shaping the way residents perceived the orderliness and safety of their environment. The majority of white residents showed they had greater respect for the police, in comparison to welfare practitioners, although the police were sometimes criticised for a failure to act or for their inadequate reactions to particular incidents or when there were a high number of incivilities occurring in public places. Levels of dissatisfaction with the police amongst non-Aborigines increased when there were numbers of Aboriginal people drinking in public spaces or 'polluting' local shops and amenities with their smell and 'unseemly' state of intoxication, swearing and/or aggressive begging. This dissatisfaction tended to only crystallise into specific complaints when for example, a car was stolen or property damaged. Local Wongi relations with police were in the main cordial, and they made requests to them to intervene when it was thought necessary. Several officers, however, were singled out for censure for their lack of respect or hostile attitude. The most openly antagonistic in their attitudes towards police - as a generalised group - were young people, some Wongi 'visitors' who participated in the drinking lifestyle when in town, and a significant number of single white men.

Neither of the two kinds of crime that local young people were mostly charged with - violent or property crimes - required much detective work to establish the perpetrator. Younger children were often 'caught in the act' by police or other people, and did not hesitate to admit to the offence. Where groups of youths were involved, which was more often the case than not, at least several of the protagonists in the burglary or the melee would be charged with offences connected to the incident. From what white young adults recalled about their pasts and from contemporary accounts by teenagers, it was apparent that white boys and girls (both Wongi and white) had engaged in illegal activities but less frequently and less visibly than the Wongi boys, who for the previous decade, had constituted and defined the 'in-crowd' of adolescents. Much of this activity appeared motivated by the desire for excitement and was regarded by white young adults as an 'experimental' testing out developmental phase. Smoking cigarettes and marijuana, drinking, graffiti, certain modalities of fighting, were normalised by local youth. However, a much smaller sub-group, predominantly Wongi boys from a young age, were recognised as regularly committing property crime such as damage, thieving and break-ins, by themselves or with a few age-mates. Local youths and adults alike, who knew these boys and their circumstances, spoke of *need* causing their criminal activities. Those close to the boys would not report their actions to the police, but a few older local Wongi women and white 'do-gooders' did relay their concerns for these boys' *welfare* to the authorities and there was usually a history of considerable departmental interest, though rarely direct coercive intervention, in the children's circumstances.

I think it is fair to say that white and Wongi parents or caregivers expressed their concerns for their young in different ways. White parents responded to known misdemeanours by imposing restrictions such as 'gating' and limits to when the

youth had to be home at night, to curtail their contact with specific individuals or peers (notably Wongi youth) and were prepared to discuss 'problems' with teachers. Wongi caregivers were more inclined to publicly remonstrate or chastise, even to hit, the young person, in a way that would be witnessed by those, predominantly white people, who believed 'something should be done'. If the youth was viewed as causing or in 'too much trouble' then the mother or another female caregiver might contemplate sending the youth to stay with family in another location, for example a Goldfields town or Ngaanyatjarra settlement. Beyond a certain age however the adult's capacity to influence or direct the youth was diminished, and with younger male Wongi children such autonomy was expected at an earlier age. There was a marked degree of self-help and independence exhibited by Wongi children who lived with adults who were either regularly or intermittently heavy drinkers, not least because the adults' capacity to monitor and to provide care was diminished when intoxicated and 'off the rails'.

There were several traits integral to local Wongi social life that increased the risk of intervention by authorities. As indicated in Chapter Five, 'being related' structured interactions between local Wongis and their interactions with non-Wongis. Demonstrating loyalty to family and to related peers sometimes entailed involvement in disputes and instigating action against people who had hurt or threatened family members or age mates. Other significant facets of Wongi self-identity - toughness and personal autonomy - also had implications for the conduct of interpersonal relations and visible displays of anger. Local Wongi youths, especially younger males were driven 'wild' by challenges to their sense of autonomous self, and met such challenges by often ferocious and instant responses, such as loud tantrums, stone throwing and physical attacks.

When local authority figures, such as teachers, police or welfare workers, responded to such outbursts or to illicit behaviour there was almost a complete withdrawal of local Wongi adult involvement in subsequent events. This was most apparent in court proceedings when it was unusual to have a parent/responsible adult in court. Various 'brokers' were expected to seek out and consult with the adults about the children (but not older youths who were regarded as responsible for themselves) on the street or in other spaces where a local Wongi person would feel at ease and not 'shamed'. Sometimes, it was believed that the complaints about a child or young person arose from the unfair treatment by a particular authority figure, such as a school teacher, police officer, or a youth centre manager, but such denouncements were rarely heard in formal settings such as the school or court room unless the adult was 'sparked up' with grog.

A parallel process characterised preventative measures designed to help local disadvantaged youth (that is Wongi youth). White adults do-gooders and a few non-local Aboriginal people organised a range of initiatives over the years, with local Wongi adults only involved in an extremely limited capacity via consultation and through intermittent employment as assistant workers. For local Wongi adults, the main focus of their efforts to help young adults was through the Wongatha Wonganarra organisation. This involved encouraging young women to act as representatives in various fora, and to create employment opportunities and work experience for young adults, predominantly young men. Funding had been obtained

for work skills programs though, at least with the programs for young men, a non-Aboriginal man ran the program.

In relation to the administration of juvenile justice it was non-Aboriginal and a few non-local Aboriginal people who acted as local practitioners. Some practitioners did endeavour to establish a rapport with local and Ngaanyatjarra youth, though the latter were primarily cultivated by the hostel staff and police, whilst local Wongi youth and non-Aboriginal youths primarily had more personalised relations with the youth centre manager and DCD officers. The local ALS field officer, and the Kalgoorlie based magistrate and ALS lawyer, had very limited contact with young people, except for the more persistent local offenders and chronic abusers of petrol from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Moreover this contact was confined to court related matters and though the local ALS field officer might see local youth around town, there were few opportunities for the lawyer or magistrate to have contact with youth in informal settings and develop a less superficial relationship. Even where young people and practitioners were co-resident in the same place, there were constraints on both sides, with both black and white young people preferring the company of peers and revealing a dislike and suspicion of a particular police officers and other authority figures, notably teachers.

The actual involvement of young people in the court process was minimal. This in itself was not remarkable (O'Connor 1990), but concerns were expressed by outsider commentators about youths ability to understand the process, because of linguistic and cultural differences. The view was generally held by local practitioners that youths did comprehend what was said and understood the fundamental purpose of the exercise. However, there were reservations about some Ngaanyatjarra youths' ability to be fully cognisant of events when they were permanently or temporarily affected by prolonged bouts of petrol inhalation. Because so few Ngaanyatjarra and local youth pleaded not guilty, within the formal context of court appearances, very little time was spent on events that led up to an arrest or to the reasons that may have had an immediate causal link to the particular behaviour which led to the arrest. Within the court setting, police accounts of offences dominated whilst the magistrate controlled the proceedings. However, outside of this setting, control and authority was more diffuse, with for example, hostel staff playing a critical role in assessments of Ngaanyatjarra youth and acting as key gatekeepers for decisions about outcomes. Due to the dissent and politicking amongst the different organisations in relation to dealing with young offenders, there were quite evident tensions between some local practitioners. This was most pronounced in relation to Ngaanyatjarra youth, though once practitioners had been in the district for some time, this issue was less divisive and in effect, the police perspective held sway as a pragmatic response.

Practitioners' local knowledge of young people primarily related to those who appeared frequently before the courts and were identified as coming from a deprived environment or as at risk sniffers of petrol. There was, significantly, considerable talk between agency representatives before and after court, which only sought to underline the importance of local knowledge, especially the identities of young people appearing before the court, and it was the familiarity with locales and locals and between practitioners which was explored in Chapter Eight. Local knowledge of process, etiquette, politics, key brokers was acquired through a range of means. For

the police it was primarily through colleagues on the job whilst with others it was through textbooks and their contact with local people.

For practitioners, the experience of working in the district seemed to have two important lessons. First, many realised they were not as powerful as they may have believed or expected to be. This was particularly noticeable amongst welfare and legal professionals and youth workers who had hoped to make a difference and who assumed they would have the capacity to do so. Second, they were willing to acknowledge that the local administration of juvenile justice, and attendant processes, had fundamental flaws but were the optimal that could be achieved in the circumstances. Frustration was evident over delays caused by non-appearances in court, by missing or incomplete information, by friction between themselves and most critically, a recognition that their knowledge and understanding of youths was inadequate. As a consequence, they struggled to explain the youths' action and were less sure about proposing long-term approaches to reduce offending by local and Ngaanyatjarra youths.

Practitioners endeavoured to provide meta-explanations for their own position as statutory representatives and the continued high rates of offending by local Aboriginal youth and of sniffing by Ngaanyatjarra youth. Once they had been in town for at least six months they were less inclined to talk of *community* solutions and development in relation to both the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and Laverton. Rather, they concentrated on the practical management of disruptive and often ailing youths, and refrained from grander designs, primarily because their local knowledge of youths was so partial and perplexing.

In Laverton the itinerancy of the population was portrayed by concerned citizens (predominantly government employees) within the town as creating a vacuum which contributed to and impeded the tackling of social problems. There was a pervasive sense of resignation amongst 'do-gooders' that the type of intense and long term community development and support that was assumed necessary to achieve 'discipline' and 'responsibility' was highly unlikely to occur in a town, dominated by white transients and where the wider structures and practices inhibit large scale and enduring investment.

Laverton was widely regarded as suffering from a range of *social deficits* because of the fundamentally transient nature of the white population, as most of the single men and families with young children did not intend to stay in town beyond a few years, and the fact that most of these residents placed a premium on acquiring capital in a relatively short time. Effectively, civic obligations and social investments were seen as sacrificed or sidelined as the majority of male white adults were pre-occupied by work, and many female white adults by child care.

The efforts of do-gooders were targeted almost exclusively at Aboriginal people, who constituted the bulk of clients of community health and welfare. However, local Wongis were not involved in many initiatives and becoming 'hardened' to local conditions seem to result in an acceptance that the local Aboriginal population might not define the problems in quite the same way and were not necessarily interested or

capable of addressing such problems in ways favoured by the do-gooders and government workers.

The racial divide

To delve more deeply into whether high levels of Aboriginal youth offending should be viewed as cultural manifestations of opposition involves an examination of a series of 'pre-conditions' that would contribute to producing such meanings and practices. It has been widely recognised that disadvantage, and racist discrimination, have structured unequal relations between indigenous people, and the state and non-Aboriginal settlers and residents, but a finer grained account of these relations, historically and currently, reveals the specificities of how this occurred within local contexts, and how it might have been experienced by local residents.

The basic contours of the racial divide formed right from the first days of contact. When large numbers of non-Aboriginal people moved into the Goldfields region in search of gold, violent contact occurred with the local indigenous population. People in the Central Reserves area remained largely unaffected by this invasion until the 1930s, when a mission was established and various prospecting parties searched for minerals. However, large numbers of desert dwellers visited settled areas, notably the Laverton district, drawn by what they had heard of European goods and at various times, driven by drought conditions. Before the 1920s, some Aboriginal people congregated around camps and settlements in the Laverton district, which encouraged exchanges of basic commodities and resulted in some instances, in sexual relations between Aboriginal women and white men.

In the ensuing years, the degree of control exercised by mission and government over local Aboriginal people was not as great as might be supposed because the 'institutionalisation' experienced at Mount Margaret and Warburton, did not result in a complete severance from family and country. This is not to downplay the marginalisation of the local Aboriginal populace. In general the government attempted to control the migration of 'full-bloods' from their 'sanctuaries' to towns and to prevent Aboriginal people lingering in settled areas by the strategic issuing of rations. Never incorporated fully into the local economy, except as seasonal and domestic workers, their presence was regarded as highly conditional, even at the best of times. Any sign of 'pauperism' and 'vagranacy' such as theft and begging was met as often as not by punitive and exclusionary measures, which were favoured by local civic leaders. In addition, more often than not, the local white residents favoured measures designed to ensure there was segregation in domestic and communal spaces from the local Aboriginal population because the latter were viewed as 'dirty' 'immoral' and a 'nuisance'.

Despite local resistance from pastoralists and others, the missionaries at Mount Margaret tried to convert Aboriginal children to the Christian faith and to transform them into model citizens (rather than domestic chattels) by inculcating a work ethic and the virtues of thriftiness, orderliness, and dependability, so that as adults they would have the capacity to participate on an equal footing with whites in wider socio-economic life. The Aboriginal families who settled in the town in the sixties, whose older members grew up on the mission, were integrated into the economic life of the

town and were accorded a measure of respect by the white residents, who of course overwhelmingly remained in positions of authority and seniority.

Ironically enough it was the more personalised relations between white and black local people which were regarded with a high degree of suspicion by philanthropists and central authorities designated to safeguard the Aboriginal populace. These 'outsiders' wished to prevent or reduce the exploitation of Aboriginal women by 'frontier' white men and of Aboriginal labour by pastoralists. The central authority, led for many years by the Chief Protector, also sought to inhibit the 'corruption' of full-bloods by missionaries. However, it is doubtful whether at a local level there was much direct governance of these relations until the sixties. Prior to this time, the closest ties were forged primarily through enduring couple relationships, working relationships or the tutelage of Aboriginal children by missionaries. As a result, older local Wongis could name and remember individual pastoralists, prospectors, missionaries and police officers from the 'early days', though not always fondly.

From the sixties onwards, these identified persons were replaced by structures, by agencies and by companies, who had unnamed employees and representatives who came and went. The end of restrictive laws, increased travel and improved communication, meant that many of old boundaries dissolved and a wider social landscape, much of it impersonal, shaped the lives of those who lived in the Laverton district. Increasingly there was less 'isolation' and more white people in Laverton and in the Central Reserves, many of them involved in mining and neo-governmental activities.

A different kind of *peripheralisation* in the district emerged with the decline in the fifties of the Mount Margaret mission, the decline of the pastoralism in the sixties and in the seventies the transformation of the town. Not only was there a huge increase in the number of white residents, but there were major changes to the local economy with mining becoming the dominant activity, which for the following two decades was largely controlled by a single company. From the seventies on, underpinning every facet of daily life in the town was the economic dependence on mining, a domain in which local Wongis did not participate directly. Even the local government employment and building contracts ceased, and government benefits became the primary source of income for almost every local Wongi household.

As Aborigines were absent from mine-sites and exploration camps, the main arena for contact between black and white remained the town. Nevertheless, only fleeting intersections transpired in space/time between local Wongis and the majority of white residents, which was reinforced by segregated activities and places. As in earlier times, for many white residents, the Aboriginal people were a collective nuisance or demoralised group with whom they had no personalised relations. They did not necessarily distinguish between 'drinking visitors' and local Wongi residents, and the more racist whites continued to refer to an objectified generalised category 'the Abos' or 'boongs'. As in years gone by, the local white residents complained of the 'smell', the 'litter', the disorderly behaviour and the begging by 'them'.

Although these complaints revealed that many white residents were annoyed and disgusted by 'them', not many white residents appeared to feel directly threatened by

the presence of Aboriginal people around town. 'They' were criticised for public drinking and fighting, but much of the violence was seen as intra-group conflict that would or should be dealt with by the police if it became 'out of control'. There was a perceptible rise in complaints, including reports to the police, as was already indicated, when there were large numbers of desert visitors in town, many of whom would drink in public spaces. Anger against Aboriginal people escalated when non-Aboriginal property had been damaged or stolen, and reached hysterical proportions only on a few occasions, when white women were the victims of assault, notably a sexual assault. Such incidents increased levels of fear for personal safety amongst non-Aboriginal residents, particularly women and children.

Those white residents with more liberal attitudes towards Aboriginal people tended to depict the local Wongis as pitiable and hopeless. Longer term white residents often recognised the young Wongi boys who were responsible for a fair amount of property damage around town. Though their exploits were frequently recounted with a degree of amusement, ultimately the conviction that these boys lacked adequate or capable parenting and were materially and emotionally deprived was taken as proof that local Aboriginal people were demoralised (rather than depraved) and unable to manage.

Those residents employed in certain occupations - police, community health, community services and so on - most of whom were white, had more profound contact with local Aboriginal residents and regular visitors mostly via work and around town. Although personnel changed over the years, it was this group that consistently focused on efforts to alter the circumstances of local Aboriginal people, though their efforts to provide help were mostly directed specifically at local Aboriginal youth. It was in a sense what set this group apart from other white and Aboriginal residents, the vast majority who whom were not engaged in assisting the young of those less well-off. It could be claimed that this constituted an interstitial group that uneasily worked across both domains, though this uneasiness was more pronounced and penetration less successful in the local Wongi domain. Maintaining a degree of social distance from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents was also seen as required in order to retain objectivity and confidentiality by some practitioners.

All local practitioners recognised two kinds of work, - that which occurred in town and its environs and that which occurred in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands - which mirrored a distinction made between town and desert people. People who lived in the Lands were regarded as traditional and authentic, and fundamental to working with these people were patrols and intervention upon request. Orthodox or standard practice was seen as being of limited relevance to this environment and to interventions with petrol-sniffing youth. In contrast, 'standard' practice was adhered to wherever feasible within the town context and efforts were made to discourage 'payback' and 'dependency', and to enforce spatial ordering of public drinking by local residents and Aboriginal visitors. Personal relations were fostered between some local Wongis and justice practitioners, but several police were very negative in their evaluations of town Wongis.

Local Aboriginal values and practices which were identified by justice practitioners and some local white residents included the absence of pretence and deception, loyalty to family, the Law and payback. Local discourses about the reasons for juvenile offending and substance abuse mainly focused on a range of individual and collective deficits - the lack of self-discipline and morale, and the 'breakdown' in traditional life. Practitioners were more likely to refer to the offending as active responses - as manifestations of anger and frustration, and of family obligation - which had been shaped by imposed external authorities, most conspicuously the 'missions'.

Amongst practitioners, the most powerful explanatory concept was 'family'. Allegiance to family and family connections explained intra-cultural politics and conflict, and an individual's history of offending or substance abuse could be understood in terms of being to any particular family household or as being part of a marginalised familial group. As such, 'family' relations signified inter-cultural difference in the local context and were a defining feature of pan Aboriginal difference.

Most justice practitioners reported changes to the way they worked and to their outlook, which was attributed to local experience. This experience included efforts to interact meaningfully within the local Wongi domain and with people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, as well having imprinted upon them incrementally town life. Their emotional responses to what they encountered or witnessed, notably drunken fighting and poor or inadequate amenities, were blunted by familiarity and the prevailing normalisation of certain kinds of violence. Police revealed that their experiences on patrol had enhanced their capacity to be accommodating and flexible, whilst welfare and legal professionals remarked on how everyday interactions with local Aboriginal people, in town and in the Lands, had wrought attitudinal changes in that they were more 'hard', less tolerant, and more racist.

In contrast, amongst local Wongis, there was very little talk about whites, although in everyday interactions they were frequently deferred to as a form of external authority and treated instrumentally as a vehicle through which assistance and goods could flow. Help and intervention was sought from whites, but this was predominantly from specific individuals in a narrow band of service occupations. Around white people who were not known personally, there was a discomfort, and a shyness, which in certain situations, was an apprehension about how the whites might act. Such hesitancy or distance often evaporated when a person was sufficiently intoxicated to make demands and to stridently complain. Those that were familiar were more likely to be local white people who were do-gooders or where there was a history of contact in a work environment.

As an objectified category, whites were characterised as 'hard' and 'mean' or 'selfish', which compared unfavourably to the Aboriginal ethos of sharing. Whites were criticised and pitied for the priority placed on material acquisitions and worldly success which was seen as affecting their capacity to appreciate and enjoy sociality and connectedness. Many local Wongi women were inclined to be scornful of whites' delusions of superiority and distinction, believing that such posturing by men concealed their susceptibility to the sexual allure of Wongi women.

Few local Wongi residents talked the language of abstract 'rights' in contradistinction to an action or event not being 'right'. The younger adults were more likely to talk of racism and rights, whilst older local Wongis complained where they believed individuals had been unjustly blamed for particular incidents. There was certainly a suspicion of 'outsiders', and it is hard to know how much the latter was influenced, at least for older local Wongis, by their up-bringing at the Mount Margaret mission. It could be hypothesised, as well, that the apolitical stance articulated by some of the older local Wongis could be related to this same upbringing.

Some of the reasons for the continuation of the literal and metaphysical divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in Laverton have already been alluded to, the most fundamental being the underlying structural inequities in economic and political power which affects the capacity of individuals to influence broader relations. However this can be taken as self-evident and there are other more place and people specific factors to take into account.

One social grouping, which was 'mixed', where the Wongi were clearly in the ascendancy was amongst the in-crowd of local teenagers. Nevertheless, even though local younger white teenagers had mimicked certain Wongi ways of speaking, these peers and friends grew apart to the extent that by the time they were in their late teens their lives rarely intersected in a meaningful way. Possibly this could be interpreted as arising from the opportunities for employment available to whites, but this is unsatisfactory in itself, not least because most Wongi youth revealed a disinterest in such opportunities. Certainly the white young adults were already acting like proto-capitalists and exhibited an interest in accumulation and the acquisition of durable commodities. They were 'outer' directed, expecting or planning to move elsewhere, moves largely related to career prospects and desires for more cosmopolitan environments.

A few white young adults had stayed within the Wongi domain, which usually involved forming a couple relationship, having children and living in a local household with family members. Some of the Wongi young adults were 'outer' directed but spoke of visits to see relations that would strengthen ties or to see a place that interested them, rather than to broaden horizons or to lead to employment. For these young adults the town was 'home' and their expectations were anchored by this identification. Male peer groups were less close with individual young adult men forming couple relationships and participating in adult activities, including drinking, with visitors and local Wongis. It was significant that it was the young women but not the young men who were more engaged in political and economic life within the local Wongi domain.

Newcomers to the town, be they black or white, who wished to transcend the divide had to learn to interact with local Wongis on their terms, a fact that was not lost on the local Wongis. For most local Wongis much of what went on in town and its environs were of little or no interest. A large part of daily life for local Wongis was taken up with activities within their own domain - economic, political and social activities - that had spatial and discursive dimensions. To refer to an internal Wongi domain is not to

suggest a cohesive or integrated community of interests. It was given coherence by the racial divide, a fracture that existed since the first non-Aboriginal settlers arrived in the district, and by the separate social and economic activities within the domain. It was also strengthened by local affiliations to familial groups, a regional Wongi identity and more weakly to a pan-Aboriginal identity and by an adherence to values and practices which were intrinsic to their daily lives.

There was considerable knowledge of and contact with Aboriginal people who usually resided in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and in the Goldfields region. Rather competitive attitudes came to the fore when discussing political events and the distribution of government funding in the region, with Aboriginal people in nearby settlements and in other Goldfields towns disparaged and criticised for their efforts to marginalise or to claim more than the local townspeople. There was less interest in the political struggles in Ngaanyatjarra Lands, though some developments in the Lands were watched carefully. It was acknowledged that many of the 'old ways', both beliefs and practices, confined as they were to mostly Ngaanyatjarra Lands residents, were no longer adhered to by the townspeople. Nevertheless, there were signs that more townspeople were visiting and staying for months at a time in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, and certain practices, such as 'payback' and attending funerals, were recognised as common across the region and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Internal rivalries and factionalism were evident within the local Wongi domain. One family or another dominated the local organisation, Wongatha Wonganarra, over the years, and there were fights over positions, access to resources and funds. Complaints were frequently voiced about particular individuals' interest in self-gain or promotion, and doubt cast over their capacity to act on behalf of their 'own people'. A commonly accepted explanation for many fights between couples and between families, and for the undermining of people in positions of power was the motive of 'jealousy'.

When dissent and interpersonal conflict was rife or 'out of control' it was sometimes expedient to call for outside intervention. There was a long history of welfare and police intervening in certain situations, much of it unsolicited and resisted, but in more recent times such interventions were often initiated by local Wongis. The vigorous politicking encouraged links with white and Aboriginal brokers outside the local Wongi networks. An example of these links was the involvement of former mission residents in the dispute over the management of Mount Margaret and the persisting influence of this group in local politics.

An avid interest in the whereabouts of other Wongis was displayed - residential arrangements and the location of familiars, kin and affines were a continual topic of conversation and contributed to a sense of identification with the district and region. Political and economic activities were structured by family networks, and by tensions arising from a desire to assert personal autonomy yet sustain relatedness. Relatedness was reaffirmed by expressions of compassion, shame, and anger. For various reasons, mainly connected to demands of family, goods or capital acquired through card playing, the retail of artwork, or other kinds of trade, were predominantly used or consumed immediately, without much nurturing of these 'assets'. Possession was valued but viewed as an essentially transitory state of affairs.

The 'toughness' of Wongi it seemed was a source of pride and distinguished them from other Aboriginal groups, especially those in the south-west of the state. 'Toughness' was inculcated into children who were encouraged to act independently at an early age and to behave assertively and aggressively when playing with peers. However, in their relations and interactions with their young adults showed a considerable indulgence which became a progressive distancing as the child grew older. This indicated the adults' appreciation of the child's self-will and perception that the older children were not longer amenable to certain kinds of control or restraint. There were evasions or silence when children's misdemeanours were brought up in conversation by *walypala*, which perhaps had more to do with Wongi adult-child relations than a fear of intervention by the *walypala*. Amongst the older Wongi people there was ambivalence about the younger generation, most clearly in relation to the young men's perceived lack of a work ethic, and sometimes they were talked about to outsiders with despair.

There were significant *generational* differences (see Martin 1993, Tonkinson 1988 Trigger 1992). One difference had already been mentioned - the young adults were more likely to speak the language of rights and to articulate political opposition to the status quo. It was the generation of children, those who were born after pastoralism had virtually disappeared as a viable industry in the district and after the missions became 'settlements', who were exposed to far more metropolitan and global influences and when for the first time 'formal' equality existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons. Growing up in Laverton in more recent times was in a local environment much different to that which had existed a generation before - less employment, more secure income from the state, greater mobility across the region, a large presence of white residents in town, and increased depersonalisation in relations between Aborigines and white people, including government officials.

Commonalities

It could be argued that local young people were conjoined in a sub-culture of opposition to authority figures and the older generation. The local teenagers and young adults frequently condemned the town for being 'boring' and a 'dump', and saw certain behaviours and practices as demonstrating their rebellion against parental or carers' strictures, though this was less true for several Wongi teenagers whose carers or mothers were heavy drinkers.

With local youth there were certain practices such as smoking and underage drinking that nearly everyone experimented with or participated in, although there were significant gender differences in the degree to and manner in which they were practiced. Primarily there were same sex friendship groups, with the girls involved in offending as secondary participants rather than as instigators. Before making the transition from school and into more stable relationships with the opposite sex, there appeared to be a common recognition and identification amongst the tougher young teenagers, which transcended race, culture and gender. This sense of solidarity appeared to be reinforced by their small numbers and the experience of being problematised by adults. The tougher kids too shared a not dissimilar class background despite the disparity in income between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal,

as their parents predominantly held working class occupations if white or were unemployed if black.

During the eighties and into the nineties, attitudes and behaviours associated with the 'in-crowd' were influenced by practices and beliefs associated with the local Wongi residents. The most obvious incorporation of local Wongi practices by local non-Aboriginal youth was the use of certain words, speaking 'lingo' and expressing adolescent feelings of discomfort through the use in quite specific ways of the word 'shame', that mimicked the way Wongi people employed the term. However, this did not translate into wholesale acceptance or identification with all things Aboriginal or Wongi. It did not produce an intellectual curiosity about 'traditional' Aboriginal beliefs and practices, which may have been discussed in class at school, but was not seen as relevant to local circumstances.

Being in a relatively isolated mining town contributed to a repertoire of styles, tastes and behaviours related to the dominant modes of masculine bravado which transcended the racial divide, and which shaped 'in' attributes amongst adolescents. The majority of white men, many of them single, worked in mines or in related industries and the town's social life was affected by their patterns of work, and an aggressive masculinity celebrated as integral to the way Goldfields mining men conducted themselves on and off the job. Those that were marginal to mining life - women, young people and Aboriginal people - were nevertheless affected by this masculine ethos of hard work and play. Being *tough and hard* were attributes commonly associated with the pastoral and mining sectors and the 'frontier', and they were recurrent themes in accounts of the town and its people. Although youth crime as a gendered phenomenon is universal and the practice of justice is a gendered activity, this ethos of aggressive masculinity no doubt contributed to the manner in which local young people committed crime and influenced interactions between justice practitioners and young people. The dominant practitioners, the police, were inclined to portray themselves as active agents, engaged in and performing 'blokey' activities with mostly other males, which entailed appreciating and managing the 'reality' of the situation without being unsettled or disturbed by this reality.

Growing up in Laverton meant witnessing reasonably high levels of violence in public spaces, and hearing glorification of some kinds of fighting. It was hardly surprising that interpersonal physical violence was normalised amongst longer-term residents, and was rarely reported to the police. Fighting in the pub might attract police intervention but in the main, violence was accepted as a routine occurrence that was a 'private' affair that should be dealt with by the parties concerned. It was also regarded by local Wongis and predominantly working class white locals as an appropriate response to certain kinds of provocation. Accounts of family violence, against women or children, contained tones of disapproval but police intervention was usually only seen as appropriate if the assaults were happening frequently or with increasing force. There was an acceptance of a reasonably violent environment, as long as it did not pose a risk because it was predictable and confined to specific locations, times, and protagonists.

In everyday conversations very few people indicated that they felt they 'belonged' to the town of Laverton. Those that did were mostly Aboriginal, and no more than a score

of non-Aboriginal people. Although Laverton lacked a stable population there were durable and multiple social links amongst those that had lived in town for longer than the couple of years typical of most residents. Predictably, it was usually the case that these residents were part of a family who had lived in the district for at least two generations and there were dwindling numbers of white people who were likely to fall into this category. There was a much larger group of residents who seemed to consider themselves 'locals' in that they had resided in the district for a significant number of years. With the non-Aboriginal people they were small business people and mine workers who had been around since the seventies or early eighties, and several pastoralists. An economic investment in the area, in the shape of running a business or property, appeared to predispose the person to judge himself or herself as a 'local'. Their offspring were also inclined to consider themselves 'local'. This self-conception may have translated into only a weak attachment to the community, but it did imply a sense of familiarity with the place and its inhabitants. It was this core of longer term white residents, including a small number of teenagers and young adults, who knew many local Aboriginal families and young people.

The 1991 census of the district showed that about one-third of people had been living in the Laverton area five years before. A fair proportion of them would be Aboriginal people, of which a minority would consider themselves as town 'locals'. Many older people would have grown up at Mount Margaret or Cosmo Newberry but during the seventies the movement of people to other parts of the Goldfields and to the Ngaanyatjarra communities had left only a few families and individuals with an established history of residence in the town. Amongst many Goldfields Wongis there were bonds of attachment to nearby settlements and the country surrounding the town, even though they may have only visited the town intermittently and for short periods. They, and visitors from the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, also had social ties to the town residents because of being related or because of shared pasts.

Amongst the town's teenagers, it was the Wongi adolescents who were inclined to view the place as their home. One young man for instance when drunk sheepishly confessed to 'loving the town', and several of the other youths said they became homesick when they were away from the place for any length of time. Only three white youths called the town 'home' - two young white woman who had lived for most of their lives in the town and a white young man who had lived many years in town but more importantly whose significant peer group was the local Wongi youth. For other white youths who had lived in the town for large part of their lives, many expected to leave town as soon as the opportunity arose. This, however, did not preclude an interest or attachment to the place.

These young people referred to the advantages of knowing everyone, and of having 'good' friends, articulating in their conversations elements of the 'ideology of localism' (Dempsey 1990). They stressed the advantages of knowing everyone, of how helpful people could be, of knowing what is really going on, of having an informed perspective and their hostility to 'external' forces. Although Laverton was not a rural town in the usual sense of the word, many of the positive features of living in a *small town* identified by local residents were similar to those associated with idealised rural life - absence of pretence and masquerade, fair play, and egalitarianism (see Dempsey 1990). However, local residents were not so inclined to mention the

helpfulness of neighbours, and an intimate knowledge of people and their families was confined to a very small proportion of the total residential population, predominantly the local Wongis. Amongst the core of local residents, an implication of the town's small size was that knowledge of past and contemporary events and personal histories, even where social ties were relatively asymmetrical and weak, could forge a semblance of communal identity that took precedence at least amongst young teenagers and a few adults over class, gender and racial divisions.

It was these people who were more likely to share local knowledge about trouble and troublesome individuals. The small size of the town meant that there was a high visibility of its actors and of events. Dempsey (1990) and Cowlshaw (1988) report that in small towns news of any acts of 'deviance' was quickly transmitted through numerous gossip chains and that sanctions could be swiftly invoked. Gossip could include passing on information about purported sexual liaisons, strife between people, and a recurrent topic, the latest news on crime incidents and the perpetrators and their victims. With personal information, a distinction was usually made between sources of credible information, with credibility being related to length of residence, with gossip being transmitted along networks influenced by social groupings in the town and its environs, including workplaces. The sanctions Dempsey (1990) refers to include the use of derogatory names and ostracism. In Laverton there was tacit recognition of the power of gossip to enhance or damage reputations which could have implications for a person's standing in the community, and of how the possession of social knowledge was an asset that relied on and formed the substance of much of the communication between locals.

Amongst local Wongi networks social censure was expressed about acts committed by other Aboriginal people and white residents whose 'deviance' could consist of a 'lack of respect' 'not giving' and so forth. These were informed by adherence to 'relatedness' and the expectations on those that this entailed. Such acts did not automatically convey the status of marginal, which was inextricably bound up with local politics and lifestyle. Young people and children were sometimes censured for their transgressions, both legal and moral, but the response was mediated by a knowledge of their own and their family's intra-cultural status.

White (1997) refers to how local knowledge of crime equals knowledge of Aboriginal people in small towns, where the constructed 'rationality' of policing appeared logical within the context of everyday experience with crime and offenders. Acquiring local knowledge for Laverton practitioners increased their ability to recognise inter-cultural and local manifestations of marginality, which informed everyday practice. It could be claimed that the significant continuities from the past, in Laverton, at least from the seventies was the inter-generational marginality of specific families and the local practice of juvenile justice. With the latter, there was a history of tension and dissent between agencies over responses to substance abuse and offending, but within the town the basic approaches had not dramatically altered over time. For many years there were local debates about the feasibility of developing alternative or more appropriate outcomes and processes, but in the main there was a dependence on removing troublesome youths for periods of time, and undertaking preventative initiatives that were aimed at tackling underlying issues or ameliorating contemporary conditions.

Most of the local justice practitioners acknowledged that there were limitations to the juvenile justice system and preventative initiatives and this, in effect, was demonstrated by the continued marginality of specific families whose children were more often than not the local repeat juvenile offenders.

An objectified critique would focus on the figures for juvenile crime and dwell on the failure to address structural constraints. Justice interventions it could be argued only reinforced marginalisation and the sanctions applied to local 'persistent offenders' could be viewed as ineffectual. This kind of analysis is undermined by local knowledge in the sense that local knowledge produced a finer grained appreciation of the Wongi domain and inter-racial relations, and that in itself, local knowledge constituted a modality of power held by local Wongis as well as key 'brokers'.

Thus local knowledge effected a person's *interpretation* of events and individual actions. Awareness of the localised setting heightened sensitivity to gendered identities, distinguishing attributes of needy children such as the specifics of family status and relations, and to who might constitute 'significant others' to an individual young offender. This could result in an appreciation, for example, of why a youth was at ease in the police lock-up or a regional prison rather than a detention centre in Perth, as who else was detained in any of these settings at a particular moment of time had a direct bearing on how the young person might adjust to his internment.

Similarly local knowledge (in conjunction with the nature and strength of kin or other personalised ties) related to an adult's capacity to *intervene*. Admonitions and interventions were of a different character when delivered by older Aboriginal people, local 'close family' and relations as well as Aboriginal justice practitioners (especially if they were local and therefore with kin links to the young person or his friends). How such statements and actions articulated with the local justice practices reflected the Aboriginal adult's ability to navigate the 'divide', and willingness to negotiate the established instrumental relations across the divide. For younger children there was a diaspora of family relatives who could or had played a significant role in caring for the children, and for young men, a diaspora of significant older men, not physically co-located, who may have only held 'respectable' positions on an infrequent basis if at all. These interventions were not of a programmatic nature, but approximated a 'harm minimisation' approach in that the child or young person was expected to stay around or with the adult without any explicit pedagogic intent.

For many older Wongis there was a 'lack of respect' shown towards them by white townspeople and by some of their own young people. They were therefore careful in the way they shared their local knowledge and used their intra-cultural capacity to influence people and events for external exigencies. In turn, as the idealistic newcomer to juvenile justice practice became more familiar with the local environment and faced with daily frustration and incapacity to intervene, he or she appeared to adopt a form of harm minimisation. Keeping the youth centre open some of the time, keeping certain youths in the hostel for several months, encouraging a young man to undertake community work for a few hours a week, and so forth became the practical measures by which the overall efficacy of the juvenile justice apparatus and the prevention of juvenile crime was gauged.

Marking difference

Local young people, both black and white, engaged in illegal activities particularly if they identified with the 'tough in-crowd', and displayed antagonistic attitudes towards authority figures. However, it was local Wongi youths, mostly the 'Lads', who were more frequently actively resistant to specific kinds of intervention. Nevertheless, acts of resistance should not be simply attributed to an oppositional culture as the unifying explanation for the over-representation of Aboriginal youth appearing before the Laverton court. Objectively speaking there was evidence of greater structural marginalisation (Beresford and Omaji 1996) and of greater 'visibility' (Cunneen 1991). However, the local administration of justice occurred within the context of localised power relations, a constitutive element being local knowledge of inter and intra-cultural status meanings and networks.

The actual behaviour of the young people has to also be understood within the context of particular peer groups as significant socialising agents, with internal meanings and practices articulated with prevailing local ideologies and structural marginality, most markedly to dominant gender identities.

The beliefs and practices of the local Wongis, as a collectivity, nor of the smaller group of Wongi young people cannot be satisfactorily described as an 'oppositional culture'. Although it was commonplace for drinking, drunkenness, fighting and begging to occur demonstrably in public places, only a small proportion of local Wongis routinely engaged in such activities in a way that was visible to the non-Wongi resident. It appeared that being 'sparked up' was an opportunity to express certain emotions as a form of 'release' and to demonstrate one's autonomy to key audiences (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal depending on the circumstances of the grievance) rather than to participate in a "rebellious display of disreputable behaviour" (Cowlshaw 1988:92).

This is not to ignore signs of generalised despair and anger exhibited by local Wongis, especially amongst those who were 'off the rails', but the underlying causes for frustration and sorrow were personal and exacerbated by factors characteristic of the Wongi domain, as well as being informed by objective and deep-rooted forms of marginalisation. A fierce sense of identity often manifest itself in outspoken resentment against other Aboriginal groups and disparagement of specific individuals, along with distaste for white cultural values such as 'non-sharing'. Despite several young Wongi adults articulating statements that showed an appreciation of wider political discourses on racism, more localised ideologies centred on a morality and a sense of justice in terms of personalised acts and outcomes. These ideologies were informed by historical antecedents, the 'smallness' of communities, and indigenous beliefs and practices, notably the significance of personal autonomy and relatedness in influencing assessments of right and wrong behaviours. To have an inkling of internal politics within the Wongi domain meant also acknowledging the significance of the tension and complementary nature of these cultural themes, and how they affected gendered and cross-generational relations.

For many local Wongi, unlike their Ngaanyatjarra contemporaries, the concept of 'relatedness' seemed to be dwindling in its indigenous complexities, re-focusing

instead on personal autonomy and looser affiliations to kin, households and same-sex peer groups.

This was mirrored by a blatant avoidance in some cases, and in most cases a level of disinterest in their daily lives to what might be called 'traditional knowledge and practice', despite rhetorical adherence at least in terms of 'pan-Aboriginal' cultural values and attributes amongst the more politicised young adults.

Certainly the significance of peer groups was evident in every aspect of young people's lives, including being directly linked to the intensity and longevity of their involvement in illicit activities. Those children that were most on the periphery, particularly where there was 'unstable' domestic arrangements and/or where caregivers/parents regularly abused alcohol and were themselves 'fringe-dwellers', displayed from an early age aggressive resistance to imposed order by elders, parents, relatives, teachers and other authority figures. These children, again predominantly males, were caught also at an early age, often in the company of one or two other boys of similar age and background, stealing and breaking into cars and mostly commercial premises or recreational amenities. Thus their 'apartness' and their 'association' with several other boys which involved hanging around in public places together during the day and night and being seen to 'cause trouble together' was marked at a young age, along with the near certainty that they were already trying various kinds of substance abuse. There was anecdotal evidence that there were distinguishing features to the familial backgrounds of the 'chronic abusers of petrol' and a gravitation to a small band of age-mates at an early age that seemed to parallel the personal histories of the most 'peripheral' and 'high-risk' children who either spent long periods of residence in or regularly returned to Laverton. This was only conjecture, but was a perception that underpinned the approach taken by the Aboriginal hostel manager and by the mentor Merlin - those that looked after these youths in Laverton and elsewhere and who were authorised to do so by the juvenile court.

In their early adolescence, many black and white teenagers in town had engaged in a range of 'incivilities' and to a lesser extent, illegal activities. To have attempted shoplifting or stealing, and to have daubed graffiti on a public surface was not uncommon. These small acts of resistance were more than 'hidden transcripts' and proclaimed the young people's disgruntlement with their situation and environment, and desire to signal their growing expectations of excitement and independent action. Although truculent attitudes and the sampling of forbidden items, such as cigarettes and alcohol, were frequently a great cause of anxiety to individual parents, teachers and anyone else held responsible for inculcating the virtues of citizenship into the young, taken collectively these displays of rebellion did not surprise nor mortify. Representations in western mass media and in manifestations of global 'pop culture' reinforced widespread expectations of the defiant and experimental teenager.

There was a smaller group, overwhelmingly white working class teenagers and Aboriginal teenagers, who were more likely to persistently engage in fighting and excessive bouts of drinking. To better understand the appeal of such activities, and underlying masculine bravado, for particular young people, it is important to look beyond the notion of social protest and resistance to middle class morality. In an article on drinking and violence in hotels and licensed clubs, Tomsen (1997) calls for dual

consideration of the tie between masculine social identity and heavy group drinking, and the importance of male honour in the social interaction that leads to much violent behaviour. His many hours of observation/participation had highlighted how rowdy drinking contributed to constructions of a strong or tough male image, where there was heightened sensitivity to perceived slights and challenges to social honour, for example allegations of cheating at the game of pool, approaches to girlfriends, squabbling over bumping and spilt drinks.

In the Laverton pub and its environs, I observed over many years innumerable melees and outbreaks of violence. Tomsen (1997:90) draws attention to the unpredictable and explosive quality to events and the excitement of risk, noting that "...this violence is interpreted by many drinkers as providing a liberating and attractive sense of release, group pleasure and carnival". The fighting I witnessed at the youth centre, at the pub, between intoxicated adult Wongis in public places, in the mining men's camps, and the excitement in recounting of fights between young people when out late drinking or in the school yard, did not seem so exceptional when it occurred within the broader context of the celebration of certain kind of mining masculinity in the Goldfields. Added to this, there was a self-identification amongst Ngaanyatjarra and local Wongi youth with representations of their people as essentially constituting a tough and hardy group, with great fighting prowess amongst males and females.

Hutchings (1993:354) wrote that "the style of [Aboriginal juvenile illicit] activity specifically defiles many values of the wider non-Aboriginal community". Inherent in this statement is what I consider an inaccurate juxtaposition between the 'styles' of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal illicit activity. The 'in-crowd' was predominantly young male Wongis for much of the eighties, but in different eras, there had been tough young non-Aboriginal males who had comprised the core group. The 'style' of illicit activities over the years had not seemed particularly distinctive, though the composition of the dominant peer groups may have changed, and approximated general characteristics typically associated with working class youth crime.

Many activities of the 'in-crowd' of Laverton teenagers, boys and girls, were contrary to the mores of the middle class and older Aboriginal people with Mission up-bringing and fundamental Christians, both black and white. Amongst non-Aboriginal residents there was widespread indignation over property damage and thefts by young people. There was also complaints about the public fighting and drinking by adult Aborigines, and the small coterie of middle class residents were more likely to condemn disorderly conduct in the pub and the recreational activities of the 'single men'. It was local Aboriginal women who were the ones most often to publicly chastise and disapprove of illicit activities by children, and who voiced concern about experimentation with inhalants, petrol and other drugs.

It was 'property crime' as a specific form of illicit activity by juveniles that acted as a marker of difference between persistent offending, boys and girls, the age of perpetrators, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youths. Thus, it was a number of young Aboriginal boys who stole from an early age, and it was the in-crowd of teenagers in their early teens that participated in break and enters of mostly small businesses, again crimes that were primarily instigated and perpetrated by boys. This needs to be explored more fully in the light of the significant differences between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations to property. Most local Wongi households experienced the routine removal (or 'theft') of property from their premises, and the destruction of goods by Aboriginal children and adults. In such circumstances, where there were limited opportunities to conserve capital and goods, it was hardly surprising that there was little sign of moral approbation of crime against the property of 'others' ('outsiders').

There were ways of responding to perceived slights, and ways of demonstrating anger, that were recognisable as specific to local Wongi and Ngaanyatjarra children, such as the throwing of rocks. However, it was not until mid-adolescence that there was a fundamental difference in the pathways taken by local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people, with the latter (or more to the point the young men) settling into a lifestyle that included direct participation, as 'equals', in the public drinking and fighting by adult Wongis. Unlike the non-Aboriginal young adults, the Lads continued to engage in power struggles with authority figures and with other males - with the police, bouncers at the pub, and mining men in the pub.

Many adults, Wongi and non-Wongi, considered the Lads to be in state of 'arrested development'. From the Lads' point of view they revealed, as they grew older, a degree of nostalgia for their 'heyday', a time of temporary transcendence, autonomy without responsibilities and peer solidarity with mates. The power they felt they embodied as marginal to Wongi and non-Wongi worlds, such as school and organised meetings and activities, seemed dissipated when they were no longer regarded with 'respect' by age-mates and admired for their sexual conquests of many local young females. They became individuals amongst many, taking on the habits of older male role models - casual labour, drinking, gambling, hanging around, working on cars, and moving around to follow sporting events and to catch up with people. This is not to imply an inevitable slippage into adult activities, as an identical reproduction of past relations and practices. There were variations between individuals and their choices and their visions for where they might go, literally and figuratively. But it was this transition into adulthood (as defined by western law) that starkly revealed wider structural constraints, gendered and cultural identities. Young adult Wongi women might stay on, intermittently employed, nurturing homes and children and accumulating social and cultural capital in the local community. In contrast, it was hard to imagine the young men embedded into the social and economic activities around town, or residing in a place for a sustained period of time.

Conclusion

An aim of the thesis has been to reflect on how well oppositional paradigms explain the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in juvenile justice statistics once the cultural complexities, internal politics and multiple subjectivities of a particular setting are factored into an account. Informed by critiques of resistance studies (Ortner 1995, Morton 1998) and of explanations for disorder and dissolute behaviour in local settings (Martin 1993, Merlan 1998), the thesis has sought to provide a rich and detailed account of the inter-cultural setting and the justice apparatus by taking an interactionist perspective. This involved examining the subjectivities of different collectivities within the town - young people, local Wongi residents, justice practitioners - and the various contexts which shaped the perspectives and experiences of these different

groups and the local administration of juvenile justice, including historical antecedents, wider socio-political changes, and town life in its broadest sense.

Merlan (1998:181) argues that the contemporary Australian scene cannot be understood by concepts that centre on indigenous cultural production as an autonomous sphere of activity, such as where 'oppositional culture' is viewed as constituting what is distinctly Aboriginal. She instead describes the scene as one of unequal, intercultural production. The themes explored in the thesis support this argument. In effect, an 'oppositional culture' paradigm errs on the side of unidimensionality of analysis with binary, mutually exclusive spheres of activity in well-intentioned efforts to find a distinctive identity beyond the authentic and the traditional. An ethnographic 'thinness' when deploying this kind of analysis to contemporary rural town life in Australia is most evident in regard to internal politics within indigenous social spaces, affected by such factors as gender, regional affiliation, family ties and age, and in regard to articulations with non-indigenous meanings and practices.

An examination of internal politics within a number of spheres of activity provides an opportunity to consider the implications of Merlan's assertion that the contemporary scene is one of unequal intercultural production. This theme is inherent in several chapters in the thesis. Separating out the 'town community' into distinct groupings, such as young people, Wongi domain, and justice practitioners is not meant to imply discrete, self-contained categories. The point is to show how the reduction of multiple differences within and across a racial divide to a simple formula of 'oppositional culture' to the 'other' western dominant culture is not fair or adequate when applied to a localised setting. As Morton has noted (1998) contemporary indigenous identities are too complex to gloss as oppositional culture.

Although the intention of such paradigms is something quite different, the youths' agency is in danger of becoming submerged when they are regarded as party to an oppositional culture that is reactive to external but insidious white domination. A narrow preoccupation with Wongi young people (and the Lads in particular) and their participation in criminal activities, along with a meta-explanation in terms of oppositional culture, would present a very partial and decontextualised picture of local meanings and practices. As indicated earlier, these young people did voice considerable opposition to certain authority figures and to what they perceived as attempts to discipline and subjugate. However, there was no direct correlation between such attitudes and the range and level of criminal behaviour that occurred in the town, including that actually committed by the Lads. It is important to bear in mind that non-Wongi youth also participated in youth crime, and in many respects 'class' background and gender were more powerful predictors for longer term and intensive involvement in crime than 'ethnicity'. It also does not take into account how 'criminal actions' were only a small part of the daily lives of these local youths and that although 'being ungovernable' appeared intrinsic to self-regard, their subjective identification was not simply in terms of being 'young offenders', being as it was tied to family, peers, place and a sense of particular histories and tradition.

Cowlishaw (1988), as have others since the publication of her book *Black, White or Brindle*, wanted to counter the widespread (and still commonplace) view that Aborigines resident in (non-remote) rural and urban places had lost 'their culture'. But

to describe and focus on cultural practices and meanings as 'oppositional culture', as Morton (1998:360) notes, is to marginalise what Cowlishaw labels 'interstitial' Aborigines and reduces her analysis to what he calls her particular brand of essentialism. It does seem that a lot hinges on an author's or commentator's political standpoint. It becomes a question of political intention and tactics, just as history can be rendered as a simplified narrative of exploitation. For example, 'interstitial' groups (who have it should be noted provided authoritative voices on 'Aborigines') could be viewed as equally 'oppositional' if they are regarded as carrying, through their mainstream success and respectability, the fight into institutional domains.

Morton (1998: 362) claims that concentration on opposition as culture valorises certain practices which may in fact hardly be worthy of the name. Articles based on contemporary ethnographic accounts of rural and settlement life referred to here such as Cowlishaw (1988), Hutchings (1993), and Sackett(1988) appear to generate a distorting focus on law breaking and dissolute behaviour as distinctive features of the oppositional nature of contemporary Aboriginal life. This produces a focus on a narrow band of expressive practices, that contrast markedly to the other extreme where there is valorisation of the sharing ethos and relatedness as defining characteristics. The rather obvious point is not made that these practices, certainly in many places and in many instances, were and are commonly engaged in by many non-Aborigines (such as miners, pastoral workers).

Without a doubt it is very difficult to present complex subjectivities of actors engaged in the drama, which Ortner (1995) persuasively argues is vitally important. In practical terms, however, ethnographies will always place constraints and limits on the drama in relation to the primacy given to particular characters, dialogues and the sequencing of events. Nevertheless this should not preclude explorations of intercultural production that take into account varying and shifting alliances across apparent cultural differences, 'penetrations' by the dominant culture and asymmetrical power relations. An interactionist perspective has provided the opportunity to begin to examine some of these complexities and has enabled this thesis to consider differing subjective perspectives of what outside commentators tend to depict as a generalised experience on the periphery and of marginal status.

Another dimension to intercultural production is to consider the processes of domination. In the introductory rationale chapter, it was stressed that there is a need to examine closely white institutional authority and to move beyond a mechanistic conception of the criminal justice system. Assumptions about the uniformity and the singular directed impact of statutory power and the pervasive nature of white hegemony has to be critically questioned when immersed in a local environment. This is why attention has been drawn in the thesis to the fragmentary nature of power through and within the local application of the justice apparatus, and how its administration and practice in the local setting was influenced by experience and local knowledge. In a sense this desire to seek out and to highlight the tensions across practice and contradictions inherent in practitioners' interpretations of events and persons only served to reinforce an overall impression at a more abstract level of a fundamental inequality between those who move on and those who stay. That is, the limited subversion of a binary model of domination and subordination only holds true for as long as one was *within* and part of town life.

In the thesis it is argued that objective unequal social relations existed in the town, which marginalised the young, Wongis and women. The dominant economic activity, mining, was a masculine domain which influenced more general social tastes and practices. Historically and into the present day, a racial divide has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. Racist beliefs, discriminatory practices, and salient characteristics of the internal Wongi domain perpetuate the contemporary divide. The Wongi domain was not a straight forward product of past exclusionary practices and spatial segregation, shaped as it was by distinctive cultural orientations and historical events. The ongoing reproduction of the divide was illustrated by showing how local white young people grew apart from their Wongi peers, and by highlighting the impact of local experience on justice practitioners.

This divide, however, was partially subverted by the significance of local knowledge in the conduct of town politics and the everyday administration of juvenile justice. This knowledge of inter-cultural differences, of local practices and politics, and of individual residents constitutes a modality of power that was exercised by local, particularly Wongi, residents. Local knowledge also shaped the practice of juvenile justice. For practitioners and many residents, it was particular families and young people who were recognised as troubled and troublesome, and notions of collective opposition and resistance were too abstract an explanation within the local context.

Postscript

In March 1994 we had packed up our belongings and were driving down to Perth. We stopped over at Kalgoorlie. A no-alcohol concert featuring the band 'Coloured Stone' was being held at the Boulder town hall on the Saturday night. We called in, as we knew some of the people playing in a support band. My notes record:

Ronny plus kids were sitting in his recently acquired second-hand Toyota. He was down in Kalgoorlie to see his son... who was in prison again. He asked for some money to buy petrol. A woman came up to me and asked if I remembered going out with her to dig up honey-ants. Nina was there, drunk, at the entrance and asked us for money so she could get in. I gave Ronny \$5 but refused Nina. Once inside I managed to talk to Rodney Higgins and his son before they performed. The latter said they had a good time on their trip east to Tamworth. They visited Melbourne, Redfern and several Aboriginal communities, where people put them up....When we were outside again, there were many people staggering around including a giggling Jeremy Swan and a few cronies, which suggested more would remain outside than go in. Only a few non-Aboriginal people were in the hall.

Six months later, I returned to Laverton for a few weeks and learnt the following:

With the high school group, Karl had left the Kalgoorlie school after one term and intended to be a famous singer/actor, Emma had quit school at Northam and planned to enrol in Art and Design the following year. Teresa, Nicole, Alison, Henny, Eric were still around and Martin was still running the youth centre, which had become a white teenager hang-out.

I met Karl who told me that seven of the white teenagers were picked up by the police at 12.30pm the night before for being 'on curtilage without lawful excuse'. They were interviewed down at the police station and Bronwyn and Karl were let off with a caution. Karl had dreaded a heart to heart with his father but he only told him not to get into trouble when he went out at night. Bronwyn had to be home in future by 10.30 pm and Stefanie was not allowed to go out at night anyway... It sounded as if they had been drinking a fair bit... recently an irate resident chased them off Billygoat Hill. The policeman, Jake, said Martin was the grog supplier and as a result the management committee would sack him. Martin had said that they would 'only get the alcohol from someone else'.

Of the Lads, Lee was at Wanarn, Sam in Kalgoorlie, Jimmy was in town, Leo was living in a caravan with Danton at the back of Vera's house, Alex had a job as a trades assistant at the service station. Matt was hanging out with the Walkers and Sally was expecting their first baby soon. Lyle was in town but he was expecting to move to Kalgoorlie soon because his grandmother was dying from lung cancer.

Of the younger Wongi children, Ella and Dora were shepherded around town by Lily, who was no longer working. Connor was about to be released from Longmore detention centre after a three-month stint for stealing clothes from a washing line. According to his mother Mavis, he had been a 'nuisance' and she was planning to take him to family up at Jameson. Keenan was with his mother at Kurrikurra.

Other news was that Stella did not last long as local social security agent and Shirley was back doing it. One of the Higgins boys was marrying a white doctor at the weekend at Mount Celta station, Fisher was still at Port Augusta, and Robyn was in Kalgoorlie. A fence was being built around the Village and, according to Lily, in future people could be arrested if they were found drunk or caused a disturbance inside the fence. A public telephone had been installed outside Ewan's house at the Village. Vera was worried that his house was turning into a drinking den and if someone died, Ewan would have to move out. She also said that that Alex and people out at the Village had been mixing Serepax, dope and booze..

A non-local group had managed to reach an agreement with WMC in Kalgoorlie over a claim, and at Mount Margaret the manager had been sacked but refused to move. I was told that a former senior

police sergeant had made \$100, 000 a year from meal allowances and that the former manager of Wongatha Wonganarra had run off with funds to support a cause related to a European war. And I have since read that the boot camp was closed and have been told that Wongatha Wonganarra acquired ownership of the petrol station, that ... had twins, that the ... are in Wiluna, that.....had died.....

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