

Ailan Dans:
Critical Issues in Torres Strait Islander
Dance and the Curriculum

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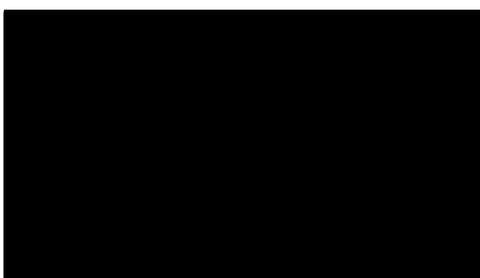
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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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ABSTRACT

The question of the place of culture in the curriculum is complex and, at times, problematic for educators and community members. The issue is frequently at the heart of debates within Indigenous education. In particular, the critics of culturalism in Indigenous education argue that too often there is an over-emphasis on cultural issues to the detriment of other aspects of the curriculum. In addition, representations of Indigenous cultural practices often reify and essentialise Indigenous peoples. Despite these critiques, many Indigenous community members argue for respect for their cultural practices, standpoints and beliefs in education.

This thesis considers the issues surrounding the incorporation of dance in the curriculum for Torres Strait Islander students. It does so through a critical discourse analysis of Torres Strait Islander community discourses. As with other Indigenous peoples throughout the world, Torres Strait Islander perspectives are diverse. Among the dominant discourses identified was a discourse that linked dance to broader social imperatives. Not only a cultural practice, Island Dance (*Ailan Dans*) emerges as an important aspect of postcolonial social movements amongst Torres Strait Islander people.

Visual and performing arts such as dance are important in a postcolonial society and postcolonial curriculum in providing spaces to interrogate and engage with colonialist legacies, structures and representations. Dance is more than a practice or commodity in, for example, tourist performances: it is also a political product, in that Indigenous peoples can assert their rights through dance.

Indigenous cultural practices are crucial as forums of Indigenous expression and 'voice', allowing people to resist dominant practices. The research suggests that *Ailan Dans* is important in community healing. Cultural practices such as dance also provide the possibility of interrogating stereotypical representations and images of Torres Strait Islander people.

This thesis interrogates anthropological representations of *Ailan Dans* and suggests the need to consider the significance of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum as an important, although contested, aspect of Torres Strait Islander resistance, affirmation, economic empowerment, communal wellbeing and artistic expression.

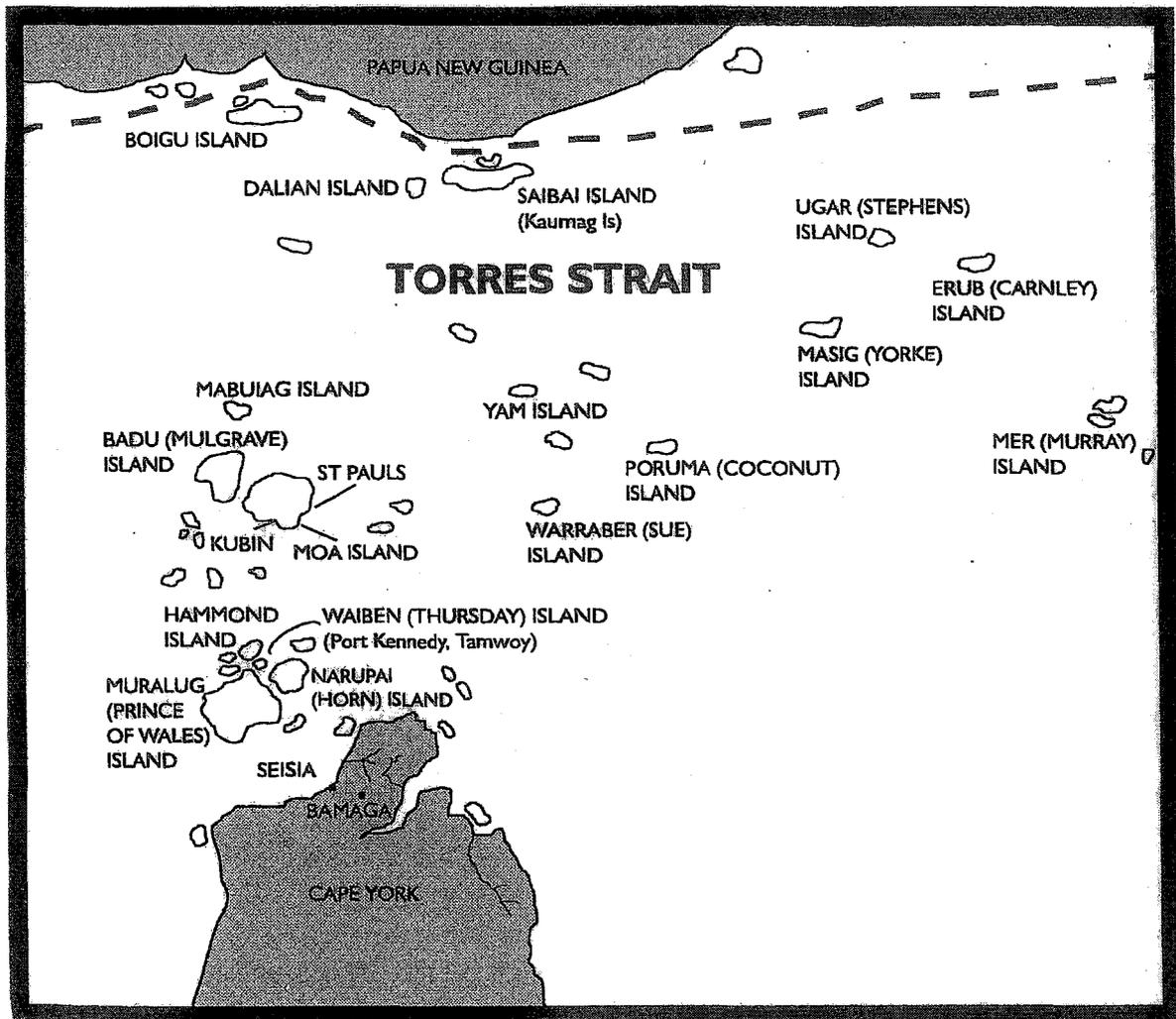
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The Torres Strait Islands



Source: Partington, G. (ed) 1998, *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, NSW, p. 57.

CHAPTER 1

DANCE, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Introduction: Situated Perspectives

This thesis explores Torres Strait Islander community members' discourses regarding the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum. The research methodology includes conversations with Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait, specifically Thursday Island, and in the mainland centres of Cairns, Townsville and Mackay.

This analysis of the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in schools is part of a broader study of the complex issues surrounding culture and education. Nakata (1995a:46) is critical of an over-emphasis on culture and cultural differences in the classroom because it disallows a critical analysis of "specific social and material conditions of discriminatory practices under way in the schooling process". That is, excessive attention to issues of culture diverts our attention from issues of disadvantage and oppression. In addition, the term culture is problematic because it assumes a collectivity and totality rather than a diversity. As Nakata (1995a:49) explains, in referring to a singular Torres Strait Islander culture, Torres Strait Islanders are portrayed "as a group, regardless of what the Islander perceives of herself/himself". It therefore becomes necessary to foreground the multiplicity of Torres Strait Islander standpoints on issues in education, including the place of dance.

A further issue is that culture in schooling is more often celebratory rather than interrogatory. In a celebratory treatment of culture, the past is romanticised and reified (Crowley 1993:42). In an interrogation of culture in education, the past as well as the present is viewed as complex, often contradictory and problematic. That is, the place of culture in education requires on-going critique. However, more often, culture is portrayed as an “artefact disconnected from its production and reception” (Crowley 1999:104). Alternatively, cultural practices may be viewed as historically and socially located; that is, as produced within specific social hierarchies, interests and dynamics. Thus, within both colonial and postcolonial contexts, dance is a form of cultural practice that emerges from within particular social relations of domination and resistance. It is within such contexts that it is necessary to analyse the place of dance in the Torres Strait Islander curriculum.

The Research Problem

Dance, therefore, is both a cultural issue and an effect of particular social relations and power. This insight emerges in part from Nakata’s (1995a:55) argument that an overwhelming emphasis on culture in education serves to elide the “political, legal or economic factors within colonial practices” that impact on Torres Strait Islander educational experiences and outcomes.

Culture in the curriculum has been researched variously as a theoretical construct and as an aspect of curriculum. This current research focuses on Torres Strait Islander community members’ discourses and perspectives of dance. This has been achieved through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with Torres Strait Islanders involved in dance and dance issues. This includes cultural custodians, a cultural officer,

radio broadcasters, private consultants and cultural advisers, health workers, an Indigenous art promoter, parents of school students and professional dancers. Some of the Participants are also musicians, singers and visual artists. The Torres Strait Islander Participants' discourses were analysed using critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is argued as an important tool for analysing identities, knowledges and power in educational texts and contexts (Luke 1999:161).

Although educational documents often purport to extensively consult with Indigenous communities, the results of these consultations are often articulated in terms of what McConaghy (1998b:350) describes as a "unified Indigenous voice". This is problematic in today's globalised world of "hybridity and multiplicity" (Kumar 2000:89). Further, such an approach limits the "possibilities for negotiated and performed identities" (McConaghy 1998b:346). Torres Strait Islander communities and discourses, as this thesis argues, are diverse rather than homogenous. Nonetheless, among the diverse discourses identified, a number appear dominant and influential. Notable are discourses of dance that link dance to a range of social imperatives. Dance is viewed as integral to the other factors that impact on the Participants' lives, such as welfare dependency, autonomy and racism. Such discourses argue that Torres Strait Islander Participants' discourses and official educational discourses regarding Torres Strait Islander dance and the curriculum need to be considered within these broader social imperatives and a broader social agenda. Thus, dance emerges as an important part of broader social movements in addition to being a cultural practice.

Research Questions and Thesis Structure

In developing this observation, Chapter 2 considers the question of the place of culture in education. Various government policies have purported to address the 'problems' inherent in Indigenous education and improve educational access, participation and outcomes. What is often not addressed, Keeffe (1992:101) argues, is the diversity within and between Indigenous peoples, or other crucial dynamics such as class, gender, location and power, which can negatively impact on Indigenous students' educational opportunities. Torres Strait Islanders, in particular, have often been subsumed under the overarching term, Aboriginal peoples. At the same time, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tend to be constrained and contained within a Western framework and discourses (McConvell 1991:21). Further, Aboriginalist discourses are implicit in eliding Indigenous voices and representations. Aboriginalism, Attwood (1992:i) explains, is a discourse produced by non-Indigenous 'experts' when researching and speaking about Indigenous peoples, in which Indigenous peoples are constructed as Other. Aboriginalism is a discursive strategy that contributes to practices of surveillance and the control of Indigenous peoples.

Chapter 2 discusses models of incorporating Indigenous culture in education. These models have enjoyed varying degrees of success, but many are problematic because they are premised on forms of cultural essentialism. Essentialism is the practice of constructing Indigenous identity as fixed and unchanging. This chapter also identifies colonial legacies in the curriculum and what some researchers have argued as an alternative or postcolonial curriculum. As Crowley (1999:103-105) argues, Indigenous histories have not to date occupied a central space in the curriculum. A postcolonial curriculum seeks to interrogate, disrupt and critically analyse colonial legacies and

structures that have precluded Indigenous peoples from fully and equally participating in wider society.

Critical issues surrounding the place of dance in the curriculum are explored in Chapter 3. The Queensland *Health and Physical Education Years 1 to 10 Syllabus* (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1999), the Queensland *Dance: Senior Syllabus* (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998) and various authors (Allison 1989; Bell 2000; Collins 1995; Garrett 1993; Koff 2000; McCormack 1997) have articulated the benefits of dance. These include enhancing development, expression, self-confidence and physical, conceptual and perceptual skills. All of these benefits are aspects of particular importance and relevance in the creative and performing arts. Nonetheless, the creative and performing arts typically do not occupy a central place in the curriculum. Koff (2000 online) is concerned that the benefits of dance in education are often ignored and the visual and performing arts are regarded as “purely performance and entertainment”. Further, as Gard (2001:214) argues, sexist and homophobic discourses can be attached to dance.

Chapter 3 discusses Indigenous dance in general and comparative terms. Through dance and artistic expression, Indigenous peoples globally are voicing and enunciating social and political concerns and asserting their rights (Magowan 2000:309). Dance is also instrumental in community healing. Indigenous peoples throughout the world have suffered physically, psychologically and emotionally as a consequence of oppressive colonial practices. In an Australian context, these effects have been documented in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Thus, a context of

colonial oppressions and resistances is identified against which the issues of dance and the curriculum are to be critiqued. In addition, the chapter reviews the historical representations of Island Dance (*Ailan Dans*), including those from the anthropological literature.

Various authors have documented Torres Strait Islander dance (Beckett 1987, 2001; Haddon 1893, 1901-35; Lawrence 1998a, 1998b; Mabo & Beckett 2000; Mosby 2000; York 1998). Cultural practices such as dance and music are an integral part of Torres Strait Islanders' social, cultural and religious life and are described as being performed for entertainment, competitions, feasts, celebrations and festivals. This is argued as being applicable to those living on the mainland as well as in the Torres Strait (Lawrence 1998a:52-58).

Chapter 3 discusses Torres Strait Islander dance as changing and dynamic rather than immutable. Although *Ailan Dans* is still considered important in contemporary society, tourist and dance theatre performances have been criticised for selling Indigenous culture and essentialising Indigenous peoples (Meekison 2000a:368-369). Dance can be more than performative, however; it can also be a political force (Magowan 2000:312). Dance, then, is both accommodative and resistive. In educational contexts, dance has the potential to critique and interrogate Aboriginalist representations. Dance is significant in postcolonial society and in a postcolonial curriculum in providing places and spaces for Indigenous representations and interrogations (Rea & Crowley 1998:356).

Chapter 4 considers critical and ethical issues in researching Torres Strait Islander dance. It is well documented that Australian Indigenous peoples are among the most researched peoples in the world. Western knowledges and discourses have been privileged in the past and despite the plethora of research, Indigenous peoples have not always reaped the benefits (Smith 1999:191). The Indigenous 'voice', which has been elided in the past, is now being heard. However, McConaghy (2000a:215) argues that the emergent Indigenous 'voice' has not led to significant structural changes. That is, Indigenous voices alone cannot sustain changes.

A crucial issue in Indigenous educational research is representation. The question of who can speak and for whom has preoccupied researchers for more than a decade. The contentious debate is whether only Indigenous peoples should speak or write about Indigenous issues. For hooks (1989:47) and Langton (1993:27), such a proposition has racist and essentialist connotations and for McConaghy (2000a:7), can result in an "atrophy of ideas". Indigenous peoples are now interrogating stereotypical representations through the visual and performing arts. Another consideration in Indigenous research is the 'white' gaze. The 'white' gaze of non-Indigenous researchers on Indigenous 'objects' is implicit in culturalism (Crowley 1993:35).

Chapter 4 discusses the contributions of feminist research to the representation issues that are problematic in Indigenous research. Indigenous women such as Huggins (1994:71) are critical of non-Indigenous feminists' emphasis on sexism, arguing that racism is the crucial issue. They also argue that non-Indigenous feminists, regardless of their rhetoric, have been complicit in dominant and oppressive behaviour.

The research methodology used in this thesis is qualitative, which is appropriate because the research seeks to discern Torres Strait Islander community members' discourses and assumptions regarding Torres Strait Islander dance and its role in the curriculum. The semi-structured interview has been the main data collection method utilised in the research. Observations of Torres Strait Islander dance performances and analysis of secondary sources such as books, journal articles, videos and educational documents have also been employed. Critical discourse analysis is the form of data analysis as discourses are important in constructions of knowledges, power relations and ideologies in educational contexts (Gilbert & Low 1994; Luke 1999; Potter 1997; Punch 1998).

Chapter 5 identifies complex discourses and debates surrounding community and community issues amongst Torres Strait Islanders, drawing on the available literature and interview data. Government policies have articulated the importance of consulting and collaborating with Indigenous community members in addressing educational issues and concerns. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP), for example, purported to have extensively consulted with Indigenous peoples to "ensure Aboriginal input to the policy development process" (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:8). Various writers, however, have expressed their concerns about the effectiveness of this consultation and collaboration. For Eckermann (1998 online), the NATSIEP is flawed, in that "alternate educational structures" were not recommended. McConaghy (1998b:344-345) argues that the NATSIEP contained diversity in its overwhelming endorsement of the Both Ways model. She further argues that government policies are problematic because they so often perpetuate the "established colonial order".

The notion of 'community' used in policy debates is also problematic. Anderson (1991:6) writes that communities are imaginary constructs. It is impossible for everyone in a community or nation to intimately know each other, but bonds can be forged through particular practices, representations or discourses within that nation or community. It must be remembered that Indigenous communities today are a result of colonial governance and colonial practices (Keeffe 1992:122). Importantly, Indigenous communities are diverse, not homogenous, and this must be acknowledged and addressed in research or policies. In addition, Indigenous spokespersons such as Noel Pearson (*Insight*, video recording, 2001) argue that policies and programs should be based on Indigenous families rather than Indigenous communities as a collective.

In relation to Torres Strait Islanders, it has been articulated by people such as Mabo and Beckett (2000:165) and organisations such as the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) (n.d.a online) that Torres Strait Islanders have shared beliefs, values and cultural practices. However, there are differences between islands, between different groups of Torres Strait Islanders, and between Islanders residing in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. Chapter 5 discusses issues of importance to Torres Strait Islanders in terms of their community aspirations. These social imperatives are crucial as they impact on educational experiences and outcomes and thus need to be addressed by educators. Brady (1990:18-20) provides a cautionary note in researching issues or 'problems' in Indigenous communities. What researchers deem a 'problem' may not correlate with what community members consider a 'problem' and, moreover, not all community members may agree on what constitutes a 'problem'. Issues of importance to the Participants in this research when discussing the significance of *Ailans Dans* include unemployment, health and housing, violence, alcohol and drugs, racism,

autonomy and welfare. These social imperatives, they argue, need to be considered in discussions of dance and the curriculum.

Torres Strait Islander Participants' discourses specifically regarding Torres Strait Islander dance and its place in schools are identified in Chapter 6. The Participants articulated the importance and significance of their cultural practices and the beliefs they wish to be maintained. According to some of the Participants, dance is a crucial aspect of Torres Strait Islanders' history. Concerns were raised, however, about the lack of interest by younger Torres Strait Islanders in *Ailan Dans* because of other influences in their lives. Participants also enunciated the importance of their Torres Strait Islander identity. However, identity is a complex issue. The regulation or maintenance of identity has both constructive and destructive potential (McConaghy 1998b:349).

Torres Strait Islander cultural practices are dynamic rather than static. However, discourses of 'authenticism' and the propensity for some non-Indigenous peoples to view dance as 'traditional' are problematic. Some Torres Strait Islander visual and performing artists incorporate both 'traditional' and contemporary aspects in their work, but other Torres Strait Islanders are critical of changes to cultural practices. The issue of essentialism and commodification in regards to public performances by Torres Strait Islanders was also discussed by the Participants. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation are of concern for many of the Participants. Nonetheless, there is a resounding pride in artistic expressions such as *Ailan Dans*.

The Participants see dance as an activity that boosts self-esteem and confidence. This is particularly so for students who are involved with or perform in the Croc Eisteddfod. In addition, young Torres Strait Islanders who are experiencing hardships or personal problems can be nurtured as part of a dance group. As a social phenomenon, dance can connect isolated youth.

Torres Strait Islander dance is incorporated in schools in both informal and formal ways and to varying degrees of effectiveness and success. The issue with ad hoc and celebratory incorporation of cultural practices, according to Crowley (1999:104) and McConaghy (2000a:181), is the frequent corresponding lack of interrogation of dominant structures and practices that have tended to limit and constrain Indigenous students. The dominant educational system has the power to decide what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. While the Participants desire that Torres Strait Islander dance be taught to young Torres Strait Islanders, there is no consensus on how it should be taught and where it should be taught. Clearly, however, Torres Strait Islander community members and educators are asking for a more active role in making the decisions that will impact on Torres Strait Islander students.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by drawing together the major research questions and critical issues in debates around the place of dance in Torres Strait Islander curricula. It summarises the major discourses identified in interviews with Torres Strait Islander Participants. It argues that rather than using simplistic and culturalist explanations of dance as important for cultural maintenance, dance emerges as a contested site for Torres Strait Islanders. Contemporary forms of Torres Strait Islander dance, and the performing arts more generally, are located with complex social, economic, political

and postcolonial educational dynamics. As such, the issue of dance and the curriculum requires a nuanced reading of multiple Torres Strait Islander discourses and social imperatives.

Researcher Positionality Issues

An issue in this research requiring reflection and consideration is my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher. There are critical issues inherent in non-Indigenous researchers conducting research on Indigenous educational matters. As McConaghy (1998b:348) cogently observes somewhat critically: “Equity and emancipation in educational policy discourses need an other. Further, they require a rescuer, the radical intellectual, the liberation theologian and the humanitarian educator.” The focus in research has too often been on Indigenous peoples as Other, while the places and spaces of non-Indigenous peoples have too often been ignored. Crowley (1999:108) describes this as the “invisibility, illusory absence and taken-for-grantedness of whiteness”. What requires attention, Pettman (1992:127) argues, is critical reflexivity by non-Indigenous researchers. Researchers have too often spoken for Indigenous peoples and been promulgated as ‘experts’ on Indigenous matters (Attwood 1992:i). Nakata (1995a:41) argues that “literature on the Islander, Islander history, Islander education, Islander future, or even Islander cultural habits, has been written primarily by Western ‘experts’ with their universalising ‘sciences’”.

McConaghy (2000a:213) cautions that speaking with, rather than for, Indigenous peoples is similarly problematic because it “still implies an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ ... an ‘us’ who speaks with and a ‘them’ who is spoken with”. This is pertinent to this research in my intention to discern Torres Strait Islander discourses and perspectives regarding

dance and its role in the curriculum. My positionality, however, renders this problematic. For Pettman (1992:130), it is preferable to speak “*from* somewhere”. I am speaking from the position of a non-Indigenous, middle-class female and this has important implications for this research. I cannot offer any ‘truths’ or assert that my research is objective or free of bias. It must be stressed that my research, as with other researchers’ work, is open to interpretation and contestation and can only offer ‘partial truths’.

I am not a dancer, dance educator or choreographer and this could be considered a limitation. However, I am an educator who is committed to social justice. Rather than the aesthetics of dance or dance as physical movement, my focus in this research is on issues surrounding the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum and dance as integral to social movements of resistance, respect, affirmation and wellbeing. A more situated reading of these issues is important for educational policy, curriculum innovation and for the preparation of teachers to work in Torres Strait Islander schools. These are issues that concern many of us working in Queensland tertiary institutions.

CHAPTER 2

RETHINKING CULTURE AND EDUCATION

In education, there has been much focus on peoples marginalised because of issues of 'ethnicity' or 'race'. There has also been interest in how various groups, such as Torres Strait Islanders, have been positioned within the education system. According to Neuenfeldt (1998:203), there has been a focus on power relationships in educational contexts and debates about how Indigenous interests and curricula innovations can be incorporated in education. While it could be argued that Indigenous knowledges and viewpoints are now being acknowledged in various forums, the questions of how this takes place in teaching practice, how successful are these initiatives and who holds the power require further attention. This thesis is specifically interested in how these issues relate to Torres Strait Islander dance.

Indigenous Educational Policy

Since colonisation of Australia, various government policies have been implemented concerning Indigenous peoples. These policies have included protection, when Indigenous peoples were assumed to be 'a dying race'; assimilation, when it was decreed that Indigenous peoples should be part of non-Indigenous society and have equal rights and opportunities; integration; self-determination; and self-management (Forrest & Sherwood 1988:21-23). Valadian (1991:5-6) posits that education for Indigenous children in the past was a tool for assimilation and a way to crush

Indigenous culture and inculcate non-Indigenous culture. Indigenous children had minimal schooling as their expectations and capabilities were perceived to be limited. Heitmeyer and O'Brien (1992:34) argue that Indigenous peoples have been controlled socially and politically by non-Indigenous peoples and educational efforts have been "futile, poorly planned and established and implemented from a non-Aboriginal Australian viewpoint".

A major concern of Australian governments since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1980s, has been the level of Indigenous educational disadvantage. Various initiatives to improve educational access, participation and outcomes for Indigenous peoples have been formulated (Adams 1998:9). An Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, chaired by Paul Hughes, was established by the Commonwealth in 1988 to draw together the main findings of various reports that had been commissioned to address Indigenous educational needs. The Report of the Task Force stated that Indigenous peoples were the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia and a national education policy was crucial in addressing educational inequalities (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:7). The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP), which came into effect in January 1990, was the first national policy and the first policy, after two centuries of ad hoc provision, that distinctly attempted to address inequalities in Indigenous education (McConaghy 1997a:122). The NATSIEP had long-term goals for Indigenous education: Indigenous involvement in decision-making; equality of access; equitable participation; and equitable and appropriate outcomes (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:14-15). Commonwealth funding for Indigenous education also increased from \$112.5 million in 1989 to \$143.5 million in 1990 (Luke et al. 1993:142).

A review of Indigenous education, which was announced in 1993 and released in 1994, noted that although there were some improvements, Indigenous students still had substantially lower levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, particularly in rural locations, and only about one in five Indigenous students achieved at levels above the average for students as a whole. Retention and participation rates were still lower than for other Australian students (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1994:24). Indigenous students, moreover, had high rates of suspension and many had low self-confidence and self-esteem (Adams 1998:8). Nakata (1997:69) challenges this last point, asserting that Torres Strait Islanders have an “over-abundance of self-esteem”. It is interesting to consider the discourses of the Participants of this current research on *Ailan* Dans in light of Nakata’s challenge.

Despite the implementation of the NATSIEP, the Review stated that Indigenous peoples still remained the most disadvantaged people in the Nation educationally (McConaghy 1997a:123). This is particularly pertinent in the Northern Territory. The *Report on the Provision of School Education Services for Remote Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory* in 1996 stated that teenage Aborigines in the Northern Territory at the end of their schooling had an average educational level of year-two to early year-three (Schulz 1996:24). In response to these statistics, the Western Australian education minister called for forced relocation of Indigenous children to hostels to improve educational outcomes, which, Schulz (1996:24) argues, is a “simplistic solution to a complex problem”.

Some authors criticised the NATSIEP as being assimilationist, as assuming that educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples should be the same as for other

Australians, while other authors argued that it allowed for the development of curriculum and teaching practices relevant to Indigenous students (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1994:6). The NATSIEP stated that it was based on the results of extensive consultation with Aboriginal peoples and the findings and recommendations of investigations into Indigenous educational needs (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:8). Woods (1991:18) disagrees, arguing that rather than addressing issues of educational reform, it merely promoted an increased allocation of funds in an education system that had already failed Indigenous peoples and, ultimately, was “written by non-Aboriginal public servants for a non-Aboriginal government”.

Policy and Representation

According to Luke et al. (1993:139), the “politics of representation, of how discourses and institutional practices construct and position groups and communities” need to be looked at when analysing the NATSIEP. The use of the general term “Aboriginal people” throughout the NATSIEP, for example, represents all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and thus assumes a “universality of ‘Aboriginality’” (Luke et al. 1993:143). In addition, the term Aborigine as a category of person is problematic because it was designated in colonial times as a form of social control and domination (Haralambos et al. 1996:651). Many Indigenous peoples today use other terms to self-identify. Queensland Aboriginal peoples, for instance, describe themselves as Murri (Woods 1998:53). While Indigenous peoples do often share experiences of invasion, resistance, dispossession, poverty, exploitation, racism and exclusion (McDaniel & Flowers 1995:233), there are differences in aspects such as class and gender (Crowley 1999:108; Keeffe 1992:101; Luke et al. 1993:148; McConaghy 2000a:247; Partington

1998:2), and power and location (Keeffe 1992:101; Luke et al. 1993:139-144). These aspects of diversity were not taken into account in the NATSIEP when dealing with Indigenous schooling issues of achievement, attendance, attrition, truancy and retention (Luke et al. 1993:148). Indigenous students, then, were discussed as a homogenous group apparently devoid of the crucial sociological identifiers such as gender and class, which impact on their lives and their educational experiences and outcomes.

Luke et al. (1993:143) posit that while the NATSIEP did mention “diversity” and used qualifiers such as “Aboriginal people generally” or “many Aboriginal people”, Indigenous diversity was not really acknowledged or discussed fully. Issues of diversity need to be specifically addressed if there are to be improved outcomes throughout Indigenous education. McConaghy (1997a:124-132) asserts that the original policy and programs and the recommendations of the Review of the Policy contained diversity rather than addressed it. She further argues that while the Review stated that it valued diversity, this diversity had to fit within the Review’s criteria.

The use of the term equity is also problematic in the Policy. The NATSIEP mentioned “equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes” (Luke et al. 1993:144). Similarly, in a presentation to a national forum on Indigenous education in 1999 at Alice Springs, Dr David Kemp (quoted in ‘Indigenous Education: Time to Move on’ 2000:6), Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, stated that the main challenge facing Australia was “achieving educational equality for Australia’s Indigenous peoples”. As Luke et al. (1993:144) argue, the “absences and aims of this marginali[s]ed group are defined by reference to an imaginary centre, a mainstream Australian population whose

educational, social justice and economic rights are presented as non-problematic, guaranteed and achieved”.

Torres Strait Islander Educational Issues

Education in the Torres Strait is provided by two high schools, one on Thursday Island and the other at Bamaga on Cape York. There are primary schools on various islands, administered either by Education Queensland or Catholic Education. The Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Consultative Committee (TSIRECC), formerly the Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Group, was formed following a recommendation in the Review of the NATSIEP and works with Education Queensland on policy and curriculum matters. The TSIRECC has developed a literacy strategy for Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary schools. School councils and community curriculum committees are involved in decision-making in schools (Synott & Whatman 1998:69-71). However, over two-thirds of Torres Strait Islanders live on the mainland.

As discussed earlier, Indigenous peoples are undeniably disadvantaged educationally; however, the use of discourses of ‘disadvantage’ is problematic. It can be exceedingly difficult to see beyond the negative descriptions and connotations. The concern with the term ‘disadvantage’ in Indigenous education is that it can be linked to inadequacies within Indigenous peoples; that is, it can suggest that they are the ‘problem’. As Nakata (1993:59) asserts, Torres Strait Islanders, as well as Aborigines, are seen as a “group of people who ‘lack’”. In addition, there are differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (and indeed within Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples), which are not fully addressed. As discussed previously in this Chapter, Luke et al. (1993:143) point out that Torres Strait Islanders are included under

Aborigines/Aboriginal in policies and in academic and media literature rather than given a separate or distinct status. Clearly, more needs to be done from Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

Although much of the early knowledge on the Torres Strait has been gleaned from non-Indigenous writers such as anthropologists Haddon and Beckett, more recently educational concerns and issues are being addressed by Torres Strait Islanders such as Dr Martin Nakata. Nonetheless, Nakata (1995b:29-30) asserts that educational writing does not articulate Torres Strait Islander concerns and difficulties and thus does little to find ways to improve Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes. He wants Torres Strait Islander knowledges and experiences to be valued and included, which could require “radical departures” from traditional educational processes and policies. McConvell (1991:21) admits that his viewpoint on Indigenous matters, and other non-Indigenous writers’ viewpoints, are “couched in terms imposed by a Western discourse about non-Western cultures”. This problem has been discussed by others as a form of Aboriginalism.

Aboriginalism

Much of the descriptions and representations about Indigenous Australians have been derived from anthropology, which is now being critiqued and challenged. Aboriginalism, which is the knowing and representing of Indigenous Others, was first described by Hodge in response to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (McConaghy 2000a:26). Aboriginalism involves three key strategies: non-Indigenous ‘experts’ researching and speaking about Indigenous peoples; the use of binary oppositions of ‘them’ and ‘us’; and the discipline, administration and rule over Indigenous peoples (Attwood 1992:i).

Aboriginalist texts, for example, elide Indigenous voices and representations (McConaghy 2000a:27). McConaghy (1998a:129-133) believes that there needs to be more effective Indigenous representation to disrupt Aboriginalism. Further, Aboriginalist discourses need to be critiqued and disrupted. However, some writers, and this includes Indigenous writers, believe that Aboriginalism can also be used as a form of resistance. Questions of cultural essentialism can be desirable, such as in Indigenous land and compensation claims. As McConaghy argues, we need to explore further the specific contexts in which it is desirable or even possible to speak outside of Aboriginalism.

Culturalism and Cultural Essentialism

The question of the place of culture in the curriculum is a complex one and has been the subject of much debate. Results of the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey ('Australia's Indigenous Youth' 2000:10-11), which was conducted and published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, show that 56 percent of Indigenous youth and 62 percent aged 25 and over identify with a clan, tribal or language group. Of these figures, approximately three-quarters of Indigenous youth are rural dwellers. Almost one in five of those aged 15 to 24 and one-quarter of those aged 25 and over speak an Indigenous language. As with culture, there are locational differences. While almost 42 percent of rural youth speak an Indigenous language, only about 4 percent in capital cities do. In capital cities, 94 percent of Indigenous peoples aged 15 to 24 speak English as their main language, while 62 percent in rural areas have English as their main language. The main language for 13 percent of Indigenous youth is an Indigenous language. Although it appears from the survey results that culture is significant for many Indigenous youth and young people, more analysis is needed to determine what

the term means and further, to consider its place in education. The issues are clearly complex. As Nakata (1995a:47) argues, the “introduction of culturally sensitive texts does not necessarily deter negative stereotyping; the appreciation of ‘difference’ does not guarantee ‘inclusion’; and the acceptance of one’s ‘blackness’ constitutes more than unity”.

“Aboriginal culture and identity” was a term frequently mentioned in the NATSIEP (Luke et al. 1993:143). As Kumar (2000:84) observes, the notion of culture does not take into account the multiplicity of individuals and also leads to a “form of discrete classification”. That is not the only issue. Nakata (1995a:50) suggests that the need to restore and preserve culture is seen by many as most important, thus deflecting attention away from other discriminatory factors that have led to the low performance of Indigenous students in schools. Interestingly, McConaghy (2000a:200) observes that when non-Indigenous peoples engage in social activity, they are viewed as creating history, whereas Indigenous peoples are seen to be preserving their culture. Thus, when Torres Strait Islanders perform *Ailan Dans*, it is important to view such performances as complex social acts with significant social, political and economic meaning. *Ailan Dans* is not merely, or perhaps not even centrally, about cultural preservation.

Culturalism, then, sees culture and cultural difference as all-important (McConaghy 1997b:57). Culturalism is problematic because it “romanticises and reifies the past” (Crowley 1993:42) and can connote “different, exotic, traditional” (Nakata 1993:63). As Crowley (1998:296) suggests, a “racial imaginary ... constructs Indigenous peoples as an immobile, static and fixed Other”. For Nakata (1993:65), it is difficult to celebrate culture and difference when that difference is “still framed in terms of lack”.

Although culture in educational contexts is problematic, Nakata (1997:72) does not advocate the abolition of a cultural focus, acknowledging that cultural practices are crucial to Torres Strait Islanders. He argues that they want respect and acknowledgement of their difference and desire to maintain and control their lifestyles, languages, traditions and practices. He believes that these aspects do have a place in education, but he is critical of the over-emphasis placed on culture in improving educational outcomes. In other words, Nakata (1995b:32) thinks that although the cultural agenda does have a place, it has had too great a focus. Nakata (1995a:50) adds that 'experts' can use culture to explain Indigenous existence, resistance and failure. Ultimately, changes to dominant social practices are required. Weenie (2000 online) also postulates that reviving Indigenous languages and cultures will not change dominant social practices, adding that it is naïve to have considered that it would. Nakata (1993:63) agrees, asserting that blaming Indigenous failure in schools on culture rather than on "how Indigenous peoples are positioned, vis a vis colonial knowledges and practices in the material world" is too simplistic. McConvell (1991:23) suggests that if Indigenous students are to value maintenance of their culture, they must see the relevance to their lives in wider society. Issues such as class, gender and racialisation also need to be addressed if there are to be real changes (McConaghy 2000a:44).

An interesting aspect of culture is that its interconnectedness with schooling is ignored. While culture is discussed and accorded importance in the curriculum, schools themselves as cultural sites are not, even though schools are "cultural products embedded in the processes of making culture" (Rea & Crowley 1998:355). Rea and Crowley (1998:355) add that culture is related to issues of "'race' and 'ethnicity' but not to whiteness, in-between-ness, marginality or hybridity". Culture, then, has too

narrow a focus. Nowhere has it been more misunderstood than in the popular notions of 'Aboriginal learning styles' and 'culture clash' in schooling

Rethinking 'Aboriginal Learning Styles'

Aboriginal learning styles theory was developed by Harris, based on his experiences with Indigenous students in remote communities in the Northern Territory. According to this theory, Indigenous peoples' educational needs differ from non-Indigenous peoples' needs because of a perceived shared world-view and culture (Keeffe 1992:98). As an example, Heffernan (1996 online) believes that many 'problems' in Indigenous education are related to a "clash of values between mainstream culture and traditional Aboriginal culture" and argues that a non-Indigenous education and a 'traditional' lifestyle are "mutually exclusive". In such views, binary oppositions such as 'traditional/non-traditional' and 'Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal' are employed to construct educational problems (McConaghy 2000a:43).

Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1998:32-45) note that while Harris' work rightly negates the notions that Indigenous peoples are incapable of being educated and are culturally deprived, attributing poor educational outcomes to different learning styles is similarly problematic. They suggest that Aboriginal learning styles theory ignores socio-political impacts such as dispossession, issues of power and control, and differences in class and gender, and instead blames Indigenous educational failure on poor communication between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers. Indigenous students are deemed incapable of handling non-Indigenous teaching and learning styles. With this theory, Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1998:49) argue, culture is a "set of practices frozen

in a museum-like condition and thus positioned outside of the forces of history, politics and power”.

For Keeffe (1992:101), the notions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous learning styles totalise and essentialise both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. McConvell (1991:14) concurs, claiming that binary oppositions result in stereotyping not just Indigenous peoples, but also non-Indigenous peoples. Binary oppositions were employed in the 1980s by Paul Hughes, Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, when he referred to cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in terms of, for example, “holistic thinking/empirical thinking”, “group/individual” and “illiterate/literate” (Keeffe 1992:98-99). There is another implication regarding Harris’ work. Keeffe (1992:88-98) explains that Harris’ and also Michael Christie’s research had widespread influence in education. Many educators used their theories and in so doing theories emerging from within the remote educational context were transposed to urban and rural contexts, in effect becoming national theories. In positing remote Indigenous contexts and dynamics as the dominant non-Indigenous constructions of ‘Aboriginality’, urban Indigenous peoples and their issues were written out of educational theory. Complex debates around authenticity, change and loss thus ensued.

Indigenous Identities

Like culture, the term identity is also problematic. For Hall (1991:21), identity is a “structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative”. In other words, one is what others are not. The notion of identity homogenises (Hall 1991:22). There is, of course, not one Indigenous identity.

Indigenous peoples need to articulate and negotiate their own identities and not have non-Indigenous peoples ascribe identities for or to them. Identities are not fixed, unchanging and essentialist. They are, Hall (1990:51-52) asserts, a “‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”. Identities, he adds, are “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power”. According to Hall (1996:1), the various discipline areas are now critical of an “integral, originary and unified identity”. Identities and cultures, Kumar (2000:89) suggests, should be “viewed through hybridity and multiplicity”.

The migration of Torres Strait Islanders is thus very relevant when looking at Torres Strait Islander identities. Over two-thirds of Torres Strait Islanders now reside on the mainland, particularly in Cairns and Townsville. This migration, Jose (n.d. online) notes, has “highlighted issues of identity, connection and cultural retention”. These complex social and identity dynamics will be discussed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

Cultural Essentialism as Resistance

The issue of cultural essentialism, that of presenting cultural identity in reified ways, is not a simple one. It is not only an “important strategy for colonising and controlling”, but also for “resistance and voice” (McConaghy 2000a:121). Muecke (1992:42) claims that discarding cultural essentialism could result in “fragmented unknowing subjects”. For hooks (1994:78), cultural essentialism allows Indigenous and other marginalised peoples spaces for resistance. After all, she explains, marginalised peoples need an identity to enable them to challenge domination. McConaghy (2000a:9) suggests a postculturalism, which does not signal a rejection of culture, but instead challenges the over-reliance of culture and the negative impacts of cultural stereotypes in educational

contexts.

A primary question to consider in relation to Torres Strait Islander dance and other cultural practices in schooling is whether they are de-colonising or re-colonising. Indigenous peoples have resisted some non-Indigenous notions of what an Indigenous person is or what Indigenous 'culture' should be; that is, the fallacious notion that only 'traditional' Indigenous peoples and 'culture' are 'real'. These notions of 'traditional culture' and stereotypes serve to objectify and de-humanise Indigenous peoples. Within these cautionary tales, however, there exists a strong desire on the part of many Torres Strait Islanders to strengthen cultural practices such as dance. This desire, of course, must be seen alongside their desire for a host of other things and experiences that the world has to offer.

Globalisation

Globalisation and the formation of new global cultures and identities have impacted on Indigenous education. Authors such as Hewitt (2000:111-113) suggest that globalisation has led to an awareness of different worldviews. He believes that this is positive as it is acknowledged that no worldview is superior or inferior to another worldview. Further, as learning is "culturally based", the learner's worldview must be taken into account in any educational context. This means that an Indigenous worldview is acknowledged alongside the dominant non-Indigenous worldview. He writes that research into the relationship between culture and education has shown that different approaches to teaching and learning are needed for different learners, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but this has often been ignored, particularly in relation to Indigenous learners. While it makes good educational sense to acknowledge and

cater for individual learners, Hewitt's concept of worldviews is problematic. Once again, notions of worldviews and culturally based learning can lead to essentialism and stereotyping. Turner (1994:124), on the other hand, argues that globalisation is leading to a hybridity of cultures, identities and worldviews.

Hall (1991:26) writes that globalisation has led to an erosion of national cultural identities and nation-states and warns that this erosion can result in a national identity "driven by a very aggressive form of racism". This can be seen in Australia with the rise of Pauline Hanson and her particular brand of racist discourse in the 1990s. It can also be seen in the response in the new millennium by the Commonwealth Government and many in the public to asylum seekers. Hall (1991:28) also argues that global mass culture is an English speaking, albeit various forms of English, and Western construct and that globalisation incorporates a new form of homogenisation that desires to assimilate differences in "essentially an American conception of the world".

According to Hall (1991:35-36), another response to globalisation is that formerly marginalised peoples now have a means of representation and spaces for their histories and languages. However, he cautions that globalisation can also result in marginalised groups "retreat[ing] into their own exclusivist and defensive enclaves". Langton (1994 cited in McConaghy 2000a:231) is one Indigenous writer who does not think that globalisation will have a negative or decaying effect, asserting that Indigenous peoples are negotiating their subjectivities within a globalised world. An example is Indigenous peoples using the global stage and technologies to sell Indigenous art worldwide (McConaghy 2000a:232). Nakata (1995b:33) wants Torres Strait Islanders to look at where they are positioned educationally. They are not separate peoples, but are part of

the global and Australian context. This brings rewards and responsibilities. Among other things, he argues, Indigenous peoples need to discern what happens when they are uncritical of non-Indigenous knowledges. In response to the debates surrounding Indigenous culture, essentialism and globalisation, various educators have articulated various models of incorporating Indigenous culture in education.

Models of Incorporating Indigenous Culture in Education

The different models that have been considered by educators to address Indigenous educational concerns include two way education, Both Ways education, bilingual education, inclusions and additions, Western only schooling and Indigenous standpoints.

Two Way Education

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have seen two way education as a solution to the 'problems' in Indigenous education. For Harris (1990:1), the dilemma for Indigenous students in remote areas is that even though Indigenous parents want educational success and political, technological and economic power, success in the Western style would seriously jeopardise Aboriginal culture. According to Harris (1990:9-14), as Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures are "incompatible" and "antithetic", two way schooling is a solution. Such an approach, he argues, necessitates a "culture domain separation" with separate teaching, languages, content and teachers for each domain, Indigenous and Western. Adrian Hyland (1995:25), a teacher of Koorie students, believes that two way schooling is needed for Indigenous students to "preserve their own culture" and acquire necessary skills. While Harris (1990:20)

believes that two way schooling does not “freeze Aboriginal culture in the past”, others disagree.

Harris uses the word ‘traditional’, which, Willis (1996:7) claims, denies change, adaptation and diversity within Indigenous communities. Moreover, it essentialises and Others Indigenous peoples. More recently, however, Harris (1999:73-74) has suggested that remote area Indigenous staff need experience in Sydney and Melbourne for a few years because “ever more sophisticated English and understanding of Western culture” are required for Indigenous peoples to participate in and have control of wider society. Such strategies are contemporary manifestations of the two way concept.

For Wunungmurra (1989:12-15), a two way school curriculum is necessary to enable Indigenous peoples to live in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. He believes that to live successfully in both worlds, a good education and maintenance of Indigenous culture and language are necessary, though Indigenous peoples must develop, implement and control educational programs. In primary school, he explains, Indigenous children should learn to read and write their own language first and learn about ceremonial life. As well as being educated academically to enable them to compete with other Australian students, Indigenous children need to learn their own culture and language so they know their cultural identity. A two way curriculum, then, is a negotiation of knowledges between Indigenous and Western cultures. He views the two domains as overlapping rather than separate. His search is not so much for the two ways, but for the common ground linking the two. Such a view provides an important departure from the strategy of domain separation.

Both Ways Education

The term Both Ways education was developed by Indigenous educators in the late 1980s. While Both Ways has its critics because of its culturalist approach, it has been a success in Arnhem Land communities and at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (McConaghy 1997a:130). According to Mandawuy Yunupingu (1990:3-5), former Principal of Yirrkala Community School, power in education was wrested from Indigenous peoples when non-Indigenous peoples established schools and the English language in the schools. He argues that disregarding Indigenous languages, in effect, disregards Indigenous culture and identity. At Yirrkala Community School, bilingual education began in 1974 and in 1986 an Action Group worked towards a Both Ways curriculum. Yunupingu (1990:5) explains that the emphasis of Both Ways is on “double power” because of the control of both languages, the importance and preservation of Indigenous language and culture, and equal respect for both cultures. Raymattja Marika (1999:110), a Teacher Linguist at Yirrkala Community Education Centre, is also an advocate of an inclusive curriculum that incorporates both Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges. At a government level, the Review of the NATSIEP came out in support of Both Ways education (McConaghy 2000a:180).

However, not all Indigenous educators agree on two way and Both Ways education, particularly in today’s globalised world. Western only education was advocated by Central Desert Indigenous educators in response to Both Ways education. More recently, Nakata (1995b:33) argues that Torres Strait Islanders do not reside in a separate domain. They interact with and are subjected to global and national influences and practices. He further argues that English and non-Indigenous knowledges are

crucial as, rather than being assimilationist or destructive, “they may well be a fundamental key to our survival”.

Bilingual Education

The attempted dismantling of bilingual education in the Northern Territory has led to much debate. Bilingual education was established in the Northern Territory in 1973 and was later adopted by other states. In bilingual education, instruction is by Indigenous languages in the early years of schooling (Malcolm 1998:136). For Harris (1999:71-73), the bilingual program meant that Indigenous peoples had roles and decision-making in schools. He adds that the program also produced Indigenous curriculum developers and educators as well as providing language maintenance and Indigenous history recording. Valerie Dhaykamalu (1999), Principal of Shepherdson College, Galiwinku and a graduate of Batchelor College’s Teacher Education, and Ken Hale (1999), a retired Professor of Linguistics at MIT, are also critical of terminating bilingual education. Hale (1999:43) called the bilingual program at its inception “one of the most exciting educational events in the modern world”. Northern Territory Education Minister Peter Adamson (cited in Horsburgh 1999 online), on the other hand, argues that better English instruction will empower Indigenous peoples because English is required for employment. Another consideration is that English programs would be more cost-effective (Horsburgh 1999 online). Of course, there would be economic arguments for the abolition of the program, particularly in the current political climate of economic rationalism.

Hewitt (2000:116) regrets the abolition of Indigenous languages in Indigenous community schools because partnerships cannot be forged between the school and home

if first languages are not recognised and valued. Community involvement, particularly in remote areas, has been called for in educational programs. Schulz (1996:25) cites a school on Melville Island, where parents and the community are actively involved, as a positive example. Most of the students go on to attend secondary school in Darwin. Dhaykamalu (1999:68) also believes that parent and community involvement in schooling of the type exemplified by bilingual schooling is crucial. In a government context, Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs Dr David Kemp (quoted in 'Indigenous Education: Time to Move on' 2000:8) stated in 1999 that a plan of action for Indigenous education included forging "strong partnerships" between parents, students and community members. The question is whether the rhetoric will be translated into real and meaningful action. The dismantling of bilingual education in those schools that want it would appear to be a retrogressive step.

However, concerns have been raised about bilingual education and language maintenance. Not all Indigenous peoples or communities believe that Indigenous languages should be taught in schools. Henderson (1994:10) gives the example of the Pitjantjatjara of north-western South Australia, who decided that community members should teach Indigenous subjects and schools should teach non-Indigenous subjects. A further issue concerns the oral and written languages. Nakata (1995b:31) writes how models such as the French-Canadian bilingual model are seen as a success, demonstrating the ease with which children can learn a second language. However, an issue in the Torres Strait is that the first language is oral rather than written, which has implications in schooling where reading and writing are required.

Also at issue in the Torres Strait is the proliferation of different languages and dialects (Nakata 1995b:31). Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mer are the Torres Strait Islander languages, but Torres Strait Creole and English are also spoken throughout the islands (Bani 1998:49). The question here is what language would be the language of instruction in Torres Strait Islander schools (Nakata 1995b:31). This is also applicable to Aboriginal communities. McConaghy (2000a:11) has documented the effects on a community in Arnhemland in which twelve languages were spoken: one was chosen to be the basis of the bilingual program and eleven were not. These are complex issues with widespread ramifications.

An article in *The Australian* (Pryor 2001:13) stated that during the past eighteen months Thursday Island High School has acknowledged that English is a second language. Anita Claasz, a teacher at the school, was quoted as saying that the National Literacy Language Institute of Australia bandscales testing has shown outstanding results. Nakata (1995b:29-30), on the other hand, writes that not all Torres Strait Islanders are happy about the push to move away from English as the main language in schooling. He believes that a non-Indigenous education is necessary to better understand the issues concerning Torres Strait Islanders and enable them to work effectively to articulate their concerns in wider society.

While two way, Both Ways, bilingual and bicultural models have been espoused by various educators as solutions to the 'problems' in Indigenous education, they are also problematic. As McConaghy (2000a:119) notes, these models are the "products of both cultural essentialism and the construction of a 'two-race' binary", which serve to limit

the options and possibilities for Indigenous peoples. Other educators have argued for culturally relevant inclusions and additions within mainstream education.

Inclusions and Additions

Neuenfeldt (1998:203) argues that Australia has a “long history of the conscious exclusion of Indigenous presences, voices and themes”. Although the aim of a more inclusive curriculum is to acknowledge and include Indigenous knowledges, the provision of inclusionary projects or curricula should not be over-emphasised.

In discussing a Social Education curriculum, Nakata and Muspratt (1994:227-232) write that it is not enough that students explore Indigenous social organisations, cultures and languages, or celebrate Indigenous difference. It is not enough just to change curriculum content from “settlement” or “colonisation” to “invasion”. What students also need to understand is how politics and colonial practices have impacted and still impact on Indigenous lives. The Social Education curriculum needs to be critiqued otherwise dominant discourses will be perpetuated for students. For Nakata (1995a:48), those programs that purport to be culturally relevant “at best, become ‘add-ons’ to unchanged mainstream practices”.

Crowley’s (1993:36-43) concern about Aboriginal Studies courses is that they often unintentionally perpetuate the notion of Indigenous peoples as Other. She writes of a research project conducted in an Adelaide secondary school. The Aboriginal Studies course at the school called for Indigenous cultural maintenance and non-Indigenous cultural awareness; however, the content was uncontextualised and unrelated to the realities and complexities of Indigenous peoples in contemporary society. Further,

politics, economy, gender and racism were erased. What is required in Aboriginal Studies, she argues, is more analysis and examination. Crowley (1999:102-104) asserts that Australian colonialism relates to issues of adaptation, change and resistance as well as to issues of “dispossession, dislocation and genocide”. She questions whether programs such as Aboriginal Studies can successfully address such issues. Another issue, she adds, is that culture in Multicultural and Aboriginal Studies often celebrates rather than interrogates. McConaghy (2000a:181-182) argues that various celebrations of Indigenous culture in schools, “damper days”, merely re-enforce cultural stereotypes and do nothing to challenge dominant social practices.

Western Only Schooling

McConaghy (2000a:9-10) notes that there has been an either/or approach to Indigenous education, which is either Western only or a more inclusive education only, such as Both Ways. Many Indigenous parents desire a non-Indigenous or Western education for their children, believing that good educational outcomes are more important than culture and good educational outcomes require a good standard of English (McConaghy 1997a:132). The Review of the NATSIEP, on the other hand, criticised mainstreaming as being “destructive” (McConaghy 2000a:10).

Indigenous Standpoints

A constraint for Indigenous academics and educators is working within a Western framework (Nakata 1998a:4). Davis (1998:4) wants Indigenous knowledges to be “constructed, encoded, validated and legitimised within an Indigenous framework”. Nakata (1999:3) argues that only Indigenous peoples can do this and he urges Indigenous academics to articulate Indigenous standpoints on educational and academic

issues. Further, he suggests, they must not merely defend themselves as Other. Indigenous standpoints emerged, according to Nakata (1998a:4), because to understand and improve their position, Indigenous peoples “must first immerse ourselves in and understand the very systems of thought, ideas and knowledges that have been instrumental in producing our position”. Nakata (1999:3) argues that “we must give primacy to experiences in our lifeworlds as we articulate our position in relation to the so-called ‘mainstream’”. He hopes Indigenous standpoints on educational issues of concern to Indigenous students will result in more effective discussions with non-Indigenous academics and educators and have a positive impact on non-Indigenous educators who are working with Indigenous students.

Nakata (1999:3) was involved in developing the Multiliteracies Pedagogy, in which, importantly, there was Indigenous involvement in the initial stages rather than Indigenous discourses as an afterthought or addition. The Multiliteracies Pedagogy calls for a broader view of literacy because of the “multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today” (The New London Group 1996 online). A component in a theory of pedagogy in the multiliteracies project is Situated Practice, where students are immersed in practices based on their experiences. This makes learning more meaningful and relevant. Situated Practice “allows for the inclusion of Islander lifeworlds and experiences, thus continuing the strength of the current trends for a culturally inclusive curriculum [as well as recognising] the complexities of these lifeworlds and their endless and changing intersections” (Nakata 1999:3-4). The New London Group (1996 online) cautions, however, that Situated Practice should not be the “sole basis for pedagogy”.

While there are different models of incorporating Indigenous culture in education, McConaghy (2000a:14-15) notes that it is not fruitful to argue in “global and totalising terms” about the different models of education. Different approaches work at different times and in different contexts. What is needed, then, is a careful analysis of specific situations of Indigenous educational disadvantage. She argues that there may be times when cultural relevance is more effective and just and, conversely, times when mainstreaming is more efficient and just. This reading of specific situations, of the need for a historical and spatial basis to analysis and solutions, emerges from within a new approach to Indigenous education emerging out of postcolonial studies.

Issues of Colonialism and the Postcolonial Curriculum

The term postcolonialism has been used to describe the historical period of colonisers handing back colonised states to the original owners (Kumar 2000:82). However, the post in postcolonial does not signal an end to colonialism. Colonialism and its legacies are still much in evidence today and need to be interrogated (McConaghy 1998a:121). According to McConaghy (2000a:268), postcolonialism works “*against and beyond* colonialism”. Postcolonialism, then, is not about temporality, but about issues of power.

Postcolonialism involves notions of history, agency, representation, identity and discourse (Kumar 2000:82). These and other notions such as knowledges, places, practices and ideologies can challenge curriculum and pedagogy (Crowley 1999:101). Questions of listening, seeing, belonging and response are arguably also crucial to both postcolonialism and education. These questions importantly “involve contestation over issues of facticity and the kinds of histories and stories that are to be kept alive” and

may, moreover, “demand a new reciprocity of engagement about identity” (Rea & Crowley 1998:356). For Crowley (1999:103), there is a need to ask, in these postcolonial times, whose knowledges, experiences and histories are acknowledged and valued. According to Luke et al. (1993:142), in postcolonial discourse, texts which once spoke for and about Indigenous peoples now supposedly speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples and are also written by Indigenous peoples. Thus, they argue, the emphasis has “shifted from deliberate dismissal and omission to strategies for incorporation via representation”.

Crowley (1999:104-105) does not suggest that Indigenous histories today are missing or unacknowledged; rather, they do not occupy a central space. For Nakata (1993:53), colonial discourses and narratives are so pervasive the difficulty is discerning if Indigenous peoples are able to speak within them, outside of them or without them. Indigenous peoples were, and arguably still are, perceived as Other (Nakata 1995b:30). Many Indigenous peoples refuse to engage in postcolonial discussions because postcolonialism is perceived to be the “convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (Smith 1999:14).

In an Indigenous critique of postcolonialism, Rea (quoted in Rea & Crowley 1998:358) does not see postcolonialism as an opportunity to confront colonial issues, but as something that has “take[n] away the space that we needed to be creating and fighting with, which existed within colonial times”. She believes that postcolonialism signifies that she does not “exist”. How, she questions, can there be a postcolonial framework when the only history in Australia is a non-Indigenous history rather than Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories. Bobbi Sykes (quoted in Smith 1999:24), an Indigenous

activist, commented at a postcolonialism conference: “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” The issue remains, however, of finding spaces within which to critique oppressive regimes in education.

In this vein, Crowley (1999:100) calls for a “descriptive” rather than a “prescriptive” curriculum, which is “self-consciously aware of the ways in which it might be situated in these postcolonial times” and is “deeply mindful of colonial legacies and historical locations”. The education system is not immune to the wider social, political, economic and cultural impacts and, as Crowley (1999:101) asserts, it is “peopled through the legacies of colonialism”. Weenie (2000 online) argues that because colonialism still controls Indigenous peoples and their land, a full analysis of colonial practices and legacies that hinder marginalised groups from fully participating in society is critical in resisting colonialism. Power relations change over time and this allows spaces for resistance.

Supporting this notion, McCarthy (1998:155) argues that what must be addressed is the “contemporary reality of students’ lives in a postcolonial, globali[s]ed, market-driven world in which schooling is only one of numerous spaces available for the negotiation of both identity and culture”. What is also needed, according to McConaghy (1997b:62), is for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to work together to interrogate and disrupt today’s colonial practices. It is within this tradition that this thesis considers the significance of Torres Strait Islander dance and its potential as a site of postcolonial resistance.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL ISSUES IN DANCE AND THE CURRICULUM

This chapter considers the importance of dance in the curriculum. Specifically, this chapter explores the significance of Torres Strait Islander dance and its place in a postcolonial curriculum. Dance is more than a form of artistic expression and entertainment. Through dance, Indigenous peoples can voice, embody and enunciate social and political concerns.

Researchers such as Beckett (1987, 2001), Haddon (1893, 1901-35), Lawrence (1998a, 1998b), Mabo and Beckett (2000) and Mosby (2000) have documented Torres Strait Islander dance and music. In conducting anthropological research, Beckett observed dance and music as integral to Torres Strait Islanders' lives. Haddon was interested in Torres Strait Islander beliefs and practices and his reports detail Torres Strait Islander history, stories, languages, religion and cultural practices. Lawrence has documented dance and music in relation to Christianity. Mabo and Mosby are Torres Strait Islanders who have written detailed accounts of dance and dance artefacts. In his PhD thesis, York (1998) examines secular music (Island Song) and music making practices of the Yam Islanders, the social and cultural relationships between dance and music, and the importance of these practices in negotiating and maintaining cultural identity. Some more general research on dance in the curriculum includes Collins' MEd thesis (1995), *The Articulation and Creation of Power Relationships in a Primary Dance Education* and Garrett's MEd thesis (1993), *The Influence of an Educational Dance Program on*

Female Adolescent Self Esteem, Body Image and Physical Fitness. The latter found statistical evidence that dance is a “valid educational tool” and suggests a relationship between “expressive movement behaviour and self esteem”. According to Buckland (2001:1), the “recent shift of scholarly focus towards the body and performance has helped to raise the profile of dance as a significant academic site for cultural investigation”. These research findings suggest that dance requires more careful attention in relation to a Torres Strait Islander curriculum.

Dance in the Curriculum

Benefits of Dance

The Queensland *Health and Physical Education Years 1 to 10 Syllabus*, of which dance is one aspect, “recognises the significance of physical activity in the lives of individuals and groups in contemporary Australian society” (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1999:1). The Queensland *Dance: Senior Syllabus* states that dance can help students in attaining their “unique potential” and enhances their emotional, social, physical and intellectual development and expression. It also helps develop self-confidence and creative and problem-solving skills and the social skills that are essential for working individually and as part of a team (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998:1-2). In support of the approach in Queensland, Bell (2000:26) articulates a wide range of benefits of the performing arts:

They play an important role in developing the full range of human intelligence, in the enhancement of the understanding of self and others in our Australian multi-cultural context. They develop the ability to think and act creatively and innovatively, to educate our feelings and sensibilities, to develop physical, conceptual and perceptual skills, to foster higher level skills of analysis, problem solving, negotiation, self discipline, adaptability, teamwork and confident communication.

While these skills are not the sole province of the arts, it is suggested that they have a particular importance in the creative and performing arts, more so than other curriculum areas. These skills, moreover, are not confined to the arts or to the school context; rather, they relate to all aspects of a student's work and personal life (Bell 2000:26). It would appear, then, that dance would be of immense and undeniable benefit to most students. However, there are critical issues concerning the place of dance in the curriculum.

History of Dance in The Arts

In 1989, Allison (20-22) wrote that dance, unlike art, often did not have a distinct status in schooling and was often under the umbrella of other subjects such as physical education. Nonetheless, art, music, drama and dance did not enjoy the status and educational importance of subjects such as language, mathematics and science, particularly in times of economic difficulties. This, he argued, ignored the value of the arts and humanities both as a potential source of income and particularly for "cultural well-being". He also noted that the arts and dance as self-expression were not seen by some of those in power as a strong enough reason for their inclusion in the curriculum, particularly when taking the costs into account. Further, some arts educators expressed concerns with the visual and performing arts as being perceived centrally as forms of self-expression, calling for a broader concept and experience that incorporated response as well as production and performance.

Curriculum reforms in Australia from the late 1980s, however, have had an impact on dance. Dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts were nationally recognised in

1994 as key learning areas of the arts (McCormack 1997:9). Despite this recognition, the place of the performing arts in schools is a nebulous one.

Critical Issues in Dance Education

Bell (2000:26) notes that it is often difficult to receive much needed support for dance from other curriculum areas and from parents. Moreover, she argues that it is difficult for performing arts teachers to “impress others with the quality and integrity” of their work. Other problems of incorporating dance in the curriculum were articulated in a survey in 1997 of 138 primary and 30 secondary schools in New South Wales on issues and needs of teachers of dance in physical education (McCormack 1997:9). The difficulties in primary schools include finding spaces for dance within a full curriculum, lack of facilities and resources, and a lack of confidence amongst general primary teachers in teaching dance. Despite the recognition of the value of dance, it was found that pre-service training for teachers and more resources and facilities are needed if dance is to be of value and a worthwhile experience for students. In secondary schools, increased theory and assessment are concerns (McCormack 1997:9-13).

A concern is that dance is often included on an ad hoc and infrequent basis rather than as a “versatile, holistic and positive experience which is an integral and continuous part of the curriculum” (McCormack 1997:9). The study of schools in New South Wales showed that rather than more creative and modern dance, there is a “narrow and traditional” focus on aerobic, bush social and folk dance. Dance, moreover, is mostly experienced at a school rather than at a community or even state level. The latter would, importantly, imbue students with a greater appreciation of the role of dance outside the narrow focus and culture of the school. This appreciation could also be

achieved by utilising the expertise of dance companies and dance professionals (McCormack 1997:12-13).

McCormack (1997:9) observes that the establishment of performing arts high schools and schools of excellence and dance included as a subject in the higher school certificate or tertiary entrance level have enhanced its status and recognition. However, she questions whether dance should just be for the “elite, wealthy, gifted and talented student”. When dance is included in a school physical education class, she argues, all students have the opportunity to experience dance and movement. Koff (2000 online) goes further, believing that dance should be incorporated with other curriculum areas because it is integral to developing the “whole child” and can enhance learning and understanding. More than performance and entertainment, dance is movement; movement is a natural expression and something children learn and enjoy from a very early age. McCormack (1997:10) concurs, asserting that dance is central to physical education as it allows all students the opportunity to express themselves and enjoy movement. This factor should not be ignored by those desiring dance only in arts education. The concern for Koff (2000 online) is that the arts are considered as “expressions of extraordinary performance, rather than as media for richly expressed, ordinary exchanges between people and groups of people”. McCormack (1997:10) states that while dance as an academic subject has engendered debate, there is widespread agreement that dance has significant “aesthetic and utilitarian” benefits. In Australian secondary schools, National Profiles recognise dance as valuable in both physical and arts education.

While educators agree that movement enhances a child's development, dance education is not so well defined or explained and this can create a barrier to its support (McCormack 1997:9). According to Gard (2001:220-221), articulating only the "inherent value" of dance ignores the diverse outcomes of dance programs and how those outcomes can be achieved. He also suggests that if dance is seen merely as a physical activity, there is no reason for children to learn dance if they are involved in other sporting activities. Dance as physical activity is also pertinent to boys' involvement in education broadly, and dance specifically, as the following discussion suggests.

Boys and Dance

There has been much debate and attention given to boys' 'underachievement' in schools (McLean 1997:82). Keenan (1999:12) writes of teachers at a boys' school, De La Salle College in Malvern, Victoria, who have developed a dance course that integrates both classroom and elective programs. As well as being beneficial for boys for fitness and coordination, dance is also seen as a means of expression, which is of particular relevance for adolescent boys. According to the teachers at the school, the boys, particularly those who play sport, need little prompting to be involved in dance. Comments from students include: "It also helps with sport, particularly coordination. I play footy and basketball and it helps there but I also do karate and that helps in dance"; "It's just fun, especially when you are practising"; and "It really helps with fitness and I really like doing it." Dance can also be seen as 'cool'. According to a year 11 student: "The odd guy might give you a hard time about [dance], but once they see you doing it on stage and how cool it looks they shut up." Appealing to the physical or sporting aspect of dance is problematic, however. Gard (2001:218-220) explains that in an

attempt to attract more boys to dance, some dance educators emphasise the athleticism of dance or training for sport, but this assumes that all boys are athletic and ignores other non-athletic aspects of dance. Linking dance to sport like football privileges only sports-minded males and ignores the differences within boys. That is, not all boys enjoy sports.

Gard (2001:214) has concerns about the “wider tendency to see the protection and cultivation of hegemonic masculine norms of behaviour as paramount”. As he explains, “boy friendly” approaches to curriculum design privilege certain kinds of males. What is at issue is that the rejection of dance is not a problem for those boys who play sport. Rather, it is a problem for students who do dance or those who wish to dance, such as females and non-sporting males, or those most likely to be marginalised within schooling “movement cultures”. He is also concerned about the homophobic and sexist discourses attached to physical movement such as dance. Fitzclarence, Hickey and Matthews (1997:69), writing on the constructions of masculinity and the culture of sport, concur with this view of how some boys perceive dance. They questioned a boy on whether he had been involved in the Rock Eisteddfod and he answered: “No way, none of my friends have, its [sic] only for girls and poofs!” When asked what he and his friends did, he replied: “Footy!” This is contrary to the comments by boys at De La Salle College. The teachers believe this is because it is less difficult to interest boys in dance at an all boys’ school than at a co-educational school (Keenan 1999:12).

Gard (2001:221-222) does not want to see dance changed to “another ‘reflection-free zone’ in which the unexamined, self-defined ‘normality’ and ‘superiority’ of certain kinds of males is given free reign”. These males who dominate tend to be interested in

sport, heterosexual and white. He believes that dance can provide an opportunity to articulate and interrogate the sexist, homophobic and stereotypical connotations attached to it. Martino (1997) and McLean (1997) are among other authors who have concerns about the dominant forms of masculinity produced in schools. It is further argued that issues of class, ethnicity and sexual orientation need to be discussed when analysing boys' education (McLean 1997:86). McLean (1997:82) provides a scathing indictment of dominant males and their 'problems' in school from the viewpoint of those who have suffered from men's power: "There is nothing quite so offputting as listening to someone moan about how hard it is to be privileged." As Gard (2001:223) articulates, making dance more "boy friendly", "runs the serious risk of further alienating the large numbers of students who have found physical education all too 'boy friendly' in the past".

Clearly, the issues surrounding the role of dance in the curriculum are complex. These discussions of issues of normality and dominant forms of masculinity and the relationships between dance, curriculum and privilege are relevant for an analysis of Indigenous dance. Further, just as dance can allow an interrogation of sexism and homophobia, there is the possibility of Indigenous dance providing an opportunity to interrogate Aboriginalist representations. This is taken up further in a later section of this chapter.

Indigenous Dance, Artistic Expression and Resistance

Artistic expression such as dance can give Indigenous peoples "voice to social and political issues which speak to all people" (Bangarra Dance Theatre n.d. online). This is crucial as one consequence of globalisation is that Indigenous peoples worldwide need

to “fight harder and harder on an increasing number of fronts to secure their cultural survival and to find new means of asserting their rights and autonomy” (Djerrkura 2000:vi). Indigenous dance, then, is one means of allowing Indigenous peoples expression in a postcolonial and globalised society. According to Magowan (2000:309), Indigenous dance has not only become more popular as a performance, it is also a means of “expressing and asserting [I]ndigenous rights”.

Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world are also intent on reviving and maintaining cultural practices in the face of globalising influences of the West. In Ghana, in West Africa, ‘traditional’ drumming and dance are being replaced by disc jockeys and Western pop music. In response, Nil Tetteh, a Ghanaian musician, has invited participants from those very globalising countries to Ghana to learn to make and play drums to keep his country’s cultural practices alive (Aldred 2002:12). Tetteh (quoted in Aldred 2002:12) believes that Western involvement in African drumming and dance has had a positive impact: “For the people of my region to see Westerners coming to learn about their culture is a big deal. The people in my area are starting to realise how important their own music is.” He also advocates more research into and support for ‘traditional’ cultural practices. In North America, Native Americans had been loath to disclose their heritage because of racism and mistreatment, but now powwows, featuring song and dance, have signalled their “public reemergence” and defined their “collective identity to outsiders” (Goertzen 2001:68-71). Dance performances also “express American Indian reactions to sociopolitical and historical forces”, which is important given that some dances have been subjected to governmental prohibition (Kracht 1994 online). As Henry (2000 online) argues, people can “intervene in their own histories through performance”.

Resistance and agency by former colonised peoples are complex issues. Parry (1995:37-41) observes how some postcolonial writers talk of the “silent subaltern” while others talk of resistance. Slemon (1995:52) cautions that “resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local”, otherwise postcolonial work will merely “remain at best a description of global relations, and not a script for their change”. Dance thus emerges as a site of significant potential for Indigenous ‘voice’, resistance and agency.

Arts-Based Projects, Social Justice and Community Healing

Dance, music and art are utilised in many parts of the world in projects for people with behavioural, social, psychological or emotional issues. The damaging psychological, emotional and behavioural consequences of colonial policy and racist ideologies are documented in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Forced removal has had a profound and ongoing impact on the children and on their families, communities and later generations. The Report found that the children’s experiences can result in low educational outcomes and subsequent unemployment and poverty. This can then lead to destructive practices such as violence, self-harm, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families 1997:178).

In a report in *The Weekend Australian* (Walker 2001:17), Mathew Priestley, a 27 year old Aboriginal man, discusses how expressing his creativity through dancing, painting and writing turned him away from a life of drugs, alcohol and petty crime. Priestly went on to establish a business teaching arts to schoolchildren in rural communities and

currently is a violence prevention officer at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's family violence and legal support unit in Moree. Margaret Seares, ex-chairwoman of the Australia Council, was quoted in the report as saying that while arts projects are used in marginalised communities, prisons and hospitals and for treatment of depression, there is little research conducted on their short-term and long-term success. However, there is considerable evidence to suggest the social benefits of community arts projects. The report states that in the United Kingdom, a government unit for the arts and offenders found a significant reduction in offending behaviour during and after the implementation of an arts project.

Expression in the arts has also helped Leah Purcell, Indigenous actor, singer and writer, to deal with painful issues in her life. Feelings of bitterness and pain were expressed in the writing and performance of her play, *Box the Pony*. Purcell also wrote a song about the Stolen Generation, which, she says, her grandmother wrote through her. Her 'Aboriginality' is expressed in her performances (*Australian Story*, video recording, 2002). There is also considerable anecdotal evidence relating to the value of performance in Torres Strait Islander contexts. For example, a student with a perceived hearing and speech disability at Cowal Creek State Preschool Centre, situated on the tip of Cape York, did not communicate with the teacher or participate in group games. After dance was introduced into the school, and he was asked to play the Island drum in which he was skilled, he began dancing and communicating with the teacher and other students (Ernst 1987:5).

Dance as social healing can be seen in many other Indigenous contexts. In the South African music and dance production of *Umoja*, which means the spirit of togetherness

in Swahili, members of the cast include former 'street kids' and children who were abused and from broken homes (Lambert 2002 online). For dancers and creators Todd Twala and Thembi Nyandeni (cited in Chester 2002 online), dance and music can help develop self-esteem and dignity and take children away from a destructive life of crime, drugs and prostitution. Dance and music are seen as empowering children physically, emotionally and financially (Bodey 2002 online). In North America, powwows are vehicles for teaching Native American youth the dangers of practices such as drugs and alcohol and for adults in developing self-esteem and "intellectual engagement" they may not experience during their working week. Powwows also emphasise "spiritual health and community life" (Goertzen 2001:70). Such practices have important historical antecedents.

History of Torres Strait Islander Dance

Various writers have argued for the importance of dance to Torres Strait Islanders. The first Western researchers to record Torres Strait Islander music and dance belonged to the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition led by A.C. Haddon in the late nineteenth century. Much later, Beckett recorded cultural practices in cassette and booklet format while doing anthropological fieldwork in the Torres Strait between 1958 and 1961 (Haywood 2001:66). Beckett (2001:75) observed at the time that dance and music were important to Torres Strait Islanders. Although music and dance were not his field of expertise, he claims Torres Strait Islanders were happy for him to watch them, ask questions and record them, the latter not only because the tape recorder was a new and interesting technology, but also to preserve for the future some of the most important music.

Torres Strait Islanders' particular beliefs, values and practices are known as Island Custom (*Ailan Kastom*). *Ailan Kastom* gives Torres Strait Islanders their particular identity and provides a connection to their ancestors. Dance is an integral part of *Ailan Kastom* (Mabo & Beckett 2000:165). Williamson (1991:317) explains that *Ailan Kastom* continued uninterrupted in the Torres Strait as Torres Strait Islanders were not dispossessed of their land. Lawrence (1998a:52) adds that dance and music are central to Torres Strait Islanders both in the Torres Strait and on the mainland.

Torres Strait Islander dance and music have been recorded on film as well as tape. In 1898, the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition filmed a dance by men from the island of Mer. The film, *Malu-Bomai Ceremony at Kiam*, is possibly the world's first ethnographic film and thus historically extremely valuable (Lawrence 1998a:56). Frank Hurley, an Australian filmmaker, photographer, sound recordist and author, filmed dance as well as pearl shell diving, beche-de-mer fishing and dugong hunting during a visit to the Torres Strait on his way to film in Papua. His multi-media presentation (film, slides and live narration and music), *Pearls and Savages*, was shown at Sydney's Globe Theatre in 1921 (Haywood 2001:66-67). Haywood (2001:67) describes the film as a significant and valuable account, despite Hurley's "exploitative", "patronising" and "imperialist" tendencies. Hurley's racist discourse can be seen in the binaristic title of his presentation, *Pearls and Savages*. It can also be discerned in his 1921 article entitled *Wild Music Amid Moonlit Palms (Fandangos In The Forest)*, with narrative such as "natives dwell in happy contentment", "children of nature" and "lives are a glad round of melody and song – a holiday that endures a lifetime" (Haywood 2001:68-69). This depicts Torres Strait Islanders as 'Noble Savages' and belies the often harsh reality of their lives. Hurley's descriptions depict dance as exotic and strange: "a motley

squatting crowd awaits the dancers” and “the ballet was indeed a grotesque assemblage” with “strange ornate toys – clutched in either hand” (Haywood 2001:70).

Also of significance is Cecil Holmes’ 1960s film, *The Islanders*. Holmes had extensively filmed dancing on the islands of Erub and Mer, but during the editing process did not retain an uncut copy of the rushes and much of the historically important footage was lost (Beckett 2001:76). While dance and music have been recorded, albeit not extensively, much of it is men’s and there has been scant recording of women’s and children’s dances (Lawrence 1998a:56).

Beckett (2001:80) found a diversity of dance styles during his time in the Torres Strait between 1958 and 1961. These included ancient cult and war dances, the province only of men; Old Fashioned dance with the feather headdress (headdress now seen on the flag); and dances learned from Melanesian men from Rotuma who worked in the pearling industry in the second half of the nineteenth century. Also common were Island Dance (*Ailan Dans*); the waltz, a version of Western ballroom dancing; and hula, performed by women. He observed different dances, music and instruments for different social and cultural contexts. York (2000:344) has observed different dance styles relating to different areas and groups: Yam Islanders, for example, deem their dance movements to be “lighter and more graceful” than those of Mabuiag dancers. These differences signify a particular island’s identity. Nonetheless, despite these differences, *Ailan Dans* is known and performed throughout the region (Mabo & Beckett 2000:165).

Following their arrival in 1871, Pacific Island mission teachers prohibited former Torres Strait Islander dance and introduced their own. However, Torres Strait Islanders incorporated aspects of Pacific Island dance with Torres Strait dance to form *Ailan Dans* (York 2000:341). *Ailan Dans* accompaniment is provided by voice, hand-beaten Papuan drums and a bamboo or tin beaten with two sticks. Guitars provide accompaniment on the island of Boigu. Dancers perform in a stooped posture – though the posture on Saibai and Boigu is more erect and the movement is more hula style – with knees apart, head erect, elbows flexed and fists clenched. The dance involves stamping on alternate feet interspersed with double steps and jumps. Good dancers are noted for moving their head quickly and gracefully. The dancers march onto the dance arena in single file, led by two leaders (field bosses) and form ranks in front of the spectators. Coordination is an integral aspect of *Ailan Dans* (Mabo & Beckett 2000:165-166). *Ailan Dans* is performed in groups and thus is collective rather than individualistic, though there is room for individuals to show their expertise and personal identity (York 2000:342). Headdresses, masks, dance objects and dance ‘machines’ are important components of dance. Dance objects include hand-held rattles (koolap), bamboo clappers (marap), clubs and bows and arrows. Dance ‘machines’ are held by dancers and the design relates to specific songs and dances. Different dance ‘machines’ are held by male and female dancers (Mosby 1998:94-95). Although dancers can affect a personal style through personal decoration and performance, they must adhere to the conventions relating to specific dances (Mabo & Beckett 2000:165).

In dance performances, each team of dancers is implicitly competing with the other teams of dancers (Mabo & Beckett 2000:166). This competitive aspect of performance emerged following the arrival of missionaries to the Torres Strait. While ritual and

religious practices were forbidden by the missionaries, secular practices were condoned and dance became the predominant cultural practice. Inter-island wars were also prohibited by the missionaries, but Torres Strait Islanders were able to continue this in a new form; thus emerged dance competitions between islands and dance teams (Mosby 2000:172). From the 1920s, Torres Strait Islanders have “represented their mythical and legendary past in dance pageants, with warfare as a favourite theme” (Mabo & Beckett 2000:167). Saibai dancers have particularly excelled in these dance pageants since the 1950s. Dancers from Mer also perform dances originating from the pre-Christian ‘cult’ of Malu-Bomai. The shark headdresses and Bomai masks adorned with jawbones of war victims originally worn by Meriam dancers were destroyed soon after the missionaries’ arrival; today, they are made from cardboard or plywood. Meriam dancers perform Taibobo and Old Fashioned dance as well as Malu-Bomai and *Ailan Dans* (Mabo & Beckett 2000:167-168).

According to Lawrence (1998a:58), dance in the Torres Strait is performed for entertainment, competitions, feasts, celebrations and festivals such as the Coming of the Light, and tombstone unveilings or openings. Tombstone openings occur one or more years following a funeral. The grave is decorated, a new headstone is unveiled, hymns are sung and a feast follows. In Anglican celebrations, there is also *Ailan Dans*.

Torres Strait Islander Dance as Changing and Dynamic

Chapter 2 argued against Indigenous identities and cultural practices being essentialised and seen as static and unchanging. Torres Strait Islander cultural practices have always been subject to change and various outside influences. An event that greatly impacted on and influenced Torres Strait Islander cultural, social and religious life and practices

was the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1871, described as the Coming of the Light. Many cultural practices were forbidden and the missionaries established their own secular and sacred rituals and practices (Fuary 1993:172). Pacific Islanders also influenced Torres Strait Islander music, for example through the use of guitars and ukuleles (Jupp 2001:102). When the Anglican Church, formerly the Church of England, succeeded the London Missionary Society in the mid-1910s, however, Torres Strait Islander cultural practices were encouraged. Drums were played in church services, hymns sung in Torres Strait Islander languages, and feasts and dancing occurred in religious celebrations (Fuary 1993:170). As discussed earlier, Torres Strait Islanders combined aspects of Pacific Islander and Torres Strait Islander dance to form *Ailan Dans*.

The arrival of shellers and traders into the region in the 1800s also had an impact on Torres Strait Islanders (Fuary 1993:170). A recent influence has been the Pentecostal sects, which have prohibited secular dance performances (Lawrence 1998a:54). Torres Strait Islander music has in turn influenced Aborigines on Cape York Peninsula (Jupp 2001:102). As well as outside influences, there have also been inter-cultural influences. These include dances on various islands being influenced by events on other islands (Neuenfeldt & Mullins 2001:2). Anthropologist A.C. Haddon (1901:36-37 quoted in Neuenfeldt & Mullins 2001:2) described a dance on Mer in 1898:

Then a man blowing a whistle walked round and round and called out, 'twenty-five cents a ride', or something to that effect. Next a number of men ranged themselves in pairs, like spokes in a wheel radiating themselves from a hub of girls. The latter sang, and the men walked round and round the girls, gradually going faster and faster. This was in imitation of a merry-go-round which had paid a couple of visits to Thursday Island ... Some of the girls had covered their faces in white, and had painted a dab of red pigment of each check [sic], perhaps in imitation of the Japanese women of the settlement in Thursday Island, which goes by the name of 'Yokohama'.

Beckett (2001:77) notes how anthropologists talk of seeing the end of 'traditional' practices or lamenting Western influence on 'real culture', but argues that Torres Strait Islanders had contact with Papuans and Aborigines and perhaps Indonesians before Western contact, trading items such as songs, drums and dance ornaments. From the mid-nineteenth century, they had contact with southeast and east Asians. Torres Strait Islander cultural practices, therefore, were never static; rather, they have always been evolving. Nonetheless, Mabo and Beckett (2000:166-167) found that despite these influences and changes, older Torres Strait Islanders regard 'real' Torres Strait Islander dance as Old Fashioned dance, which was performed before the missionaries' arrival. This dance, rarely performed today in the Torres Strait, is considered the most difficult dance to perform. York (2000:344) found that elders desire to preserve and maintain Torres Strait Islander cultural practices against the threat of Western commercial and popular influences and are adamant that only 'traditional' owners perform Old Fashioned dance and music.

Magowan (2000:314) asserts that although Western society is comfortable with and proud of adapting, evolving and changing, it is not so comfortable with Indigenous cultural practices changing, tending to desire aspects of the 'traditional'. Turner (1994:135) agrees that non-Indigenous peoples frequently seek 'authenticity' in Indigenous performances. He argues that this essentialises Indigenous peoples, assumes non-Indigenous peoples should speak for Indigenous peoples and connotes the most important aspect of Indigenous performers is their 'Aboriginality'. The danger in discourses of 'authenticism' is the negative impact on Indigenous peoples socially, economically and politically (Smith, Burke & Ward 2000:9-10). It is Giurchescu's

(2001:110) opinion that dance is powerful because it “does not only allude to the changing world, but becomes an instrument of change”.

Ram (2000 online) also discusses how dominant groups expect Indigenous performers to adapt to non-Indigenous expectations as well as retain ‘authenticism’. She argues that when non-Indigenous students become students or apprentices of Indigenous peoples, however, they are “no longer offered easily digestible discursive statements about what the ‘meaning of the culture’ might be”. Non-Indigenous students who are serious about wanting to learn are subjected to strict criticism and encouragement in order for them to learn all the nuances of performance. There are, Ram (2000 online) argues, “criteria for virtuosity, appropriate ‘feeling’ and for the experience of a kind of ‘integrity’”. One non-Indigenous student was Tamisari (2000b online), who learnt dance from the Yolngu. She practised assiduously and, imbued with a sense of achievement and perceiving the dance to be simple, performed in public. She failed dismally and was subjected to laughter from the Yolngu. The Yolngu persevered in their teaching and Tamisari (2000b online) realised that participating in dance performance gave her an “empathic understanding of how knowledge associated with country is embodied and transferred in the performative act itself”.

Contemporary Indigenous Dance

Torres Strait Islanders are involved in dance theatres such as Bangarra in New South Wales and Tjapukai in Queensland. Bangarra Dance Theatre, a nationally and internationally acclaimed company whose members are both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal, has developed an innovative and distinctive combination of ‘traditional’ and contemporary dance and music. The dances reflect ‘traditional’ issues such as the land,

environment and peoples and contemporary social and political issues that Indigenous peoples face in wider society. The aims of the company include respecting and maintaining “artistic and cultural links with Australia’s [I]ndigenous peoples”, supporting artists in “innovative forms of artistic expression”, and being “cultural ambassadors” and “role models” (Bangarra Dance Theatre n.d. online).

Tjapukai Dance Theatre was established in 1987 and, like Bangarra, has performed for national and international tourists (Schalch n.d. online) and toured both nationally and internationally. Tjapukai Dance Theatre closed in mid-1996 and relocated from Kuranda to Cairns to become Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (Henry 2000 online). A Commonwealth Government National Tourism Strategy in the early 1990s mentioned the social and economic benefits that would accrue from performances of Indigenous cultural practices. The Strategy also mentioned that a 1990 survey found 49 percent of international tourists desired to experience Indigenous cultural practices, although only a small percentage did in fact do so (Kennedy 1992:14). While cultural practices are important – one dancer regards the theatre as a means of maintaining practices that are in threat of extinction – the theatre is business and as one of the non-Indigenous owners states:

And it is a successful business because that is its primary motivation – it was not formed as part of a land rights claim, or to raise the status of one clan or language group over another, or as a social experiment. It is a business dedicated to providing a quality tourism product to a dynamic industry. (Schalch n.d. online)

However, dance is more than tourism for the Djabugay dancers of Tjapukai, who consider themselves to be ambassadors for their peoples. They endeavour to resist management initiatives to make performances more “theatrically pleasing” to non-

Indigenous audiences, by changing the dances they were taught by elders and through the employment of other Aboriginal dancers (Henry 2000 online).

A criticism that has been directed at Indigenous dance theatres is commodification of Indigenous cultural expressions (Meekison 2000a:369). McConaghy (2000b online) argues that commodification can be either beneficial or have the “potential for exploitation and misappropriation”. She adds that celebrations of Indigenous cultural practices too often benefit non-Indigenous peoples rather than Indigenous peoples. In discussing the World Wide Web, she points out that most of the so-called Indigenous sites are non-Indigenous controlled and designed, specifically by young non-Indigenous males. Smith, Burke and Ward (2000:14) call for Indigenous images and representations to be conducted in such a way that Indigenous peoples are rewarded.

The danger in tourists viewing ‘traditional’ Indigenous dance and art in social and cultural isolation is that Indigenous peoples can be essentialised. Prince Philip, for example, when he visited Australia in 2002 asked whether Indigenous peoples still threw spears at each other. According to Wild (1992:11), although there is an undeniable economic benefit in performing for tourists, simplified tourist performances can lead to a further marginalisation of Indigenous peoples. Essentialism concerns have been directed at Bangarra. Although Bangarra’s production of *Ochres* in 1995 was a success, non-Indigenous critiques of the production served to “romanticis[e] Bangarra as an exotic company offering a peek at an ancient, reverential, and somehow more primal culture” (Meekison 2000a:368). Nonetheless, Meekison (2000a:369) asserts that Bangarra’s “political force is in the quality and excellence of its dance”.

Evaluating or critiquing Indigenous cultural and other representations is a vexed issue. It is problematic for critics to assess Indigenous work because of a lack of critical theory and understanding of the work (Langton 1993:23). In relation to Aboriginal paintings, Michaels (1994:142.3) notes the “curious fact that almost nothing of this work is ever designated ‘bad’ – a lacuna that would not seem to make it easy to sell anything as especially good, either”. Magowan (2000:316) writes how the Managing Director of Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, in a dispute over performance times and concomitant payment, argued that the performers should not be paid in accordance with other performers in the entertainment industry as their performance was a “cultural experience, not professional entertainment such as that presented at theme parks such as Movie World”.

It is Henry’s (2000 online) opinion that although tourist performances are mostly ignored by anthropologists because of their lack of ‘authenticity’, they are an “important means by which social and cultural structures are at one and the same time produced, reproduced and resisted”. For Meekison (2000b:118-119), performances can show the dynamic nature of cultural practices, the diversity of Indigenous societies, educate non-Indigenous peoples and provide role models. Henry (2000 online) notes the essentialism and hegemony attached to tourist performances, but believes that they constitute agency rather than essence:

Identities are not given but are made through social action, including dance performances, that is, by ‘bringing it out’. What the dancers recognise as being in themselves is not something given, not a fixed essence, but something embodied, and to bring it out requires agency.

Other Indigenous dance performances are less staged and more spontaneous. A powerful and spontaneous dance performance occurred when an Australian Indigenous

woman danced outside the High Court of Australia after the 1997 Wik decision, effectively transforming the dance arena into not just a legal building, but a “living, moving, ancestral arena” (Magowan 2000:308). According to Magowan (2000:312), the woman “inscribed her personal and political feelings into a movement sculpture that remoulded the space as [I]ndigenous history and politics in movement”. Dance, she argues, has “political potency”. Henry, Magowan and Murray (2000 online) concur, arguing that dance is not only an art form or commodity, but also a political product. An example of Indigenous peoples performing their rights was when Prime Minister John Howard participated in a Yolngu ceremony in 1997 (Magowan 2000:318). The Yolngu did not achieve their aims and Magowan (2000:318) suggests that “politicians might need to rethink the taken-for-granted epistemological grounds on which they expect to negotiate political issues when they are continually being repositioned within [I]ndigenous performative contexts”. Given this discussion of dance as a powerful political, social and cultural force, it could be argued that the term performing arts has too narrow a focus.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Indigenous peoples are using technology and the global stage to bring their visual and performing arts to world attention. Both Bangarra Dance Theatre and Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park make use of technology. Bangarra Dance Theatre (n.d. online) performs in both live and electronic media mediums. At Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (Henry 2000 online), a laser display is a major component of performances in the dance theatre. Whereas in the past such ‘non-traditional’ activities were charged with ‘inauthenticity’, today there is widespread public support for the use of new technologies. An article in *The Courier Mail* (Keane 2001:2), for example, discusses utilising music, broadcasting, cable television, the

Internet and broadband to promote Indigenous cultural practices globally. The article also discusses a report from the Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (CIRAC) at the Queensland University of Technology, funded by the Brisbane City Council, which found that Brisbane was imminently suitable to promote Indigenous owned and controlled “commercially viable cultural enterprises” through these mediums. These Indigenous enterprises include ‘traditional’ dance, publishing, theatre and performance, art, multi-media and music. The CIRAC report stated that business support is required for successful promotion and distribution of Indigenous work. What is also required is a move away from stereotypes of Indigenous peoples that portray them as being outside the sphere of the new technologies. McConaghy (2000b online) further calls for an analysis of new technologies to determine whether they are sites for disruption or reproduction of colonial structures and practices.

The previous discussion reveals the complexities involved in contemporary Indigenous dance. The issues surrounding commodification, evaluation of Indigenous cultural expression, essentialism, new technologies and the potential of dance as a political force are relevant to a critical discussion of Torres Strait Islander dance in educational contexts.

Torres Strait Islander Dance in Education: Critical Issues

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are complex issues involved in thinking about the place of dance in the curriculum. Similarly, the role and place of Torres Strait Islander dance in education requires analysis. Linked to this are broader issues around the place of culture in education, discussed in Chapter 2. There is considerable

evidence to suggest that there is strong support amongst educators and Torres Strait Islander community members to maintain and revive cultural practices.

For example, one initiative was the joint New South Wales Board of Studies and the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) program in 2001 for cultural elders to teach Year 9 and 10 students at schools in New South Wales. The course aimed to maintain cultural practices in danger of being lost. The high school students attended the Sydney-based NAISDA College to learn 'traditional' dance from elders from various communities. A Torres Strait Islander elder currently teaching dance at NAISDA College has been encouraging students to become "cultural custodians" and teach their skills to future dancers. It is a concern of NAISDA that younger children in various communities lack the desire to perform Indigenous dance (Albert 2000:9).

Although NAISDA has been a success and there has been a demand for the disciplined and trained NAISDA dancers, at its inception, government funding was difficult to obtain as dance was considered a recreational pursuit rather than an employment skill (Johnson 2000:365-366). NAISDA was in danger of closure in 2002 over problems with the extension of its lease with the New South Wales Government ('NAISDA Faces Closure' 2002:6). Fortunately, the issue was resolved and NAISDA has continued operating. Some successful performers who have graduated from NAISDA include Torres Strait Islander singer Christine Anu and Bangarra Dance Theatre artistic director Stephen Page (Albert 2000:9). There are Indigenous broadcasting programs and organisations as well as opportunities for dancers to perform at festivals, on tours,

including overseas, and at events such as the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Jupp 2001:108), where they featured prominently in the opening and closing ceremonies.

In addition, the 1999 World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education held in Hawaii focused on the theme of cultural survival as well as educational success. This was deemed to be achievable through the inclusion of 'traditional' values and beliefs in the educational context. Ten students from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait attended the conference and performed 'traditional' dance for conference members (Thursday Island State High School n.d. online).

One arena in which Torres Strait Islander students can express themselves in dance is the Croc Eisteddfod. Issues of importance to young Indigenous peoples such as "reconciliation, racial tension, Australian history, unity and celebration" can be acted out in the Croc Eisteddfod performance (Condie 2000:27). The Croc Festival, of which the Croc Eisteddfod is a part, involves the areas of education, health, employment, reconciliation, the arts and community engagement. Such events aim to give students access to the performing and visual arts and to engender skills in choreography, costumes, dance, production and performance (Indigenous Festivals of Australia 2001). Respecting and celebrating cultural practices is a primary aspect of the Croc Festival (Condie 2000:27). The first Croc Festival was held in Weipa in far North Queensland in 1998. Other remote and regional areas embraced the Croc Festival from 1999. The Croc Eisteddfod is the "young cousin of the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge" (Allard et al. 2001:1). Like the Rock Eisteddfod, it involves students performing dance to music with a specific theme and has a focus on students enjoying themselves in a drug and alcohol free environment. Unlike the Rock Eisteddfod, however, the Croc Eisteddfod is not

competitive; rather, it involves “whole communities in intense forms of cooperation and interaction” (Allard et al. 2001:1-2).

The Croc Festival attracts large numbers. Indigenous Festivals of Australia (2001) has documented that more than 5300 students from 135 schools participated in Croc Festivals at Thursday Island, Tom Price, Port Augusta, Kununurra and Moree in 2001. At the Thursday Island Croc Festival, all schools in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Education District participated in addition to schools from the Gulf of Carpentaria, Palm Island and Daru Island, Papua New Guinea. One of the activities at the Thursday Island Croc Festival was a NAISDA dance workshop. Research on the Thursday Island festival suggests enhanced relationships, self-esteem, attendance, literacy, communication, arts related skills and community involvement from participation in the Croc Festival. The following is a comment recorded as being from a member of a Thursday Island school: “Arts are often left behind in the push for better literacy and numeracy standards. Performance and self-confidence help create a stronger self. A self that it [sic] better equipped for all of life’s challenges” (Indigenous Festivals of Australia 2001).

Enhancing relationships between school and community (articulated in the Croc Festival) and a wish to include cultural practices impelled a teacher at Cowal Creek State Preschool Centre on Cape York to bring in community members and assistant teachers to teach the preschoolers music and dance. The resultant “bridge between home and school” forged by dance led to improved attendance at school. Dance was also included in other curriculum areas, for example making books about dancing (Ernst 1987:5).

According to Hewitt (2000:112-113), the focus in schools is largely on facts and vocational education rather than on the creative and performing arts, which are “creative pursuits that have been relegated to a low status in our utilitarian approach to learning”. He writes of a teacher education course for mature-age Indigenous students at the Australian Catholic University (c.1990) that aimed to “respect the culture” of the students. Students undertook most of their studies in their own communities. Dance, music and art were integral components of the course, designed to ease the students’ transition into Western education. Hewitt, however, talks of ‘traditional culture’ and ‘traditional’ environment in his writing, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is problematic. Further, he does not disclose whether research was undertaken into the success or otherwise of the course.

This thesis argues that dance has the potential to critique and interrogate Aboriginalist representations. Chapter 2 discussed how, in Aboriginalism, Indigenous peoples are researched, spoken about and for, represented as Other and stereotyped, and how their voices and representations are largely ignored. Mackinlay (2001:14-15), who teaches the subject Indigenous Women’s Music and Dance at the University of Queensland, writes of the value of learning through performing and participatory experience in schooling. Students learn dance and music from Indigenous custodians who possess the status and authority to impart particular knowledges of dance and music to the students. These students gain a perception of Indigenous cultural practices when they observe, participate and share performances with Indigenous custodians. Edwards (1996 cited in Wemyss 1999:30) concurs, writing of an American study that found Indigenous guest teachers effectively challenge stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples held by non-

Indigenous peoples. Others, such as Ellis (1992:162), argue that funding must be made available to appoint 'traditional' performers to teach.

Mackinlay (2001:15-16) says her subject aims to allow students to "experience the diversity of Indigenous women's performance practice" and gain an understanding of being "Indigenous, woman and performer". The subject's focus on participatory experience means students are not passive learners, but need to engage actively in what is often an unfamiliar context. Giving Indigenous women 'voice', she hopes, will enable an interrogation of Aboriginalist and colonial representations that have worked to elide Indigenous voices. Mackinlay (2001:20) further argues that performative pedagogy, while it has limitations, is a way of "critically engaging with and deconstructing the social, political and ethical dimensions of power and knowledge".

There are issues inherent in a non-Indigenous person teaching Indigenous knowledges within a dominant non-Indigenous framework. Mackinlay (1998:24-25) explains that because issues of power, domination and subordination are involved in any teaching, she relays only the knowledges that Indigenous peoples have given her permission to use. She also endeavours to encourage her students to challenge dominant discourses. Another issue, Wemyss (1999:29) argues, is misrepresentation if teachers are unaware of the cultural contexts of knowledges and the importance of acknowledging Western and Indigenous frameworks and teaching and learning styles. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, there needs to be a cognisance of the diversity within and between Indigenous peoples and the problems associated with a universal Indigenous learning style.

Dance and the Postcolonial Curriculum

Hall (1991:34) talks of an era of “profound cultural revolution”, which has emerged as a “consequence of the margins coming into representation” through the visual and performing arts, politics and social life. This struggle of the marginalised to represent themselves and not have others represent them has, he writes, been a positive experience for everyone. According to Henry, Magowan and Murray (2000 online), dance is important in postcolonial society as it is where “cultural and social identities are being performed, contested, constructed and/or reformulated”.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the interconnection between culture and schools is often not critiqued. Culture is seen as a narrow representation, relative only to particular groups or ‘races’ or ‘ethnicity’. What is ignored is the role of schools and education in constructing culture and as sites of cultural expression. The visual and performing arts, however, “provide material entry into dialogue and representation just as they provide a site of engagement with the tensions of postcolonialism and the postcolonial” (Rea & Crowley 1998:355-356).

Indigenous visual and performing artists are interrogating colonial representations. Postcolonial questions of identity and history are integral to the work of Rea, a digital artist. Rea’s work incorporates “intervention and reinterpretation of colonial art and its representations of Indigenous peoples, physical geography and history” (Rea & Crowley 1998:356). Rea and Crowley (1998:356) argue that “‘real listening’, ‘engagement’ and ‘making art matter’ are critical to the shape that a postcolonial pedagogy might take”. It is crucial to not only view art, but also to interrogate and engage with it.

It is in such a context of beginning to re-imagine the postcolonial curriculum in Torres Strait Islander education that the significance of dance emerges. This chapter has explored critical issues in dance and the curriculum with specific attention to Torres Strait Islander dance. The following chapter looks at crucial methodological issues inherent in Indigenous educational research: the emergence of the Indigenous 'voice'; representation debates; and ethical issues involved in conducting research in Indigenous communities.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCHING TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DANCE: CRITICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Australian Indigenous peoples are arguably the world's most researched peoples. Rea (cited in Rea & Crowley 1998:357) questions why Indigenous peoples are continually being investigated and interrogated. Those who have conducted research include anthropologists, sociologists, criminologists and historians (Huggins 1994:76). As Smith (1999:61) observes, in the past Indigenous peoples have been the "objects of research", lacking a 'voice' or contribution towards research. Representations of Indigenous peoples have also come from missionaries and administrators who, following colonisation, described Indigenous peoples as 'primitive', based on their own perspectives and ideologies as Christians (Vidich & Lyman 2000:41). Now, however, Indigenous peoples such as academics and writers and visual and performing artists are articulating their concerns and interrogating racist and stereotypical representations.

Given this, it has been vital, wherever possible in this research, that Torres Strait Islander dance be researched from Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Although this has been my intention here, my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher must be considered as a limitation in doing so. However, it is also important that non-Indigenous educators are open to learning and listening and we involve ourselves in, rather than absolve ourselves from, the work of structural reforms and strategic interventions.

Colonialism and 'Voice'

In the past, Indigenous voices were elided by the dominant voices of researchers such as anthropologists. As Moreton-Robinson (1998:278) asserts, Indigenous peoples have neither controlled research nor have they been the audience of research. Anthropology has also been problematic because it has focused on 'traditional' society rather than the continuing effects of colonialism. Moreton-Robinson (2000:75) is critical of the "'traditional' versus 'contemporary'" binary opposition and discourses of 'authenticism' in anthropological research, adding that anthropological fieldwork is "premised on many exclusions, silences and absences". The problem of the 'authentic voice' can be seen in a writer's description of Eve Fesl as not being an 'authentic' Indigenous person because she did not articulate the Indigenous concerns that he deemed important (McConaghy 2000a:98-99). It is Cowlishaw's (1992:20) opinion, however, that the "objects of earlier analysis have become speaking subjects: Aboriginal authors now provide a powerful challenge to the writings of the old 'experts'". Attwood (1992:xiv) concurs, suggesting that the emergence of the Indigenous 'voice' has led to non-Indigenous researchers working within an Indigenous framework. In addition, Neuenfeldt (1998:203) notes that the elision of Indigenous voices has been so pervasive until recently that "even a whisper has power to sound silences".

It is important to recognise, however, that there is not one Indigenous 'voice', but many voices. 'Voice', important and necessary to many Indigenous peoples, is a complex issue because it can be "invoked to link representation and identity in reductionist terms" (McConaghy 2000a:24). McConaghy (2000a:215) cautions that celebrating Indigenous 'voice' "masks the presence of conservative and racist voices which

frequently continue unchecked". Indigenous 'voice', then, needs to be critically analysed. It may be heard, but what needs to be looked at is whether it has resulted in any significant structural changes. As McConaghy (2000b online) asserts, Indigenous voices on their own cannot change social structures. Ultimately, changes to dominant social practices are required.

Representation Debates

A crucial issue today is who can speak and for whom. Too often, non-Indigenous peoples have spoken for and about Indigenous peoples. Representation is a concern in postcolonial, feminist and class studies and, importantly, for Indigenous peoples. There are questions of "silence and invisibility" and how "would one *want* to be heard or visible [or] want to emerge from Aboriginal discourses" (Muecke 1992:32). Smith (1999:150) argues that being able to represent oneself is a basic human right, but one that historically has been denied Indigenous peoples. Despite this, she adds, Indigenous peoples have sought to represent themselves since colonisation.

Nakata (1993:59-60), a Torres Strait Islander academic, writes of the "strange sensation" when reading representations of Torres Strait Islanders. He says that from the first anthropological expedition by A.C. Haddon in the 1880s (the six volume *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, 1901-1935* is still an important reference for researchers today), Torres Strait Islanders have been named and described by so-called 'experts'. Haddon was interested in studying Torres Strait Islanders because they were "approachable, cooperative, intelligent and able to be communicated with" (Nakata 1998a:7). However, Haddon was working under preconceived anthropological assumptions of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples

were perceived to be 'primitive' and researchers studied them with this erroneous, yet powerful, assumption firmly in place. The unfortunate consequence is these narratives have been embedded in education policies and bureaucratic structures, which then serve to disadvantage Indigenous peoples.

Research in the past has tended to privilege and reproduce Western knowledges and theories and ignore Indigenous knowledges. Arising out of Indigenous and postcolonial critiques of this tendency is the complex issue of whether non-Indigenous researchers can conduct Indigenous research (Smith 1999:183-184). According to Nakata (1995b:29), much of the work on Indigenous education has done little to enhance educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples. As Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999:2) writes, Indigenous peoples have their own stories to tell and those stories question Western knowledges, ideals and ideologies embedded in research. In speaking about Indigenous women, Moreton-Robinson (2000:19) asserts that they see themselves and their experiences differently from non-Indigenous women, in that non-Indigenous women are "impersonal, individualistic and egocentric", whereas Indigenous women are "holistic and collective in nature". As discussed in Chapter 2, however, binary oppositions such as these are problematic. Leaving aside the essentialism in such an argument, Moreton-Robinson (2000:151) adds that non-Indigenous feminists and Indigenous women "speak from different cultural standpoints, histories and material conditions". Nakata (1998b:23) writes that Indigenous peoples know best Indigenous experiences and difficulties and this can be different from how non-Indigenous peoples see them, but, in articulating their own viewpoints, discourses and solutions, Indigenous peoples must "first understand how others understand our position".

Issues of representation can be seen in feminist debates. Indigenous women are concerned about non-Indigenous feminists speaking for and about them and, from the 1970s, have sought to articulate their own particular concerns, based on their own particular experiences (Mackinlay 1998:21). Huggins (1994:75) wants non-Indigenous feminists to understand Indigenous women's "politics of representation", in that Indigenous women desire to choose their own representatives and want the "group cohesiveness and communal nature of relationships inherent in Aboriginal society" to be acknowledged. Huggins (1994:74-76) is also critical of those non-Indigenous feminists who believe that they are "experts on *all* women" and those who support non-Indigenous 'experts' on Indigenous matters, thus "maintaining their role of misinterpreting and misappropriating Aboriginal women's culture and history and undermining their politics".

A further concern is that some Indigenous women are privileged over others. Pettman (1992:128) writes that not all Indigenous women, for example, are invited to participate in conferences organised by non-Indigenous women. Indigenous representation, she says, is limited to a few Indigenous women who are deemed suitable. According to Huggins (1994:75), those Indigenous women are deemed suitable as they are uncritical of non-Indigenous feminist ideology, which serves to reinforce non-Indigenous domination and superiority. If Indigenous women are critical of non-Indigenous women or fail to meet non-Indigenous expectations, they are dismissed as angry, their credibility is questioned, or they are not invited to further conferences (Pettman 1992:128).

All of this suggests that the politics of representation is inherently complex and problematic. Hence, Attwood (1992:xii) poses the question:

Is it possible to have any worthwhile non-Aboriginal knowledge about Aborigines, or is it inherently flawed, either because of the political – that is colonial – circumstances in which it was created, or because of epistemological considerations associated with representation; all production of knowledge about the other involves an act of translation which distorts the lived experience and world view of that other, and, at worse, such accounts barely refer to the object of inquiry.

Attwood (1992:xii-xiii) observes that while it is agreed that knowledges about Indigenous peoples are predicated on a Western framework, this does mean that non-Indigenous peoples cannot know anything about Indigenous peoples, or that Indigenous peoples will produce better knowledges. He adds that believing only Indigenous peoples can write or speak about Indigenous issues can perpetuate the essentialism and binary oppositions of Aboriginalism. Others share his concerns. For Langton (1993:27), the belief that Indigenous representations would necessarily be better than non-Indigenous representations is naïve. It is not only naïve, she argues, it also has racist connotations as it essentialises Indigenous peoples, assumes mutual understanding and ignores the diversity within Indigenous society. What it also assumes, Langton (1993:27) asserts, is that there is a “‘right’ way to be Aboriginal” and that only Indigenous peoples can produce a “‘true’ representation of ‘Aboriginality’”.

Another writer who has commented on the complexities of Indigenous representation is hooks. hooks (1989:47), in commenting on white women who feel that it is inappropriate for them to comment on black women’s work, argues that such a view intimates that “women of colo[u]r represent this group whose experiences and whose writing is so removed from that of white women that they cannot address such work

critically and analytically”. Further, like Langton, she argues that such perceptions reinforce racism. hooks (1989:47-48) believes that it is preferable for white women to comment on black women’s work and preface their comments: “As a white women reading ..., I was ...” She is not concerned about white women writing about black women; rather, her concern is when the writing is portrayed as authoritative. While she does not agree that only black women should articulate and write about black issues and experiences, hooks is adamant that black women’s work is valued and, consequently, they are motivated to have their voices heard. Similarly, in relation to feminist research, Smith (1999:187) notes that it was once argued only women could know and thus write about women. However, issues of gender in research are no longer considered the sole province of women. In summing up her arguments, hooks (1989:47) gives an example of an Ernest Hemingway novel, stressing that she does not need to be a male to have an understanding, nor does she need to study the novel with only white males. While her understanding and interpretations may differ from a white man’s, they are, nonetheless, valuable.

Another concern is ethics and protocols. McConaghy (2000a:7) argues that while ethics and protocols are important in Indigenous research, they are problematic because “conventions about speaking positions may lead to an atrophication of ideas, a reluctance to engage in critical thinking and the reproduction of hierarchical structures and oppressive systems within education”. The issues for a non-Indigenous woman researching *Ailan Dans* and the curriculum are thus fraught.

Indigenous Standpoints

The challenge for Indigenous educators and academics is that they are required to work within the constraints of a Western framework. One answer to the dilemmas arising from this is “intellectual separatism”, which is the “full and separate development of Indigenous knowledge and control over its production” (Nakata 1998a:4). Nakata (1998a:5) is not advocating “intellectual separatism” and nor is he critical of anthropologists who have conducted research in the Torres Strait or of their research; what he is critical of is the “taken-for-granted practices which emerge in the processes through which we form knowledges about ourselves”. What needs to occur, Nakata (1998b:23) suggests, are more effective discussions and collaboration between Torres Strait Islanders and academics, governmental bodies, teachers, community members and policy makers. He wants Indigenous peoples to be actively involved in knowledge production and seeking ways to solve their own problems. McConaghy (2000a:212-213) cautions, however, that collaboration does not necessarily lead to benefits for Indigenous peoples. The power to make decisions still frequently lies with non-Indigenous peoples and, moreover, there are the complex questions of appropriation and exploitation that beset collaborative relations.

One institution that has considered the issues of control of research is the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The Institute, which originally constituted a non-Indigenous organisation seeking to “preserve a record of a dying culture”, now has Indigenous peoples on the Council and Committees and receiving research grants, conducting research, producing papers and developing policy. The focus of the Institute has also changed from anthropological to historical, in that it is not solely focused on ‘traditional’ society as in the past, but on Indigenous

peoples' places throughout colonial history (Wild 1992:9). However, as the Institute is still dominated by non-Indigenous staff, it is debatable how much control lies in the hands of Indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, the Institute's protocols for conducting research with and for Indigenous Australians are an essential research guide. Although there is still a gap between the thinking around representation issues and intellectual property rights and the protocols, much has been done in recent years to make such issues more transparent and explicit in Indigenous research.

Representation and the Visual and Performing Arts

Representation is important to Indigenous visual and performing artists. Langton (1993:7) calls for an "anti-colonialist cultural criticism of representation and visual artforms". Self-representation by Indigenous performing and visual artists is about "countering the dominant society's image of [I]ndigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems" (Smith 1999:151). Dance, music and art were an integral part of 'traditional' Indigenous peoples' lives and Indigenous peoples' involvement in the visual and performing arts today is clearly indicative of their continuing value. Many of the representations have been racist and derogatory and Indigenous peoples are now seeking to control representations of themselves (Langton 1993:9). Langton (1993:10) argues, however, that this control is tantamount to censorship and that such censorship is not tenable; self-representation and the "power of aesthetic and intellectual statements" are required. She adds that these statements, which are now being articulated by Indigenous visual and performing artists, can interrogate racist and stereotypical representations.

One such artist is Bangarra Dance Theatre's David Page, who is both an artist and an entertainer. He sees himself as an Indigenous role model and wants non-Indigenous peoples to "understand the pain, the difficulties, the realities of being an Indigenous Australian" (Page 1999:105). Page (1999:106) asserts that Indigenous peoples "must be more than an artefact, a tourist attraction, a smoke screen covering the truth of our people's existence". Indigenous dance and music, he believes, are the best means to bring this to a world audience. Henry, Magowan and Murray (2000 online) argue that dance is about "power in a most Foucauldian manner – the productive, creative and discursive flows and networks through and around bodies which simultaneously privilege and marginalise discourses of being, relating and meaning". This is relevant in education as issues of identities, knowledges and power are embedded in various texts in schools and thus require careful analysis (Luke 1999:161).

In relation to Indigenous music, research has been conducted predominantly by non-Indigenous researchers on 'traditional' music (Newsome 1999:95). Newsome (1999:95-96) writes of ethnomusicologist and educator Catherine J. Ellis, who recorded hymns and shearing shed songs sung by Indigenous peoples only out of "politeness, waiting always for the miracle of the 'real' performance". Ellis' dismissal of these contemporary forms of music and her privileging of the 'traditional' was because of "cultural prejudice", though later she realised their value. Indigenous artists today still struggle against discourses of 'authenticism' and what is valued.

An interesting question is who owns knowledges and performances. This question of ownership can be seen in copyright issues surrounding a 1996 Sydney production called *Drums of Mer* by the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre and Torres Strait Islander

singer Christine Anu. The production was based on Ion L. Idriess' 1933 novel of the same name. Idriess' novel was based on Torres Strait Islander legends, but copyright was held by the Idriess estate. Therefore, ironically, the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre had to acknowledge the estate as legal owners of materials that had been collected from the Torres Strait in the 1920s and 1930s, materials that arguably are owned by Torres Strait Islanders (Dixon 2001:99-100). Dixon (2001:100-101) regards this as a clear example of on-going colonialism, adding that "colonial texts are a form of plagiarism, literally a 'kidnapping' of [I]ndigenous narrative materials, whose meanings are then altered to reflect the interests of their captors". There are thus complex legal and ethical issues around the slippage from research to appropriation.

Problems of the 'White' Gaze

The non-Indigenous or 'white' gaze on Indigenous 'objects' is an important aspect to consider in research. According to Moreton-Robinson (2000:1), non-Indigenous Australians have come to "'know' the 'Indigenous woman' from the gaze of many, including the diaries of explorers, the photographs of philanthropists, the testimony of white state officials, the sexual bravado of white men and the ethnographies of anthropologists". Anthropologists are still regarded as 'experts' on Indigenous peoples and it is these anthropologists who are particularly criticised by Indigenous peoples, for their gaze has "collected, classified and represented other cultures" (Smith 1999:67).

Kameniar (1999:112-116) discusses the 'white' gaze in relation to school excursions, suggesting that excursions to cultural sites, instead of educating students in positive ways about cultures and interrogating racism, can be implicit in perpetuating racist stereotypes. She writes of a non-denominational Christian school's visit to a Buddhist

temple and a later conversation between the teacher and her students. In the discussion on Buddhism, the teacher was unable to see past the binaries of “Christianity and Buddhism, sameness and difference” and the Western tendency to exoticism and Othering. Kameniar (1999:120) argues that the teacher did not interrogate being Western and non-Indigenous; they were a “‘given’, buried beneath an assumed but unarticulated understanding she shared with her students”. Such issues are significant in relation to Torres Strait Islander education and the work of non-Indigenous teachers.

The ‘white’ gaze can be seen in forms of culturalism. Culturalism, according to Crowley (1993:35), may be explained as “methods of thinking and reasoning about cultural relations and processes and is characterised by a reliance on anthropological usage of culture as a ‘way of life’”. She further explains that culture was perceived to be a non-racist alternative to ‘race’ and biological determinants of difference; however, a focus on culture, like ‘race’, requires forms of Othering and, moreover, fails to take into account issues of power. The concern with cultures and cultural differences in education, McConaghy (1998b:345) notes, is that they have primacy over curriculum, pedagogical and other educational issues. She also argues that the cultures presented are “not cultures as lived, but rather the cultures as represented in texts”. Denzin and Lincoln (2000a:2), in discussing early research, observe that colonial and postcolonial histories are only possible because of the “investigative mentality that turned the dark-skinned other into the object of the ethnographer’s gaze”. Some of the most important contributions on the problems of appropriation and objectification in research have emerged from within feminist critiques.

Feminist Research: Tensions and Traditions

In early research on Indigenous peoples, men's lives were considered to be pivotal to the social structure and women's lives secondary (Mackinlay 1998:20). This can be seen in relation to Torres Strait Islander cultural practices discussed in Chapter 3, in that there has been little recording of Torres Strait Islander women's and children's dances.

Mackinlay (1998:20) writes that:

Patriarchal superiority, gender bias and colonialism were but some of the cultural baggage carried by male observers and have often resulted in the presentation of an outsider's perspective which blinds the researcher and the reader to the realities of Indigenous cultures.

The predominance of male anthropologists and their focus on Indigenous males could be argued as working to reinforce a necessary relationship between patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism (McConaghy 2000a:117). Feminist and postcolonial theories, however, question the "traditional logic of the heterosexual, narrative ethnographic text that reflexively positions the ethnographer's gender-neutral (or masculine) self within a realist story" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b:xvi). Research on Indigenous women, nonetheless, is fraught as there is no definitive account of what were women's and men's roles and status in 'traditional' Indigenous society – whether equal, complementary, subordinate or dominated (Mackinlay 1998:20). In addition, the linking of anti-patriarchal critiques with research on the experiences of Indigenous women is also fraught. Some Indigenous women are critical of the discourses of 'brutality' attached to Indigenous men (Reed 2002:22), arguing for oppression to be best understood on racial rather than gendered axes.

From the 1960s, Mackinlay (1998:20-21) writes, there have been attempts by women to address the domination of research by and about men. However, she argues that non-

Indigenous feminists' error has been in universalising the category of 'woman', in assuming that non-Indigenous women's concerns are those of Indigenous women. In addition, Indigenous women's concerns have been framed within a Western framework. According to Moreton-Robinson (2000:xvii), "women of colour, African American and lesbian feminists" have criticised the "homogeneity of the category 'woman'". Another issue, Huggins (1994:76) argues, is just as non-Indigenous male researchers have worked under the constraints of their own gender biases, so too have non-Indigenous female researchers worked under particular constraints relating to their own and Indigenous "cultures". Non-Indigenous feminism has been criticised by Indigenous women for "conforming to some very fundamental Western European world views, value systems and attitudes towards the Other" (Smith 1999:43). As Weenie (2000 online) asserts, non-Indigenous women cannot fully understand or appreciate Indigenous women's experiences because they come from a "relatively privileged position".

Some Indigenous women have criticised non-Indigenous feminism as irrelevant, arguing for the primacy of racism rather than sexism as social concern (Mackinlay 1998:22). According to Huggins (1994:71), early non-Indigenous feminists merely asked Indigenous women to join the feminist movement, with scant acknowledgement of the impact of racism on Indigenous women's and men's lives. Australian colonialism was predicated on racist ideologies and they still impact negatively on Indigenous peoples' lives. Indigenous women, Huggins (1994:70) claims, are stereotypically described in racist terms such as "boong, coon, nigger, gin or abo" rather than in terms of their gender and non-Indigenous feminists need to fully recognise and understand this. hooks (1989:177), on the other hand, disagrees that racism is the only

issue of importance. She believes that sexism is also a crucial issue. Aboriginal academic Jeannie Herbert (1997:93) agrees, arguing that gender issues impact on Indigenous students and need to be addressed. Nonetheless, women such as hooks (1989:180), Huggins (1994:77) and Pettman (1992:129) agree on the repercussions for Indigenous men and families if Indigenous women speak about sexism, in that racist stereotypes circulating in wider society will be reinforced.

It has been claimed that non-Indigenous feminists have not always treated Indigenous women equally, despite their rhetoric. Moreton-Robinson (2000:xvii) talks of experiences with “white middle-class women who were acting from a subject position of dominance”. Huggins (1994:70-73) adds that Indigenous women have been controlled and manipulated not only by non-Indigenous feminists. Non-Indigenous women such as welfare workers, teachers and foster mothers have also been, and still are, complicit in discriminatory and oppressive practices and policies. Colonialism, she stresses, is still apparent in the feminist movement. hooks (1989:179), however, writes that although many black women will not join the feminist movement because of racism and historical white domination and oppression, not all white feminists are racist and black women who do collaborate with these women should not be accused of being naïve or lacking “political acumen”. Moreton-Robinson’s position perhaps makes it difficult for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women to come together in coalition.

For Huggins (1994:78), not including Indigenous women on their own terms serves to “construct culturally insensitive, alienating and inadequate feminist theories and policies”. It has been suggested that if non-Indigenous feminists could acknowledge and respect Indigenous women’s issues and concerns and insert a race analysis, then

there could be real and effective dialogue and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, for the benefit of both (Huggins 1994:74). One of the issues in feminist and postcolonial theories is that they have resulted in a blurring of social boundaries. In light of this, difference needs to be analysed in alternate ways. 'Race' and racism concerns can be analysed as "issues of ideology and representation" rather than "issues of epistemology" (McConaghy 2000a:42-43).

As a non-Indigenous woman conducting research into the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum and in my conversations with Torres Strait Islander community members, such issues as have been discussed thus far in this chapter require careful attention. My awareness of these issues and debates helped inform my actions and self-positionality in relation to data gathering and analysis. Crucially, they also suggest the need for an ethics of care and respect in relation to the research process.

Data Collection Methods

In seeking to explore critical issues and community discourses on the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum, qualitative research methodologies were developed. Qualitative research concerns individuals and the "subjective world of human experience", or their interpretations of the world (Cohen & Manion 1994:36). It deals with "interpersonal relationships, personal values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings" (Leedy 1993:142). In addition, qualitative research focuses on the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a:8). Qualitative researchers, then, acknowledge that their research is not value-free and there is no objective reality. Flexibility and the ability to adjust during

the research process are other features of qualitative research (Wiersma 1995:213). Qualitative research involves data collection techniques such as observation, which includes participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviewing, focus groups and the use of textual material.

Semi-structured Interviews

The more meaningful, interpretive data collection method of extended interviews was chosen for the research. Participant observation was discounted as a viable data collection method by virtue of the short timeframe of the research and the distance of the research sites. Minichiello, Fulton and Sullivan (1999:36) argue that extended interviews enable the researcher to understand the participants' perceptions. Interviews for the research were semi-structured, which allows for flexibility (Minichiello et al. 1995:65) and a "greater breadth of data" (Fontana & Frey 2000:652). A crucial aspect of interviewing is building a rapport with participants, although Fontana and Frey (2000:655) caution against getting too close to participants. Given my 'outsider' status as a non-Indigenous female academic, this did not appear to be a danger.

Interviews were conducted with Torres Strait Islander community members who have been or currently are involved in dance or dance issues. This included cultural custodians, a cultural officer, radio broadcasters, private consultants and cultural advisers, health workers, a promoter of Indigenous art, parents of school students and professional dancers. Some Participants are also musicians, singers and visual artists. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Torres Strait Islanders from Thursday Island, Cairns, Townsville and Mackay during July 2002. A total of 21 interviews were held, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. Half the Participants agreed

to be tape-recorded. The other half preferred that I took notes during the interview and I respected their right not to be taped. The benefits of tape-recording are that it negates the distraction of taking notes, allows full attention to be devoted to the Participant and, importantly, the Participant's discourses are recorded accurately. A few Participants were nervous at the beginning of the interview, but all were comfortable once the interview was underway. Indeed, they were keen to impart their feelings and assumptions on Torres Strait Islander dance, cultural practices and issues facing Torres Strait Islanders today. This was primarily due to the relatively informal nature of the interview and the semi-structured interview questions. In addition, as the Participants were discussing their experiences and assumptions, they were, in effect, positioned as the experts. When recruiting Participants, I was guided by the relevant Torres Strait Islander community groups in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. The research project was conducted with the approval of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA).

My access to community members related to my prior contact and experience with the Torres Strait and Torres Strait Islanders. I visited Thursday Island in 2000 for a cultural festival and the Olympic torch relay. I talked informally with various Torres Strait Islanders and observed Torres Strait Islander dance performed during the cultural festival and the official Olympic torch ceremony.

Secondary sources such as books, journal articles, videos (for example, the Laura Dance and Cultural Festival, an important festival held at Laura in Cape York every second year), newspaper clippings and educational documents were also critically analysed. Various dance competitions and events were observed during the research period.

Data Analysis Methodology

The form of data analysis for this research is critical discourse analysis, which analyses spoken and written language and the construction of accounts and descriptions (Punch 1998:229). It seeks to “provide detailed analysis of cultural voices and texts in local educational sites, while attempting to connect theoretically and empirically these with an understanding of power and ideology in broader social formations and configurations” (Luke 1999:167). Critical discourse analysis, which has emerged from the disciplines of linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics and poststructuralism, is “overwhelmingly qualitative” (Potter 1997:144-147).

Discourse analysis was originally used in the 1950s for linguistics, in the 1960s and 1970s to analyse the work of second language users and by educational psychologists, and in the 1970s and 1980s for face-to-face discussions. From the late 1980s, issues of power and knowledge became a central focus. Feminist and postcolonial studies, for example, interrogate dominant discourses and seek to give ‘voice’ to those who are marginalised or were ignored in the past. Critical discourse analysis can be argued as constitutive of three theoretical positions: poststructuralism and the role of texts in constructing identities and actions; Bourdieu’s notion of the role of texts in cultural capital; and neo-Marxist cultural theory and the role of discourses in political economies (Luke 1999:165-167). Each of these has been taken up in various feminist and postcolonial studies to include a focus on the constitutive nature of discourse in relation to racial formations and notions of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism. It is particularly in relation to the latter, colonialism, that cultural practices such as dance are deemed relevant for an analysis of issues in Torres Strait Islander education.

Discourse analysis is important in qualitative research as discourses are seen as an “important resource” (Punch 1998:228). In discussing Foucault’s ideas, Luke (1999:163-164) argues that discourses are “disciplinary” and “disciplining”, in that particular things are articulated or performed in particular fields. Further, institutionalised discourses “classify and regulate people’s identities” and educational sites or institutions are “comprised by and through discourses” such as policies and curriculum documents, interactions, discussions within the classroom, and institutional and self-regulatory practices. Luke (1999:161-162) argues that language, texts and discourses have become a major focus in these rapidly changing times. No longer are schools predicated on homogenous groups and no longer are minority cultural and language groups unacknowledged or ignored. Instead, immigration, multiculturalism, multilingualism and the formation of hybrid cultural identities have necessitated a critique of old practices and outcomes within educational sites. Critical discourse analysis, therefore, is instrumental in emphasising the inequalities and unequal access to resources and power within various sites. Indeed, the New London Group (1996 online) claims that many of the challenges inherent in today’s education can be addressed by looking at the role of language, discourses and texts in educational sites.

Critical discourse analysis is necessary for an analysis of the construction of identities, knowledges and power in various texts in operation throughout educational contexts (Luke 1999:161). Luke (1999:163) writes that for “Foucault and Derrida, language and discourse are not transparent or neutral means for describing or analy[s]ing the social and biological world”, but instead work to “construct, regulate, and control knowledge, social relations, and institutions”. Critical discourse analysis is beneficial because it uncovers the power relationships that manifest in educational contexts and,

consequently, can be utilised to address issues such as racism (Gilbert & Low 1994:21).

According to Attwood (1992:ii):

... in Foucault's terms, knowledge or 'truth' is not 'outside of power' but closely affiliated with it. Indeed, any 'truth' depends upon power to make it true ... power, knowledge and Aborigines are mutually constitutive ... they produce and maintain one another through discursive practices which can be known as Aboriginalism.

The relation between discourses, knowledges, hierarchies, power and ideologies is important when analysing the central issues surrounding Torres Strait Islander dance and its inclusion in the dominant non-Indigenous education system. Also at issue is the notion of constructing 'truths' in educational research. According to Attwood (1992:xiv), "all knowledge is *interpretive*" and the various disciplines do not "reflect or record knowledge, but rather discourses which construct or produce knowledge". Luke (1999:171) adds that critical discourse analysis does not subscribe to the existence of 'truths' and 'realities' that can be readily observed; rather, it describes discourses and language as "nontransparent, opaque ways of studying and representing the world". Data collected by a researcher, then, is a text open to other interpretations rather than an authoritative or objective 'truth' free from the researcher's personal bias or any external influence. Data, Luke (1999:171) asserts, is discourse and as such "raises and addresses the question of self-reflexivity by making researchers' own uses of discourse a key problematic in design and inquiry". Self-reflexivity, therefore, is a crucial aspect that researchers must address in their research endeavours.

Researcher Reflexivity

All research, and particularly research in Indigenous communities, is complex. For Smith (1999:164), research is not an objective means for "observing and making sense

of human realities". In support of this, Moreton-Robinson (2000:93) writes that knowledge is "never innocent or neutral", but a "key to power and meaning", which can "dominate and control". She adds that non-Indigenous researchers write within a Western framework of knowledge and their representations of Indigenous peoples, therefore, are "based on interpretation and translation and, as such, offer partial truths". This needs to be clearly acknowledged in any research. As researchers bring their own values and beliefs to research, it cannot be asserted that research is objective or value-free. Smith (1999:63) believes that Indigenous knowledges are at greater risk today because the "globali[s]ation of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civili[s]ed knowledge'".

I have attempted to consider the issues of being a non-Indigenous woman conducting research in Indigenous education in a self-reflexive way. Critical reflexivity is crucial for non-Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous peoples (Pettman 1992:127). The intense scrutiny of Indigenous peoples by researchers and the subsequent wealth of representations have been mostly unreflexive. Indigenous peoples are so often presented as merely objects divorced from time and space and from any relationship to the researcher. Some writers describe researchers' representations as their "fictions", which serve to "create public myths" about Indigenous peoples (McConaghy 2000a:26-27). In calling for the need to be critical and reflexive in Indigenous education, McConaghy (2000a:208) challenges some educational researchers' assertions that "we now know what works" for Indigenous students. Our 'truths', of course, are only ever partial and contested. Non-Indigenous educators and researchers should be critical of

their assumptions so that racist or dominant ideologies are not reinforced. According to Marcus (1998:189-190):

The sometimes heated debate over the desirability of reflexivity marks the opening up of the ethnographic tradition to new possibilities, to a departure from the ideology of objectivity, distance, and the transparency of reality to concepts, toward a recognition of the need to explore the ethical, political, and epistemological dimensions of ethnographic research as an integral part of producing knowledge about others.

Ethical Issues

Any interaction with people requires attention to ethical issues. While ethical concerns are important in both qualitative and quantitative approaches, they are more of an issue in some qualitative approaches because they are more intrusive (Punch 1998:281). Ethical issues have been a major consideration in this research because of my interaction with Indigenous groups and individuals. Consideration and thoughtfulness are paramount when conducting research in communities (Bouma 2000:191). Smith (1999:191) cautions that researchers need to take into account the “cultural ground rules of respect” when they conduct research in Indigenous communities. In this research, Torres Strait Islander community members were interviewed. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of New England’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The HREC’s role is to “protect the welfare and rights of participants in research” (University of New England 2002:1). Bouma (2000:194) points out that ethical clearance has been a necessary component of research involving humans following the problems associated with the work of “over-zealous or unscrupulous” researchers in the past. People’s rights, he asserts, take precedence over the research.

It is important to access Indigenous guidelines for working with Indigenous peoples. During data collection, I was particularly mindful of being a non-Indigenous woman conducting research with Indigenous peoples. When conducting any research with Indigenous peoples or communities, evidence of support is needed from the broader Indigenous communities. The TSRA was contacted on 4 January 2002 for consent to conduct the research and my research proposal was subsequently approved on 9 April 2002. I addressed the TSRA's set of protocols for researchers wanting to conduct research in the Torres Strait. This included providing a letter of support from my supervisor and a copy of my research proposal and answering questions such as how Torres Strait Islanders will benefit from my research. As Kvale (1996:119) argues, when considering ethics, researchers need to be aware of the benefits of the research and how it contributes to knowledge.

It is hoped that my research will give educational personnel some insights to explore the complex and important issues surrounding the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in schooling. In reading of my informants' conversations, they may also have greater access to Torres Strait Islander desires in regard to dance and its role in schooling. This is a hope rather than an assertion. There has been much research conducted on Indigenous issues and in Indigenous communities, yet much of this research has not benefited Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999:191). Smith (1999:117-118) adds that Indigenous peoples are "deeply cynical" about non-Indigenous research and its purported benefits. Upon completion of my research, I will personally deliver the findings to the TSRA and other relevant Torres Strait Islander community groups. This is but a small token of my indebtedness to the Participants for participating in the research.

Participants in the research were given an information sheet outlining the research. Interviews did not proceed until they had a full understanding of their requirements and the nature of the research. They were informed that they were involved on a purely voluntary basis and were made aware they could withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice. Tape-recording only proceeded if Participants were agreeable. Participants were informed about the length of time required for the interview and were also encouraged to ask any questions or voice any concerns they had about any aspect of the research. A consent form was signed by Participants for agreement to participate in the research. They were informed that all data would be held in a confidential and secure location. Access to data is contingent on the wishes and advice of my supervisor and the TSRA.

A major ethical consideration in this research concerns protecting the identities of the Participants. Although it could be argued that not naming them in research results in reduced credibility or theoretical strength, the Participants were unfailingly honest and forthcoming in the interviews and I felt their identities should be protected from any potential negative consequences from their involvement in the research. I considered using pseudonyms, but ultimately discarded this idea. Some of the Torres Strait Islander communities are relatively small and I did not want to risk inadvertently using a name of someone living in that community and have comments erroneously attributed to that person. The following chapter is the first of two chapters that identify Torres Strait Islander discourses arising out of the interviews. Chapter 5 identifies discourses of community and Torres Strait Islander social imperatives. Chapter 6 considers discourses of dance in which dance emerges as an aspect of contemporary social movements rather than a cultural practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOURSES OF COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL IMPERATIVES

This chapter explores the significance of issues in Torres Strait Islander community members' discourses on education. This chapter also explores government rhetoric about the importance of community involvement in Indigenous educational policy, what constitutes community, concerns surrounding community consultation and collaboration, and Torres Strait Islander discourses regarding issues of significance in incorporating dance in the curriculum. Because what Indigenous peoples consider as issues or 'problems' may not correlate with researchers' notions, my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher conducting research within Torres Strait Islander communities requires careful consideration. As argued in the previous chapter, I am also mindful that no research is value-free or objective and there is no construction of 'truths' in educational research. The analysis of 'official' and 'community' discourses on dance and the curriculum presented here, therefore, provides perspectives that could be considered 'partial truths'.

Governance and Community Involvement

In a presentation to a national forum on Indigenous education held at Alice Springs in 1999, Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs Dr David Kemp (cited in 'Indigenous Education: Time to Move on' 2000:8) stressed the importance of effective participation by Indigenous communities in addressing

Indigenous educational concerns. This was considered a solution rather than simply allocating extra funding, which research had proven to be ineffective:

I am working to ensure that Indigenous parents, caregivers and community leaders work in partnership with schools, systems and governments, and take part in the decisions and actions that will lead to their children receiving a sound and an appropriate education. These effective partnerships are essential to success. (Kemp quoted in 'Indigenous Education: Time to Move on' 2000:9)

In a state government context, Shane Williams (1999 online), Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Branch, Education Queensland, claims that higher levels of participation and involvement by Indigenous parents and community members are needed in education, particularly in decision-making, and that ownership by the community should be increased. Suggested strategies to enhance community participation and support include designing programs to encourage community involvement and to meet the needs of Indigenous students, parents and community; consulting community members; and parental and community involvement in designing, developing and implementing programs. It is hoped that community involvement will ensure that programs are "culturally sensitive".

Schulz (1996:25) also highlights the importance of involving community members, asserting that community involvement needs to be the "target of programs aimed at turning around the sorry state of Aboriginal education". This, coupled with instilling a "culture of education", he further argues, can lead to positive educational outcomes. He cites a school on Melville Island, where active involvement of parents and community council leaders has had tangible results: educational outcomes at the school are comparable to mainstream schools. In addition, consultation with and input by

Indigenous peoples and their communities are thought to be crucial to the principles of self-determination and self-management (Baumgart et al. 1995:41).

Problematizing Community and Community Involvement

Consultation or collaboration with Indigenous communities is problematic, however. The NATSIEP, for example, stated that Indigenous peoples were extensively consulted in relation to their educational needs (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:8), though many Indigenous writers disagree. Woods (1991:18) succinctly states that the NATSIEP was “written by non-Aboriginal public servants for a non-Aboriginal government”. The Review of the NATSIEP reiterated the importance of extensive consultation, but what was not recommended, Eckermann (1998 online) argues, was “alternate educational structures”. Eckermann (1998 online) further claims that many government policies have been “culturally inappropriate and have imposed non-[I]ndigenous concepts of community and structures of decision making”. Nakata (1998b:23) is one Indigenous academic who stresses that Indigenous peoples must be actively involved in policy-making and in seeking solutions to issues confronting them. The salient word here is ‘actively’. It is arguably pointless to consult and collaborate with Indigenous peoples if they lack any control or meaningful input into policy-making.

While there are calls for more Indigenous control and involvement, McConaghy (1998b:343) cogently observes that government policies are inherently flawed because of Australia’s “long history of colonial governance”. Government policies, then, need to be critically analysed. McConaghy (1998b:345) cautions that notions of plausibility, rationality and reasonableness attached to government policies “require a colonial

hierarchy of values for their legitimacy” and, moreover, “both create and sustain colonial hierarchies, despite their espoused rhetoric which claims to dismantle them”. It is further thought that narratives and discourses enshrined in government policies such as the NATSIEP serve to limit diversity. McConaghy (1998b:344-347), for example, points out that the Both Ways model was privileged in the NATSIEP, which ignored the wishes of other Indigenous peoples such as those who advocated mainstream education. This, in effect, suggests homogeneity rather than diversity. Indeed, in a brief review of Queensland submissions, she found suggestions for many models rather than an overwhelming call for Both Ways. In privileging Both Ways, the Review Committee, McConaghy (1998b:350) argues, declared a “unified Indigenous voice for the sake of political expediency”. Alternatively, what government policies should reflect and support are specific models or initiatives for specific areas, not a narrow and confining choice between Both Ways or mainstream education. The focus of Indigenous education, therefore, should be on multiplicity rather than universality.

The above discussion has shown the importance of, yet the disjuncture between, community consultation and collaboration and government policies. What also needs to be analysed is the notion of community. According to Anderson (1991:6), communities are imagined and can be “distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”. It is pertinent that contemporary nations or communities have not always been in existence; rather, they have been historically or culturally constructed. People in a community or nation cannot conceivably know everyone in that community or nation, yet they are linked by particular practices. As Anderson (1991:36) posits, “fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality”. Indigenous communities today are more often colonial constructs and the “work of maintaining

such artificial communities is rarely recognised in policies that treat ‘community consultation’ as automatic and unproblematic” (Keeffe 1992:122).

In view of this, a salient point in research in or consultation with communities is that communities are not homogenous or collective in thought, but rather diverse. Linda Burney (*Insight*, video recording, 2001), Director-General of New South Wales Aboriginal Affairs, is critical of government policies and programs that are premised on the notion of Indigenous peoples as homogenous, arguing that it is erroneous for one solution to be promulgated, or “one size fits all”. It must also be acknowledged that individual Indigenous communities are not homogenous. Brady (1990:20) has documented issues involved in working with Indigenous communities. She discusses a research project in an Aboriginal community in South Australia, where, instead of a homogenous community that would articulate a collective notion of ‘problems’ in the community, the research team found “small, labile, autonomous collections of people who rarely come together for a shared purpose”.

A more appropriate construct might be that of family rather than community. For Pollard (1988 quoted in Eckermann 1998 online), policies are problematic because they provide “communal” funding. Indigenous peoples, however, are family oriented, not group or community oriented, and the consequence of policies based on community and not family is factionalism and frustration instead of community development. Aboriginal spokesperson Noel Pearson agrees that government emphasis should be placed on family rather than community (*Insight*, video recording, 2001). According to Rifkin (1986 cited in Brady 1990:20), who has worked on primary health care projects in developing countries, individual concerns take precedence over community concerns

and goals in poor countries or communities. It is difficult to be mindful of the community when one's family is struggling to survive. Nonetheless, it has been argued that both education and community development are crucial in improving Indigenous peoples' life and educational chances. Governments, therefore, need better consultation with Indigenous communities (Eckermann 1998 online). However, as discussed previously in this thesis, changes to dominant social practices are also required in addition to the gathering of Indigenous views.

Some reasons for the failure of consultative methods to address educational concerns include problems related to needs-based rather than rights-based approaches (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1995 cited in McConaghy 2000a:213), decision-making powers still in the hands of bureaucrats, and failure to address issues of who should speak on Indigenous issues (McConaghy 2000a:212-213). McConaghy (2000a:213) cautions that collaboration or speaking with Indigenous peoples, although it seeks to be inclusionary and is preferable to speaking for Indigenous peoples, is problematic because it has "enabled white authors to enter new fields of legitimacy which were previously reserved for 'Indigenous Voices'". Crucially, collaboration does not necessarily resolve the problem of Othering. In response to this issue, Pettman (1992:130) advocates speaking "*from* somewhere". In this research, I am speaking from the position of a non-Indigenous, female, middle-class researcher who works in an academic institution. In a criticism of academic institutions, Banerjee (2000 online) argues that they too often have spoken for and continue to speak for Indigenous peoples and are, therefore, "complicit with colonial conditions". This is a sobering realisation for many academics: that their research conducted on the basis of social justice may

indeed have negative consequences for the groups the research intended to benefit. The issues of research, consultation and social change are therefore complex.

Community Leaders and Representation

Another issue in communities is that of community leadership. Rifkin (1986 cited in Brady 1990:20) argues that community leaders do not always have the interests of the community at heart and, consequently, those who are most needy do not always benefit. This was discussed by Participants N and H from the mainland. Participant N is critical of the notion that Indigenous leaders are inherently best. What is needed, she argues, are competent Indigenous leaders who are best for particular positions, but she fears that this is forgotten in the urgent push for more Indigenous representation in government and in positions of power. She believes that spaces to critique or criticise Indigenous leaders are also required.

As discussed in Chapter 4, McConaghy (2000a:245) argues that ascribing all Indigenous voices with inherent value and assertions that Indigenous representations are better than non-Indigenous representations are problematic as there is no analysis or concept of what constitutes a good or bad Indigenous 'voice'. What this does is essentialise Indigenous peoples. Describing Indigenous peoples as all good, she adds, is a "desperate romanticism". As Hall (1992:254) posits, it is no longer possible to "conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject". This issue of community leaders is a complex one with no easy answers. Questions commonly raised include what constitutes a 'good' Indigenous leader and by whose criteria? However, can this be debated objectively without protestations or accusations

of racism or bias, and is it possible for Indigenous leaders to work successfully when they are, effectively, under intense scrutiny, given that they are a minority in positions of power? Such questions are reminiscent of debates surrounding women in positions of power and in government. A patriarchal system continues to challenge their efficacy and legitimacy. In addition, if there is dissension between Indigenous peoples, there is a tendency to claim that they cannot cooperate and, consequently, it is pointless to do anything. This is an essentialist argument, premised on the assumption of homogeneity rather than diversity. Governments want consensus and easy answers.

Discourses of ‘Community’

In the 2001 Census, 410,003 people were identified as Indigenous and of these, 6.4 percent (approximately 26,240) were identified as Torres Strait Islander and 4.3 percent (approximately 17,630) as both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal. Torres Strait Islanders reside both in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. The majority live on the mainland and the highest populations are in the Queensland cities of Cairns and Townsville (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002 online). There are over 100 islands in the Torres Strait and numerous coral cays, exposed sandbanks and reefs, with 19 of these islands inhabited (Torres Strait Regional Authority n.d.b online). While there is geographic and linguistic diversity, it is thought that Torres Strait Islanders share beliefs, values and cultural practices and a pride in their identity, which is known as *Ailan Kastom*, or Island Custom (Mabo & Beckett 2000:165; Torres Strait Regional Authority n.d.c online). According to the TSRA (n.d.c online), *Ailan Kastom* is a “source of unity and strength, bonding Torres Strait Islanders throughout the region and on the mainland”.

Yet, despite *Ailan Kastom*, there are differences and tensions between the islands and between Torres Strait and mainland Islanders. Participant B from the Torres Strait argues that Torres Strait Islanders from the different islands perceive themselves as individuals, not as a homogenous group. Two Participants on Thursday Island claim that language and cultural practices are stronger on the outer islands in the Torres Strait than on Thursday Island. They also claim the 'shame factor' is not as strong on the outer islands. Incidences that would 'shame' Torres Strait Islander children on Thursday Island are of no consequence on the outer islands. Participant A from the Torres Strait spoke of tensions on one particular island, which has been claimed by five different communities under Native Title. It has been suggested that the communities withdraw the separate claims and submit a joint claim. Nakata (1995a:42) is critical of a "collective identity" for Torres Strait islands and Torres Strait Islanders and the failure by educational and social scientific literature to recognise "inter-island politics".

The Torres Strait is currently fighting for greater autonomy and Participant C from the mainland ponders how this will "work in terms of mainland Torres Strait Islanders". Two Participants mentioned the issue of homeland versus mainland. Participant A, in speaking of a mainland Torres Strait Islander in relation to his vocal assertions of land rights in the Torres Strait, says: "That kind, they have a bit of a victim mentality ... in terms of we should be stronger. There's more of us down there than up here ... Most of us are down here and you guys are up here running the show". He is concerned that this has continued for too long. From a mainland perspective, Participant C observes that:

They say because you live down here on the mainland you don't have any rights to land or whatever. So that raises conflict because if an eldest son of a family lives down here ... and everything is passed through the eldest son, land, property or whatever ... they're entitled to that by cultural law, but because that person may live down here there's that issue with people up there ...

Problematising Issues

Discussing issues or 'problems' in Indigenous communities is problematic, as Brady (1990:18-20) has documented. She writes of a multi-disciplinary research team formed in a School of Medicine at a South Australian university, which conducted research with an Aboriginal community. The research methodology was based on the problematising approach of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, who advocated that societies or communities must articulate or define their own 'problems'. The aim of the research was to empower the community members. The members themselves were to define the 'problems' in the community and the research team would then help them to address these 'problems', with minimal intervention or control. The result was unexpectedly a failure. The community members did not perceive the 'problems' articulated by the team as 'problems' and there was no collective agreement on what constituted a 'problem' in the community.

It is difficult for a non-Indigenous researcher to discuss contentious issues such as Indigenous violence and welfare. The danger is that the research can inadvertently feed into racist and stereotypical discourses circulating within society or it could be dismissed as racist. A researcher at Melbourne's Monash University, for example, was criticised by colleagues for publishing findings that along with the consequences of colonialism and colonial practices, 'tradition', or "ritualised rape", is a factor in violence against women (Donnan 2001 online). However, Indigenous spokespersons such as Barbara Flick (*Insight*, video recording, 2001), an Indigenous health consultant, are concerned that for many people it is not a "popular view" to acknowledge what is happening in Indigenous communities. Participant A also is adamant that issues facing Torres Strait Islanders today need to be openly discussed:

Sometimes you have to face the truth. You're not gonna get anywhere by all this absolute 100 percent feel good stuff without facing some realities ... It's why some may speak negative; the other side of it is really acting negative ... You can't do anything positive unless you can recognise the negative. If you don't recognise any negative you're not gonna do anything positive. You think everything is hunky dory.

Similarly, Participant E from the Torres Strait believes that:

... it's for me to highlight and promote and say to people out there who I am and if I have a struggle in the community and I know that in order for me to address it I certainly going to look at the long term solution, not the bandaid solution. And the long-term solution can put people back a bit or get people to think 'Oh look here he comes again'.

The above discussion has implications for Torres Strait Islander dance and the curriculum. The importance of community involvement has been espoused in both government policy and educational documents. The *Dance: Senior Syllabus*, for example, stipulates that only "approved persons" from Torres Strait Islander communities can demonstrate Torres Strait Islander dance (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998:13). It is also Torres Strait Islander community members who teach cultural practices in schools in an informal context. As discussed above, Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse rather than homogenous, which means Torres Strait Islanders' wishes regarding dance and the curriculum may differ. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

Torres Strait Islander Social Discourses

The following are issues of significance articulated by the Torres Strait Islander Participants during my discussions with them about dance and the curriculum. Talk of dance and education, it appears, provokes talk of varied social concerns.

Unemployment, Health and Housing

Issues that impact on Indigenous children's educational experiences and outcomes include structural inequality, poverty, unemployment and poor health and housing (Eckermann 1998 online). These issues were mentioned by some of the Participants in this research. Facilities, services and employment opportunities in the Torres Strait are limited and many Torres Strait Islanders move to the mainland for education and employment. Diabetes is one of the major health concerns in the Torres Strait. Some of the Participants mentioned the role that dance plays in health and fitness and argue that it deserves more emphasis in both school and social life. There are new housing developments being constructed in the Torres Strait, but as Participant G from the Torres Strait says:

We've been isolated, but we haven't had the services like mainland Australians have had. All these houses that are coming up now ... when I think of it ... there was overcrowded extended families living in a one bedroom house ... and it's just in the past few years now, all this accommodation and I mean I grew up in a one bedroom house ... with an outside toilet and this is like in the 80s, you know, and it took them to about the end of the 1990s before we got decent accommodation and then all the houses getting renovated ... I sit back and I think ... here we are saying Australia is great, you know, but why, you know, did it take them so long to give us these basic needs and stuff like that.

While education is seen as the way to address these issues, Eckermann (1998 online) notes that educational programs "continue to be structured for majority needs, according to majority priorities and within majority institutions". Further, although most Indigenous adults believe that education is the most significant factor in improving their life chances, the stark reality is the continued high unemployment rate of Indigenous peoples, despite educational and welfare programs. Participant A, however, has concerns about the plethora of unemployment and poor health and housing statistics because people can buy into the hopelessness. Participant F from the mainland has

similar concerns about the effects of stereotypes on young Indigenous peoples: “They’ve lost hope so they think, why not just give in to the stereotype.”

Violence, Alcohol and Drugs

hooks (1989:180), Huggins (1994:77) and Pettman (1992:129) have documented the ramifications of discussing sexism or violence in Indigenous families and communities, in that spurious representations of Indigenous peoples are perpetuated. They further write that women are loath to complain, even though violence is an issue in Indigenous communities. That it is a critical issue is borne out by a 1994 Western Australian study that found Indigenous women were involved in half the domestic violence cases in that state (Donnan 2001 online). This is a significant figure as Indigenous peoples make up only about 2.4 percent of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002 online).

According to Brady (2002 online), recently there has been a “more honest and critical public debate”, particularly by Indigenous peoples, concerning the causes of drug and alcohol abuse and violence. Despite the disturbing statistics of abuse against women, it is Indigenous women who are at the forefront in fighting destructive practices like drinking, violence and petrol sniffing (Donnan 2001 online). Mackinlay (1998:21) further argues that it is Indigenous women who see themselves as the preservers and maintainers of their cultural practices, citing Yanyuwa women as an example. Indigenous community leaders are also involved in addressing violence. A national Indigenous Women, Men and Youth Roundtable on Family Violence in December 2001 discussed sexual and physical assault in Indigenous communities, described as being of “plague proportions” (Loff & Cordner 2001 online). Three female Participants in my research, two from the mainland and one from the Torres Strait, spoke candidly of

domestic violence. Participant P from the Torres Strait spoke enthusiastically of the work of a women's group on Thursday Island that is successfully addressing issues such as domestic violence. No males mentioned domestic violence as an issue of significance.

Participant I from the mainland related the perspectives of a group of Australian Indigenous women who were attending an International Women's Conference, *Poverty, Violence and Women's Rights: Setting a Global Agenda*, at Townsville in July 2002. The women want Indigenous women to be "allowed or recognised as an outspoken group in the areas of policy-making" because non-Indigenous men, who dominate decision-making, "sometimes ... don't have the heart that a woman has for making decisions or that sensitivity of a woman in certain areas of what would be best". A crucial area for these women in policy-making is funding for shelters and places of refuge for women subjected to domestic violence.

A study by the Queensland Government into violence in communities in the Cape York Peninsula suggests a link between paydays, alcohol abuse and violence (Loff & Cordner 2001 online). Noel Pearson (*Insight*, video recording, 2001) has articulated his grave concerns about the alcohol and drug "epidemic" in Indigenous communities. A common theme by Participants living in the Torres Strait is the damaging effects of alcohol on all aspects of Torres Strait Islanders' lives. However, Islanders in the Torres Strait are less likely to drink alcohol (44 percent) compared with those on the mainland (60 percent) and Indigenous peoples overall (62 percent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 online). Indigenous drinking must be put into context. The percentage of Indigenous peoples who abstain is far greater than for non-Indigenous peoples.

However, in relation to Indigenous drinkers, the problem is the heavy binge drinking, and it is this style of drinking that is associated with violence. While colonial practices have undeniably had a negative impact, some Indigenous spokespersons are calling on Indigenous peoples to not passively accept colonialism as a reason, but to look at other factors, for example, pressure from family and friends to drink and supply alcohol (Brady 2002 online). Chapter 3 explored the role dance can play in community healing, developing self-esteem, connecting isolated youth and teaching youth the dangers of drugs and alcohol. The Croc Eisteddfod Festival, for example, focuses on students enjoying themselves in a drug and alcohol free environment. Dance, it would seem, has a significant role to play in relation to cycles of violence, substance abuse and poor self-esteem.

Feminism, Indigenous Women and Racism

Indigenous peoples have long faced prejudice and discrimination. Chapter 4 of this thesis explored issues surrounding feminism and Indigenous women. Huggins (1994:70-72), for example, criticises the primacy of sexism in non-Indigenous feminism, positing that racism has a more profound effect on Indigenous women's lives. She also argues that Indigenous women have not always been treated fairly by non-Indigenous feminists, which is contrary to their espoused rhetoric of 'sisterhood'. The Indigenous women who attended the Townsville conference, according to Participant I, are still confronted with racism in their daily lives. The women agree that racism has a greater impact on their lives than sexism. They did not agree with some of the presenters or papers at the conference, which was underpinned by radical feminism, as they go "against the grain of Indigenous thinking". Participant I admits that Indigenous women are subjected to domestic and verbal violence from Indigenous men,

but says that Indigenous women “support our men” and men “need healing as well”. A group of Indigenous women at the July Townsville conference articulated their concerns about racism, oppression and poverty in a press release:

We want to speak out against the oppression of our women by the male domination of our economical, psychological, physical and spiritual lives. It's because of this oppression past and present, that we have a high level of poverty and violence.

Non-Indigenous people of our country – need to accept whether they like it or not; that we will NOT lay down for the white man and have his boot on our neck any longer!

We want to tell you that Australia's Indigenous women should no longer be put into a class that sees our culture as ‘all the same’ – we are diverse in our tribal ways and diverse in our every-day living. We will share our culture with you – but do not violate it, do not bastardise it and do not dis-respect it. We have survived this long – while we ‘walk the walk’ and ‘talk the talk’, we ask you to walk beside us – not in front of us. We ask you to talk to us – not over us. We ask that you accept, recognise, and respect who we are as individual women and where we come from as an Indigenous nation ...

Participant F spoke of her encounters with racism and the effects on her. Alcoholism and unemployment are undeniable issues in Indigenous communities; however, the problem is when all Indigenous peoples are stereotyped as alcoholic or unemployed. Participant F is now wary about entering alcohol outlets because of the stereotypical and racist perceptions and treatment by non-Indigenous peoples. Once she had ID and her sister had money, but the attendant would not sell them alcohol (they were both adults).

Another time:

I actually touched a tequila hat that was on a tequila bottle and the guy behind the counter just goes right off and says don't touch that unless you can afford to buy the bottle, and we were actually standing there considering buying the bottle.

The assumption here is that Participant F is unemployed, an erroneous assumption as she is employed and is also currently studying at university. She was shocked and hurt by the incident: “I do everything that is expected of any other person, but I still have to

get treated like this.” When she was younger, the anger she felt from discriminatory experiences at school and in society “manifest[ed] itself with me ... in very negative ways like, you know, just binge drinking with friends”. As Nakata (1993:59) asserts, Indigenous peoples too often have been positioned in terms of “lack”. Participant I agrees with Moreton-Robinson’s (2000:xvii) claim that Indigenous women still are not treated as equals in the workplace, saying they are expected to be subservient. Racism, she explains, can also be more subtle, but equally insidious, such as “a look ... tone of voice, a turning away”. Indigenous women, she points out, “can just sense it when they’re looked down on”. The women at the conference believe that Indigenous women need to “come together as an Indigenous women’s collective nationally”. There needs to be “more a strengthening of [Indigenous] women”.

Racism is a complex phenomenon that requires careful consideration and analysis. As McConaghy (1998b:347) argues, the assumption that racism is the “result of the poor attitudes of individuals or sick institutions” is common yet erroneous. Aveling (1998:313) similarly suggests that it is misguided and simplistic for anti-racism programs to be premised on the notion that “racists are misinformed people who are ‘not like us’”. For McConaghy (1998b:348), what needs to be analysed are “colonial social formations [that] not only produce the inequities but also require them for their ongoing legitimacy”. Issues of racism are pertinent to Torres Strait Islander dance. As argued throughout this thesis, dance has the potential to interrogate racist and stereotypical representations. Dance also has links to Torres Strait Islander women’s movements and their demands for an end to racialised and gendered oppression.

Autonomy

A third of the Participants spoke of greater autonomy as a crucial issue. Participant B believes autonomy will give Torres Strait Islanders a more “powerful voice”. McConaghy (2000a:246) provides a cautionary note, arguing that although Indigenous ‘voice’ is critical in social justice, what is required is an interrogation of inclusionary politics in light of the “internalisation, commodification and structural inertia that so often remain unproblematised in both radical and conservative celebrations of Indigenous Voice”. Another important point is that there are many voices, not one Indigenous ‘voice’. Participant J from the Torres Strait is a staunch advocate of greater autonomy, maintaining that Torres Strait Islanders have been exploited by colonial powers rather than protected. He is critical of the lack of consultation with Torres Strait Islanders when the Torres Strait was annexed by the Queensland Government and the subsequent subjugation of Torres Strait Islanders. Participant B supports his view: “We don’t get what we want up here. We don’t get the full cake that we’re supposed to get.”

Similarly, according to Participant E:

The reason for [autonomy] is to have a uniquely Torres Strait Islander run affairs. Now the big-ticket items are still going to be looked after by the Government. You know, the defence, the social security, the pension, the fisheries, the immigration. I mean we’re not gonna touch that ... So I mean we’re not that stupid in that sense. What we’re saying is that, hey, let us run our own affairs within ourselves.

Participant A, on the other hand, is more cautious:

I’m not a huge believer in [autonomy], not that I’m a disbeliever in it. I just don’t see it as the issue here. I think our problem is an attitudinal one whereby we need to get away from the victim mentality, this handout mentality and that’s the real issue. Now you can do that with or without greater autonomy. If you can do that and then bring in greater autonomy all the better. Greater autonomy on its own to me is a nothing unless there is some major attitudinal positive changes ... They’ll never be economically autonomous. They still want this sort of strange autonomy, but with the welfare handout sort of mentality. They don’t want any dollars to change;

in fact they want it increased with greater autonomy ... I think we're still spiralling downwards until we come to some kind of self-realisation. That's how you need to start doing more for yourselves, not relying on someone else and more dollars to do this.

According to Participant J, a survey conducted throughout the islands has found support for a home rule type of government in the Torres Strait. Participant B cautions that while the autonomy movement has support, islands must be approached individually because they "perceive themselves as individuals". Torres Strait Islanders, then, do not consider themselves as a homogenous group. As discussed in Chapter 3, this has significance in reminding us that there is considerable diversity in what may be termed 'Torres Strait Islander dance'. Nonetheless, for some Participants, a strengthening of cultural practices, such as dance, is an important part of autonomy.

Welfare Tensions

Welfare is a concern for many of the Participants. Participant H from the mainland describes welfare as "the worst thing to happen". On a visit to his homeland, he was compelled to say: "Look at the land. You have gold here in the land, in the sea. Nothing will happen if you sit on your back and do nothing." His criticism of welfare extends to Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland. Participant P claims the "hand-out mentality" impacts on classroom behaviour and management. It is difficult to motivate students when they do not see the value of education or seeking employment. Participant A stresses that with welfare "you get into a routine where people are just handing you stuff and you tend to sort of expect it all the time then". He considers welfare to be the most significant issue facing Torres Strait Islanders as it impacts on all aspects of their lives. The TSRA (n.d.a online) is also concerned about welfare, stating that "to achieve autonomy it is essential to move away from welfare programs and to

develop an economic base for the region”. According to Participant A, however, the economic potential of the Torres Strait is very limited, based on a study he conducted in the late 1980s. For the TSRA (n.d.a online), upgrading infrastructure is a “key objective”. Two of the Participants talked of Papuans, saying that they do not have a welfare system or ‘mentality’ and they value schooling and their cultural practices and speak English well.

Welfare has been discussed by Indigenous leaders and spokespersons in various forums. The television program *Insight* in 2001, for example, discussed Noel Pearson’s criticism of “passive welfare dependency” and his belief that social problems have escalated following the introduction of welfare payments. Linda Burney, Director-General of New South Wales Aboriginal Affairs and Michael Mansell from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, however, believe that it is too simplistic to place the entire blame for what is happening to Indigenous peoples on welfare. Pearson has courageously articulated some innovative solutions: the creation of space for entrepreneurial community development and placement of social entrepreneurs, not welfare workers or bureaucrats; devolving policy emphasis from communities to families; and economic development, ideally self-sufficiency, which is a difficult and long-term solution, or a transformation of welfare funds into business, employment and enterprise activities, which would then be owned by Indigenous peoples (*Insight*, video recording, 2001). Not all Indigenous spokespersons agree with entrepreneurial development. Olga Havnen (cited in Jopson 2002 online), Indigenous programs manager for the Fred Hollows Foundation, believes that socio-economic disadvantage necessitates a “multi-pronged approach” and, crucially, “has to come back to education”. Education, she feels, should be the primary focus as it impacts on poverty and poor health. In

discussing issues such as welfare, however, it is important not to 'blame the victim' and play into discourses of Indigenous peoples as 'lazy' and 'unemployable'. While high unemployment is a critical issue in Indigenous communities, what must be acknowledged are the structural and systemic causes that impact on educational experiences and subsequent employment opportunities.

Other issues of significance discussed by the Participants and contained in Torres Strait Islander social discourses more generally concern sea rights, lack of respect by young people and lack of discipline. Only one Participant mentioned reconciliation as an issue of concern. Issues of significance appear to be those that directly affect the Participant or the community in which she or he lives.

Many Torres Strait Islanders desire to strengthen their cultural practices and for them to be taught to young Torres Strait Islanders. However, the above issues articulated by Torres Strait Islander Participants also deserve emphasis and need to be addressed by educators and governments as they impact on Torres Strait Islanders' educational and life chances.

Torres Strait Islander Educational Discourses

Educational factors that impact on Indigenous students include "teaching approaches and teacher attitudes, or children's preferred cognitive styles" (Eckermann 1998 online). In relation to teacher attitudes, a subtle expression of racism that has implications for education in the Torres Strait can be seen at an end of year graduation ball held by the Queensland University Association of Student Teachers in November 1996, where posters disturbingly proclaimed: "End of Civilisation Ball (Thursday Island Here We

Come!!)” (McConaghy 2000a:256). As McConaghy (2000a:256) argues, the “narrative of primitivism remains resilient despite the best intentions of the teacher education program to expose students to ‘diversity’ issues”. Not all education students are exposed to diversity issues, however. Hickling-Hudson (1998:330) laments the inadequacy in universities of the “minimalist approach to studying ethnicity and culture” and a curriculum informed by “individualist, behaviourist and technicist pedagogical skills”. The low priority of ethnicity, gender and identity issues in most undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education courses in Australian universities, she argues, has implications when these student teachers ultimately enter the classroom. According to Participant P, some teachers go to the Torres Strait for the wrong reasons, such as promotion or for fun, and are thus ill prepared. She believes that all teachers need induction or orientation, but not all receive this or do not receive it immediately. To address such omissions and concerns, Participant B is involved in a program in the Torres Strait to teach government department officials and nursing and teaching staff about Torres Strait Islander protocols.

Participant F spoke of some teachers having “low expectations” of Indigenous students. Indigenous students are expected to fail and, moreover, they are expected not to respond: “That means we can reprimand you and talk to you in any way we like, but you can never respond to that even if it is a reasonable response.” She remembers being classified as a “bad person” for speaking out. Participant A is concerned about the “standard of education” at Thursday Island:

There seems to be a focus on not being too hard on these kids because they’ve had to make some adjustment about coming to a school and they kind of, I think, are a bit lenient with their markings and stuff and I think that that’s not a good thing because you still eventually have to face the real world ... One of the pluses in being [stricter is] to teach them to be more independent and be able to cope with the realities.

Participant P is also concerned about the standard of education in the Torres Strait. She claims that when students from the Torres Strait go to the mainland, it can take them twice as long to complete a course as the first few years are needed for revision. An educational dilemma that is relevant to this thesis is how much time should be allocated to Torres Strait Islander dance in schools.

Teaching approaches linked to children's preferred cognitive styles can be problematic if they are totalised and essentialised as Indigenous or Aboriginal learning styles and teachers then teach under this narrow assumption. This limits and constrains Indigenous students. Various writers have expressed their concern with the notion of Aboriginal learning styles (Keeffe 1992:98-101; McConvell 1991:14; Nicholls, Crowley & Watt 1998). Some of the Participants spoke of schools and teachers needing to take into account the different learning style of Torres Strait Islander students. As discussed above, this is problematic if it is thought of in terms of an overarching learning style, one that contains and limits the possibilities to express their own preferred ways of learning. What needs to be acknowledged is the different styles of learning *within* Indigenous students.

Perhaps of more relevance to learning, Nakata (1999:3-4) argues that what also needs to be recognised is Torres Strait Islander "lifeworlds" and experiences. What this means is that schooling practices are based on Torres Strait Islander experiences, which makes learning more meaningful for students. Participant P claims that some curriculum areas are "alien" to Torres Strait Islander experiences. Cultural practices such as dance are relevant here as they are a part of many Torres Strait Islanders' experiences. It must be noted that particular ways of learning are not inherent to all Indigenous peoples, but are

reflective of factors such as background, location, experiences, class, gender and power.

Nakata (1999:4) suggests a metalanguage:

... which assists students to articulate how their position is related to the practice. It might involve the awareness and the language with which to express that consciousness of, for example, why a test or practice is alien, or not much in evidence in their community, or confined to a particular domain or time or place etc and of what significance it is to them. Or indeed how that practice or story or language has been transformed over time by Islanders as much of non-Islander practice has been transformed to take its place as 'Island custom'.

Importance of English

Chapter 2 explored the issue of incorporating Indigenous languages in schools. Indigenous language maintenance has been seen by many as significant. However, this is a vexed issue. According to Nakata (1995b:30), Torres Strait Islanders have long sought English and a mainstream education as they deem this necessary not only for the educational benefits, but also to understand Western political and economic contexts. One area for a good understanding of English skills, Nicholls (1998:300) posits, is in understanding land rights legislation and the legal terminology and processes involved in making land claims. Another area of relevance to Torres Strait Islanders where English skills would be highly beneficial is the greater autonomy process.

Participant P agrees with Nakata, asserting that the majority of Torres Strait Islander parents do not want a "watered down curriculum"; rather, they desire a mainstream curriculum for their children. Most of the Participants agree that English is an important aspect of the curriculum. While their cultural practices are a part of their lives, they are adamant that Torres Strait Islander children also have a competent grasp of the English language. For Participant M from the Torres Strait, English is necessary to learn "white ways". She argues that for Torres Strait Islanders to survive in a non-

Indigenous world, it is imperative that they acquire good English skills and a good education. Basically, they must read and write well. She considers herself fortunate that her parents instilled the need for a good education and she, in turn, has instilled this in her children. A “power word” is how Participant K from the Torres Strait describes English. He wants English to be taught properly as it is an “English world”. According to Participant P, a Torres Strait Islander curriculum was trialled a number of years ago in the Torres Strait, but it was problematic as it failed to cater for non-Torres Strait Islander students and did not prepare Torres Strait Islanders for life outside the classroom.

Not all Torres Strait Islanders are happy about the push for good English skills. English has been encouraged by Participant F’s family, but other family members are not so happy. As she explains: “I’ve had other comments from the family, and still do today, that my English is very straight and, you know, if people couldn’t see me they’d think I was a white person talking.”

Another issue in schools is that many Indigenous children struggle with English when it is their second language. It must be remembered that Indigenous children enter school with different language abilities. This is often not recognised or carefully addressed in schools and the curriculum. While some Indigenous students only speak English, other students, particularly those from rural and remote areas, may speak their own languages and have limited knowledge of English; others may be bilingual in one or more Indigenous languages and an English based language, such as Torres Strait Creole; and others may be bidialectal, speaking in two forms of English (Malcolm 1998:128). Participant C, who used to tutor Indigenous students in primary schools in literacy and

numeracy, thinks it is inane to teach some of these students another language, for instance German:

They're forced to do it. They can't get out of it ... They still have to sit in the classroom and listen anyway. So I think that's silly. I mean the kids are flat out struggling to get a grasp of English, let alone another language.

What could also work against the acquisition of a good education and English skills is what Schulz (1996:25) describes as a "culture of education". According to Participant G, who is studying at university:

We're just coming to grips with university, you know, because our culture is not all about money ... our culture was more of a family and looking and fending for each other and stuff like that and we've had to move out of our way to fit into white society.

Participant A, who previously worked as a teacher aide in Torres Strait schools, is also concerned about the lack of university trained Torres Strait Islanders from the Torres Strait. He explains that it is difficult for those from the Torres Strait to "pass that bridge" and go on to tertiary qualifications. Most of the university trained Torres Strait Islanders, he argues, have grown up or have spent time at school on the mainland, which makes it easier for a "university culture" to be inculcated. While more Islanders both in the Torres Strait and on the mainland continue education beyond year 10, compared with Indigenous peoples overall, only 10 percent of Islanders in the Torres Strait have post-school qualifications, compared with 21 percent for those on the mainland (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 online). Another issue, Participant A notes, is that girls in the Torres Strait are under pressure to start a family young, which then makes it incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to attain good educational qualifications. Alternatively, Indigenous academic Jeannie Herbert, in her professorial address at James Cook University in July 2002, suggested that educators might need to

rethink what is success in Indigenous education. It may be very limiting if success is measured only in terms of attaining a degree or higher degree.

Torres Strait Islander Languages

Even though English is highly regarded by the Participants, many spoke of the importance of Torres Strait Islander languages. Three Participants articulated their regret at the loss of languages. As discussed above, Torres Strait Islander languages are Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mer, but Torres Strait Creole is spoken throughout the Torres Strait. There are language differences between Islanders in the Torres Strait and those on the mainland. On the mainland, 70 percent speak English as their principal language, whereas 81 percent in the Torres Strait mostly speak Torres Strait languages or Creole as their principal language. Further, 90 percent in the Torres Strait speak one language, while 45 percent on the mainland speak more than one language (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 online). Participant A has concerns with Creole: “We have a Creole that we use all the time and people get around, get away with that and say that that’s the lingo franca, but there’s nothing wrong in my view with learning straight English.” He believes that good English and Torres Strait Islander language skills and pride in Torres Strait Islander cultural practices are all important. Participant K also wants “pure” English taught in schools.

Hickling-Hudson (1998:335), on the other hand, argues that Creole should be accorded status in schools. In a similar vein, Tripcony (1995:39-41) believes that Indigenous forms of English should be recognised by teachers and Indigenous students should not be excluded on the basis of their language. According to Nicholls (1994:9), these forms of English are not uneducated, but genuine dialects that should be “respected and

affirmed". She also argues that although English is the language of power, or a "power word" as Participant K describes it, it should not be regarded as a more valuable language because Indigenous students can perceive this as an "assault on their identity". As with Torres Strait Islander dance, there are complex issues surrounding English and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools. Dance and languages are, however, inextricably linked as key aspects of Torres Strait Islander social, economic and educational movements.

Torres Strait communities are diverse, not homogenous, but there are experiences that many Torres Strait Islanders share and some of these were articulated by the Participants in this research. Unemployment, poor health and the incidence of violence and alcohol and drug abuse are areas of concern in Indigenous communities. Despite anti-discrimination policies and anti-racism strategies, Indigenous peoples still face prejudice and discrimination in wider society. Dependency on welfare is also problematic. The Participants in this research honestly and uncompromisingly articulated the issues facing Torres Strait Islanders. Although some of these appear insurmountable, there is an underlying optimism and a determination to improve the life and educational chances of Torres Strait Islanders. Nonetheless, changes to dominant social practices and colonial structures are necessary if there are to be any meaningful changes in Torres Strait Islanders' lives. Dance and the curriculum must be considered in light of these broader social imperatives for Torres Strait Islander communities and schooling.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL DISCOURSES OF DANCE

Dance, although often marginalised and maligned in the curriculum and ignored in favour of subjects such as science, mathematics and information technology, has been argued by writers such as Bell (2000), Koff (2000) and McCormack (1997) as being integral to the overall education of students. According to Bell (2000:26), the creative and performing arts concern the “well being of the human spirit”. Espoused benefits of dance include enhanced self-confidence and the development of creative, problem-solving, analytical, social, physical, conceptual and perceptual skills. The Queensland *Health and Physical Education Years 1 to 10 Syllabus* (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1999:1) and the Queensland *Dance: Senior Syllabus* (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998) also articulate the benefits of dance.

Cultural practices such as dance have played a prominent role in Torres Strait Islander communities and this has been documented by writers such as Beckett (1987, 2001), Haddon (1893, 1901-35), Lawrence (1998a, 1998b), Mabo and Beckett (2000) and Mosby (2000). For Morais (1992:130), dance constitutes a “form of human behaviour; a learned social phenomenon that can incorporate and reveal intrinsic aspects of a culture such as values and social organi[s]ation”. However, in this chapter I explore not only the ‘cultural’ value of dance from the perspective of the Torres Strait Islander research Participants, but the ways in which dance emerges as integral to the spiritual and social well-being of various Torres Strait Islander communities.

Discourses of Dance and Community

The TSRA (n.d.d online) writes that Torres Strait Islander communities regularly “celebrate their culture” with feasting, music and dance. According to Lawrence (1998a:52), dance is central to Islanders both in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. Mabo and Beckett (2000:165) argue that dance is the “main outlet for creativity and the principal source of aesthetic satisfaction”. Some of the Participants in this research have danced throughout Australia and overseas, either individually, in groups, or as part of dance theatres. Other Participants are recording artists and visual artists whose works are exhibited throughout Australia and overseas.

Ailan Dans, which was formed following the arrival of missionaries in 1871, is performed throughout the Torres Strait and mainland, although there are differences between islands. *Ailan Dans* is performed in groups (Mabo & Beckett 2000:166); however, individual dancers do have the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess and artistic ability (York 2000:342). When Participant B was dancing as a young man, dancers would endeavour to better express themselves to get the message of the dance across and “when somebody gets the message they come up and ooh, they whirl you around, you know”. He remembers dance groups coming together from different islands and performing for one another. Two of the Participants were field bosses, whose role is to lead the other dancers onto the dance arena. Participant B explains the role of dance:

Well, I could express it this way, that dancing is a main part of Torres Strait history, like Torres Strait life. Dancing and feasting are the centre of many, many things. There are dances for entertainment, there are dances as sacred and classified as rituals, restricted to perform at certain times, certain occasions and there’s also dances that are composed just to make people laugh and have a happy time, or group dances to let people join with you.

Dance as a significant activity is not confined to Torres Strait Islanders. As Participant K explains: "Dance is all around the world. Wherever you go you see dance. Every nation has dance. One part of culture is dance." Dance gives Participant K "a feeling inside". Participant L from the Torres Strait concurs, saying dance helps build the "internal self" and conveys what is inside. For Participant B, dance involves "solidarity, it keeps us together, identify ourselves".

Participant B was a primary instigator of a cultural festival that is held in the Torres Strait every two years. A predominant reason for the Cultural Festival, of which dance performances are an integral part, is to maintain cultural practices that are in danger of being lost. All the Participants in this research agree that Torres Strait Islander cultural practices should be maintained. Participant A observes that "as older people die there's less and less knowledge people have and, consequently, you see a lot more lost people wandering the streets sort of picking up styles, interests, whatever from the countries down south". Participant C articulates his concerns:

You know, because of the way that society is we have a lot of our kids having to learn English at school, learn the European way of life for things and we're bombarded with American culture ... From going into schools and seeing it we are losing our culture. Our kids are not learning these things that should have been taught to them because our culture is not written down. It's all tied up in our old people and we're losing them all the time ... We can't go and pick up an encyclopaedia and, oh yeah, this is how we do something.

For Participant D from the mainland, maintaining cultural practices is crucial because "when you're away from home and you're in such a different environment, you need something you can relate to". Participant I, who moved to the mainland as a child during the Second World War, concurs, speaking of the isolation she felt until she heard Torres Strait Islander music and saw Torres Strait Islander dance and her "spirit was

lifted". Cultural practices, she says, are part of Torres Strait Islanders' "very makeup, their very being".

Torres Strait Islanders' first language is oral rather than written (Nakata 1995b:31). Dancing and singing, Participant E explains, form Torres Strait Islanders' "history book" and are "like a library, our history passed down orally rather than through writing". Participant B also points out the link to history: "So that's how oral history is maintained, through dances and songs, because songs tell you in language just like literature, and with your hand movement in the dancing it's illustration to the stories." He spoke of the construction of a railway line in Western Australia being incorporated in song, which enabled Islanders in the Torres Strait to understand the experiences of Islanders on the mainland. Participant E further explains:

Now there's dances for July 1, which is the Coming of the Light. There's dances that talk about Eddie Mabo High Court decision. There's dances about cray fishing. There's dances about people travelling in to visit other families. There's dances about families leaving other families behind because of employment, education and other opportunities down south. There's dances about a son saying goodbye to his mother and don't know when he's gonna return.

It is a concern for some Participants that young Torres Strait Islanders have little interest in cultural practices. Participant I believes, however, that these young people will value them more as they get older. This was the case for Participant F, who is in her 20s. Cultural practices were not a major part of her life when she was young. She preferred to be "shopping and hanging around friends, you know, and stuff like that" and, indeed, she resented her father's attempts to teach her cultural practices. Although cultural practices are now important to her, she understands that they may not hold the same importance for others: "That's just the nature of life. Things are born and things

die.” Many of the Participants from both the Torres Strait and the mainland spoke of dance not being as strong today because, they believe, of the impact of other influences like television and other styles of music. They discussed how dance was a valued and enjoyable part of everyday life when they were young. Both Participants S and T from the Torres Strait believe more people are needed to “help bring out the culture”. According to Participant S, dance is more for special occasions today than an integral part of everyday life. Participant Q from the Torres Strait is sorry for Torres Strait Islanders who have “lost their culture”. Some of the Participants mentioned that dance is stronger and more valued on the outer islands of the Torres Strait than on Thursday Island. Participant H, for example, spoke of the strength of dance on Mer and how the Meriam peoples’ pride has been enhanced by the Mabo decision. Mabo Day is now a major celebration. While all the Participants agree that dance and other cultural practices should be maintained, there are degrees of importance. There were vocal and fervent assertion and quiet agreement and others spoke of the ambivalence of some Torres Strait Islanders towards cultural practices.

Some of the Participants from the Torres Strait lament the dearth of art and dance in the Torres Strait as compared to the mainland. Participant A makes the following comment, based on a 1995 study funded by Arts Queensland: “There’s no art centres. There are ... scores of them, particularly in the Territory, with literally millions and millions of dollars going into them. Well, we’ve never had an arts centre ever. There’s just been no support for it.” The Arts Queensland study recommended a review of existing art centres, which, to Participant A, is ironic and pointless: “Now if you’ve got nothing anyway, well you miss out. You don’t even get a mention.” Those communities that have no art centre are the ones that need funding and support the

most. Participant A compares the Torres Strait unfavourably with Broome. Both these regions were important pearling centres. In Broome, he asserts: "They publish books there. They have a very active musical scene. Lots of bands, a lot of people teaching each other. They have kids that have been taught skills, how to write and all this stuff. They write plays." One of the Participants from the mainland similarly believes cultural practices are stronger on the mainland than in the Torres Strait. However, a 1994 survey found that Islanders living in the Torres Strait have a "stronger sense of culture and identity" than those living on the mainland (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 online). Participant C agrees, stating that in mainland centres with large Torres Strait Islander populations "we take our culture for granted and a lot of our people don't participate in our cultural activities". Alternatively, he gives the example of Canberra, which has a relatively small Torres Strait Islander population and where "they all participate and they all pass on their culture and they're all getting involved".

There have been some positive Queensland Government initiatives, according to Participant A. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie has been instrumental in promoting Indigenous cultural practices. He commissioned a book, *Gatherings: Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from Queensland Australia* (2001), for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Brisbane in October 2001 (CHOGM was postponed because of September 11 and was finally held in 2002). According to Premier Beattie (*Gatherings* 2001:7), the book is a "showcase of the rich, diverse and inspirational art of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people". Torres Strait Islander artists who are featured in the book include Ken Thaiday Sr. from Cairns, who is a dancer as well as an artist, and Vic McGrath from the Torres Strait. Ken Thaiday Sr. produces intricate articulated dance masks, which are

exhibited in art galleries, universities and museum collections throughout the world (*Gatherings* 2001:190). Vic McGrath uses pearl shell, turtle shell and dugong bone and his work is “highly sought after by private collectors” (*Gatherings* 2001:120). In addition, a web site is being developed for Indigenous visual and performing artists to showcase their work. Commonwealth funding has now been allocated for a cultural centre on Thursday Island, which will be, according to Participant A:

... a compromise of all sorts of things. It will be sort of a museum, sort of a living cultural centre ... an art shop for people to sell their work ... We've got a site, it was a state government owned one and we had to buy that off the state government, they didn't contribute it, and we had some designers come in, a multi-discipline team and got some nice designs ... and we're going to build this kind of hybrid thing ... something to show tourists and something to try and regenerate some culture and get people into supporting it.

The TSRA (n.d.c online) states that some of the benefits of the cultural centre will be the “preservation of the unique cultural heritage, a workspace for the local artists and an opportunity to pass on traditions and oral history from one generation to the next”. Some of the Participants from the Torres Strait are hoping part of the Haddon Collection, which includes dance artefacts, will be permanently housed at the proposed cultural centre. A.C. Haddon led the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait from 1888 to 1905. The members of the expedition recorded history, stories, languages and religious and cultural practices and collected various artefacts. Sixty artefacts from the Haddon Collection, *Past Time: Torres Strait Islander Material from the Haddon Collection, 1888-1905*, were exhibited at the Cairns Regional Gallery from June until September 2002. The collection was a National Museum of Australia Exhibition from the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Cairns Regional Gallery 2002). Participant H from the mainland, however, is concerned whether the artefacts, which are historically significant, would be cared for

properly and professionally if taken out of a museum environment. The TSRA would like the Haddon Collection to visit the Torres Strait as many of the elders and communities were unable to visit Cairns because of financial constraints and thus lost the opportunity to view a significant part of their own history ('Haddon Collection in Cairns Reinforces Need for Cultural Centre' 2002:27).

During my research I observed dance performances, which I found powerful and stirring. At the opening of the *Maiem Sewngapa Algeda to the Torres Strait* (Welcome to the Torres Strait) exhibition of Torres Strait Islander art and craft at Pinnacles Gallery in Townsville in July 2002, Torres Strait Islander recording artist Seaman Dan and a young female dancer performed for the visitors. During breaks and later during the performance, Torres Strait Islanders in the crowd moved onto the performance area and sang and danced in a joyous, spontaneous and unrehearsed celebration. An Indigenous Gospel Music Cultural Festival was held in Townsville at the same time that featured dance, choirs, singing, solo musicians and bands. On the last day a combined band, didgeridoo player, women on Island drums and an Indigenous dancer performed in a blend of 'traditional' and contemporary music and dance. On an informal visit to Thursday Island in 2000, I watched dance performances during the Cultural Festival and the official Olympic torch ceremony and a dance competition held at Thursday Island State High School. However, while I enjoyed the performances, I am loath to articulate any assumptions or statements about the 'value' of such performances, except from the point of view of an onlooker. During the performances, I was all too mindful that I was a non-Indigenous person looking at or 'gazing' on Indigenous peoples. As discussed in Chapter 4, the 'white' gaze is problematic in Indigenous research because, as Lattas (1993 online) asserts, it "analyses, questions, and problematises [Indigenous peoples']

resistances and even their identities”. That is, the issue of cultural value is complex, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Here I am attempting to gather evidence on this issue from the perspectives of the Torres Strait Islander Participants.

Discourses of Dance and Identity

The Participants spoke of the link between cultural practices and their Torres Strait Islander identity. Participant I explains what her identity means to her:

It’s a precious thing to have. It’s like when you’re given a lovely jewel ... you keep that and you keep on taking it out and looking at it, or you wear it, and it’s something that no-one else has got. You have it. You as a Torres Strait Islander person have that and you can move on to other things, but in the end you always go back to your roots – your dancing, your songs, your art, your stories. They’re a part of you. Because if you’ve got no past, you seem to sort of have no anchor. You’re drifting.

As discussed in Chapter 2, however, notions of identity can be essentialist and thus problematic. hooks (1994:83), however, is concerned about criticisms of identity politics, that is, that identity is used as a means of advancing political interests, as identity is also significant in challenging dominant discourses. Moreover, she is concerned that criticisms of identity politics or essentialist identities not be a “new, chic way” to silence those already marginalised. Lattas (1993 online) agrees that essentialism can be empowering and resistive and argues that “[t]here is something disturbing about the self-confidence of some white academics who have assumed the role of offering critical advice to Aborigines about what sort of identity they should be producing”. In a criticism of identity politics, Brah (1992:135-136) discusses the women’s movement in Britain, where instead of the “necessary task of sifting out the specificities of particular oppressions”, these specificities become “hierarchies of oppression”. The more oppressions a woman names the “greater her claims to occupy a

high moral ground". Being a member of an oppressed group, she argues, serves to "vest one with moral authority". Identity, then, is both a constructive and destructive social phenomenon (McConaghy 1998b:349). What is required is a more careful and critical analysis of identity issues as situated in place and time.

Identity is relevant to Torres Strait Islanders today as it is crucial in their struggle for greater autonomy. It is another example of Indigenous peoples challenging dominant practices and structures. Identity has other implications. Participant F explains:

The moment that I realised that [identity] was important was when I suffered racism and I am never ever going to be accepted as a non-Indigenous person. It doesn't matter how educated, there are always going to be circles that will remind me that I am black ... I need to feel comfortable about my identity so that when people are doing that to me [being discriminatory] that I feel quite strong in knowing exactly where I'm from, who I am and why they're doing that, and just that I'm still okay with myself.

Her identity, and pride in that identity, is necessary for her to survive in a predominantly non-Indigenous world. Cultural identity, however, comes with constraints, particularly for younger Torres Strait Islanders who face the dilemma of either fulfilling cultural and family expectations and obligations or seeking success in wider society. Participant F speaks of her defining moment at age 20:

There became a point where I had to look at my own life and say what is the price that I pay. The price that I most likely have to pay if I continue to be always kind of abiding by this cultural expectation, the price is most likely going to be my success in this society that I'm living in now, and then it's always a struggle then to find for Torres Strait Islander kids, I think, to find that balance ... You're limited to doing certain things because you always are worrying about what your family will say ... You always feel this great responsibility to your family, and I'm the eldest in my family, so I guess it's been a bit more difficult for me I'd say than just say a younger sister of mine ... I was 20 and that was the moment that I knew that I had to find a balance. It's not good enough to just let [culture] go altogether, but you can't because it's like I said, it's embedded in your whole identity, your psychology.

As with Indigenous 'voice', it must be remembered that there is not one Indigenous identity, but multiple identities or subjectivities. The Participants in the study articulated the importance of their Torres Strait Islander identity and the cultural practices that are an integral component of that identity. Although identity was spoken of as a singular entity, not a plurality, there were differences in their responses to cultural practices and the places and spaces for them in their lives. The Torres Strait Islander Participants in this research conduct their lives and employ and enjoy cultural practices in myriad ways.

Resistance and Performance of Identity

As discussed in Chapter 3, dance has resistive potential. In countries like Chile and Greece, dance and music have been instrumental in resisting military regimes (Bottomley 1992:72). Cultural practices such as dance can also be a response to forces of globalisation, which can be both destructive and constructive. Globalisation can lead to racism or aggressive nationalism, be assimilationist or isolationist, or, conversely, those peoples marginalised in the past now have spaces to articulate their concerns and histories (Hall 1991:26-36). For Australian Indigenous peoples, dance is an instrument for asserting their rights in a postcolonial and globalised world (Magowan 2000:309). David Page (1999:106) of Bangarra Dance Theatre argues that through artistic expressions such as dance performances, Indigenous peoples can "spiritually express the cultural identity that burns inside us". Langton (1993:10) goes further, positing that "aesthetic and intellectual statements" by visual and performing artists can interrogate stereotypical and racist representations. Although the Torres Strait Islander Participants did not explicitly articulate resistance or interrogation of stereotypical and racist representations, there is a strong pride in and urge to perform dance.

Participant F says that while Torres Strait Islanders today are proud of their cultural practices, this was not always so. In the past, they were made to feel ashamed of their heritage. This is also apparent with Native Americans, who feared repercussions for disclosing their heritage, but who are now celebrating through powwows (Goertzen 2001:68). Resistance, however, can be both negative and positive. Keffe (1992:102-103) argues that it is positive, in that it is an “active and dynamic concept” and negative, because in rejecting the dominant non-Indigenous society “poverty and powerlessness become legitimated and entrenched”.

Discourses of Authority, Authenticity and ‘Traditional’ Dance

A critical issue concerning dance performances is that of authority and ‘tradition’. Non-Indigenous peoples tend to desire ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ Indigenous performances (Grau 2001:73; Magowan 2000:314; Ram 2000 online; Turner 1994:135). Discourses of ‘authenticism’ attached to Indigenous dance serve to essentialise and limit Indigenous peoples. Torres Strait Islander dance has historically been subject to change and has, in turn, been an influence on others. It is, therefore, not immutable. Grau (2001:73) argues that “when we see modernisation as a sort of ‘corruption’ or ‘perversion’, it may say more about our aesthetic ‘tastes’ and cultural conditioning than about culturally valid responses by individuals to a changing environment”.

According to Participant E, dance, rather than being essentialist, is a “vital link of the current generation of Torres Strait Islanders to the past, or what happened in the past, and understand it to enable them to go into a better future”. Two of the Participants, one a dancer and the other a visual artist, incorporate both the ‘traditional’ and contemporary in their work. In relation to art and sculpture, the TSRA (n.d.d online)

discusses the combination of “traditional motifs and forms with contemporary styles”. Ken Thaiday Sr. uses contemporary materials to produce articulated dance masks, which relate to his Erub people:

The importance of the shark in the seas around Torres Strait means the use of this type of mask in ceremonial dance is paramount. While this is an example of a contemporary interpretation of traditional masks, it is necessary and appropriate for the maintenance and transmission of traditional culture to the youth of today. (*Gatherings* 2001:190)

Other Participants are adamant that dance should remain the same. As an elder, Participant J is unhappy about changes to ‘traditional’ practices. He gives the example of dancers using real guns in a performance on the mainland rather than carved guns, which he terms the “lazy way”. He prefers that the skill of carving be revived. Participant J is critical of the part Christianity and missionaries have played in changes to Torres Strait Islander dance. *Ailan Dans* was formed in response to the prohibition and disruption of former Torres Strait Islander dances following the arrival of missionaries in 1871 (York 2000:341). A more recent occurrence has been the prohibition by the Pentecostal sects of secular dance performances (Lawrence 1998a:54). In its response to Christianisation, therefore, *Ailan Dans* is both resistive and accommodative. Participant B is not adverse to adaptation and contemporary dance, but wants the meanings to remain:

... contemporary dances can be performed, but remember the tradition is really the meaning of the dances. The meaning must stay the same. If I am in the centre of the city, I look down and see this piece of plastic lying there. I pick it up, take out my pocket knife, start cutting dugong. To me it’s not a plastic, it’s what’s inside the plastic, the whole idea, the spirituality surrounding it. That plastic dugong will remind me of my totem, but it’s a plastic so you can almost do anything in contemporary art, contemporary creative ways, as long as the meanings stay, do not change. Meaning is the important part and the other name for the meaning is the spirituality, attachment ... What is being seen. Because if I communicate with you with my thoughts your conception will be different. If I carve out something and see it, we all see what it is.

Use of Technology

Discourses of 'authenticism' have also been attached to Indigenous use of technology. McConaghy (2000a:240) poses some pertinent questions in relation to Indigenous peoples utilising technology such as the World Wide Web. To the claims that such technologies are not 'Indigenous', she asks: "What is 'white' about the Web when Indigenous people use it? What does it matter? Or for that matter, is there any reason to consider the issue ... of what is 'Indigenous' about the Web when Indigenous people use it?" Technology, however, is both a potential threat and benefit to processes of decolonisation and its effects require a careful and situated analysis (McConaghy 2000b online).

According to Participant B, while technology is problematic, Torres Strait Islanders will be "converting this to our own end". He envisages students learning about cultural practices and history while enjoying playing on computers at the proposed cultural centre. He would like 'traditional' dance to be captured and presented on audio-visual records. Participant N promotes Indigenous art through her website. She is concerned that Indigenous peoples' works and talents are recognised, not exploited, and that financial benefits accrue to Indigenous peoples.

Participant I believes recordings of Torres Strait Islanders such as Seaman Dan and the Mills Sisters are a "legacy for the generations to come". Participant O, a recording artist from the Torres Strait, spoke of the difficulty for Islanders in the Torres Strait to have their work recorded. According to Participant G, there is a wealth of talent in the Torres Strait and she is hopeful that a recording studio can be established. While there

are recordings of Aboriginal music and dance, there is little of Torres Strait Islander music and dance.

Tourist and Theatre Performances: Discourses of Essentialism and Commodification

Torres Strait Islander dance is now performed for tourists and other audiences, which brings with it issues of essentialism and commodification. Tourism is a cultural industry and as such advertisements of Indigenous peoples and performances of Indigenous cultural practices can play a role in attracting tourists to particular areas. This is problematic, however, as colonial ideologies are embedded in some tourist advertisements, in that they utilise narratives of discovery, or Australia as one of the “last frontiers (the exotic)”, particularly in relation to rural and outback locations (Turner 1994:111). Performances of Indigenous dance can essentialise Indigenous peoples and connote a primordial and static culture. There is an essence of the ‘white’ gaze in tourists passively looking on at Indigenous dance performances. Similarly, in writing about Greek dance, Bottomley (1992:84-85) argues that images in the film *Zorba the Greek*, combined with tourism, serve to “trap many Greeks in the role of latter day Zorbas”. Dance theatre performances have also been accused of commodification of Indigenous cultural expressions (Meekison 2000a:369). On the other hand, in answering criticisms of performances in multicultural festivals, Bottomley (1992:84) argues that rather than trivialising ethnic identities, such performances are both “resistance and potential subversion”, in that dancers perform their differences from the dominant society. Moreover, she suggests, there lies a “lurking ethnocentrism in a judgement that music and dance are essentially ‘trivial’”.

However, Torres Strait Islander views on such issues are complex. As the Participants argue, dance performances can benefit Torres Strait Islanders or, conversely, exploit or misappropriate. Participant B is adamant that performers should be rewarded financially, but he is critical of exploitation, or as he more damningly describes it, “cultural prostitution”. Participant C further asserts that some groups have formed expressly “because of the cultural industry; they, you know, dance for money”. Although performances can work to dispel stereotypical representations (Meekison 2000b:118-119), there is the danger of misrepresentation or misinterpretation. Participant C gives the example of a promoter seeking a Torres Strait Islander dance group to perform at an event. The promoter wanted the group to adapt the dance to be more “high energy” and “high powered”, which, Participant C asserts, is “selling out to do something just for an audience”. In *The Laura Dance Festival* (1990) video, a resource for senior students, an Aboriginal man speaks of adapting some dances to enable non-Indigenous audiences to more easily understand them.

According to Participant N, tourist performances fail to convey the spirituality or the meanings inherent in Torres Strait Islander dance. Participant F asserts that “a lot of people need to really consider the spiritual side of Indigenous people and dance in itself does so much to the individual spirit”. The notion of an Indigenous spirituality, however, is problematic in its essentialism, suggesting universality and an inextricable link with the land and the past. That is, the tag of spirituality limits the possibilities for Indigenous peoples to be not particularly, or not at all, spiritual.

Participant K agrees with Meekison (2000b:119) that tourist performances show non-Indigenous audiences Torres Strait Islander history and cultural practices. In his dance

performances, Participant H talks to the audience about Torres Strait Islander history and the meanings attached to songs, dances and dance artefacts. Other Participants agree that the meanings of dances should be articulated to audiences. Participant E adds that it is crucial to fully explain songs and dances, not just give a brief description. He also discusses other cultural practices during performances:

People would say to me when I said, look, we eat turtle steak and dugong. They say 'Oh yuck', and I say, well, we think the same about your meat pie you cover with tomato sauce ... We grew up on this particular food. You grew up with meat pie and tomato sauce, but you know I don't go around and tell you how you eat and do your stuff. I want you to understand how I do and why I do it for and why you do it and respect one another for that.

Discussion with an audience is undeniably preferable to dance in isolation, but much more is needed to achieve mutual respect and tolerance in society. Participant A argues that dance is a "real connection to your own history and culture and family and I think that sits very well within contemporary life style". According to Henry (2000 online), rather than being complicit in the vagaries of tourism, public performances are a "means of engaging with dominating ideologies and of exploring different possibilities of being". For Tamisari (2000a:146-147), dance is a "multi-dimensional activity" that is not just constituent of movement, but is also a "complex event which binds the land and time of the ancestral actions to the present context, the performers to their audience, language to movement, and music to space". Dance could be considered an important social movement in asserting Torres Strait Islander presence at local, national and global levels. Dance is more than performance and as the research Participants argue, it has an important role in community healing.

Dance and the Discourses of Community Healing

Chapter 3 examined the 1997 *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* and the distressing and damaging legacies of colonial policy and racist ideologies. For Participant L, colonialism means “spiritual death” – people are still alive, yet they have been separated from land, song, dance, totems, kinship and rituals. For Participant N, Torres Strait Islanders need to feel good and have hope that there is a positive future for them. She believes that cultural practices can help enhance self-worth. For Participant A, cultural practices such as dance are beneficial for Torres Strait Islanders in “restoring pride in their heritage”. The resulting positive outlook, he feels, will have a positive impact in education and employment. Participant E spoke of the sick and elderly getting enjoyment out of watching dance.

Although Nakata (1997:69) argues that Torres Strait Islanders have an “over-abundance of self-esteem”, some of the Participants spoke of low self-esteem as being a concern. The Croc Eisteddfod is seen by many Participants as a confidence and self-esteem boosting event for young Torres Strait Islanders. Through the Croc Eisteddfod, Indigenous students enter the exciting world of the visual and performing arts and have the opportunity to perform in front of large, appreciative audiences. According to Participant E, performing in front of an audience can boost self-esteem and confidence. As well as the visual and performing arts, the Croc Festival, of which the Croc Eisteddfod is a part, aims to inform Indigenous students about education, health, employment, reconciliation and community engagement (Indigenous Festivals of Australia 2001). Participant G, who was one of the hosts at the 2001 Croc Eisteddfod held on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, remarked that the shyness of many students

was not apparent during their performances. They oozed confidence and enjoyment in front of large and approving crowds. She was almost brought to tears as she watched them perform. The performances were a blend of 'traditional' and contemporary dance. It has been argued that the enhanced confidence and self-esteem engendered by involvement in the Croc Eisteddfod translates to the classroom (Indigenous Festivals of Australia 2001).

According to Participant K, dance enables people to laugh and forget their problems and encourages people to turn away from destructive practices. Destructive practices such as violence and substance abuse can be consequences of colonial practices and racism (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families 1997:178). Participant C spoke of a sense of belonging and friendship in dance groups for young Torres Strait Islanders experiencing personal problems: "That belonging that is so much since we're always made to feel like an outsider ... So that dancing, it contributes to feeling good about yourself." These young people become part of and are nurtured by the members of the dance groups and the members' families. This can assuage feelings of isolation and self-doubt. Dance as community healing is also significant in many other parts of the world. For example, it is believed to have a positive effect on the lives of Native American youth, creating a sense of self-respect, pride, responsibility, hope and accomplishment (Benson 1997 online).

Discourses of Dance in Schools

Discourses of Dance and Culture

As has been argued throughout this thesis, culture is problematic in postcolonial educational contexts. Romanticism, reification and a tendency to exoticise and essentialise are implicit in an overwhelming focus on culture. According to Bottomley (1992:71), “‘culture’ has been either reified – in the emphasis on traditions – or marginalised – as irrelevant or ideological”. Chapter 2 identified the various models of incorporating Indigenous culture in educational contexts. A number of models were implicit in the responses of the research Participants to the issue of dance and schooling. Participant B, for example, is actively involved in cultural maintenance programs: “When schooling first came to Torres Strait it was predominantly another teaching, another history. People knew more about Cook than their ancestral stories.”

However, a focus on a singular culture is problematic as it can homogenise and essentialise and ignore diversity. Nakata (1995a:50) further argues that discriminatory factors that impact on Indigenous educational outcomes deserve emphasis, not the preservation or maintenance of culture or cultural practices. An over-whelming emphasis on culture, moreover, ignores issues of power in education (Crowley 1993:35). This does not mean that cultural practices hold no place in education, however. Participant C argues that cultural practices make Torres Strait Islanders “special and different”. For Participant O, dance and music can bring people together, unlike other curriculum areas. Nakata (1997:72) similarly asserts that cultural practices are important to Torres Strait Islanders and they do have a place in education, but they should not be deemed all-important. Changes to dominant practices are considered crucial if there are to be real and meaningful changes. However, this is not all that is

required. Issues of class, gender and location also need to be addressed in Indigenous education.

Discourses of Dance in the Curriculum

According to the *Dance: Senior Syllabus*, dance is an “evolving form of expression which is fundamental to the human condition” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998:1). Choreography, performance and appreciation are the focus of the Syllabus. In relation to Indigenous students and dance, the Syllabus stipulates that only “approved persons” are able to demonstrate ‘traditional’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dances (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998:13). The Syllabus further calls for equity and an inclusive curriculum: contributions by Indigenous peoples; inclusion of life experiences, such as the “impact of the non-Aboriginal settlement of Australia” [the more palatable term ‘settlement’ is used]; use of non-stereotypical and non-racist resources; and equity in access to curriculum choices. While the Syllabus exhorts educators to recognise diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it then goes on to make a distinction between “traditional and non-traditional communities” (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 1998:53). As discussed throughout this thesis, the ‘traditional/non-traditional’ binary is problematic because discourses of ‘authenticism’ can be associated with ‘traditional’ Indigenous peoples.

One resource for senior dance students is *The Laura Dance Festival* (1990) video. The video focuses predominantly on Aboriginal aspects of dance, though Torres Strait Islanders are briefly mentioned. One section discusses preparation for dances, types, purpose, techniques and formations, songs and sound instruments. The other section

takes a storytelling approach that features an Aboriginal boy, his uncle and a non-Aboriginal friend. This section mentions that Indigenous dances are constantly changing and thus are not static. It also discusses the importance of maintaining cultural practices. Colonialism and the role of missions and reserves are alluded to, in that Indigenous peoples were forced into changes and, consequently, knowledges and cultural practices were lost. However, missions are also described in *The Laura Dance Festival: Teachers Guide* as a “haven at times when Aboriginal lives seemed to be worth little” (Queensland Department of Education 1990:6). There is no mention of the damaging effects of colonial structures and practices, including missions, on Indigenous peoples’ lives and that it was these structures and practices that led to their lives being “worth little”. *The Laura Dance Festival: Teachers Guide* also notes that the video “hints at the future” (Queensland Department of Education 1990:5). In the video, this is where the non-Indigenous boy, after learning about colonisation, says he would like a “happier ending”. The uncle replies: “We’re working on it.” This needs to be discussed much more critically. Mackinlay (2001:15-16), who teaches an Indigenous music and dance subject at the University of Queensland, believes that dance can serve to critique and interrogate Aboriginalist representations.

Informal Torres Strait Islander Dance in Schools

Much of the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in schools is on an informal and ad hoc basis. At Saibai Island State Primary School, for example, community members come into the school about a month before a performance for a celebration such as NAIDOC Week to teach the students. Participants K and M teach cultural practices on an informal basis to students in schools in the Torres Strait. Participant K is adamant that dance, music, weaving and cooking need to be taught in schools because

they are in danger of being lost and, moreover, they are not always taught at home. Indeed, Participant C, a cultural officer who promotes cultural practices in schools, lectures at university and organises cultural activities and events, is often asked by students to teach them dance as they are not taught at home. Further, Indigenous students can identify with the dance groups and this can have positive results. Participant C recalls a classroom where the Torres Strait Islander students were shy, did not participate and sat at the back of the room, but during a visit by a dance group:

... their confidence grew. Their self-esteem grew and they were more active in the classroom so that was because they were able to get out there and perform and sing and dance and have confidence that they could do something really good. So then that transferred to the classroom, and you know they were up front and they could communicate.

Through dance being taught in schools, Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary school students are given the opportunity to travel throughout the Torres Strait, the mainland and even overseas. There is even the potential for a career in dance. Participant D is a professional dancer whose dance group now performs and conducts workshops in schools on the mainland. He is thankful that elders taught him when he was at secondary school and inspired him to become a professional dancer. His craft has taken him throughout Australia and overseas. Those Torres Strait Islander students desiring a career in dance can apply to various universities or colleges. The renowned NAISDA College has produced many talented Indigenous performers.

Not all Participants want dance to be taught in a school context, however. Participant B prefers that dance be taught in a cultural environment such as the proposed cultural centre. Such a context, he argues, would more effectively articulate spiritual meaning and energy:

The people who are taught the dancing must be aware of their environment too, otherwise they feel so artificial doing it somewhere where it doesn't give you a cultural presentation as a background or backdrop. So I think the accepted way of teaching kids is to create the environment around them first ... And let me express to you as a dancer. I'm a professional dancer. My father was a composer/choreographer. I'm also composer. What I can express is if you compare dance lesson on two different environment and you see how them dancers perform ... the ones taught dances in the schools will move like soldiers. Attention! They so tense, they so mechanical, while the one on the cultural environment will take it as part of their life. Relaxed and another main part of history is to renew your energy. So I mean in the school it won't be a spiritual energy that will be projected ... It's still not [the same] because there is no relaxation. Dancing is part of meditation.

Although he feels that dance is more appropriately taught in an environment like a cultural centre, he argues that there are spaces for curriculum inclusions: "There is a white history, there have to be black history too. They have to be hand in hand." He further argues that both histories need to be taught, "otherwise some people feel inferior because that's what we were".

Discourses of Dance and Pedagogy

The Participants discussed issues surrounding who should teach cultural practices in schools. It is elders, Participant K argues, who need to give teachers advice on cultural practices and, importantly, Islanders should speak only about their own islands. Non-Islander teachers can assist or coordinate, but Torres Strait Islanders must have control and teach their cultural practices. Participant E believes that Torres Strait Islanders should teach their history as "you're teaching something that is alive, you're not teaching something that is dead and gone". Further, he asserts, Torres Strait Islanders should be given appropriate and effective training to be able to control programs. Non-Islanders can be part of the team, but not in control.

There are risks associated with non-Islanders teaching cultural practices in educational contexts. Participant R, a community member who teaches dance in schools on the mainland, says one of the risks is that wrong instructions can be given. She gives the example of a non-Islander teacher teaching students the wrong pronunciation of a song that accompanied a dance. A vexed issue arises when Indigenous programs are written by Indigenous writers and distributed to schools. Participant C's organisation has produced a cross-cultural training kit that articulates a precise Torres Strait Islander history. The organisation does not allow non-Islanders to conduct programs in schools: "But is it the same if we have a package for them and it's all written in there and they get up there and deliver it?" Will, he questions, non-Islanders deliver the content correctly and, moreover, should they even be able to teach it? As discussed in Chapter 4, however, issues of Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation and whether non-Indigenous peoples can speak about Indigenous issues are complex and problematic. The notion of the cross-cultural is also problematic. As McConaghy (2000a:208) argues, the cross-cultural "depends upon the existence of discrete, bounded and homogenous entities characterised by distance and difference".

Two of the Participants discussed the issue of payment to community members for teaching cultural practices. Although these members deserve to be compensated for their time and talent, not all schools are able, or willing, to pay. Regardless of the essentialism issues inherent in Indigenous celebrations or programs, the issue here is who has the power to decide what programs are to be implemented in schools and how they are to be implemented.

Some of the Participants articulated Nakata's (1997:72) concerns about too strong an emphasis on cultural practices in education. Participant A is in favour of incorporating cultural practices in schools, but "as long as it's not at the detriment of some other necessary skill, and I have a bit of a worry about that here [in Torres Strait schools]". Participant P similarly argues that cultural practices should not "permeate the whole day" and there should be a "happy medium". Participant P wonders whether students will get bored with cultural practices if they are a major part of school life.

Discourses of 'Tokenism'

Participant D performs in schools because "one of our main objectives and goals is to preserve our culture and educate the wider community on culture". Those Participants who work in schools believe that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students enjoy participating in dance. Participant D suggests that it "breaks down the black and white barrier". From her experiences in schools, Participant R relates that many non-Islander students have little knowledge of Torres Strait Islanders, nor of the Torres Strait, therefore dance in schools is an effective means of educating non-Islander students. How effective are ad hoc celebrations and programs in schools? It has been argued that celebrations in schools satisfy the "need for liberals to tolerate others", but do little to dispel stereotypes or interrogate dominant structures and practices (McConaghy 2000a:182). Participant C concurs: "To me it's sort of like a token thing that we come in for an hour, do a couple of dances and let's put on a meal and then we come back out again." His group does not always have the opportunity to talk to students. What is required is more than a token attempt at incorporating Torres Strait Islander dance in schools.

Essentialism is apparent in an advertisement for NAIDOC Week in the *Townsville Bulletin* (2002:13). The article speaks of Indigenous peoples' "survival", "uniqueness of their traditions and cultures" and "among the most ancient on our planet". Although 'survival' is preferable to 'victim', which connotes passivity and helplessness, it is problematic as it ignores Indigenous resistance and agency and still signifies powerlessness. 'Ancient' suggests primordial and immutable peoples. However, as McConaghy (2000a:245) suggests, this term is popular because having 'ancient' Indigenous peoples still continuing and 'surviving' in contemporary society "invests the nation as a whole with value". Although cultures are spoken of as a plurality in "uniqueness of their traditions and cultures", this phrase can still serve to objectify Indigenous peoples and put them outside the realities of life in contemporary society.

Discourses on Indigenous Studies

Participants C and E advocate a more inclusive curriculum that incorporates Torres Strait Islander history and cultural practices, not just a non-Islander history. Participant E also calls for more consultation between educators and academics and Torres Strait Islander community members. This is supported by Williams (1999 online), who writes that there is widespread support among Indigenous peoples for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in the curriculum for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. He adds that an inclusive curriculum is supportive of diversity issues as well as "providing a balance between the dominant culture and the minority culture". According to Aveling (1998:313), however, Indigenous Studies are problematic because they can romanticise or exoticise Indigenous peoples. McConaghy (1998b:348) argues that although Indigenous Studies were formed as part of an anti-racism strategy, they were "founded upon an inadequate understanding of racialisation practices and their

manifestations in everyday life". It is not individuals or institutions that are the 'problem', it is colonial practices and structures that need to be interrogated.

It has also been argued that rather than an overarching emphasis on 'race' and 'ethnicity', it is imperative for 'whiteness' to be interrogated in educational programs (Aveling 1998:313; Crowley 1999:108; hooks 1990:171; Kameniar 1999:120; Rea & Crowley 1998:355). As hooks (1990:171) explains: "To ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturali[s]ing it. Without specifically addressing white ethnicity, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other." It is further argued that Indigenous Studies and programs can be mere "add-ons" to the curriculum and that it is colonial practices, which negatively impact on Indigenous peoples' educational experiences, that need to be interrogated (Nakata 1995a:48). In addition, Indigenous Studies need to be contextualised and related to Indigenous peoples' lives in today's society (Crowley 1993:37). This is not to say that Indigenous Studies should not be provided; rather, more analysis is required.

It is Participant F's opinion that Indigenous Studies gave her sister pride in being a Torres Strait Islander and this led to her learning *Ailan Dans*, which has further enhanced her self-esteem. Participant L is a supporter of Indigenous Studies and cultural practices in schools because they are a means to change "mindsets" and destructive colonial practices that have negatively impacted on Torres Strait Islanders' lives. He is part of a community initiative in conjunction with Thursday Island State Primary School for a Cultural Heritage Program, which will be part of the curriculum in 2003. Community members have been extensively consulted and will be an integral part of the program. He believes Torres Strait Islander students need to learn from the

past to better understand the present and the future. Torres Strait Islanders have a “mindset”, he says, based on past colonial experiences. They have been disempowered, displaced and segregated. A primary focus in the Cultural Heritage Program is on Torres Strait Islander history, values and cultural practices; community ownership; and rebuilding, restoring and reconciling. Curriculum areas will be relevant to Torres Strait Islanders and students will document aspects of the Torres Strait, such as oral histories and scientific information, on video and CD-ROM. This will be a significant record for future Torres Strait Islanders. Community activities within the curriculum framework include community members teaching cultural practices such as dance, art, cooking, crafts and music and how to make jewellery and dance paraphernalia. Students will utilise their skills by catering at events, performing and selling their arts and crafts. The program also requires students to think deeply about their places in today’s society. It will be interesting to see the results or evaluation of this program.

Discourses on Boys and Dance

As discussed in Chapter 3, Gard (2001:214-223) has discussed issues surrounding boys and dance. He argues that some dance educators articulate the athletic and sports training aspects of dance, which privileges sports-minded males, marginalises those boys who do not enjoy sport and perpetuates dominant forms of masculinity in educational contexts. His concern is the sexist, homophobic and stereotypical discourses attached to dance. However, he also argues that the incorporation of dance in schools can allow teachers and students to interrogate and critique these discourses. Arguably, the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in schools could allow an interrogation of Aboriginalist as well as sexist and homophobic discourses. Various Participants spoke of Torres Strait Islander boys dancing, though there was no clear

agreement on the extent of their enjoyment of and participation in dance. Participant C argues that:

It's not cool to be walking around with your traditional clothes on or things like that. Your cap back to front, your American logo, you know, the company shirts and stuff like that. Yeah, that's cool, but because I know with a few of our kids that dance, they're quite shamed because they're in their traditional gear.

However, he says that despite this initial reticence, once the boys start performing, 'shame' dissipates and they enjoy dancing. For some boys, dance is a 'natural' thing to do because of the involvement of their fathers, grandfathers and uncles in dance. Indeed, some families are renowned for producing talented dancers, just as others are renowned for producing talented writers of songs or makers of dance paraphernalia (York 2000:343).

Dance and the Postcolonial Curriculum

Crowley (1999:103) argues that the place of Indigenous histories, knowledges and experiences needs to be critiqued in a postcolonial curriculum. Others, such as Smith (1999:14), are critical of postcolonial theory as it perpetuates dominant power structures. For Banerjee (2000 online), even in contemporary postcolonial theory, Indigenous peoples' places remain "unspeakable and invisible". In spite of these assertions, spaces must be found to interrogate and disrupt colonial practices and legacies in educational contexts.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are spaces for the visual and performing arts in a postcolonial curriculum. Rea and Crowley (1998:355-356) explain that they can be interrogated and engaged with in terms of postcolonialism: "In these postcolonial times

engagement with visual [and performing] art calls up the need to listen as well as look, the need to engage in order to make politics, identity and subjectivity 'matter'." Hall (1991:34) describes the emergence of Indigenous visual and performing arts into a globalised and postcolonial society as a "profound cultural revolution". There are, nonetheless, tensions and debates arising out of this revolutionary social movement through the performing arts.

Representation Issues in the Curriculum

Western knowledges and voices have tended to be privileged in the past and today there are complex questions of who should conduct Indigenous research and who should control Indigenous programs. My positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher is a tenuous and uneasy one. For too long, educators and researchers have tended to speak for and about Indigenous peoples, which is a form of Aboriginalism. On the other hand, Attwood (1992:xii-xiii), Langton (1993:27) and hooks (1989:47) question assertions that only Indigenous peoples can write or speak about Indigenous matters, in that it perpetuates essentialism and racism. As I argued in Chapter 4, these are complex questions with no easy answers.

Participant A, who has collaborated with various non-Indigenous individuals and groups, argues that it depends on the situation and the people with whom you are collaborating. He explains that sometimes non-Indigenous researchers have fresh insights. Participant F appreciates that anthropologists documented Torres Strait Islander history and cultural practices, but wants Indigenous academics to have the opportunity to interpret and critique researchers' work and effectively contribute to research. She does not want decisions to be based purely on non-Indigenous

researchers' work or the work to be portrayed as the definitive answer to an issue. Huggins (1994:75) and Nakata (1995a:50) have documented their criticisms of those non-Indigenous peoples who are promulgated as 'experts' on Indigenous matters. According to hooks (1989:47-48), while non-Indigenous peoples can write about Indigenous issues, it must not be portrayed as 'authoritative' and they should write from a position as non-Indigenous.

Participant F also asserts that the Indigenous 'voice' is not enough: "We need people to be in the position where they can do the action, not so much us just always being the voice." What Nakata (1999:3) calls for is Indigenous standpoints on educational issues. He argues that more effective discussions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and educators are required, but it is imperative that Indigenous peoples articulate their positions, or standpoints, and they must, moreover, not be constructed from the positionality of Other. Indigenous standpoints, Nakata (2000:x) argues, necessitate Indigenous scholars to "both enter and know 'the discourse' and at the same time stand outside of it, to avoid being captive to our discursive construction". Although more effective discussions are called for, McConaghy (2000a:212-213) argues that collaborative research does not always result in tangible benefits for Indigenous peoples. What has to be critiqued is who has the power to make decisions. Participant N wants Torres Strait Islanders to have training so they can control programs and hence their lives. She thinks that it is simplistic to blame Indigenous peoples if money is misspent or Indigenous run programs fail. What Participant E desires is for Torres Strait Islanders to be "understudies" to "qualified, experienced people" in the Torres Strait and for those understudies to eventually take over the roles and responsibilities within that organisation or program.

Some Participants discussed being under the umbrella of Indigenous or Aboriginal. However, as Participant B explains: “This does not mean that we want to come away from our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. We want to live together, but recognised differently.” Luke et al. (1993:143) have written of Torres Strait Islanders being subsumed under the term Indigenous or even Aborigine/Aboriginal in government policies and other literature. This is illustrated in the NATSIEP, with the comment “throughout this statement the term Aboriginal should be taken to include Torres Strait Islander” (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:5). In a similar vein, Participant C spoke of a comprehensive Indigenous health strategy document in 2001 that had very limited references to Torres Strait Islanders. Diversity between groups and within groups is often not apparent or articulated. Participant C describes Torres Strait Islanders as “probably a minority within a minority”. He explains that his organisation needs to articulate Torres Strait Islanders’ concerns because of the perception in wider society that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are the same and the lack of knowledge of who are Torres Strait Islanders and where is the Torres Strait.

The preceding discussion of Torres Strait Islander discourses on dance and schooling reveals diverse and complex perspectives. What emerges is that *Ailan Dans* is highly valued and considered important as an aspect of economic, social, spiritual, psychological, political and educational movements amongst Torres Strait Islanders. The specifics of how dance is to be incorporated in schooling, however, are contested and require local negotiation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: *AILAN DANS* AS SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT

... dance is a cultural theme of some significance that has been largely silenced in industrialised societies. (Bottomley 1992:73)

We [Bangarra Dance Theatre] need to cross barriers of language, technology, time and place. Dance and music are the best possible conveyors of these experiences and these messages. (Page 1999:106)

... dance is an intensely generative site in which cultural and social identities are being performed, contested, constructed and/or reformulated in postcolonial societies. (Henry, Magowan & Murray 2000 online)

In its current marginali[s]ed standing, dance often is categori[s]ed as a branch of physical education – an old-fashioned attempt to add grace and bearing to, mostly, female students. This misunderstanding of dance education derives from a cultural prejudice suffered by all of the fine arts, in which the visual and performing arts are perceived as purely performance and entertainment ... Adding motion [dance] as a vehicle for exploring subject matter increases the depth of resultant learning and understanding. (Koff 2000 online)

Dance is compelling because it merges resonance and wonder both with and without a knowledge of the cultural and historical conditions of its production as an encounter with enchantment ... [I]ndigenous dance should be examined as an expressive, active and ongoing performative dialogue with the nation. (Magowan 2000:319)

This thesis has explored the issues surrounding the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum. In doing so, it has sought to explore dance in terms of the broader complex issues surrounding culture in education.

To summarise the argument of the thesis, Chapter 1 considered culture and education as a site of contestation and debate. While various educational policies have been formulated to address Indigenous educational disadvantage and improve educational access, participation and outcomes, Indigenous peoples still remain the most educationally disadvantaged peoples in Australia. Although there was a concerted effort to extensively consult with Indigenous peoples and communities in the NATSIEP (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1989:8), Indigenous writers such as Woods (1991:18) argue that the policy had the effect of perpetuating dominant discourses. One concern for McConaghy (1998b:344-346) is that the NATSIEP did not articulate the diversity of opinion in wider society about what is desired or needed in Indigenous education. She argues that Both Ways education was privileged in the NATSIEP, even though an analysis of submissions revealed suggestions for many alternative models. Therefore, although it was stated in the NATSIEP that Indigenous communities were extensively consulted, Indigenous communities' wishes for specific models for specific situations, that is, for multiplicity and diversity rather than universality, were elided.

Universality is produced in policies through various strategies, foremost being the general term, "Aboriginal people" (Luke et al. 1993:139). The differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are neither recognised nor articulated. Diversity needs to be addressed as it impacts on Indigenous peoples' life and educational opportunities. Another concern that is pertinent to this thesis is the representation of Torres Strait Islander perspectives and standpoints. Torres Strait Islanders are often subsumed under the term 'Aborigines/Aboriginal' in educational policies and other literature.

Nakata's (1995a; 1995b) and McConaghy's (1997a; 1997b; 1998b; 2000a) critiques of the NATSIEP and other government policies give insights into the concerns surrounding the ways in which culture is constructed in education. 'Culture' is problematic in that it suggests homogeneity rather than diversity. It privileges sameness rather than diversity. Further, a reliance or emphasis on culture as central to analysis ignores dominant social practices and colonial legacies that have negatively impacted on Indigenous peoples. That is, the preoccupation with culture in education frequently obscures important social and historical issues that have been central to shaping Indigenous education.

Indigenous identity is another complex issue and, like culture, tends to be portrayed in terms of homogeneity. An emphasis on a singular culture and identity, moreover, ignores crucial dynamics of class, gender, sexuality, location and power. Writers such as Muecke (1992:42) and hooks (1994:78), on the other hand, have expressed concerns over these arguments against cultural essentialism, arguing that cultural identity is crucial in resistance and in challenging dominant practices. Cultural essentialism and identity are crucial in, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' struggle for land rights (McConaghy 1998a:129) and for Torres Strait Islanders in their fight for greater autonomy.

Educational models in various schools and educational contexts include two way, Both Ways, bilingual education, inclusions and additions and Western only schooling. Two way, Both Ways and bilingual and bicultural models are, however, problematic, as McConaghy (2000a:119) suggests, in their "cultural essentialism and the construction of a 'two-race' binary". What she calls for is a careful analysis of specific situations with

strategies developed for local contexts. One educational model will not fit all contexts and situations. As the notion of culture has both constructive and destructive potential, specific situations need to be looked at. Nakata (1998; 1999) advocates Indigenous standpoints and giving prominence to experiences in Torres Strait Islanders' worlds as the basis for the development of appropriate strategies.

A number of researchers have argued that a postcolonial curriculum can interrogate and disrupt colonial practices. Such a curriculum interrogates issues of power and asks whose knowledges, experiences and histories are acknowledged and valued. Indigenous peoples such as Rea (cited in Rea & Crowley 1998:358) and Sykes (cited in Smith 1999:24), however, are critical of postcolonialism, claiming that despite its promises it does little to disrupt dominant power structures. Despite these concerns, it is imperative to find spaces within which to critique power issues and colonial legacies in education. Indigenous dance, Rea and Crowley (1998:355-356), Hall (1991:34) and Henry, Magowan and Murray (2000 online) argue, has a crucial place in a curriculum that seeks to interrogate and disrupt oppressive schooling practices.

Chapter 3 explored these issues of dance and the curriculum with specific reference to issues surrounding Torres Strait Islander dance. A number of writers are critical of the generally low status of dance in the curriculum. Koff (2000 online), for example, is critical of the position of dance as an extracurricular and expendable activity. For some educators, dance is too nebulous and ephemeral to have other than a marginal place in the curriculum. However, dance, argues Koff, enhances self-expression and, ultimately, self-knowledge.

In an Australian political climate of economic rationalism and an environment of high unemployment, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a focus on vocational education. However, it could equally be argued that such a context necessitates a focus on subjects with the potential to enhance communication skills, self-expression and self-esteem, which, arguably, may help students to cope in a globalised, ever-changing and uncertain world. Such an assertion requires empirical research and further analysis.

It is Gard's opinion (2001:222) that dance has the potential to interrogate sexism, homophobia and stereotypical representations. Similarly, this thesis argues that Torres Strait Islander dance could allow an interrogation of Aboriginalist representations. Mackinlay (2001:15-16) encourages an interrogation of Aboriginalist and stereotypical representations in the Indigenous music and dance subject she teaches at the University of Queensland. However, more analysis and research are required on this potential for dance in schools. Research could also be conducted specifically on Indigenous boys' involvement and experiences with dance and any potential benefits to particular groups. As Herbert (1997:96) argues, the change in societal roles has been particularly devastating and debilitating for many Indigenous men and this, in turn, has had far-reaching and damaging consequences for many Indigenous communities.

As well as a form of artistic expression, dance is resistive. Magowan (2000:309) argues that Indigenous dance is a means of asserting Indigenous rights. This is applicable to Indigenous peoples in other countries, such as Native Americans. Indigenous peoples in Australia and throughout the world are also using dance as a means of dealing with psychological, emotional and behavioural issues. Indigenous peoples have suffered from the ongoing consequences of colonial practices and legacies and racist ideologies.

Indigenous Festivals of Australia (2001) notes that the involvement of Indigenous students in the Croc Eisteddfod is one means of enhancing self-esteem and confidence and improving literacy skills, community involvement and attendance at school.

A crucial aspect of Torres Strait Islander dance is its mutability. It has been subject to change and, in turn, has influenced change in other aspects of social life. However, writers such as Magowan (2000:314) and Turner (1994:135) suggest that non-Indigenous peoples frequently seek 'authenticism' and the 'traditional' in relation to Indigenous dance. That is, non-Indigenous peoples view change as loss. Discourses of 'authenticism' can serve to reify the cultural practices of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous dance theatre performances have felt the pressure to resist change, at the same time that they have benefited by the processes by which Torres Strait Islander dance has become commodified and inserted within a global economy.

The past, of course, is important. Lattas (1993 online) writes of some intellectuals' propensity to ignore the past and concentrate on the present and what is perceived as a better future, arguing that the "primordial past is not appreciated as a space of empowerment or freedom, or as capable of providing the distance which allows people to see the present in a new light". Denying other peoples' past or memories, he further argues, "becomes a means of dispossessing people of their ownership of space". Henry (2000 online) concurs, suggesting that essentialism needs to be "historicised and contextualised". She argues that "people, individually and collectively, are able to intervene in their own histories through performance". Public performances, she adds, are a "means of engaging with dominating ideologies and of exploring different possibilities of being".

Chapter 4 considered complex issues of representation, the 'white' gaze and ethics in Indigenous educational research. An important consideration in Indigenous research is that of the 'white' gaze. Lattas (1993 online) argues that non-Indigenous discourses "create a knowledgeable gaze which seeks to police the cultural practices through which Aborigines produce themselves". Indigenous peoples, he argues, have become the "focus of a gaze which analyses, questions, and problematises their resistances and even their identities". The 'white' gaze can be seen in educational contexts, as Kameniar (1999) has documented. Too often, non-Indigenous teachers fail to interrogate their 'whiteness'. For hooks (1990:171), ignoring "white ethnicity" serves to naturalise it and therefore reinforce dominant power structures. This has implications for non-Indigenous teachers and a Torres Strait Islander curriculum.

Indigenous voices are now being heard after being elided and ignored for so long. Indigenous visual and performing artists are now asserting their voices and challenging racist and stereotypical representations through, according to Langton (1993:10), "aesthetic and intellectual statements". However, as McConaghy (2000a:215) notes, "conservative and racist voices" are still prevalent. In addition, more than Indigenous voices are required in order to change dominant social structures. This is pertinent to Indigenous education and the incorporation of Torres Strait Islander cultural practices in the curriculum. Significantly, there is not one 'voice', but many voices.

An important question in any research concerns the contribution to knowledge or the benefits of the research. In this research, the pertinent questions are how will it benefit Torres Strait Islanders and how will it contribute to Indigenous educational knowledge? Smith (1999:191) argues that Indigenous peoples have benefited little from Indigenous

educational research. The intention of this research is to provide educational personnel with some insights into the complexities and crucial issues inherent in incorporating Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum. It is also the intention to provide educational personnel with Torres Strait Islander community members' discourses and desires with regard to Torres Strait Islander dance. Importantly, the research has strived to articulate the need for the complexities and diversity of Torres Strait Islander communities to be seriously considered and reflected in any educational policy or program.

However, it must be acknowledged that as a non-Indigenous researcher, I can only provide perspectives that could be considered 'partial truths'. This thesis could not have been completed without speaking with the Torres Strait Islander Participants. However, speaking with, McConaghy (2000a:213) argues, is problematic as it "still implies an 'us and a 'them'". I can only speak, as Pettman (1992:130) suggests, "*from somewhere*". Therefore, my positionality as a non-Indigenous, middle-class, tertiary educated female must be taken into account in this research.

Chapter 5 analysed interviews with the research Participants and identified Torres Strait Islander discourses on social imperatives, community consultation and the notion of community. More than cultural value, dance emerges as having an important role in addressing social imperatives such as employment, racism, autonomy, self-esteem, social health and wellbeing. The importance of Indigenous community consultation and collaboration has been espoused in various educational policies. Nonetheless, policies can limit diversity and privilege some models over others rather than articulate models for specific contexts. Policies, moreover, can serve to "create and sustain colonial

hierarchies” (McConaghy 1998b:345). Further, instead of articulating a singular Indigenous identity, policies should reflect and articulate the diversity and multiplicity inherent in Indigenous communities. The notion of community requires further attention in educational policies. Indigenous communities are not homogenous entities. Anderson (1991:36) has provided insights into the ways in which nations or communities are imagined and how “fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality”. Some educational policies may suggest homogeneity, but the Torres Strait Islander Participants in this research articulated the differences as well as the similarities between and within Torres Strait Islanders, islands and communities. If communities are not homogenous, then neither are Indigenous peoples’ experiences or social imperatives necessarily homogenous.

Brady (1990) has provided a cautionary note for researchers in articulating ‘problems’ in Indigenous communities. What researchers perceive as ‘problems’ may not be perceived as ‘problems’ by Indigenous peoples and there may not be total agreement in the community that something is a ‘problem’. Once again, acknowledgement of diversity and an analysis of specific situations are needed.

Indigenous spokespersons such as Noel Pearson (*Insight*, video recording, 2001) are bravely articulating issues that affect Indigenous peoples and promulgating strategies and initiatives to address these issues. The Participants in my research also honestly and candidly articulated issues of concern. They believe that to make positive changes and ultimately enhance Torres Strait Islanders’ educational and life chances, issues have to be faced and openly discussed. However, there is a danger in discussing issues such as violence and drugs, as hooks (1989:180), Huggins (1994:77) and Pettman (1992:129)

point out, in that pejorative and stereotypical representations can be reinforced. Careful analysis is thus required.

Unemployment is a concern for most of the Participants and understandably so as unemployment is high among Indigenous peoples. Alcohol and drug abuse and dependence on welfare are concerns for many of the Participants, both male and female. Three female Participants spoke of violence, but no males. While many Indigenous women bear the brunt of domestic violence, it is Indigenous women who are fighting destructive practices (Donnan 2001 online) and articulating the importance of maintaining cultural practices (Mackinlay 1998:21). Racist attitudes and ideologies still impact on Indigenous peoples. Interestingly, more female Participants articulated racism as an issue of concern. Greater autonomy for the Torres Strait is crucial for some Participants, while others feel that other concerns, such as welfare dependency, deserve greater attention. Greater autonomy appeared to be more of an issue with the male Participants. In an educational context, most of the Participants see the need for good English skills, which will enable better participation in wider society. The social imperatives articulated by the Participants need to be considered in relation to Torres Strait Islander dance and the curriculum.

Chapter 6 identified Torres Strait Islander discourses regarding Torres Strait Islander dance and the curriculum. The research Participants have been or are involved in Torres Strait Islander dance, either as dancers or with dance in schools, or both. As well as an involvement in dance or dance issues, some of the Participants are also musicians, singers and visual artists. Some of the Participants have danced or performed

throughout Australia and overseas and others have had their art exhibited throughout Australia and overseas.

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, culture in education is a vexed issue. All the Participants articulated a desire to strengthen and maintain Torres Strait Islander dance and other cultural practices. There was a theme of resounding pride in Torres Strait Islander dance.

While it is highly desirable for the Participants that Torres Strait Islander dance is strengthened and maintained, there is no agreement on how it should be incorporated in schools. Some believe that it should play an integral part in the curriculum. Others prefer dance to be taught at home, but argue that as there is less desire for this today and too many other influences that readily attract young Torres Strait Islanders, it may be preferable for it to be taught in schools. Although agreeing that Torres Strait Islander dance has a place in the curriculum, some Participants are adamant that it should not be at the expense of good English and other educational skills needed for employment and success in wider society. One Participant strongly believes that cultural practices should be taught in an “appropriate” environment such as a cultural centre. Schools, he argues, can be too regimented, which means students can miss the true essence and meaning of Torres Strait Islander dance as well as the relaxation benefits and enjoyment of artistic expression and movement.

One benefit of incorporating Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum is that it has the potential to interrogate Aboriginalist representations. However, this would require careful thought. It must be interrogatory rather than celebratory as are some Indigenous

Studies programs (Crowley 1999:104). The incorporation of Torres Strait Islander dance and other cultural practices is mostly on an ad hoc and informal basis in schools. Some of the Participants are critical of this tokenistic treatment and call for a more inclusive curriculum. Music, dance and food in multicultural celebrations in schools are a palatable and non-threatening means of showing 'difference' and diversity. Students can feel good about participating in or watching these cultural practices; however, feel-good messages are problematic. What is much more difficult and potentially threatening for teachers and students is interrogating dominant structures and practices. Cultural practices will be an integral component of the Cultural Heritage program at Thursday Island State Primary School in 2003. The program has been written following consultation with community members and community members will also play a crucial role in teaching students cultural practices. Most of the Participants agree that in schools non-Islanders can assist, but it is Torres Strait Islanders who should teach cultural practices. There were clear calls for more active involvement in decision-making and effective contribution by Torres Strait Islander academics and educators and better consultation with community members.

Torres Strait Islander dance has an important role to play in enhancing self-esteem and confidence, in social healing and in self-expression and movement. These aspects arguably need to be valued more. All the Participants agree with this potential of dance, particularly involvement in the Croc Eisteddfod. The educational and personal benefits of involvement in the Croc Eisteddfod deserve more detailed study and analysis.

For the Participants, Torres Strait Islander dance is not static or essentialist, but dynamic, vibrant and alive. However, while some Participants incorporate both the

contemporary and 'traditional' in their work, others desire that 'traditional' practices remain the same. Commodification issues concern some of the Participants. Participant B scathingly describes exploitation as "cultural prostitution". Others are concerned about Torres Strait Islanders dancing purely for the money or changing dances to suit audiences. Some take great pains in dance performances to explain the meanings of their dances. For others, there is an immense pride in sharing their cultural practices with non-Indigenous audiences. Although not a representative sample (in statistical terms) of Torres Strait Islander views, the varied responses of the research Participants call attention to the existence of multiple and contested discourses on dance and schooling.

The question of what is the place of Torres Strait Islander dance in the curriculum is a complex one and this thesis offers no easy answers. Torres Strait Islander dance is both resistive and accommodative. In considering the place of dance in Torres Strait Islander education, what is required is a careful analysis of specific situations, acknowledgement of the diversity within Torres Strait Islander communities, and more careful consultation with Torres Strait Islander community members and educators. Importantly, Torres Strait Islanders' wishes and perspectives on the social and cultural benefits of dance need to be reflected in educational policies and programs.

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