

Losing Ground? Issues of Autonomy in an Urban Indigenous Organisation

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I certify that this thesis is a product of my own original work and has not been published elsewhere. All data collection, analysis and writing, except where cited in the text, has been undertaken and completed solely by the author.

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Abstract

This thesis offers an ethnographic study of one urban Aboriginal organisation, Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation; a successful human services agency struggling against the socioeconomic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians. The thesis argues that the difficulties faced by Winanga-Li stem not from Indigenous incapacity, but rather from government policies that maintain Indigenous oppression.

Three interwoven theoretical strands serve to explicate this thesis: those of post-colonialism, identity politics, and neoliberalism within contemporary government bureaucracies. Essential to this theoretical framework is the exploration of power relationships between Indigenous Australians and the State. These power relationships not only bear upon Indigenous interactions with other Australians and each other, but also upon both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' constructions of Indigenous culture, tradition and behaviour.

Australian governments have a poor track record of interacting and consulting with urban Indigenous collectives. This, coupled with the centralised top-down design and development of Indigenous-specific human services, results in the programs intended to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage producing negligible outcomes. Further frustrating efforts to improve the socioeconomic outcomes of Indigenous Australians is governments' preferred approach for funding a small number of large non-Indigenous organisations to provide Indigenous-specific human services. Although such organisations have little experience with the Indigenous clients they intend to serve – or credibility in their eyes – these organisations are increasingly being awarded Indigenous service funding through neoliberal tendering processes, since their structure and ideology aligns with those of the State. As a result, Indigenous-controlled organisations are being coerced into adopting an economic imperialist outlook or risk being defunded; thus losing the organic governance culture that has uniquely been producing results in reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

While Australian governments openly acknowledge the egregious disadvantage Indigenous Australians face when compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, and attempt to decrease it largely through the delivery of Indigenous-specific human services, their policies have failed and are continuing to fail. Evidence demands a new approach to the funding and design of Indigenous-specific human services if positive outcomes are to be achieved, and this thesis puts forth plausible recommendations for more effective Indigenous human service delivery.

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Aunty Margaret, who is no longer with us, was the first community member who fully embraced my presence at Winanga-Li, making me feel less like an interloper and more like someone whose contribution to the organisation was socially valid. She was a beautiful person and I dedicate this work to her.

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Thesis Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme
ACA Act	<i>Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (renamed CATSI Act 2006)</i>
AIA Act	<i>Associations Incorporation Acts 1984/2009</i>
ACLO	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADC	Aboriginal Development Commission
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AES	Aboriginal Employment Solutions
ALO	Aboriginal Liaison Officer
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
APB	Aborigines Protection Board
ARG	Aboriginal Reference Group
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services
AWB	Aborigines Welfare Board
CATSI Act	<i>Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 (previously the ACA Act 1976)</i>
CGOI	Consolidated Gross Operating Income
CtGC	Closing the Gap Clearinghouse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DEO	Disability Employment Options
DFT	Department of Fair Trading
DoCS	Department of Community Services
DSS	Department of Social Services (previously known as FaHCSIA)
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Children's Services and Indigenous Affairs (renamed DSS September 17, 2013)
HPAIED	Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development
HSC	High School Certificate
MSP	Statistical Division of Marrickville, Sydenham and Petersham
NAC	National Aboriginal Conference

Acronym	Definition
NACC	National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NFP	Not for Profit
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NPM	New Public Management
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
OID	Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
ORAC	Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations
ORIC	Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
RPA	Regional Partnership Agreement
SACS Award	Social and Community Services Award
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SRA	Shared Responsibility Agreement
VFM	Value for Money

1. Introduction

We all know that Aboriginal organisations have the tendency to go belly-up.

The above remark was made by an employee of the federal government Department of Families, Housing, Children's Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) during an October 2009 information session for Aboriginal organisations on how to obtain government funding. The comment referred to "risk management", a category used to assess government tender applications. In this area, the representative informed the group, Aboriginal organisations were vulnerable in comparison to non-Indigenous organisations. Because Aboriginal organisations are prone "to go belly-up", should they be awarded government funding, the program or service was likely not to be delivered and the money would be wasted. When the representative was asked if that meant that all Aboriginal organisations began at a disadvantage in tendering processes, she shifted her ground and asserted that they were equally positioned with non-Indigenous organisations to receive funding, but that many people believed that they posed a risk to successful program delivery; a risk that needed to be assessed and managed. When the FaHCSIA employee was further asked if it was likely that those analysing the tenders believed that Aboriginal corporations were a risk because they had a tendency to go "belly-up" she responded: "We are only human."

This incident, which occurred approximately eleven months into my fieldwork, lent support to assertions by members of the Mount (Mt) Druitt Aboriginal community that Indigenous¹ corporations were increasingly denied funding for Aboriginal-specific programs, in favour of non-Indigenous organisations. Initially my research involved employees of Aboriginal organisations only peripherally, as I originally planned to focus on Aboriginal² individuals

¹ I use the capitalised "Indigenous" to refer specifically to indigenous Australians and their culture. When the word is not capitalised, I am using it to refer to indigenous peoples and cultures globally.

² Throughout this work I avoid using the term "Aborigine", unless in quotations or formal titles, as a number of my informants find it highly offensive, belittling, and patronising as it was the name put upon them by colonisers. Similarly, I do not use the word "Aboriginal" as a noun as it reduces a person to their ethnicity, rather than treating it as one aspect of one's identity (Raymond Gibson, personal communication, January 24, 2014). Not all Aboriginal persons find these terms to be offensive; however I have elected to honour my informants' wishes and do not use them.

in full-time employment, and the support mechanisms and constraints experienced in obtaining and maintaining employment. I began to work with Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation³ in an effort to examine the employment opportunities provided to Aboriginal workers. Compelling data on this topic emerged during fieldwork, yet my primary informants convinced me that a more salient focus lay in the increasing difficulty Indigenous corporations experience in accessing government resources. I frequently heard assertions of concern regarding perceived inequity and injustice in the allocation of government funding for Aboriginal-specific programs and this led me to refocus my dissertation on this topic.

Indigenous corporations were created under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (ACA Act)* in an effort to grant Aboriginal Australians autonomy over the public services that they use. These organisations were envisioned as serving as an interface between government institutions and Indigenous communities, functioning as a “carapace” (Rowley 1972:423, 429) beneath which Aboriginal priorities and modes of conducting business would reign in the design, implementation and delivery of services to Indigenous citizens. Indeed, this is how Aboriginal organisations such as Winanga-Li presently function. Thus, should such corporations face increasing difficulty in obtaining funding, as alleged by my informants and suggested by the above quote from a civil servant, the space permitted these organisations to promote Indigenous autonomy also stands in jeopardy.

This thesis examines the situatedness of Indigenous organisations within the schema of human service providers, exploring their field of struggle to provide essential services to other Indigenous persons. In order to fully contextualise this site, taken-for-granted notions such as Aboriginal community and culture, as well as accountability and evidence of organisations’ outcomes will be examined. The application of these value-laden notions will then be investigated within the modes through which government funds for Indigenous-specific human services are allocated.

³ Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation is a pseudonym, used to protect the identity of the organisation. All names of individuals and organisations – with the exception of those of academics, government departments, and organisations whose actions are not critiqued in this work – are likewise pseudonyms.

Such funds are distributed in alignment with economic rationalism, via “competitive” market mechanisms; most frequently the “purchase of service contracting” via a competitive or negotiated tender (Productivity Commission 2010:303). I will argue that although this system of funding distribution purports to provide an unbiased assessment of value-for-money (VFM), upon closer examination one finds that value-laden assessments dominate its structure. Within the bureaucratic workings of the tendering system one ideology dominates – that of neoliberal economic imperialism, which prescribes a Western quantitative “rationalist” approach. Organisations that do not adhere to this ideology are penalized (Box et al. 2001:611). Overlooking the widely acknowledged fact that facets of human behaviour (such as self-esteem, wellbeing and human capital) are difficult to quantify, the competitive tender model subscribes to a logic that purports that VFM can be determined solely in numerical terms. This privileges organisations with the resources to harness experts in formulaic tender composition and/or that adhere to neoliberalism’s New Public Management (NPM). Many small Indigenous organisations lose out in this allegedly unbiased approach to distributing government funding. The thesis concludes that the strictures of neoliberalism, as entailed within the funding distribution schema, does indeed pose a threat to Indigenous corporations and thus works to perpetuate Indigenous disadvantage and marginalisation rather than to alleviate it.

This thesis offers an ethnography of one small Aboriginal organisation in Mt Druitt, Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation, set within the overall framework of cultural anthropology and based upon a year’s fieldwork, as well as ongoing participation and communication with the organisation’s employees and clients. My work emphasises the strengths of Winanga-Li and the Aboriginal community with which it engages, rather than focusing upon deficits. This thesis argues a counter-narrative regarding both Indigenous persons and organisations: that Aboriginal people are resilient in the face of adversity and oppression, and that their organisations can effectively provide not only essential services, but by operating on a principle of self-empowerment, function to make visible the needs and priorities of their community to non-Indigenous Australians.

I have received criticism for what some have interpreted to be a biased portrayal of Winanga-Li. This apparently emerges through my empathy with Indigenous service

providers and promotion of Aboriginal organisations' approach to aiding their clientele, without greater efforts to challenge the seeming necessity of such organisations to provide human services to Indigenous clients. To this I respond that Indigenous organisations have occupied an important space, not only within government policy history, but also in the minds of Indigenous people with regards to their advancement. The "difference" exhibited by Indigenous people has for centuries resulted in maltreatment by White Australia, yet the *ACA Act* sought to recognise and support this "difference" through the carapace of Aboriginal corporations. However, Australia now features a political climate that has reverted to the view that such "difference" is a disorder and symptomatic of dysfunction. It is this phenomenon and its bearing upon the provision of Indigenous-specific services that this thesis critically addresses.

In the vein of Phillippe Bourgois' anthropology, which seeks to understand disadvantaged subcultures that are seen to be irrational and self-defeating through close examination of the historical and structural circumstances of their post-colonial existence, I have explored the conditions of urban Indigenous life in Mt Druitt. Further, inspired by the "good enough" ethnography of Nancy Sheper-Hughes (1992:28), I have sought to understand Indigenous experiences of injustice that produce real suffering in the context of the societal structures within which they occur.

There is a great lack of comprehension and empathy on the part of the Australian populace regarding Indigenous experiences of injustice and suffering. All too often I have heard non-Indigenous Australians assert that Aboriginal people need to "just get over it"; that the racial oppression of Australia's past is no longer present and that Indigenous persons should stop "whining" and "asking for hand-outs". In response, this work attempts to demonstrate that racism still occurs within Australian society; that it covertly pervades societal structures, that it has been internalised by Aboriginal people, and that it bears upon Indigenous opportunity and autonomy.

In spite of the disadvantaged circumstances within which Indigenous Mt Druitt residents conduct their lives, I have observed Winanga-Li attempt to counter the internalised hopelessness of its clients, providing them with the support to realise that opportunities are

for them and not just for others. During my fieldwork I witnessed the programs of this Aboriginal corporation, and the efforts of its staff, facilitate positive change within numerous clients' lives, in some cases resulting in the overcoming of seemingly intractable social problems. Thus, my portrayal of Winanga-Li is an accurate depiction of the work undertaken by this organisation and its staff, rather than one of bias and blindness to shortcomings.

In preparing the reader for the body of this work, I will first provide a brief explanation regarding how I came to be working with an Aboriginal corporation and my position within the landscape amidst which events transpired.

Methodological Framework

As an ethnographic work, participant observation is the foundational methodology of this thesis. This involved an intensive twelve months of fieldwork in 2009 during which I lived in Sydney and commuted via train to Mt Druitt.

While I had initially scheduled one year of fieldwork, my engagement with the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community did not end at the conclusion of the planned twelve months, and continues to this day. During the fourth year of my PhD candidature the Executive Officer of Winanga-Li, Betty, was diagnosed with cancer and in early 2012 I was asked to step in and help keep the organisation going while she underwent surgery and other treatment. I agreed to do so for a modest salary, and this entailed taking a leave of absence from my university program. Betty has since recovered from her treatment (despite a number of setbacks) and is now cancer-free. My work at Winanga-Li on an almost daily basis for approximately four months in early 2012 served to enrich the breadth and quality of this research and enabled a longer-term analysis of the events that occurred at the organisation during my formal period of fieldwork. Outside of these fieldwork windows, communication with Winanga-Li staff was ongoing and meetings between myself and community members occurred fortnightly at Winanga-Li and other locations throughout Mt Druitt.

Research Context

This research was undertaken in a disadvantaged area of suburban Sydney. While there is a history of anthropologists investigating the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal life in urban Australia⁴, this population gets far less academic attention than their remote counterparts (Biddle 2009b:6; Lahn 2012:294). This is the case despite the fact that over the past seventy years Indigenous Australians increasingly migrated to city centres from rural and remote regions of the country. The 1970s and 1980s then saw a mass suburbanisation of previously urban Aboriginal communities in New South Wales (NSW) (Guppy 2005:2), largely due to the growth in public housing on cities' outskirts (Morgan 2006a:62). The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census reported that approximately 76 percent of Indigenous Australians were living in major cities or regional settings, with 53 percent living in cities or their inner regional areas (ABS 2007). Thus, although infrequently acknowledged, the majority of Australia's Indigenous citizens now reside in urban and suburban locales (Biddle 2011:6).

The importance of investigating urban Indigenous populations is underscored by the fact that their socioeconomic and health outcomes are consistently poorer than those of non-Indigenous urban residents (Biddle 2009b:6). One approach to "closing the gaps"⁵ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes involves funding Indigenous-specific human services; yet research has revealed that urban Indigenous persons experience difficulties similar to their rural and remote counterparts when attempting to access human services, despite their greater availability in urban areas (Baldry et al. 2006:372). As more government funding is directed towards the 8 percent of Aboriginal persons living in remote areas (ABS 2007), less is being allocated to those in urban or regional areas (Morgan 2006c:26). Furthermore, in urban regions Indigenous Australians must compete with a greater number of other disadvantaged social groups for resources, such as refugees (receiving location-specific funding), as well as remote Indigenous populations receiving Aboriginal-specific funding (Adams 2005:299). This alarming fact indicates that

⁴ For example, see Barwick 1964; Beasley 1970; Rowley 1971; Lickiss 1971; and Gale 1972.

⁵ "Closing the gaps" is the name of the present approach to Indigenous policy in Australia (Sullivan 2011:100). The "gaps" pertain to Indigenous outcomes in life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment, which are significantly poorer than those of non-Indigenous Australians. In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) introduced this framework in response to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's 2005 Social Justice Report, setting six ambitious goals to close the aforementioned gaps within 25 years.

Australia's efforts to "close the gaps" in Indigenous socioeconomic outcomes will largely fail should attention and resources not be directed to the urban regions in which Aboriginal Australians predominantly live (Biddle 2009b:6).

Field Site

In an effort to contribute to understandings of the socioeconomic challenges faced by urban Aboriginal people I elected to ground my research project within Sydney's Indigenous population. Initial fieldwork was conducted at two different Aboriginal corporations, one in Redfern and another in Mt Druitt. Contact with the organisation in Redfern, which specialised in Aboriginal employment and training, was established via cold-calling and setting up subsequent meetings with staff. Although a number of interviews and approximately one month of participant observation was carried out at the Redfern Aboriginal organisation, internal staff politics led some staff to experience discomfort with my presence and I elected to remove this organisation from my research plan.

The initial meeting with staff of the Mt Druitt organisation, Winanga-Li, was achieved with the help of a family friend familiar with the organisation's work, and who knew TAFE⁶ teachers leading courses on-site at the organisation. As this organisation's staff and community members responded positively to my preliminary engagement, it became my primary field site early on in the fieldwork period, and I began to work there as a volunteer four or five days per week.

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation was founded to provide adult education to Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt. Since its inauguration over twenty years ago, the organisation has expanded its services to incorporate community-building, advocacy, youth activities and referral services. As the Indigenous constituents to which it caters are almost wholly socioeconomically marginalised and largely experience deficits in education, the organisation is seen by clients as an important ingredient in the human services mix upon which they are heavily reliant.

⁶ Technical and Further Education, or TAFE, institutions are funded by state governments and provide vocational training and certification in areas of business, community work, construction, engineering, finance, hospitality, information technology, tourism, and visual arts.

Methodological Approach

Rumours of fellow-anthropologists experiencing difficulty in gaining the trust of Australian Aboriginal community members⁷ made me extremely sensitive to the need to allow the organisation's staff and clients time and space to get used to my presence, and to gain an understanding of who I was and why I was there. During the first three months of my fieldwork I therefore initiated few conversations, instead letting informants approach me. As a volunteer of Winanga-Li I undertook mostly administrative tasks, and my constant presence and role within the organisation led members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community gradually to open up to me.

The connections I made with members of Winanga-Li's Aboriginal community facilitated open and trusting relationships that yielded a great deal of data on the lives of my informants. Prior to fieldwork I had designed a semi-structured life history interview, which I conducted with six informants. This interview process was time-intensive, each interview being spread out over a number of days and taking between two to four hours. These interviews were most times enjoyable for informants, as they recounted their histories in various places throughout NSW; the family members involved in their upbringing and transition into adulthood; the circumstances of their present day lives; and the various barriers and supports they encountered on their life paths. At times however these interviews became emotionally painful for informants as they recalled the illnesses and deaths of loved ones. Yet informants were aware of this possibility, due to my informed consent process, and in certain cases interviews were suspended until the informant felt more emotionally able to continue. No informants subsequently requested that their participation be withdrawn from the study; however, on a number of occasions during interviews I was asked to turn off the audio recording device and not include the ensuing narrative of potentially scandalous data in my analysis, to which I always agreed.

Within this work I have included accounts and analyses only after receiving informants' consent that incidents involving specific community members or their families be

⁷ One example of the ire White researchers draw from Indigenous Australians can be found in Diane Bell's 1996 work "White Women Can't Speak?"

mentioned. Staff members of Winanga-Li have read this work in its entirety and granted me their permission for its publication.

Throughout this research I have taken every opportunity to ensure that the Indigenous people about whom I am writing have a sense of control over what is published, in accordance with the guidelines for ethical research in Indigenous studies (AIATSIS 2012:6-12). This has not been problematic, as no one has disagreed with my portrayal or the conclusions I have drawn. If anything this approach has strengthened the accuracy of the accounts provided and allowed informants to reflect upon their experiences and the ways in which these might signal broader institutional power imbalances. The only drawback to this approach was the time necessary for informants to read and comment on my work or, if they chose not to read the actual work, to discuss what I had written. However, this simply required a little more time and effort to maintain ongoing social relationships.

The data obtained from interviews were greatly enriched by informal interviews with family members of interviewees and by ongoing participation in the social lives of Winanga-Li community members. Topics emerged that appeared to be central to informants' understandings of the world in which they live: for example perceptions of community, of Mt Druitt, of government welfare structures, of racism and of Aboriginal identity. Around each of these themes informal interviews were conducted; sometimes in a one-on-one format and other times in group settings; sometimes audio-recorded and others taking hand-written notes. I can only guess the number of informants with whom I interacted during my fieldwork, but a modest estimate would be over 300 individuals, both within and beyond⁸ Winanga-Li. These various methods of data collection yielded a rich understanding of the various ways members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community perceived their place in this world and the formal and informal structures that shape their agency.

⁸ Those I classify as beyond Winanga-Li include Indigenous individuals residing outside of western Sydney, workers from government departments such as DoCS and FaHCSIA, Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees within branches of education and the police, representatives for Members of Parliament and Members of Parliament, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Mt Druitt who are not directly involved in Winanga-Li's activities.

Initially I had designed a household survey in line with my original thesis topic regarding the support mechanisms and constraints experienced by employed Aboriginal persons in obtaining and maintaining employment. While I did conduct three household surveys, this was not enough for a comprehensive analysis of lifestyle choices and demands on household resources. Few of these surveys were undertaken due to unforeseen problems on a number of fronts: the time necessary to complete a survey was extreme and the data yielded tended to be inaccurate. This latter fault had to do with the demand for informants' instant reflexivity. For example, when asked how many visitors had spent the night at their residence over the past year there tended to be gross undercounting, as respondents did not fully take into account the family and friends who would sporadically (and sometimes regularly) spend one night or several at their residence. Ongoing participant observation throughout fieldwork yielded data conflicting with interviewees' statements on such topics, and observation tended to be more reliable. I found that participation in social activities among members of the Winanga-Li community – such as chatting while smoking a cigarette; over tea, coffee, or lunch; at birthday parties and other social events; or before, during and after participation in one of the organisation's programs – yielded much richer and more accurate representations of the demands made on the household resources of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents. Therefore, while a reliable quantitative analysis of lifestyle choices has not been feasible, the methods employed yielded a deep qualitative understanding of the complex forces within which informants negotiate their identity and agency.

I will now turn to a brief overview of why Mt Druitt is a particularly relevant site for inquiry regarding Indigenous Australians, and explain its application within this work.

Mount Druitt

Mt Druitt is an urban location containing an unusually large proportion of Indigenous residents. It is a prime site to investigate present government efforts to “close the gaps” through publicly-funded human services, as the area is characterised by deep socioeconomic disadvantage. This disadvantage is not unique to the area's Aboriginal residents, and approximately one third of Mt Druitt's population consists of first generation immigrants (ABS 2011). However, analysis of Census data indicates that disadvantage is

more pronounced amongst Mt Druitt's Indigenous inhabitants, and as this disadvantage is a key feature of this work's line of inquiry, my focus within Mt Druitt is upon its Aboriginal population.

"Mt Druitt" is the term I use to describe the area sitting on the south-western edge of the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA), and contains the eleven adjacent suburbs of Bidwill, Blackett, Dharruk, Emerton, Hebersham, Lethbridge Park, Mt Druitt, Shalvey, Tregar, Whalan and Willmot. These suburbs are the focus of this thesis as their residents form the primary target population of Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation, although the region has no formal administrative status or governmental application.

In 2011 Mt Druitt had a population of 3,708 people who self-identified as Indigenous, forming approximately 6.8 percent of the area's total population (amalgamated ABS 2011 Census data). For the same year the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported that nationally Indigenous people accounted for 2.5 percent of the total population (2012); indicating that the Mt Druitt region contained more than twice the national average of Indigenous residents. The Blacktown City Council reports that its LGA has the largest Aboriginal population in New South Wales (http://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/our-city/statistics/statistics_home.cfm, accessed November 17, 2012), while the western Sydney Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) boasts that the region for which it caters contains the largest urban Aboriginal population in Australia (<http://www.amsws.org.au/about-us/>, accessed February 20, 2013).

In an effort to investigate the extent to which Mt Druitt is socioeconomically disadvantaged, this thesis draws on ABS Census data, with statistical analysis undertaken of the eleven aforementioned neighbourhoods. This has included totalling Census counts for each with regard to specific topics and exploring disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. Therefore, any errors in numerical representations of Mt Druitt's population are my own. To broaden the scope of comparison, I have contrasted Mt Druitt results with an inner Sydney region that has a corresponding population size: the Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham (MSP) statistical division. In comparing the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Mt Druitt with those of MSP, I draw conclusions

regarding various forms of disadvantage (locational, socioeconomic, educational, etc.) experienced by Indigenous Mt Druitt residents.

Government efforts to decrease Indigenous disadvantage primarily manifest in the funding and provision of human services, a number of which have Aboriginal-specific forms. Human services classified as Indigenous-specific are those for which the target group consists solely of Indigenous persons. These services are delivered in three different ways: via organisations managed and staffed almost wholly by Aboriginal persons; via mainstream non-government organisations (NGOs), which are likely to have an Aboriginal person at the service delivery interface; and via government services, such as Centrelink⁹ or public hospitals, which are also likely to have an Indigenous person, known as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO), interacting with target clients. In addition to Aboriginal-specific services are mainstream human services, which Indigenous people may also use. However, as discussed in later chapters of this work, barriers exist that deter Aboriginal people from using these latter services.

The human services that are funded to contribute towards reducing Indigenous disadvantage include multiple and overlapping programs targeting health, child welfare, criminal justice, housing, education, emergency assistance (financial, housing, nutrition), aged care, employment, transport, and community development. Many Mt Druitt Indigenous residents are familiar with these services and most, although not all, have a history of engagement with their Aboriginal-specific forms.

In an area like Mt Druitt, where a high proportion of residents experience socioeconomic disadvantage, human services are relied upon to meet basic human needs. All of my Aboriginal informants have, or know someone who has, accessed these kinds of Indigenous-specific services; for example, using the AMS when they are sick; attending Aboriginal-specific early childhood development programs with their children; registering with or living in a residence administered by the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office; attending Aboriginal-specific adult education courses at Winanga-Li, frequently in order to

⁹ Centrelink is a national government body that is responsible for administering welfare entitlements to Australian residents. It oversees government pensions and allowances and issues cards that entitle holders to discounts in essential services such as health, transportation, and utilities.

meet unemployment pension requirements; attending community events put on by local Aboriginal organisations, such as those during NAIDOC week¹⁰; and interacting with the numerous ALOs in mainstream government departments such as police, hospitals, primary through to tertiary education, and Centrelink. When Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents are unable to meet their needs independently, there is little hesitancy to access the resources available to them via these Aboriginal-specific services, should the organisation providing them be seen positively in their community. The same, however, cannot be said for their use of mainstream services and those of organisations with poor track-records of working with Aboriginal people, which tend to be used only in times a desperation or necessity, as will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Presently Australian governments are pushing for the mainstreaming of all human services (Sullivan 2011:98); with funding for Aboriginal-specific human services being reduced, awarded to non-Indigenous organisations, or eliminated completely. This is particularly troubling given that Indigenous people are likely to go without a service when they experience barriers accessing its mainstream form, or the Indigenous-specific form when provided by mainstream organisations (Baldry et al. 2006:369). While Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents demonstrated agency in publicly reprimanding Indigenous organisations for inferior services, this was not the case with non-Indigenous organisations that provided poor quality Indigenous-specific services. This thesis argues that by awarding funding for Aboriginal-specific human service programs to non-Indigenous organisations, the government is curtailing Aboriginal people's already limited agency and, furthermore, is frustrating efforts to "close the gaps". By not directly funding Indigenous organisations, a great deal of government funding allocated to decreasing Indigenous disadvantage fails to reach its target population; rather, it is spent creating jobs within the funding schema for

¹⁰ NAIDOC Week is one week each year, usually the first week in July, where Australians come together "to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (<http://www.naidoc.org.au/about/>, accessed January 25, 2014). Emerging from the 1938 "Day of Mourning and Protest" the name of the week is an acronym for "National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee", which in 1991 became responsible for the organisation of a national week-long celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition (<http://www.naidoc.org.au/naidoc-history/>, accessed January 25, 2014).

White¹¹ administrators, who often have very little contact with Indigenous people themselves.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical orientation of my analysis draws broadly upon three bodies of works: theories of the postcolonial, of identity politics, and of neoliberalism within contemporary government bureaucracies. All three theoretical approaches are especially pertinent, as they engage with power relationships.

Postcolonial Theory and the Politics of Aboriginal Identity

This thesis argues that in many ways Australia remains a colonial society, for as a colonial settler nation its governing institutions, ideology, national imagery and collective aspirations lie grounded in those of a distinctly White European heritage (Hage 1998; Lovell 2007); what some academics have called neocolonialism¹². However, since postcolonial theory begins by unmasking the Imperialist traditions of colonial societies, laying bare oppressive power relationships, it is the appropriate lens through which to examine government policy toward Aboriginal Australians. This theoretical perspective foregrounds such concepts as Othering and Essentialism, key concepts in this thesis, which will be highlighted throughout. The State and broader Australian society have, both historically and today, viewed Indigenous Australians as outside the boundaries of the Australian polity (Goodall 2008), which has been constructed as White (McGregor 1993; Hage 1998).

Further, as the thesis will demonstrate, certain reified traits are demanded of Indigenous Australians for them to be considered “authentic”; only persons and communities that behave in such “authentic” ways are deemed legitimate and worthy of notice and patronage (Hage 1998; Povinelli 2002; Merlan 1998). Thus it is critical for this thesis to designate a

¹¹ In this work I capitalise the word “White” when the meaning goes beyond that of colour, to parallel feminist understandings of Patriarchy, i.e. a white Anglo-Saxon, male dominated power base. The capitalised form of White is intended to resound with colonial-based Patriarchal culture (Hage 1998:262) and also includes non-white actors who ascribe to its ideology.

¹² See, for example, Shohat 1992; Cunneen 2001; Ross and Pickering 2002; Kowal and Paradies 2005; and Shaw 2006.

framework within which concepts such as tradition and culture can be explored. With regard to tradition, I draw upon the works of Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984; 1991), Nick Couldry (2000), David Hollinsworth (1992), and Robert Tonkinson (1993). These authors assert that culture and its traditions have never been static or existing in a vacuum, but are dynamic and continually respond to the social, environmental and technological conditions of the present. Tradition should therefore be seen as cultural representations of the past constructed within the present (Linnekin 1991; Macdonald 2001:186). This, however, is not the practice within Australian legislation¹³: rather, static depictions of timeless practices have become enshrined within “authentic” Aboriginality.

This thesis does not attempt to define Australia’s “Aboriginal culture” (and thereby further reify it). Rather, it deals with the forms of identification¹⁴ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) practiced by members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, which embody their self-understanding, demonstrate their connectedness to “Aboriginal” others and differentiate them from non-Indigenous Australians. Yet in the perpetuation of these practices, White Australia’s imaginings of the Aboriginal Other, and legislation which reflects these presuppositions, form aspect of the “structuring structures” of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). Therefore, when Indigenous Australians promote certain stereotypes of Aboriginal behaviour, they may not always be consciously enacting strategic essentialism, but rather have internalised the dominant society’s rendering of who and what they should be.

Typical of postcolonial societies, the question of who and what is “Aboriginal” has too often been decided by White Australia, rather than by Aboriginal people themselves; defying recent recommendations for self-determination put forth by academics (HPAIED 2012; Cornell 2012; Hunt and Smith 2006). As such, a single homogeneous identity and culture has been assumed by government policy makers. Yet Australia is a vast continent holding numerous Indigenous language groups and tribes, each of which experienced a different history of colonial contact and interference. This, coupled with urban migration, has resulted in extremely heterogeneous groupings of Aboriginal people residing within

¹³ For example, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*, discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ Following Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) I refrain from using the rather ambiguous term “identity”, and instead use the more specific terms “identification”, “sense of self”, “commonality”, and “connectedness”.

localities¹⁵. Yet rather than acknowledging the socio-cultural complexity of such populations, political and funding structures are geared towards localised cultural groupings, which they label the Aboriginal “community”, and expect to operate as discrete self-governing social units (Smith 1989:12).

In order to investigate applications of Aboriginal “community” within government policy, as well as the lived reality of Indigenous persons assumed to “belong” to such communities, I explore the meaning of “community” as well as its use in the context of Aboriginal Australia. In doing so, I draw on the works of Fredrik Barth (1969), Benedict Anderson (1983), Anthony Cohen (1985), and Arjun Appadurai (2002), as each of these authors has made important contributions to the theoretical model through which I analyse the elusively bounded community. Building upon Anderson’s notion that all “communities” are imagined, I examine the usage of this term with reference to Indigenous Australian collectives, particularly in relation to the allocation of government funding for Aboriginal-specific human services. This latter analysis draws heavily on the work of Barry Smith (1989), and is supplemented with the work of George Morgan (2006c) and Diane Smith (2008), to illustrate the way in which the imagined Aboriginal community is used by White Australia to further marginalise Indigenous persons.

Insisting upon discrete, self-governing local Aboriginal communities within Indigenous Affairs policy thereby legitimates assertions of Aboriginal dysfunction once it is revealed that these groupings can be riven by sectarianism. This is one example of cultural violence used to justify structural violence. Structural violence is the product of unequal power relations within “the invisible social machinery” (Scheper-Hughes 2004:13) of the State, which results in systematic violence against the marginalised Other by preventing them from meeting their fundamental human needs. Correspondingly, cultural violence is produced when the dominant cultural group ascribes negative facets to the Other, which are then used to justify the Other’s continued oppression (Galtung 1990:291). Key to my interpretation and application of the theoretical framework of structural violence are the

¹⁵ Due to this heterogeneity, particularly in urban locales such as Mt Druitt, I use the term Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably throughout this work. Numerous members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community have Torres Strait Islander ancestry, in many cases mixed with Aboriginal heritage. While the term “Aboriginal” has been used exclusive of Torres Strait Islanders, and vice versa, I do not make that distinction.

works of Johan Galtung (1969; 1990), Paul Farmer (2004), Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2004) and Ian Meyer (2003). These authors argue that power held by the dominant class, which in Australia is that of White Patriarchy (Hage 1998), allows this class to systematically exert and naturalise violence against the Other, resulting in the avoidable impairment of the Other meeting their basic human needs for survival, wellbeing, freedom, and a meaningful identity.

The reification of Aboriginality is one way by which Indigenous persons are Othered, while their socioeconomic class is another. Having been confined to the lower rungs of Australian society for centuries, it is only in the past several decades that upward mobility has been possible for Indigenous persons. While relegated to the lowest socioeconomic status within society, Indigenous Australians have adopted behaviours of this class. Drawing on the works of Wendy Bottero and Sarah Irwin (2003), Fiona Devine and Mike Savage (2000), Philippe Bourgois (1989), and William Julius Wilson (2009) I argue that it is not necessary for persons to identify with their objective class status for the processes of class to function. Rather, class status bears upon one's "cultural outlooks", and thereby their behaviour, which in turn invokes their exclusion and domination by the privileged social order. Thus class is one aspect upon which structural violence operates, yet, with regard to Indigenous Australians, it is a product of the nation's colonial roots.

Neoliberalism within Government

An additional theoretical framework that guides analysis within this research regards the Australian government and its bureaucracies at the turn of the twenty-first century: particularly that of neoliberalism. This potent ideology spread throughout the industrialised world beginning in the late 1970s and became dominant in the 1980s. Neoliberalism prioritises fiscal restraint and promotes the outsourcing and privatisation of previously public works, coupled with smaller governments and reduced taxation and welfare apparatuses (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002:533). Guided by the principle of economic rationalism, those who espouse neoliberalism assume that unregulated markets will judiciously monitor domestic and global economies and societies.

One element of this neoliberal orientation within governments and their bureaucracies is the institution of New Public Management (NPM). Underpinning NPM is the application of an audit approach, borrowed from the administrative practices of the private sector, to public administration (Power 1997:43). While proponents of NPM argue it to be an apolitical form of governance, analysis reveals that within its purported “rational” areas of quantification, trust, and impartiality, significant biases emerge. Drawing upon the works of Michael Power (1997; 2007), Christopher Hood and Guy Peters (1991; 2004), Lee Parker and James Guthrie (1993), Richard Box et al. (2001), Louise Humpage (2008), and Farmer (2004) I argue that the institution of NPM within Australian Indigenous Affairs policy has resulted in the further marginalisation of Indigenous Australians and greater structural violence by jeopardising the space occupied by Aboriginal corporations.

As NPM dominates the current bureaucratic framework operating within all levels of Australian governments, it lies at the heart of Aboriginal organisations’ struggle to obtain funding. The government’s power to award or deny Aboriginal corporations public resources is a manifestation of the aforementioned power relationship between the White settler society and Aboriginal Australians. Within these policies and practices, neoliberal governance structures remain omnipotent, and the only “rationalism” given any merit resides solely within the ideologies of White western practice. As Pierre Bourdieu argues (1998:25), “scientific rationalism... is both the expression and the justification of a Western arrogance, which leads [some] people to act as if they had the monopoly of reason and could set themselves up... as self-appointed holders of the monopoly of legitimate violence” (in Farmer 2004:313).

Alongside my critique of neoliberalism within Indigenous Affairs policy, I also explore some of Australia’s recent approaches to governing its Indigenous population. Through the work of Tim Rowse (2000) I explore the tension between tolerance and autonomy within postcolonial liberalism, supplementing my analysis with Ghassan Hage’s 1998 book regarding multiculturalism in White Australia, David Mercer’s 2003 investigation of Indigenous rights of citizenship, Jeremy Beckett’s 1988 analysis of “welfare colonialism”, and Cathryn McConaghy’s (2000) examination of cultural relativism. Additionally I critique Australia’s policy of “practical reconciliation”, drawing upon Damien Short

(2003), Bain Attwood (2011), Joan Cunningham and Juan Baeza (2005), and Miranda Johnson (2011) to illuminate the way in which this version of “reconciliation” was used to silence calls for restitutive justice and substantive reparations, only to promote the symbolism of a unified national identity, thereby restoring the authority of the White state.

It is through these interrelated theoretical approaches that data collected for this research has been analysed; indeed, it is only through these frameworks that the events that transpired during my fieldwork make any sense. Having described the process that led to this work, its methodological approach, and the theoretical framework used for analysis, I will now turn to an overview of chapters and the literature upon which they draw.

Literature Review and Chapter Overview

Each chapter within this thesis is grounded by several different academic works, while drawing upon a multitude of additional sources. The first section of this thesis, comprising Chapters 2 and 3, lays out Australia’s Indigenous Affairs policies, both past and present. The second section, consisting of Chapters 4 through 7, establishes the locational context of Mt Druitt and the identity politics of its Aboriginal inhabitants. Section three, Chapters 8 through 10, examines Indigenous-specific human services and their funding by state and federal governments. The final section of this thesis, Chapters 11 and 12, builds upon the previous three sections to illustrate how the structural oppression of Indigenous persons is fostered through Australian public institutions’ approach to dealing with the Indigenous Other.

Much ethnographic work on Aboriginal populations has been undertaken in NSW over the past six decades. Marie Reay’s 1949 work analysed Indigenous social class, while Jeremy Beckett’s 1964 work explored Indigenous alcohol consumption. More recently, Gaynor Macdonald (1998; 2001; 2011) examined kinship obligations and changing practices among the Wiradjuri of NSW and Nicolas Peterson and John Taylor (2002) investigated intermarriage and economic status in the state’s west. Additionally, in 2005, Taylor went on to examine changes to Indigenous economic status throughout the state as a whole. This

same year saw the completion of Christine Adams' dissertation on the medicalisation of Indigenous "loss".

With specific regards to Indigenous Australians in Sydney, some of the earliest work dates to 1971; with J. N. Lickiss documenting the socio-economic status of the urban population and C. D. Rowley (1972) examining the living environment of this population in conjunction with policy history, socio-economic status, cultural practices, and the newly emerged Aboriginal corporations. Julie Finlayson's 1991 work investigated Indigenous engagement in Sydney's tourism industry, while in 1995 Diane Smith explored urban Community Development Employment Projects (CDEPs) through the lens of the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation. While not an anthropologist, but rather a human geographer, George Morgan has made important contributions to literature regarding Sydney's Indigenous population through his 2000 and 2006 works, which discussed the urban migration of Indigenous Australians to Sydney and its western suburbs. Close to the location of Mt Druitt, Yuriko Yamanouchi's 2007 dissertation examines Indigenous "community" in south-western Sydney, while Gillian Cowlshaw's 2009 book analyses causal factors to (dysfunctional) Indigenous behaviour actually within the Mt Druitt area. Finally, Julie Lahn's 2012 work explores the nature of social capital in relation to Indigenous social networks.

As this thesis explores the Indigenous population of Mt Druitt, particularly in the context of Indigenous-specific human services and their funding, the aforementioned works are drawn on to varying degrees. While these works make important contributions to scholarship on Indigenous Australia, they are not all equally pertinent to my specific line of research. Below I will outline those works that have been integral to the analysis of field data and the formulation of the arguments of this thesis.

Drawing on the works of numerous scholars of Aboriginal Australia, such as Patrick Sullivan (2011), Heather Goodall (2008), Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (2007), George Morgan (2006a), Christine Adams (2005), Philip Batty (2003), Jeremy Beckett (1988) and Russel McGregor (1993), Chapter 2 looks at early government policies towards First Australians. The chapter explores Indigenous policies from colonial invasion,

characterised by genocide, to the founding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), an elected body that promoted Indigenous voices within Australian policy. The reason for the separation of this Indigenous Affairs policy era (1788-1995) from the contemporary period (1996-present) is that it is characterised by a gradual lessening (although never elimination) of White paternalism towards, as well as overt and covert violence against, Indigenous Australians.

This progress toward a lessening of oppression within Indigenous Affairs policy was reversed most noticeably at the time of John Howard's ascent to Prime Minister under the Liberal-National Coalition. Chapter 3 examines the manifestations of this reversal and the preceding events that enabled the legitimisation of this turnabout. Applying the work of Joan Cunningham and Juan Baeza (2005), Damien Short (2003; 2007), and Ravi De Costa (2000), I highlight the Howard government's dismissal of support for any form of Indigenous self-determination in favour of a policy called "practical reconciliation". A pivotal point for the decline of Indigenous autonomy was the Howard government's closing of ATSIC, which will be explored through the works of Louise Humpage (2008) and William Jonas and Darren Dick (2004). Casting off ATSIC's approach to funding Indigenous human services, Howard's Coalition government introduced new funding schemes, granted only in return for promises of good behaviour on the part of Aboriginal people. The ineffectiveness of these approaches continues to this day in policies intended to "close the gaps" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes, as illustrated in the works of Sullivan (2005; 2010; 2011). The Howard government's paternalistic Indigenous Affairs policies culminated in what became known as the Northern Territory Intervention, which will be explored through the work of Rex Wild and Pat Anderson (2007), Olga Havnen (2008; 2012), and Peter Stewart (2008). The chapter concludes by noting that despite Howard's party losing control of the Federal government, its legacy within Indigenous Affairs continues due to longstanding ingrained beliefs within the Australian populace regarding the inabilities of Aboriginal persons.

The failure of previous Indigenous Affairs policies is highly evident upon reviewing the socioeconomic outcomes of Aboriginal Australians. As this thesis deals with the region of Mt Druitt, Chapter 4 provides a statistical portrait of this area's inhabitants. While the focus

of the chapter is on the area's Indigenous population, brief attention is given to the sizeable immigrant population of Mt Druitt. This chapter draws heavily upon ABS Census data (2006; 2011) to illustrate socioeconomic trends within Mt Druitt, while at the same time employing academic sources – such as John Taylor and Neil Westbury (2005; 2012), Nicholas Biddle (2009b), Gabrielle Gwyther (2008), Nicolas Peterson (2005), Jeremy Beckett (1988) and Stephen Hodge (1996) – in an effort to explain these trends. The roots of Mt Druitt's marginalisation date back to the 1960s settlement of the region and an exploration of this process is undertaken with the aid of the works of George Morgan (2000; 2006b).

As Chapter 4 notes, Mt Druitt has one of the largest urban Aboriginal populations by density in all of Australia. Chapter 5 explores representations of this population as an Aboriginal “community”. Drawing heavily on the work of Barry Smith (1989), the normalisation of constructing locationally-based Indigenous populations as “communities”, particularly within government policy, is discussed. In examining the various interpretations of who and what comprises the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, and if in fact it is a single entity as presented in government policy documents, I draw on the work of Diane Smith (2008), Morgan (2006c) and McConaghy (2000). Furthermore, through the works of the Harvard Project of American Indian Economic Development, including Stephen Cornell (2006) and Janet Hunt and Diane Smith (2006), I highlight that the self-governance expected of Aboriginal communities by Australian governments aligns with Western models of representation and their entailed processes, and lacks a “culture match” with the “community” being governed.

Chapter 5 argues that White representations of, and expectations from, Aboriginal collectivities are inappropriate and carry very little on-the-ground validity. In Chapter 6 I take a number of stereotypical behaviours ascribed to Aboriginal people and explore their presence (or lack thereof) in Mt Druitt. The presence of a relational ontology within Aboriginal worldviews is discussed, supported by the works of Gaynor Macdonald (1998; 2004) and Lorraine Gibson (2010); while the extents of “caring and sharing” with Aboriginal kin are explored and related to the works of Macdonald (1998; 2004), Peterson and Taylor (2003) and Marika Moiseeff (1999). Finally the role of “elders” within Mt

Druitt's Aboriginal population is explored, drawing on the works of Margaret Cranney and Dale Edwards (1998), Kristina Everett (2005), Gillian Cowlshaw (2009) and Amanda Keddie (2013).

Having established the socioeconomic conditions of existence amongst Mt Druitt's Indigenous residents, in Chapter 7 I illustrate the ways in which persons who identify as Aboriginal are subjected to discrimination and oppression. Drawing on media portrayals of Mt Druitt, as well as the works of Hodge (1996), Morgan (2006c), Biddle (2009a) and the *Blacktown City Social Plan* (2007), I demonstrate the negative stigma this region bears. This stigma intensifies the scrutiny faced by the area's Aboriginal residents and entrenches their disadvantage. Indigenous health, justice and incarceration outcomes are discussed, with examples given of each in Mt Druitt, and expanded upon through the use of scholarly works. Analysis of Indigenous health draws upon Theo Vos et al. (2009), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (2008), and A. E. Daly and Diane Smith (2003). Supported by the work of Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz (1982) and J. N. Lickiss (1971) I assert that despite the vast sums of money invested in Indigenous health over the last four decades, little has changed in outcomes. Indigenous encounters with the justice system are analysed with reference to the works of Chris Cunneen (2001), Don Weatherburn et al. (2006) and the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (CtGC) (2013).

With such high levels of marginalisation and oppression amongst Mt Druitt's Indigenous residents, Chapter 8 explores Winanga-Li's approach to ameliorating this disadvantage through the provision of human services. Several aspects of this organisation set it apart from others providing Indigenous-specific services in Mt Druitt. Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation grew organically as an organisation in direct response to the needs expressed by its members, with all projects and services being initiated at the suggestion of Indigenous community members. This chapter investigates the organisation's assertion of "organic community development" and how this is linked to deep social engagement with the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, as well as Rowley (1972) and Robert Levitus' (2009) notion of the Aboriginal corporation as a "carapace". The heightened emphasis Winanga-Li places on social relationships between clients, their families, staff, and the Aboriginal community is discussed in the context of the relational ontology noted above and family

support services as discussed by Natasha Cortis (2006). This approach to conducting “business” appears to be common within Aboriginal communities, as is demonstrated in the work of Keddie (2013) and Gibson (2010), yet is frequently devalued as inefficient and wasteful. Such assertions of inefficiency and mismanagement haunt Indigenous organisations, and contribute to their under-acknowledgement in the third, Not-For-Profit (NFP), sector. Drawing on the works of Sullivan (2005; 2010; 2011), Will Sanders (2006) and Diane Smith (1995), I examine the benefits and challenges common to small Indigenous NFP organisations as they attempt to deliver services to local Aboriginal residents.

Chapter 9 then turns its gaze upon other human services available in Mt Druitt, offered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations. I distinguish between different types of services and the organisations offering them, as well as exploring the way each is perceived by Aboriginal people, through the work of Elaine Baldry et al. (2006). I look at a number of problems that are frequently associated with Indigenous corporations, employing publications by Diane Smith (2008) and Rowse (2000) to determine the extent to which such allegations are founded.

Finally, drawing on the works of Sullivan (2011), Lahn (2012), Taylor and Westbury (2010), and Michael Dillon and Westbury (2007), Chapter 9 introduces the recent trend in governmental funding of Indigenous-specific services by way of competitive tender. Under the competitive tender Indigenous organisations must compete with non-Indigenous organisations for funding. Within these tendering processes, consultations with the Aboriginal communities intended to benefit from specific services rarely, if ever, take place in urban areas such as Mt Druitt. This is in spite of the fact that community consultation has been promoted as “best practice” by Wild and Anderson (2007), the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP 2011), Warren Snowden (2013), and the CtGC (2013). Instead, determinations – such as the most advantageous approach to service delivery and the needs to be met with the tendered funding – are made largely by non-Indigenous bureaucrats, holding little experience with Aboriginal people and the communities in question, as established by Richard Box et al. (2001), Baldry et al.

(2006), Dillon and Westbury (2007), Peri O'Shea et al. (2007), Sullivan (2010; 2011), and Keddie (2013).

Having introduced the theme of competitive tender in Chapter 9, Chapter 10 details how this approach to social service funding rose to supremacy in Australia. The ideology of neoliberalism and its present dominance within Anglo democracies is first explored with a review of literature authored by Michael Power (1997; 2007), Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas and Sarah Babb (2002), Kathy McDermott (2008), Lee Parker and James Guthrie (1993), and Box et al. (2001). The institutionalisation of neoliberal ideology led to the naturalisation of the New Public Management (NPM), which draws upon the business modelling of private sector enterprise, as “best-practice” for the administration of all government expenditure. A critique of NPM is undertaken, drawing on the works of the aforementioned authors in addition to Boyd Hunter (2013), Cortis (2006), Christopher Hood (1991), and Hood and Guy Peters (2004). These works expose the contradictions inherent in NPM’s seemingly objective regime. The chapter elaborates upon the shortcomings of Australia’s new service funding framework, which eventuated in a Productivity Commission review (2010) of government contributions to the NFP sector. The findings and recommendations of this review highlight the concomitant contradictions within NPM. Drawing on O'Shea et al. (2007) and Sullivan (2010; 2011) I argue that the neoliberal ideals emphasised and promoted by NPM are fundamentally at odds with those that drive effective human service delivery.

Power and privilege emerge as dominating forces within tendering processes in the discussions of Chapter 10, and feature pervasively throughout all structures that bear upon Aboriginal corporations. Chapter 11 returns to the public demonisation of Aboriginal corporations as mismanaged, prone to fraud and a funding risk by their very nature, as demonstrated in the works of Dillon and Westbury (2007), Sullivan (2005; 2010; 2011), Cunningham and Baeza (2005), and Rowse (2000). This demonisation has resulted in excessive scrutiny of organisations incorporated under the Indigenous-specific *ACA Act* and *Corporations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (CATSI) Act*, administered by the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). The omnipresent surveillance of organisations incorporated under these Acts is unique to this group, which leads to the

question of whether or not this scrutiny is racist. Drawing on the work of Stephen L. Carter, I explore the difference between racialism and racism, to conclude that, indeed, it is. I further delve into this surveillance to explore governments' demand for unidirectional accountability, which discounts any need for these organisations to be accountable to their Indigenous constituents. Through the works of Sullivan (2011), Cornell (2006), Box et al. (2001), Rowse (2000), and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) I argue that such unidirectional accountability further marginalises the voices of Indigenous citizens and, coupled with their lack of consultation in developing and implementing services specifically for them, contributes to the poor outcomes of the billions of dollars spent each year to decrease Indigenous disadvantage¹⁶.

Having explored the framework through which governments award vast sums of money for Aboriginal-specific services, as well as the lived reality amongst Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents, Chapter 12 documents and analyses one case in which the results of tendering not only marginalised and oppressed members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, but delivered an ineffective and inferior service that produced negligible outcomes. This case study of the Community Support Service (CSS) details the awarding of funding for an Indigenous-specific program to a large non-Indigenous organisation, in part on the premise that this latter organisation was better-able to "connect" with Indigenous people than the Aboriginal corporation. The case follows the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community's attempt to challenge the results of the tender, and through correspondence from the CSS funding body, FaHCSIA, demonstrates the inability of Aboriginal voices to be heard. Despite the extremely poor outcomes resultant from the non-Indigenous organisation's CSS program it was not deemed a failure, as indicated by the renewal of this organisation's funding without retender. The seemingly illogical outcomes documented in this case study are elucidated through the works of Power (1997; 2007), Sullivan (2011), and Hood and Peters (2004), which assert that when technical routines are followed, the results are automatically deemed successful. The silencing of Aboriginal voices within processes, as is frequently the case in Indigenous service delivery, is explained through the works of Richard Parker (2012), Sullivan (2011), Cornell (2006), the SCRGSP (2007; 2009), and the CtGC (2013).

¹⁶ During the financial year 2010-2011, NSW alone directed an estimated \$6.1 billion to Indigenous expenditure (SCRGSP 2012:1).

This thesis establishes that government expenditure, with regard to decreasing Indigenous disadvantage, is yielding negligible results. As Sullivan (2011) and Dillon and Westbury (2007) also conclude, the bureaucrats charged with defining, designing, and allocating funding for Indigenous-specific services have little experience with the Indigenous citizens they are intended to serve. Consequently, structural violence pervades all policies used in allocating funding for Indigenous-specific services. As a result, Indigenous corporations – originally intended to free Indigenous collectives from overriding Western concepts and surveillance (Rowse 2000:1516) – are increasingly in jeopardy, threatening the erosion of space in which Aboriginal autonomy is fostered.

2. Australia's Early Indigenous Affairs Policy

The violence of colonialism is ongoing because the colonial project is unfinished.

- Gaynor Macdonald (2010:62)

In order to provide a context for this thesis, it is necessary to understand the history of Indigenous-State relations. This historical grounding is best analysed through postcolonial theory, a key framework employed throughout this work.

Postcolonial theory¹⁷, as it applies to this work, asserts that the reality lived by Indigenous people today cannot be separated from the historic dispossession of Aboriginal people during colonisation processes. The historical experience of Indigenous Australians at the hands of the White nation looms large in many Aboriginal people's sense of self. Indigenous genocide and violent coercion by colonial Australia lingers in the 21st century through paternalism and racism. While Australia is no longer a colony of Britain, contemporary structures and institutions of society and State remain firmly grounded in their imperialist origins. The settler-state of Australia has forged its own identity on the back of Indigenous subordination. While government policies have shifted away from those of blatant domination, towards those of tolerance, multiculturalism and "practical reconciliation", Indigenous Affairs policies remain replete with overt paternalism and covert oppression.

This chapter sets out Aboriginal Affairs policy in Australia from invasion (1788) until the end of the Self-Determination period (mid-1990s)¹⁸ and provides a backdrop upon which developments in Aboriginal rights, policy and service funding occurred. Today's Indigenous policies, and Aboriginal people's response to them, remain grounded in the

¹⁷ See, for example, Beckett 1988; Spivak 1988; McClintock 1992; Williams and Yousaf 1994; Peters-Little 2000; Adams 2005; Morgan 2006a; Lovell 2007; Attwood and Markus 2007; Kowal 2008; Goodall 2008; Attwood 2011; and Johnson 2011.

¹⁸ I have elected to separate Australia's Aboriginal Affairs policy post-mid-1990s from this chapter as at this time a radical shift in the ideology governing such policies emerged.

events of the past, a past in which Aboriginal people were constituted as an alien Other whom the State sought to dominate and control.

The history of Australian governments' policy towards Indigenous Australians has been one of oppression. Postcolonial scholars have argued that much of the self-harming behaviour exhibited by contemporary Indigenous persons comes out of the

anger and grief of feeling powerless and marginalized [by] colonial dispossession... from ungrieved family deaths and injury from introduced diseases, starvation because of economic (land) dispossession; overt physical and sexual brutality; covert structural violence including forced removal of people to reserves and the separation of children from their parents [during the colonisation process]. (Atkinson 1992:9-10 in Adams 2005:166).

Aboriginal Affairs Policy in Australia

From the mid-1800s to the 1880s there was no official government policy regarding the Indigenous inhabitants of the continent that would become Australia, other than that they could be legally dispossessed of any land rights under the colonisers' doctrine of *terra nullius*¹⁹ ("land of no one") (McCorquodale 1986:8; Short 2007:859). This era was characterised by "conflict and appropriation" (Sullivan 2011:1). Colonial settlers believed that it was their duty to "impose moral order" on the Aboriginal Other and colonial governments willingly accepted that the Aboriginal "race" would gradually die out as a result of disease, massacres and warfare with colonists (McGregor 1993:17-18; Mercer 1993:301; Adams 2005:19; Morgan 2006a:1-7). However, in the 1880s growing concern over the economic and social circumstances of the Indigenous population, both within Australia and abroad, led the New South Wales (NSW) government to establish the Protector of Aborigines in 1881. This was the dawn of the "Protectionist" era in Australian Aboriginal Affairs, an era characterised by the White nation establishing a set of paternalist policies for the Other as a means of preventing the exacerbation of Indigenous health, social, and economic difficulties.

¹⁹ This legal doctrine originated within John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), in which he proposed that property rights to land began with the tilling of soil or "mixing labour with land" (Locke 1970 in Short 2007:860). As colonisers believed there to be an absence of such activities on the part of Indigenous Australians, they claimed that these people had no legitimate claim to the land (McCorquodale 1986:8).

Protectionist Era

In 1883 the Protector of Aborigines was expanded and renamed the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) (Adams 2005:22), in part as a response to the colonists' frenzy of concern regarding the "moral danger" entailed within areas inhabited by Indigenous people. Aboriginal policies during this era were characterised by "protection and segregation" (Sullivan 2011:1). APB policy established White-governed missions and reserves upon which Indigenous persons were sent to live, in an effort to preserve the sanctity of both Aboriginal and settler populations (Goodall 2008:241-42; Morgan 2006a:7). It was argued that Indigenous persons were caught up in the "colonial juggernaut" and had lost their ability to sustain their identity (Morgan 2006a:11). Therefore the imposed segregation of mission life was conducted under the guise of freeing Aboriginal persons from the "contaminating" influence of white society; although it was the reverse that was true (Goodall 2008:234; Adams 2005:22). The living conditions on missions and reserves were in most cases deplorable and highly institutionalised, with food rationing and the freedom of movement and association for Aboriginal persons highly curtailed (Beckett 1988:7).

In 1909, eight years after Australian federation²⁰, NSW introduced the *Aborigines Protection Act* in response to the unwillingness of half-caste Aboriginal persons to leave the missions²¹ and reserves to assimilate into broader society (Adams 2005:23). During this period Aboriginal children were taken from reserves and their parents by the APB as early as possible and placed in White-governed institutions. Here they were to be trained for employment in the lower echelons of White society (Adams 2005:23, 199). Up to and during this era Aboriginal people were subject to the "special" attention of police and welfare officers and liable to confinement upon the whims of officials (Beckett 1988:8). They were banned from public spaces as well as prevented from marrying or moving about the land without prior permission (Adams 2005:23). The denial of their welfare²² and wage rights was justified by the continued belief that the Aboriginal "race" would die out and was therefore not worthy of any such entitlements (Beckett 1988:9).

²⁰ Upon federation, the Commonwealth government agreed not to formulate any policies regarding Indigenous Australians and instead left the making of these laws up to state governments (Sullivan 2011:2).

²¹ In 1893 the NSW government removed all Aboriginal reserves from church control and missionaries could only enter the reserves with permission from the Aboriginal Protection Board (Goodall 2008:xv). However, Aboriginal reserves continued to be called "the Mission" by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and the presence of Christian missionaries in such locations was ongoing.

²² Aboriginal Australians did not receive welfare entitlements until 1959 (Beckett 1988:10).

Assimilation Era

In 1936, the Australian nation adopted NSW's policy of child removal²³ "for the 'lighter caste' element" (Beckett 1988:9). This was in fact a continuation of the previous policy and the belief that Indigenous people would die out. The difference here was simply that instead of disease and lack of fitness causing complete disappearance, those Aboriginal persons who could, to some extent, appear "White" would in time become eligible to join White society.

In 1937 the nation formally adopted the policy of "Assimilation" (Morgan 2006a:15; Sullivan 2011:1). In line with Assimilation policy, NSW reconstituted the APB as the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) in 1940 (McCorquodale 1986:13; Adams 2005:24; Morgan 2006a:15). The goal of Assimilation policy was to begin to erase all difference between Aboriginal and European Australians (Adams 2005:25). However, darker-skinned Aboriginal people remained segregated, often on reserves, and much poorer than other Australians; living in conditions that were frequently far below "acceptable standards" (Beckett 1988:10).

Aboriginal persons were essentially "wards of the state" (Sullivan 2011:2) and the reserves became sites of social engineering that "disparaged Aboriginal language, culture and traditions and promoted the nuclear family life, wage labour and the moral economy of white Australia" (Morgan 2006a:15). As the Indigenous population was not dying out as predicted, this was an effort to assimilate them into the White nation. Aboriginal people were coerced, often violently, into following these policies with promises of freedom from the reserves and exemption from AWB control²⁴. Yet in order to do so, it was required that they break all ties with their families and traditions (Morgan 2006a:16). Under Assimilation

²³ It was only in 1994, when a formal inquiry was conducted, that the ramifications of the child removal policy were brought to light. This inquiry revealed that the social and emotional dispossession of those removed from their families commonly resulted in "poor educational and employment outcomes and involvement with the criminal justice system" (Sullivan 2011:3). It has also been argued that the Australian policies of child removal have destabilised the protective, censoring and caring mechanisms within Indigenous culture, creating a new generation of Aboriginal adults who are ill-equipped for parenting (Cunneen 2001:43).

²⁴ In NSW in 1943, those who broke all ties with family and culture and adopted a lifestyle deemed morally upright by Whites were granted Exemption Certificates, known colloquially as "dog tags" or a "dog license" (Beckett 1964:40). This granted its holders relative privileges, such as the ability to vote, attend school and enter hotels, as well as freeing them from the restrictions of the state's "Protection" laws (National Museum of Australia 2013).

policy wages for Aboriginal labour were far below those of Whites, if remunerated at all; education was either basic or totally absent; housing was sub-standard and health was poor (Sullivan 2011:3).

While Assimilationist policies remained unchecked in Australia well into the 1960s, something very different was appearing on the international stage: the rising awareness of the “Fourth World”. As global popular culture’s awareness grew of the plight of those in the Fourth World to overcome colonial legacies of domination and assimilation, so too did pressure grow on respective governments to somehow ameliorate this form of oppression. At this time the United States’ civil rights and Black Power movements were well under way, calling upon a “universalist-liberal political discourse that challenged the double standards and apartheid of the past” (Morgan 2006a:39). During the late 1960s, Australia’s growing involvement in the Vietnam War heightened both national and international scrutiny of the nation’s treatment of its Aboriginal population (Batty 2003:49). The mood was set and the conditions were ripe for Aboriginal Australians to exercise their demand for civil rights.

Self-Determination Era

In 1965 Charles Perkins led Freedom Rides throughout the NSW countryside, bringing attention to the appalling living conditions suffered by Aboriginal people living on reserves and stations, as well as the extreme forms of discrimination and segregation still operating within small towns. The Freedom Rides generated widespread sympathy from the non-Indigenous population (Batty 2003:39). Responding to the public outcry, Australia took several steps to maintain its national image. The first, in 1964, was the establishment of the “Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies”, a gesture proclaiming the nation’s appreciation of Aboriginal culture. Secondly, in 1965 the policy of Assimilation was changed to one of “Integration”. Yet Australia’s Aboriginal population saw little difference between Assimilation and Integration. Integration policy, since it now recognised minority-groups’ rights for autonomy, did however open the door to the multicultural emphasis that was to come to fruition in the 1980s (Adams 2005:37).

A third step taken to demonstrate Australia's progressive stance on Indigenous policy was the 1967 Referendum in which 90 percent of Australians²⁵ voted for the partial transfer of constitutional power to legislate Aboriginal Affairs from the state to federal government and for Indigenous persons to be counted in the national Census (Lake 2001:585; Attwood and Markus 2007:122). At the same time the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, an advisory body, was formed (Dillon and Westbury 2007:12). These gestures did not truly realise Aboriginal civil rights, however, as Indigenous persons were still denied full citizenship rights²⁶ and rights to equal wages in pastoralist industries²⁷: in other words, Indigenous Australians were still Other and had to be surveilled and guided by a paternalistic State.

Aboriginal activist Patrick Dodson described the tokenism of the Referendum²⁸ as "assimilation with consultation" (Adams 2005:38). So while the Referendum was widely viewed as Australia's timely progressive stance on global racial equality, it actually did little to promote reparations or true equal rights (Attwood and Markus 2007:53-69): it merely mirrored the public's desire for normalisation or for making Aboriginal persons "like everyone else" (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, October 12, 2010).

Due to growing mainstream acceptance of Aboriginal peoples' rights to full citizenship, in 1970 the priority of Aboriginal activists shifted from "civil rights" to "Indigenous rights" (Adams 2005:39; Attwood and Markus 2007:71-72). In the following two years several high-profile Aboriginal-controlled organisations emerged, including the first Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Medical Service, both in Redfern, NSW. The federal government increasingly acknowledged previous policies of Aboriginal Assimilation had

²⁵ Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus note that regions featuring a large Aboriginal presence more frequently voted against the 1967 Referendum, than did those in urban areas (2007:54-56). Additionally, electors in North Territory (NT) and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were not permitted to vote on this Referendum (Attwood and Markus 2007:118).

²⁶ In NSW the alcohol consumption restriction for Indigenous persons was lifted in 1962 (Beckett 1964:32). However, this remained a state-specific policy and even after the 1967 Referendum some states prohibited Indigenous persons from consuming alcohol.

²⁷ In 1968 the Department of Social Security instituted a new policy in which wages and welfare entitlements were to be given directly to Aboriginal people, rather than to reserve administrators or station managers. Additionally, they required that equal pay be given to Aboriginal workers (Peterson 2005:10). In many cases this resulted in the mass dismissal of Aboriginal workers, for they were no longer a cheaper form of labour (Peterson 2005:11).

²⁸ Further assertions that the 1967 Referendum did little to realise true equal rights between Aboriginal and other Australians are voiced in Attwood and Markus 2007.

failed in bettering the living conditions of the Indigenous population and a new direction was sought.

Aware of the pioneering social work of Jim Downing amongst the Aboriginal “community”²⁹ of Alice Springs from 1965 on³⁰, policy historian C.D. Rowley brought the concept of Aboriginal-controlled organisations to the attention of H.C. Coombs³¹. Coombs had significant influence on the new policies of the incoming Whitlam government (Batty 2003:50, 55). Rowley and Coombs together proposed that these Aboriginal corporations could integrate Aboriginal values into the political realm, enabling Indigenous Australians to become agents of social change (Levitus 2009:75). The Aboriginal corporation, deemed to serve as a “carapace” by Rowley, would provide a layer of protection over the Aboriginal “domain”³² and function as an interface that mediated between Aboriginal communities and Australian governments (Rowley 1972:423, 429 in Levitus 2009:79). Government funding for Indigenous-specific programs would be received and accounted for by Aboriginal corporations, which would in turn provide a forum through which their local Indigenous constituents could exercise autonomy over the programs it delivered (Levitus 2009:83).

Seventeen days after his December 1972 rise to Prime Minister under the Labor government, Gough Whitlam formed the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA); its main objective to “encourage and strengthen the capacity of Aboriginals to manage their own affairs”³³ (DAA 1975:5). To ensure that the DAA was representative of Aboriginal

²⁹ The use of the term community within government policy and rhetoric is highly problematic, as it is often taken for granted that an “Aboriginal community” is an autonomous, self-governing social unit. Jeremy Beckett argues that the use of the term “community” in reference to Aboriginal groups is a colonial construct, “conceived of as a primordial entity” (1988:13). For an analysis of the use of the term “community” in reference to Aboriginal people, see Chapter 5.

³⁰ During this period in Alice Springs, Downing had facilitated the formation of an “Aboriginal group organisation”.

³¹ H.C. Coombs served as the chair of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs from 1968 to 1976.

³² Similar to Tim Rowse (1992:19-21), I have used the term “domain” to denote “Aboriginal people... organising themselves according to Aboriginal values for the pursuit of Aboriginal priorities” (in Levitus 2009:76).

³³ The founding of the DAA was perhaps not as radical a shift in Indigenous Affairs as it was presented to be, as many of the same bureaucrats that had previously been employed in the Office of Aboriginal Affairs were appointed positions when this Office obtained Ministerial status. Furthermore, the DAA had no management services of its own until the latter half of 1973, relying instead on the Management Services Branch of the Department of the Environment and Conservation (http://naa12.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/AgencyDetail.aspx?reg_no=CA%201476 accessed March 13, 2014).

voices, in 1973 the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC)³⁴ was established as an advisory body to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, James Cavanagh. Thus, with Whitlam, the era of “Self-Determination”³⁵ in Australia’s Aboriginal policy was born.

Self-Determination Policy

Under Whitlam’s policy of Self-Determination, all responsibilities of the AWB were transferred to the DAA. In order to implement Self-Determination, it was envisioned that as more Aboriginal-controlled corporate bodies were established, the DAA would gradually hand over all administrative and service-delivery duties to such organisations until the DAA would cease to exist (Batty 2003:57). During the initial stages of this process it was deemed necessary that there be skilled professionals and experts, most of whom were non-Aboriginal, to encourage Aboriginal groups to form themselves into incorporated bodies and Aboriginal Councils.

Through the formation of Aboriginal corporate bodies, Rowley foresaw a path to aligning the “aspiration” of the government and those of Aboriginal people:

[Aboriginal corporate bodies] make possible a meaningful identity... and a dialogue with, rather than an evasion of, government. Such an objective will be extremely difficult to achieve. Yet it forms one – in my opinion the only – way to provide effective incentives for such social changes as will enable the Aboriginal caste to demand, with a chance of success, access to all strata of Australian society. (Rowley 1972:13)

Yet the government, in its position of power and privilege, overlooked the fact that their governance priorities and methodology did not align with that of many Indigenous Australians. Policy makers held an inadequate understanding of the English literacy and numeracy skills possessed by many Aboriginal Australians during this time. Furthermore they failed to consider that bureaucratic technology was largely foreign to Indigenous Australians, as were the operations necessary to govern large-scale bodies in accordance

³⁴ The NACC was an elected assembly consisting of 40 Indigenous Australians (http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29, accessed 2 July 2013).

³⁵ When “Self-Determination” is capitalised, I am referring specifically to Australia’s Aboriginal Affairs policy of Self-Determination, which falls short of true Indigenous self-management and self-rule. However, when this word is not capitalised, I am referring to Indigenous self-rule, as discussed in Chapter 5.

with government objectives (Batty 2003:58). As such, the initial withdrawal of mainstream services, without their replacement by an adequate infrastructure for Aboriginal-controlled services, resulted in what was called in 1973 by James Cavanagh, a “disaster” (Batty 2003:60).

It became evident that Aboriginal people needed to develop certain capacities in order for them to effectively govern themselves in line with Western bureaucracies, such as acquiring the skills necessary to manage and run complex institutions (Batty 2003:61-62). Yet, by acknowledging this and developing programs by which this might be accomplished, there was a certain mirroring of Assimilation policies. In fact, in the early 1970s those Aboriginal persons who possessed such capacities had gained them under Assimilation policy (Batty 2003:61), often having to distance themselves from their local Aboriginal networks to undertake training and work.

The necessity of Aboriginal people developing the aforementioned Western skill sets in order to be free from government interference is largely a paradox. In order for such persons to gain these skills, a certain removal from familial and cultural priorities is required: a distancing from Aboriginal ways of doing things (Macdonald 2010:61). To obtain such skills requires the privileging of Western priorities, such as education (numeracy, literacy, bureaucratic governance), over cultural obligations and priorities (being “on country”, being near and supporting family, etc.). Therefore, coercive elements of Assimilation remained present even within the policy of Self-Determination.

So while the government policy of Self-Determination enabled the rhetoric of Aboriginal agency, it was dominated by the imposition of Western governmental structures rather than allowing for the development of an Indigenous governing institution. Operating within pre-established restricted codes³⁶, the newly emerging Aboriginal organisations remained bound by the rules and norms of the dominant society. This continues to the present day and manifestations of this will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

³⁶ “Restricted code” was coined by Basil Bernstein (1986) and applies when one “merely accepts the boundaries and ideological renderings established within the discourse of the most powerful and influential...” (McConaghy 2000:207).

It should be noted that regardless of the prevalent use of the term “self-determination” during this policy era, there was very little understanding of what it meant. In 1972 the Whitlam government attempted to institute Self-Determination as a policy, yet when Cavanagh was asked how he defined “self-determination” his response was:

Yes, what is self-determination? I don't think any of us really knows. It is a new experiment, but I suppose self-determination is the creation [by government] of town and village councils run by Aborigines; the establishment of housing associations, medical centres and other projects... (Mullard 1974 in Batty 2003:60)

As noted above, the government intended that the policy of Self-Determination would result in handing over the responsibilities of all Aboriginal social services to the Aboriginal population, for them to govern themselves as they deemed fit. Yet with the size and distribution of the Aboriginal population, a system to scale was demanded in order to manage institutions, account for resources, and ensure their appropriate distribution. Australia has a long-standing history of systems' management, grounded in colonial governance models, and it was naively assumed by Whitlam's government that Indigenous persons would spontaneously organise themselves into bureaucratic collectives, forming the backbone of a new Aboriginal political structure. Bureaucrats failed to acknowledge that this Western system not only imposed a colonial ideology, but that Aboriginal persons had very little contact with, and understanding of, the intricate workings of such systems. Furthermore, the ideological beliefs that governed Western bureaucracies were not seen as legitimate by Indigenous Australians, thus making the institution of such a complex structure over a short period of time unrealistic.

In 1975, Self-Determination policy was still hampered by gross shortages in skilled Aboriginal employees to run the newly-established Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. This was understood by the Australian public as Aboriginal people being “disinclined to take up the challenge of ‘managing their own affairs’” (Batty 2003:71, see also Ivanitz 1998:2). It has been argued that for Indigenous persons, exercising administrative power over kin and controlling the allocation of resources for an entire community goes against traditional models of authority and may even pose the threat of further eroding the pre-existing forms of Aboriginal social organisation (Batty 2003:71;

Hunt and Smith 2006:16; Cornell 2006:11, 20-23; Macdonald 2010:61). Traditionally, Aboriginal elders were deferred to as arbitrators and chief organisers of local affairs, yet many possessed neither English literacy nor even fluency, nor were they familiar with Western governance models (Batty 2003:71). Yet rather than creating time and space for Aboriginal collectives to negotiate amongst themselves an equitable resolution to resource and leadership disputes, it was deemed necessary that “development workers and experts” continue to fill these roles in the governance of Aboriginal persons. There was no recognition that Indigenous people might prefer to organise and administer their affairs within an alternative framework; rather, it was proposed that “every effort should be made to ‘train and employ’ Aboriginal people [in English and in line with bureaucratic protocol]... and that the non-Aboriginal workers and experts should ‘pass on their skills’ to their Aboriginal co-workers” (Batty 2003:72).

Under Malcolm Fraser’s Liberal-National Coalition government³⁷ (1975-83), Aboriginal organisations came to be formally incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (ACA Act)* (Batty 2003:36, 59). Ian Viner, then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, stated the importance of this act, as it would “recognise cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies and enable Aboriginal communities to develop legally recognisable bodies which reflect their own culture and do not require them to subjugate this culture to overriding Western legal concepts” (Rowse 2000:1516). The extent to which Aboriginal bodies were able to escape “overriding Western legal concepts” was and continues to be minimal, as will be demonstrated in later chapters.

The prime funding body of the Aboriginal organisations incorporated under this 1976 Act was the DAA, which required proof that organisations were being wholly governed by Aboriginal persons in fulfilment of Self-Determination. It was expected that organisations would supply ratified meeting minutes and other verifiable documents to demonstrate that

³⁷ The incoming Fraser government ordered a review of the NACC in 1975. The review was heavily critical of the body as it was found to have been ineffective at both advising the Minister and consulting with Aboriginal communities. In 1977 it was replaced by the National Aboriginal Conference, another advisory body, which featured many of the same members of the NACC (http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29, accessed July 2, 2013).

its Aboriginal Executive Committee was fully aware and in support of the organisation's activities and that Aboriginal persons were being trained in order to replace the non-Aboriginal "specialists".

Yet ironically, from the emergence of Indigenous corporations in the 1970s, bureaucratic approaches to governance were the one and only accepted way for Aboriginal collectives to assert legitimate agency. Cathryn McConaghy writes that "policies of self-management and self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s led to the transition from mission and superintendent rule to rule by elected local council. These local governing bodies however had to operate within strict and restrictive operational and financial guidelines" (2000:204). She concludes that Self-Determination amounted to a long-lasting and far reaching effort by the government "to enforce colonial structures of governance within the rhetoric of Indigenous self-determination... [with] restrictive administrative and legislative structures ensur[ing] that Indigenous communities continued to be highly-regulated and monitored" (2000:204-5). Thus, Aboriginal Australians continued to be subject to a White nation that was disinclined to accommodate the (re)development of an Indigenous governance system.

Land Rights

While calls for Aboriginal land rights had been ongoing throughout the 20th century, during the early 1970s this movement gained traction within White Australian society. The ever-increasing migration of Indigenous Australians to urban centres provided the opportunity for greater organisation, and Aboriginal persons mobilised to assert their rights as First Peoples. The more moderate and White-led efforts to promote Indigenous rights were, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, "giving way to a more aggressive urban Aboriginal leadership" that drew upon the Black Power movement of the United States (Beckett 1988:11). Within this setting pan-Aboriginality emerged, grounded in an identity politics that promoted the search for Aboriginal roots and a return to living on country (Adams 2005:40-41).

The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy³⁸ on Australia Day³⁹ 1972 drew international media coverage and catapulted the land rights issue into the forefront of Indigenous rights. Later the same year the newly elected Whitlam government established the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission, which formed the basis for the first legislation to address land rights. The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* was enacted in the Northern Territory⁴⁰ in 1976, allowing Aboriginal Australians to claim freehold land title over vacant crown land on the basis of “traditional association” (Adams 2005:41-42). While in 1977 Land Councils were formed in NSW (Adams 2005:200), it was not until 1983 that the state established the *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/alra1983201/, accessed June 27, 2013).

Welfare Colonialism

When exploring why Aboriginal land rights came to be recognised as legitimate by the Australian federal government, Jeremy Beckett invokes the rationale of “welfare colonialism”⁴¹. Beckett writes that welfare colonialism juxtaposes the concept of citizens’ rights entailed within welfare, with the denial of responsibility entailed within colonialism; making for a “contradictory and unstable” policy (Beckett 1988:14). Drawing on the work of Robert Paine (1977:43), Beckett elaborates that welfare colonialism is:

continuous with classic colonialism... [as] it is still ‘the colonizers who make the decisions that control the future of ‘the colonized’ and the decisions are made (ambiguously) on behalf of the colonized, and yet in the name of the colonizer’s culture (and their political, administrative and economic priorities). (1988:14)

³⁸ The Tent Embassy was established when four Aboriginal men from Sydney planted a beach umbrella on the front lawn of Parliament House in protest of the McMahon Coalition government’s refusal to recognise Aboriginal land rights (Robinson 1994:51).

³⁹ Australia Day is held annually on January 26, in celebration of the arrival of the First Fleet (<http://www.australiaday.org.au/australia-day/about-our-national-day.aspx>, accessed June 27, 2013). Aboriginal Australians have their own celebration on this day, which they call “Survival Day”, “Invasion Day”, or “Day of Mourning”. The latter term was coined in 1970 by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on the bicentenary of Captain Cook’s landing in Australia (Adams 2005:40).

⁴⁰ As implied by its name, the Northern Territory is a territory rather than a state, which enabled the federal government to pass legislation in the region (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

⁴¹ Welfare colonialism is a term that was coined by Robert Paine in reference to the situation experienced by the indigenous people of Northern Canada (Beckett 1988:14).

This analysis aptly applies not only to land rights, but to the institution of Self-Determination policy and the creation of the *ACA Act 1976*. Such efforts by governments aim to project an image of social harmony and internal equity in order to promote the nation's moral rectitude internationally.

Policies characteristic of welfare colonialism have emerged in first-world post-colonial settler nations – such as the United States, Canada and Australia – when the nation is faced with international embarrassment due to the state's inability to provide for its indigenous citizens: “the expropriation and marginalization, which are the common outcomes of colonization, have produced a level of poverty and deprivation that is beyond the capacity of the market or the welfare apparatus to remedy” (Beckett 1988:14). In Australia, conceding Indigenous land rights was an opportunity for the government to appear to ameliorate the legacy of dispossession experienced by Aboriginal persons, while at the same time delimit the extent to which such claims could be made⁴². By acquiescing to the Aboriginal ideal of returning to country, the government could expect the dispersal of a large number of Indigenous persons from urban areas (where unemployment was high, as were tensions with White residents), which held the potential to weaken the urban-led Aboriginal movement (Beckett 1988:13).

Ghassan Hage speaks to the efforts of the “White Nation” to appease, but at the same time control, its non-White citizens. In an effort to prevent minorities from organising themselves to a degree allowing them to assert their will over the national body, ameliorative and tokenistic policies have been passed to curb the “counter-will” (Hage 1998:108-111). By promoting the dispersal of Indigenous Australians from urban areas to the remote regions of their traditional lands (as it was only “vacant crown land” to which they could claim rights), the government found a means through which they could curb this counter-will. Furthermore, the choice of returning to tradition, entailed within the ideal of returning to one's roots, permitted Aboriginal poverty to be “rendered exotic and so no longer comparable to other forms of poverty” (Beckett 1988:12).

⁴² Land rights claims were restricted to “vacant crown land”; thus excluding the majority of Aboriginal people from making claims (Adams 2005:42). This opened the door for “judicial activism”, through the lens of Western property law, to begin to demarcate the conditions under which land rights claims would be granted (Mercer 1993:310, 315). Furthermore, the criteria used by the state to determine one's traditional ties to land were grounded in reified Western imaginings of Aboriginal life. For elaboration, see Chapter 5.

As Australians awoke to the reality that their Aboriginal population was highly visible on the international stage, the nation sought to capitalise upon their value, largely as a tourist attraction and a feather in the nation's post-colonial cap. Hage argues that this valuing of Aboriginal persons, much like the nation's immigrant population, could only occur once "they were no longer capable of endangering the British-constituted colonising national will" (1998:111). In order for Indigenous and immigrant Australians' value to be acknowledged, they must first be "caged"⁴³ and accept the terms of their existence as being set by the White nation (Hage 1998:116). Policies of Assimilation had served to cage non-White Australians; yet this also resulted in a national image of an intolerant society. In order to resolve its international "image problem" (Hage 1998:106), politicians began to promote Australia as a multicultural⁴⁴ nation, making the country "relevant [and likeable] to the rest of the world" (Hage 1998:128).

Australian Multiculturalism

Since its 1901 federation, Australia had enforced "White Australia" policies⁴⁵ (Pilger 2013). Yet during post-World War II reconstruction the nation had become increasingly dependent upon migrant labour. White Australia policies were gradually phased out after 1949, formally ending in 1972 (Luke and Luke 1997), and were replaced with the policies of Assimilation and then Integration for migrants and Indigenous Australians alike. As noted above, this foreshadowed the emergence of multiculturalism (Hage 1998:83). Australia had grown to recognise the need to "tolerate" non-White people within the nation, due the value these people contributed through their cheap labour (Hage 1998:94). Beyond this, another example of the recognised "value" of non-White Australians was the power of the ethnic vote, discovered by the Whitlam government (Beckett 1988:6). And so it was under Whitlam's 1972 government that multiculturalism first began to be enacted within Australian policies. However, multiculturalism did not come to fruition until Hawke's

⁴³ This term emerges from the concept of "ethnic caging" in which the ethnic subject is "tamed", subordinated to the national will, and whose own will has been subjugated to that of the White nation (Hage 1998:111-115).

⁴⁴ Initially the image of multiculturalism in Australia emphasised only the non-White immigrant (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

⁴⁵ "White Australia" policies effectively prevented non-White immigrants from entering the country (Hage 1998:82). For an overview of White Australia policies, which actively excluded and discriminated against non-European people within Australia, see McCorquodale 1986:20-24.

Labor government began to promote “productive diversity”⁴⁶ to its citizens; thus maximising the value of Australia’s resident Other(s).

Although a “multicultural” Australia presents a more desirable image globally than does a “White” Australia, colonial power relationships prevailed. Multiculturalism is grounded in a particular sort of tolerance: the ability of one group to decide to grant or withhold tolerance from another (Hage 1998:85). Within a multicultural Australia, White society continues to wield the power, as it is within their purview to dictate the terms by which non-White Australians will be tolerated and then integrated into the White community; thereby cementing past colonial power relationships within future government policy. Hage writes that multiculturalism “is a strategy aimed at reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society... It is a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism” (1998:87). This statement resounds greatly with Michel Foucault’s assertion that “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1990:86).

Under the guise of multiculturalism, migrant Australians internalised the notion that they were being incorporated into the nation, but that they would only be tolerated by White Australia as long as they conformed to the national will. In a parallel fashion, as Indigenous Australians fought for land rights, the extent to which these were granted was always contingent upon the tolerance of White Australia. This barrier to true self-determination has haunted all manifestations of Indigenous autonomy.

The early 1980s brought an economic downturn and, due to the threat Aboriginal Land Rights posed to the mining industry, a propaganda campaign ensued to destabilise the movement (Short 2007). Arguing that Indigenous Australians were no different from other Australians and deserved no special rights, the mining industry and state governments launched a concerted attack against the Indigenous movement (Beckett 1988:15). While in

⁴⁶ Emerging in 1983, soon after Hawke’s election, the discourse of “productive diversity” validates government social policy intervention on the basis of economic rationalism. Multiculturalism was promoted to Australian citizens as an economically efficient way to maximise the value of the nation’s non-White Others (Hage 1998:128).

1983 a commitment to Land Rights was a pledge of the newly elected Hawke Labor government⁴⁷ (Adams 2005:45), a 1986 poll revealed that the majority of Australians no longer supported this movement or Aboriginal people in general (Beckett 1988:15). However, this poll may not have been truly representative of the scope of public support for Indigenous rights. George Morgan writes that in the decade following the 1988 bicentennial “the Aboriginal movement gained considerable strength... extend[ing] Aboriginal social and political power” and generating “considerable sympathy for the Aboriginal cause, notably among middle-class, tertiary-educated city dwellers” (2006c:25).

Yet the economic downturn of the 1980s pulled the Labor government away from the Left and towards the newly emergent neoliberal ideology, which will be further discussed in Chapter 10. A restructuring of government and Labor strategies eventuated in corporatism, which debilitated grass roots social activism (Adams 2005:45-46; Morgan 2006c:24). Although public attention towards Indigenous rights lessened in the early 1980s, in the mid-1980s Indigenous issues were once again in the public eye in response to media reports of Aboriginal deaths in police custody.

Deaths in Custody

In late 1986 reports began to emerge that young Aboriginal men, many of whom were incarcerated for public intoxication, had allegedly committed suicide while in police custody. The first such media report came from Queensland⁴⁸, but soon after similar reports appeared from around Australia. One explanation offered for these “deaths in custody” was that they resulted from excessive alcohol intake arising out of the social and cultural collapse of Aboriginal communities. An alternative explanation offered was police negligence and possible brutality (Beckett 1988:16). The latter explanation held greater

⁴⁷ Calls for national Indigenous land rights were initially supported by Hawke’s Labor government (1983-1991). However, upon Hawke learning that Labor Premier of Western Australia (WA) Brian Burke would not support comprehensive land rights, such as those in the Northern Territory, Hawke withdrew national land rights legislation from his agenda (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, March 12, 2014). It is pertinent to note that WA has a longstanding history of mining, with the region being rich in nickel, petroleum, bauxite and alumina deposits.

⁴⁸ This was the first report to gain public attention and media scrutiny, however Aboriginal deaths in police custody had been occurring long before 1986. In John Pilger’s 2013 film, *Utopia*, he documents the case of Eddie Murray, an Aboriginal man from Wee Waa, NSW. In 1981 Murray was arrested for public intoxication and died 50 minutes after being placed in a cell. Murray was alleged to have hanged himself, although his family claims that he was not suicidal.

salience with Indigenous Australians, who remained in constant confrontation with police over their drinking habits⁴⁹. The Aboriginal movement adopted this view as the cause of these deaths, as it supported their position that Aboriginal citizens were denied the rights of White citizens. As reports of more Aboriginal deaths in custody emerged, Aboriginal activists and media representatives pushed for a federal inquiry.

With hesitation the federal government launched an inquiry into these deaths; Australia's bicentennial celebrations were only two years away and the government feared international embarrassment⁵⁰. Yet the relentless media coverage gave politicians little choice but to launch a national inquiry that would focus on the role of police in Aboriginal deaths in custody (Beckett 1998:16). In 1987 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was launched.

The findings of the RCIADIC were released in 1989. The report was highly critical of government policies that affected the lives of Aboriginal Australians. RCIADIC Commissioner, Elliot Johnston, stated that "far too much police intervention in the lives of Aboriginal people throughout Australia has been arbitrary, discriminatory, racist and violent" (Cunneen 2001:6). The RCIADIC found that:

In a great majority of cases, Aboriginal people come into custody as a result of relatively trivial and often victimless offences, typically street offences related to alcohol and language. Many of these 'offences' would not occur, or would not be noticed, were it not for the adoption of particular policing policies which concentrate police numbers in certain areas, and police effort on the scrutiny of Aboriginal people... The presence of police in large numbers leads to innumerable further trivial charges, creating a vicious circle in which Aboriginal people are criminalised. (Wootten 1991:268 in Cunneen 2001:90)

A number of issues identified by the report resulted in government actions. For example, it was found that 43 of the 99 people who had died while in police custody had been removed

⁴⁹ A number of my informants, particularly men over the age of 50, recounted incidents in which they had been harassed, arrested or driven out of town and left by the side of the road by police for reasons involving alcohol. According to informants, the police interaction was not due to unruly behaviour, but simply because they were "black" and had "had a couple of drinks".

⁵⁰ The Bicentennial was a celebration of Australia's progress and was grounded in self-congratulatory rhetoric. The deaths in custody represented the dark side of the colonial conquest that resulted in Australia's foundation and reminded the world of the extended violence and injustice that had been inflicted upon Indigenous Australians (Beckett 1988:16).

from their families as children. This prompted greater government funding of the agency Link-Up, which reconnects Indigenous individuals who were taken away as children with their birth families. This finding also initiated the “reconciliation”⁵¹ movement and formed the basis for the 1995 inquiry into the “stolen generation” (Adams 2005:59-64).

Another issue acknowledged within RCIADIC reports was the lack of progress in realising self-determination for Indigenous Australians (Whimp 1989). A newly founded government body known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was endorsed by the RCIADIC to provide a pathway by which Indigenous Australians might seize autonomy over policies directly affecting their lives (Johnston 1991).

The Establishment of ATSIC

Set against the backdrop of the RCIADIC was growing criticism of the lack of power held by Aboriginal people when policies specific to them were developed. The initial advisory body, the NACC (1973-1977), was criticised both for not adequately consulting with Indigenous people – which is not surprising as the 41 elected Aboriginal assembly members were responsible for representing around 800 Aboriginal communities. The NAC (1977-1985), its replacement body, faced similar criticisms in 1983 (http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29#thelead, accessed July 2, 2013). The incoming Hawke Labor government pledged a restructuring of the NAC in 1983 and ordered a review of the body. Upon the 1985 public release of the review’s conclusions, which were that the NAC was “not a significant instrument of Aboriginal political influence and power”, a controversy arose regarding the body’s financial administration. This controversy revolved around the NAC’s “very significant weaknesses” in grant administration, assessment and monitoring processes (Sander 1994:475).

⁵¹ The reconciliation movement, led by the 1991 formation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, was grounded in the initiative to reconcile two bodies of Australian citizens: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. While forging “new partnerships” grounded in “justice and equality” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, reconciliation simultaneously highlights the commonalities between these two reified groups and reinforces a cultural binary (Adams 2005:59). The movement has been criticised for being emotive rather than practical, resulting in apologies rather than reparations (Adams 2005:60).

While the NACC and NAC were “early experiments in the creation of government-sponsored Aboriginal representative structures” (Sanders 1994:475), scholars believe they were not truly representative of self-determination, as they were granted no executive powers and their role was limited to advising. Michelle Ivanitz and Ken McPhail assert that this characteristic “indicated that the [policy of Self-Determination] was more symbolic and rhetorical than substantive” (2003:188). Although the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC), formed in 1980 and consisting of ten part-time Aboriginal commissioners, did carry executive powers, they were limited in scope, dealing only with Aboriginal programs relating to development. Furthermore, the commissioners were appointed by the government rather than elected by Indigenous people.

In light of the substantial criticisms of these Aboriginal bodies, in 1987 the Hawke government announced that it would establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which was to amalgamate the former functions of the DAA, ADC and NAC (Sullivan 2011:4; Palmer 2004:5). ATSIC was to hold representative and executive powers, realised through regional and national councils of elected Aboriginal people, in an effort to “allay the criticism that decision-making in Aboriginal affairs had never been fully given to Aborigines” (Sanders 1994:475).

The passage of legislation to launch ATSIC faced great opposition from the Liberal party, which saw ATSIC as a form of “black parliament” and recommended the withdrawal of the legislation altogether (Palmer 2004:6). After two years of amendments and revisions to the legislation, due largely to concerns that financial accountability and transparency were lacking, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* was passed by Parliament (http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29#thelead, accessed July 2, 2013).

ATSIC

ATSIC (1990-2005) was established as a two-tiered system consisting of decentralised groups of elected regional councils and a central assembly of Aboriginal commissioners

and federal bureaucrats. Members of the regional councils were elected by Indigenous registered voters living in the region (Coe 1994:36).

The objectives of ATSIC, set out in section 3 of the *ATSIC Act 1989* were:

- (a) to ensure maximum participation of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders in the formulation and implementation of government policies that affect them;
- (b) to promote the development of self-management and self-sufficiency among Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders;
- (c) to further the economic, social and cultural development of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- (d) to ensure co-ordination in the formulation and implementation of policies affecting Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders by the Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments, without detracting from the responsibilities of State, Territory and local governments to provide services to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

This was to be accomplished through ATSIC's three key roles: advising all levels of the government on Indigenous issues; advocating for the recognition of Indigenous rights regionally, nationally and internationally, on the behalf of Indigenous Australians; and delivering and monitoring some of the federal government's funding for Indigenous programs and services ([http://www.aph.gov.au/About Parliament/Parliamentary Departments/Parliamentary Library/Publications Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29#thelead](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib0203/03cib29#thelead), accessed July 2, 2013).

It was this latter role that was integral to the sustainability of Aboriginal corporations. ATSIC's major role was not only as an organisation representing Indigenous interests within Australia's governments, but as an agency administering grants for Indigenous development (Sullivan 2011:1). In practice, ATSIC directly funded Aboriginal communities⁵² and community organisations (Sullivan 2011:48). During the existence of ATSIC, Indigenous social services organisations rarely had to compete with mainstream organisations due to part (b) of Section 3 of the *ATSIC Act*.

⁵² While a role of ATSIC was to dispense funding to its regional councils, the body lacked a funding allocation formula – meaning that monetary distribution did not take into consideration factors such as remoteness and population size – and the distribution of funding to councils was seen to be unequal and somewhat arbitrary (Smith 1993a:6-10; Smith 1993b:1-5).

Since the passage of the 1967 Referendum, the federal government had assumed almost exclusive responsibility for funding a vast array of Aboriginal human services: those addressing disadvantage in such areas as health, law, culture and media; and multi-purpose resource agencies. During the 1970s and 80s there had been an exponential increase in Aboriginal-controlled community service and governance organisations, funded by the Commonwealth (Sullivan 2011:3-4). The RCIADIC reports identified these organisations as integral in realising Indigenous autonomy, via services designed to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage (Johnston 1991; Whimp 1989). In turn the RCIADIC's recommendation that a system of block funding be introduced to provide a minimum level of funding to Aboriginal communities and organisations on a triennial basis, was implemented (Johnston 1991:27.3.6).

Another important feature of ATSIC was that it shielded the funding and administration of Aboriginal services from the neoliberal⁵³ policies that swept through Australia's governments from the mid-1980s on. This aspect of ATSIC, and the direction Aboriginal service administration took upon its abolition, will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Australian Indigenous Affairs policy has always been grounded in an ideology of White Western imperialism. No longer a colony of Britain, Australia is a postcolonial nation; however, the primacy of Euro-centric ideology and institutional structures firmly grounds the country as a neocolonial settler-society. While Indigenous Affairs policy titles and objectives have varied over the past two centuries, they have all been essentially paternalistic; with White society determining what is best for the Indigenous Other.

The Australian nation regularly falls under international gaze, with its Indigenous policies frequently drawing attention and criticism. Public chastisement from a global audience often spurs the nation to take action, or at least look like it is taking action, to avoid

⁵³ Neoliberalism is characterised by privatisation, the out-sourcing of social services, and a heightened emphasis on financial bottom-line thinking. Chapter 10 will elaborate on the ideology of neoliberalism, the effect it had on Australian governments and its repercussions on Aboriginal humans service funding.

stigmatisation as a racist country. Yet despite the cessation of the White Nation policy and the removal of overt segregation, Australia continues to be a country of White privilege.

Although the 20th century saw Australia progress towards enacting policy that was hoped by many to facilitate greater Indigenous autonomy, particularly in regard to the shift signalled by Self-Determination, the *ACA Act* and the *ATSIC Act*, all policies have fallen short of Indigenous self-rule⁵⁴. While the ideals behind Whitlam's Self-Determination policy were admirable, the structures of governance it imposed undermined the cause from the very beginning. The same can be said regarding the *ACA Act* and the *ATSIC Act*, as these policies were also framed within a system of White governance.

As we have seen in this chapter with reference to Self-Determination, these flaws in policy design and execution have ultimately landed the blame for policy failure on the heads of Indigenous people. Under Self-Determination Indigenous Australians were seen to be “disinclined to take up the challenge of ‘managing their own affairs’” (Batty 2003:71), rather than the policy itself being seen as poorly designed and badly implemented. This same pattern endures in more recent Indigenous policy and programs.

The following chapter continues to examine Indigenous Affairs policy, from the period of 1996 on; a time during which another major shift in the nation's approach to governing its First Peoples can be seen. While the Aboriginal policies of the 20th century by no means fostered holistic Indigenous autonomy, there was nevertheless a gradual progression enabling a more forceful Indigenous voice in the policies that directly affected them. However in 1996, with the election of the Liberal-National Coalition government and John Howard, this progress was reversed. Self-determination, even in the weak sense in which it was enacted in Australia during the 1970s, ceased to be seen as desirable (Levitus 2009:74, 82, 95) and overt paternalism in Indigenous Affairs policy once again became the norm.

⁵⁴ In determining Indigenous self-rule, the essential question is “who is exercising decision-making power... within a given policy domain or set of decisions” (Cornell 2006:16). In Australian Indigenous Affairs the answer to this question has never been Indigenous persons. For more on Indigenous self-rule, see Chapter 5.

3. Recent Indigenous Affairs Policy

I speak for the entire government on this and it's a matter that's been discussed at great length. We don't think it's appropriate for the current generation of Australians to apologise for the injustices committed by past generations.

– Prime Minister John Howard⁵⁵

As previously discussed, the 1970s saw a shift in Aboriginal policy from Assimilation to Self-Determination, with wide popular support. Yet the policy of Self-Determination was fraught with contradictions and much indeterminacy. The 1980s saw a rapid emergence of Aboriginal community-controlled service organisations, in direct response to the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*. Self-determination was expected to be realised through the formation of Aboriginal collectives that would gradually take over governmental service delivery to Indigenous populations (Batty 2003:36; Rowley 1986:66), yet in order to do so Indigenous Australians were required to adopt Western skill sets and, to some extent, values (Batty 2003:58, 65, 71-2). The newly emerging incorporated Aboriginal organisations were flexible, adaptive and responsive to the cultural priorities of their Indigenous communities; yet remained bound within structures of White Western governance⁵⁶.

When John Howard rose to Prime Minister in 1996, he ushered in an era of Liberal-National Coalition government rule that re-evaluated the worth of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The popularity of self-determination ebbed in mainstream narratives of Indigenous Affairs, and assimilation once more became the norm (Mercer 2003:434), although this time under the guise of “practical reconciliation”.

The initial appeal of reconciliation was grounded in the positive global attention paid to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the late 1990s, out of which reconciliation emerged as a widespread and popular discourse regarding times of transition

⁵⁵ Howard made this statement on May 29, 2000 during an interview on the ABC Television program *7.30 Report*.

⁵⁶ A discussion of how Aboriginal corporations were able to maintain their flexibility, despite having to operate within Western frameworks, can be found in Chapter 8.

after national conflicts (Moon 2005:258). However, as will be demonstrated below, the Howard government's use of the term "reconciliation" had little to do with truth and justice, as people were perhaps led to believe, but rather imposed the White national will upon the Indigenous Other. During his eleven year leadership, Howard's Coalition government successfully disempowered the *Native Title Act 1993*⁵⁷ and dismantled the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Further, the invasive Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) was initiated. When, in 2007, the Labor Party returned to parliamentary power under Kevin Rudd, there were great expectations that many of the Howard government's Aboriginal policies would be reversed. This was signified by Rudd's election platform and the delivery of the "National Apology"⁵⁸. Yet during the following six years of Labor government rule, little changed in federal Indigenous policy: the paternalistic NTER persisted and Indigenous Australians continued to have little voice in the policies that affected them.

This chapter discusses how, after progress had been made over previous decades towards empowering Indigenous persons within the Australian nation, albeit through the poorly conceptualised pathways discussed in Chapter 2, the current state of overt paternalism and White rule in Aboriginal Affairs policy re-emerged. Beginning with Howard's ascendancy to Prime Minister in 1996 (Attwood and Markus 2007:77), I will discuss the ways in which his Coalition government eroded Aboriginal rights and its justifications for doing so. I will also touch upon the return of the Labor government (2007-2013) under Kevin Rudd and discuss how this perpetuated policies of "practical reconciliation". As a result of these recent Indigenous Affairs policies, Aboriginal-specific human services are once again heavily circumscribed by the desires of White Australia.

⁵⁷ The *Native Title Act 1993* was passed into legislation by Paul Keating's Labor government (1991-1996) in response to the High Court ruling in *Mabo v Queensland (No.2)*, which rejected *terra nullius* and upheld the common law doctrine of aboriginal title. The 1993 Act looked to extend this high court ruling throughout Australia and was grounded in the principles of the *Mabo* ruling, namely the rejection of *terra nullius* and "the recognition of native title rights based on the traditions of the indigenous people of Australia" (<http://www.ags.gov.au/publications/legal-briefing/br11.htm>, accessed March 13, 2014).

⁵⁸ On February 13, 2008, at Parliament House in Canberra, Kevin Rudd issued a National Apology to Indigenous Australians for past Commonwealth Aboriginal Affairs policies. Policies of child removal were emphasised, yet Rudd also more broadly included the "laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians" as necessitating an apology to Indigenous Australians (Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples, <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>, accessed September 10, 2012).

Removal of Self-Determination from the Policy Agenda

Philip Batty argued in his 2003 PhD thesis that a “primary objective of successive federal governments up to and beyond the year 2000” has been to “encourage Aboriginal people to manage their own affairs” (27). While I agree that this largely occurred from the time of Whitlam’s government (1972-1975) up until the Howard government’s 1996 election, I, and my Aboriginal informants, strongly believe that this failed to be the case after 1996 (see, for example Humpage 2008:420). Batty states that while the Coalition government of Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983) used the terms “Aboriginal self-management” and “self-sufficiency”, the meaning of these terms were parallel with that of Whitlam’s use of “self-determination”, which the Hawke and Keating Labor governments (1983-1996) also used during their periods in office. When John Howard’s Coalition government (1996-2007) came to power, Batty argues that his use of the term “self-sufficiency” was employed in much the same vein as Fraser’s, and that the “administrative infrastructure first proposed and partly developed by the Whitlam Labor government has remained intact” (2003:27). This analysis is borne out neither by the statements of my informants, nor by the historical record. Rather, it is the case that the Howard government spent its eleven-year tenure overhauling Indigenous Affairs’ administrative infrastructure and reorienting policy objectives away from self-determination and towards what Patrick Sullivan calls “normalisation”⁵⁹ (2011:100).

Batty’s analysis is critical of Australia’s initial implementation of Self-Determination, and rightly so. Numerous poorly rationalised assumptions within Australia’s 1970s Self-Determination policy, such as the English literacy capabilities of Indigenous Australians and their willingness to wield administrative power over kin, plagued the policy with contradictions and indeterminacies. Batty is correct if the continuity he speaks of refers to the overall framework in which the system of governance remained embedded within White ideology. Yet, while Whitlam’s Self-Determination envisioned this governance

⁵⁹ Sullivan notes that although the present phase of Aboriginal affair policy is popularly referred to by government as “closing the gaps”, he prefers the term “normalisation” as “it encapsulates the development dilemma for Aboriginal people” (2011:100). This development dilemma can be attributed to, among other things, the governments’ preference for approaching Indigenous Australians as if they were just another minority group that lacks any special status, standardising and mainstreaming all human services, and tailoring services to the individual; all in spite of the fact that Indigenous Australians hold an internationally recognised special status as First Peoples and that many hold an allegiance and obligation “to collectivities of families and communities” (Sullivan 2011:106, 100-111).

system being gradually handed over to Indigenous Australians, this was certainly not the case under the Howard government's "practical reconciliation", nor is it under present Indigenous Affairs policy (Havnen 2012:33). Batty's assertions regarding the Howard government's Indigenous policies were perhaps moulded by their composition during this period of Liberal-National Coalition government rule, at which time the long-term ramifications of policy changes had yet to emerge. However, Batty's examination is difficult to justify in light of the hallmarks of Howard's ministry, some of which occurred even prior to the thesis's 2003 completion.

The Howard Government's Approach to Aboriginal Affairs

Several days after his March 1996 election, Howard called a press conference to announce his intention to appoint an administrator to assume the role that was, until then, held by the Indigenous body ATSIC. It was an ironic turn of events, as ATSIC's role was to "provide the opportunity for a significant devolution of decision-making power to Aboriginal people over a range of issues which would otherwise be determined by non-Aboriginal people" (Whimp 1989:Recommendation 189). Due to this contradiction in terms, the appointment of an administrator would have required changes to the *ATSIC Act*, something which was blocked by the Senate (Graham 2007). Howard's Coalition government nevertheless persevered in this vein (Ivanitz 1999a:7). In April 1996 Howard announced that he would appoint a special auditor to investigate allegations of widespread fraud within organisations funded by ATSIC – an action later deemed by the Federal court as invalid under the *ATSIC Act* – although not before the special auditor found the allegations of fraud to be baseless (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:463-464; Ivanitz 1998:13).

The Howard government was able to justify such excessive scrutiny of ATSIC as it was widely believed by politicians and the public that the body lacked accountability, despite being "perhaps the most audited and monitored organisation of its kind, and the only one with its own internal audit office" (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:463, see also Ivanitz 1999a:18). ATSIC acknowledged this public distrust and stated that there was a need "to respond to a perception of accountability problems, rather than to objective evidence-based reality of accountability problems" (ATSIC 2003:6 in Cunningham and Baeza 2005:464). Yet even when the 1996 audit proved that ATSIC had significantly lower rates of fraud

than a survey of large non-Indigenous Australian companies⁶⁰, the body's excessive surveillance continued.

In May 1996 the Howard government released its first budget, which cut \$470 million from ATSIC's Aboriginal program and service spending; resulting in the closure of many Aboriginal women's centres and youth programs (Graham 2007). One year later, in response to the success of the 1996 Wik land claim, the Howard government introduced the "10 Point Plan" as an Amendment to the *Native Title Act 1993*, which essentially reduced the Act's efficacy⁶¹. This amendment was condemned on three separate occasions by the United Nations as racially discriminatory (Short, 2003:502). Yet Howard ignored these criticisms and insisted that:

What has happened with Native Title is that the pendulum has swung too far in one direction, particularly after the Wik decision. What I have done with this legislation is bring it back to the middle. (Howard 1997a)

At this point, Howard's government led Aboriginal Affairs discourses away from issues of rights and autonomy and instead directed attention to what he called "practical reconciliation", essentially repudiating Indigenous self-determination (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:270; Attwood and Markus 2007:77-78). Larissa Behrendt notes that "the clear agenda (of 'practical reconciliation') is one of assimilation and integration" (Short 2003:503).

There appears to have been a rather shallow interpretation of the term "reconciliation" when employed by the Howard government. Reconciliation, when used as a paradigm during the South African and Chilean peace-making processes, demanded a "shared

⁶⁰ The 1996 audit found that, of the 1,122 ATSIC-funded organisations assessed, 95 percent were in compliance with funding regulations; with those not in compliance having only "minor technical irregularities, many of which resulted from a lack of training" (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:464). This contrasts with a 1997 company fraud survey of 490 large Australian companies, in which almost 50 percent were found to have experienced "significant fraud" during the previous two years (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:464).

⁶¹ In 1996 the High Court of Australia ruled in the *Wik People v Queensland* that statutory leases did not necessarily extinguish Native Title land claims, as in certain cases the land leased could still be deemed "unalienable crown land" to which a land claim could be made. The Court ruled that the pastoral leases under consideration did not bestow rights of exclusive possession on the leaseholder (Gal 1997:490). In 1998 the "10 Point Plan" Amendment to the *Native Title Act* was passed, which returned security of tenure to non-Indigenous pastoral leaseholders and made it impossible for Indigenous Australians to lay claim to this land.

comprehensive vision of mutual healing, restoration and mutual forgiveness” (Short 2003:504). This was to include not only “forgiveness” and “moving on”, but more importantly “truth” and “justice” in order for “mutual healing” to occur. Appropriate forms of redress would then follow the identification of injustice, such as restorative justice and reparative justice, in order that post-conflict states attain legitimacy in the eyes of the victims (Short 2003:495).

However, in 1999 Howard refused even to issue a national apology to the Stolen Generations (de Costa 2000:277), justifying this by asserting a need to focus on the more positive aspects of Australia’s past rather than dwelling upon “black armband history” (1997b; see also Attwood and Markus 2007:68, 78). In a 2000 interview on the *7.30 Report*, Howard stated that:

I speak for the entire government on this and it’s a matter that’s been discussed at great length. We don’t think it’s appropriate for the current generation of Australians to apologise for the injustices committed by past generations. (Howard 2000, first aired on ABC Television May 29)

This clear refusal to engage with the violent atrocities and other injustices of colonisation processes, or to acknowledge the truths of Australia’s historical record, speaks to the Howard government’s perception of “reconciliation” in terms of it being “practical” rather than substantive. It denies the possibility of restorative justice and cannot even truly be said to contain policies within the field of “restitutive” justice. Furthermore, this perception of “reconciliation” excludes such indigenous human rights as those detailed by the 2007 United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, for example, the rights to: be free from forced assimilation (Article 8), participate in decision-making relevant to themselves (Article 18), and “maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions” and entitlement “to just and fair redress” should they be “deprived of their means of subsistence and development” (Article 20). These clauses of this United Nations’ Declaration were clearly violated by the Howard government, in part by the Prime Minister’s continued efforts to dismantle ATSIC.

The End of ATSIC

When the Hawke Labor government introduced the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989 (ATSIC Act)* to parliament, then Minister for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) – Gerry Hand – stated that there was an “urgent need to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a real say in the decision making process... a real say in the management of their own affairs” (in Coe 1994:35-36).

Yet the majority of funding allocated to ATSIC to administer was quarantined for specific programs at the behest of the federal government. Therefore, little of ATSIC’s funding was allowed to be used solely at this body’s discretion. From the time of the Howard government’s election, ATSIC controlled only around 15 percent of its own budget, making up approximately 7 percent of all spending on Indigenous Affairs (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:466; see also Jonas and Dick 2004:7). However this did not prevent the widespread condemnation of ATSIC for its lack of progress in bettering the living conditions of Indigenous Australians. While the body only existed for little more than ten years, half of which fell under the Howard government, ATSIC was squarely blamed for not immediately undoing two centuries of government-sponsored oppression. The body served as a ready scapegoat for all governments’ Indigenous Affairs policy failures, despite not being the primary funding source for programs affecting Indigenous Australians (Ivanitz 1998:9). A prime example of this is evinced by a 2003 national newspaper article that blasted ATSIC for the poor health outcomes of remote Indigenous populations, in spite of the fact that the body had not been tasked with health since 1995 (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:466).

Allegations of nepotism, corruption, criminal behaviour⁶² and monetary waste⁶³, a number of which were unfounded, haunted ATSIC from its inception. While the body was flawed, as are all government bodies⁶⁴, it served several valid functions for advancing Indigenous voices within government decision making and policy. The body provided a formal platform upon which Indigenous priorities and concerns could be voiced at the national

⁶² Geoff Clark, ATSIC Commissioner (1999-2003) was convicted of numerous criminal offenses, such as “riotous behaviour”, “obstructing police” and rape (Rintoul 2007).

⁶³ See, for example, Morrissey 1998:104; Pratt 2003:14-15; Anderson 2007:144-45.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Smith (1993a; 1993b) and Ivanitz (1998; 1999a; 1999b).

government level. It also served to monitor government initiatives to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, acting as a sort of watchdog that held the government accountable for its performance regarding Aboriginal services and service-spending (Jonas and Dick 2004:14). Furthermore, ATSIC performed several key roles that enabled the sustainability of Aboriginal community-controlled human services organisations.

When distributing funding for Aboriginal-specific programs and services, ATSIC insisted that organisations eligible for their grants be incorporated under the *ACA Act 1976* (Coe 1994:38). By securing a pool of funding for Aboriginal-specific services, ATSIC not only ensured that Aboriginal organisations would not have to compete for funding with large non-Indigenous organisations, but also provided a relatively secure scheme of funding on which Aboriginal corporations could depend.

An additional form of security provided to Aboriginal organisations by ATSIC was that it shielded them from the neoliberal changes⁶⁵ sweeping through the public administrations of Western countries, particularly the “introduction of commercial accounting standards for public administration” (Potter 2002 in Sullivan 2011:71). By shielding Aboriginal corporations from these administrative changes, ATSIC enabled them to continue to function in a relatively autonomous manner, in which they, by way of their Management Committee, identified the objectives of programs, delivered services in a flexible and innovative manner, and quantitatively *and* qualitatively reported outcomes to stakeholders.

The largely unwarranted allegations of corruption within ATSIC, and claims of its lack of accountability, were ultimately the platform upon which the conservative Howard government began to dismantle the body (Kowal 2008:340; Ivanitz 1999a:1). In November 2002, a review of ATSIC was called for in what the Indigenous Affairs Minister, Philip Ruddock, claimed was an effort to “strengthen ATSIC... It is a unique organisation that is meant to give Indigenous people a genuine voice in policy making” (2002 in Jonas and Dick 2004:4). While this review was estimated to have cost \$2 million dollars, prior to the release of the review panel’s findings the Howard government began instituting major

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of ways in which neoliberal ideology was instituted within Australia, and has come to dominate Indigenous Affairs policy, see Chapters 10 through 12.

changes within ATSIC (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:466). The body was split in two, with the elected arm of regional councils continuing on as ATSIC and the administrative arm, including the majority of staff, being refashioned into a new executive body, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS), which was to take over all major fiscal responsibilities (Cunningham and Baez 2005:466-67). This was deemed by Ruddock to be an “interim” measure while the government explored

the potential for more effective arrangements for ATSIC at the national and regional level... [with a] forward looking assessment which addresses how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can in the future be best represented in the process of the development of Commonwealth policies and programmes to assist them. (2002 in Jonas and Dick 2004:5).

Regardless of the significant weakening of ATSIC caused by this division, the ATSIC review panel found that the body was important in representing Indigenous voices. However, it noted that it saw:

ATSIC as a top down body. Few, if any, of its policy positions are initiated from community or regional levels. The regional operations of ATSIC are very much focused on program management. To fulfil its charter, engage its constituency and strengthen its credibility, ATSIC must go back to the people. The representative structure must allow for full expression of local, regional and State/Territory based views through regional councils and their views should be the pivot of the national voice. (Jonas and Dick 2004:5)

The report recommended that ATSIC be strengthened to better meet those challenges. However, the Howard government had already significantly diminished the capabilities of the body by removing the majority of its administrative staff and leaving the elected regional councils without implementation capabilities. The findings of the review panel were essentially treated as irrelevant, and less than six months from their release Howard announced that both ATSIC⁶⁶ and ATSIS would be abolished (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:468).

⁶⁶ While it was Howard’s government that introduced and perpetuated efforts to dismantle ATSIC from 1996 on, in the lead up to the 2004 Federal elections the Labor Opposition announced that, should it become elected, it too intended to abolish the body (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:468).

In May 2004 the Howard government successfully introduced legislation abolishing ATSIC. This legislation was formally passed one year later and, in the place of ATSIC, the federal government created a new body of hand-picked Aboriginal representatives, known as the National Indigenous Council (Graham 2007), which would advise on, rather than decide, Indigenous policy (Humpage 2008:422). In turn, the administration of funding for Indigenous-specific services was handed back to mainstream government departments at both state and federal levels.

William Jonas and Darren Dick⁶⁷, noted in a 2004 article that

The abolition of the nationally elected representative Indigenous body ensures that the government will only have to deal with Indigenous peoples on its own terms and without any reference to the stated aspirations and goals of Indigenous peoples. It means that the government only has to talk to select Indigenous people when it chooses to and only on issues that it wishes to engage. (14)

Shared Responsibility Agreements

To replace ATSIC's role in distributing grants for Indigenous-specific services Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) were introduced in May 2005 and were administered and disbursed by mainstream government departments. Linked to SRAs were Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs), creating Indigenous regional bodies that would streamline the signing of SRAs in their region (Strakosch 2009:83, 85). In order to oversee these new forms of agreement, Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) were established as a branch of the new Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC). ICCs were staffed primarily by White senior public servants, and these centralised offices coordinated the programs of multiple government agencies (Sullivan 2005:5). As a result, far more money ear-marked for Indigenous services was expended upon bureaucratic institutions and their staff than was on Indigenous communities (Humpage 2008:423).

In addition to the distribution of Aboriginal service funding being placed firmly in the hands of White Australia (Sullivan 2005:6), SRAs differed from ATSIC grants in another

⁶⁷ At this time Jonas was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, while Dick was Director of the Social Justice Commissioner's Office at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

important way: unlike other government funding for human services, SRAs were contingent upon pledges by Indigenous communities for “improved behaviour” (Sullivan 2011:40). While the distribution of other forms of grants is grounded upon recognised need, SRAs recognised need but in return demanded promises of self-regulation from recipients under a policy of “mutual responsibility” (Sullivan 2005:6).

Mutual obligation, or mutual responsibility, is a welfare policy rhetoric that has been adopted by Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States (Yeatman 2000:157). It became dominant in these countries as neoliberal rhetoric gained popularity. Howard promoted this policy approach in Australia, as did Tony Blair’s “Third Way” in the UK and Bill Clinton’s “Personal Responsibility” in the US (Braithwaite et al. 2002:225), for welfare policies of mutual obligation had rapidly gained traction in Anglo democracies as “best practice”.

As suggested with SRAs, mutual obligation sets passive welfare dependency against citizens’ obligations to productively contribute to society. While the State assumes responsibility for supporting its citizens, mutual obligation proposes that it should only be expected to do so for those who are willing to contribute to society in return (Yeatman 2000:156-157). However, one issue regarding mutual obligation in Indigenous organisations lies within the question of what White society deems to be a “productive” contribution to society, as will be discussed with regard to work in Chapter 8, and will again be illustrated in Chapters 10 and 12 with regard to service outcomes.

The implementation of SRAs was well-received by the Australian public, which had demonstrated its increasing belief that Indigenous organisations were irresponsible, wasteful and inept in their use of the funding (Sullivan 2005:6). SRAs were seen to be an implement for improving the governance of Aboriginal communities, as it was assumed that the demanded promise of improved behaviour in return for funding would result in community members falling in line. However, this was unrealistic due to “the lack of cultural precedent for leadership to enforce compliance” in rural and remote Aboriginal communities, where the majority of these contracts were signed (Sullivan 2011:40).

Furthermore, the tenuous nature of SRA grant-giving was short-sighted and did not correspond with the entrenched social issues faced by Aboriginal communities. Patrick Sullivan writes:

[SRAs] were conceived in the cultural system of contract and obligation, and were not a good substitute for long-term programs to engage the communities in their own cultural change on a daily basis, with the involvement of skilled development workers. These necessarily involve community-based not-for-profit organisations ... Yet SRAs, and the early RPAs, were intended by the government to undercut these [community-based organisations], dealing instead with individuals, families or favoured organisations that posed no threat of political dissidence. (2011:40-41)

As a starting point, SRAs were negotiated directly with “communities and families” (Kowal 2008:340), cutting out the expertise of local Indigenous-controlled human service organisations. Louise Humpage argues that these communities and families frequently “lacked the institutional capacity and information to successfully negotiate with government agencies” (2008:423), thereby realising Dick’s aforementioned warning regarding the abolition of ATSIC that “the government will only have to deal with Indigenous peoples on its own terms” (2004:14).

Upon the signing of an SRA, the ICCs were then expected to develop programs that responded to the needs identified by communities and families, something which was frequently frustrated by the bureaucratic entanglements of incommensurate timelines and changing policy and funding objectives (Sullivan 2011:46). ICCs and other OIPC bodies have continuously failed to meet the needs of local Indigenous communities as, staffed by centralised bureaucrats, they lacked the “local wisdom, community credibility [and] expertise acquired through practice” (Sullivan 2005:11).

The traits cited above, which are often lacking in government bureaucracies, are those same traits found within Indigenous community-controlled organisations. However, in the past two decades these Indigenous organisations have been disparaged and treated with suspicion, with politicians and policy makers attempting to malign, circumvent and disempower them within Aboriginal Affairs policy. One reason for this treatment is that Indigenous organisations, through their advocacy and community-building, pose a threat to

the status quo of White Australia by challenging the legitimacy of State institutions' ethicality in treatment of Indigenous Australians. As Hage notes:

In the institution of new forms of symbolic violence, the possessors of the dominant cultural capital strive to present themselves as the governmental enactors and guarantors of the nation doxa (everyday common sense) and assume the power to delegitimise those who challenge the doxa. (1998:207)

Within a year of the introduction of SRAs, reviews of the program were not positive. The model was widely criticised as paternalistic in its attempts at micromanaging Indigenous behaviour. Less than fifty of the estimated 1,300 Australian Indigenous communities were willing to engage in SRAs and the scale of funding was minimal (Strakosch 2009:85). An evaluation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trials, which included SRAs and RPAs, was completed in mid-2006, and despite the efforts of the Howard government to block its public release, the damning report was leaked to the media later that year. The evaluator, Bill Gray, slammed the government's handling of the program and asserted that "social problems such as crime and housing shortages had worsened over the trial period" (Strakosch 2009:87); and revealing that while numerous Indigenous communities were fulfilling their obligations under SRAs, Australian governments were not (Humpage 2008:423). The evaluations that followed in 2007 were not as heavily critical, but noted only negligible outcomes in improving material inequalities – the central objective of the COAG trials. Humpage argues that although this Reconciliation Framework was not successful in alleviating Indigenous disadvantage, it was successful in other ways: namely in cementing the legitimacy and efficacy of neoliberal ideology and policy in Indigenous Affairs. She states that the Reconciliation Framework "allowed the Liberal-coalition government to reframe political disputes as technical issues of measurement and reporting and 'success' and 'failure' in ways amendable to itself" (2008:424).

The limited success of SRAs led to their quiet disappearance from sight within the Indigenous policy spectrum. While these grants still exist in 2013 on a small scale, they clearly have not been the answer to "closing the gaps". Although SRAs are no longer prevalent, ICCs still operate throughout Australia and the policy of "mutual obligation", entailed within the granting of funding only when good behaviour is promised, still

reigns⁶⁸. This latter point demonstrates the traction neoliberal rhetoric has found within Australian politics, as will be demonstrated in Chapters 10 through 12. With the decline of SRAs and the abolition of ATSIC, no formal policy has been introduced to fill their place. Compartmentalised and inflexible Indigenous programs are devised, allotted and administered by mainstream government departments, increasingly in line with New Public Management (NPM)⁶⁹.

It is hard to pin-point the cause of the Australian public's growing disenchantment with Aboriginal autonomy, yet the media was undoubtedly key in fuelling this disillusionment (Sullivan 2011:74). The roots of this may lie in the propaganda campaigns of the early 1990s launched by industry groups, particularly mining lobbyists, which portrayed the Indigenous land rights bestowed by Native Title as "a national crisis". The media failed to investigate and accepted this sensationalism⁷⁰ and reported a great deal of misinformation. For instance, the belief that Native Title threatened the property titles of all non-Indigenous Australians was promoted, in what came to be known as the "backyards threat" (Short 2007:866). At one point a major Sydney newspaper went so far as to declare a Native Title land claim on the Sydney Opera House, despite lacking any legal foundation or evidence for such as assertion (Short 2007:862). Just as the media aided in the demonisation of Native Title, it was complicit in creating a public spectacle surrounding ATSIC's purported ineptitude (Sullivan 2011:74).

The Intervention: the Northern Territory Emergency Response

A further example in which the media perpetuated notions of the incapacity of Aboriginal Australians to govern themselves was demonstrated throughout the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), also known as "the Intervention".

⁶⁸ Welfare policies of mutual obligation have now been implemented throughout all branches of Australian social policy, not solely in Indigenous Affairs.

⁶⁹ New Public Management applies an audit approach, originating in the field of accounting, to public administration (Power 1997:43). For an in-depth discussion of NPM, see Chapter 10.

⁷⁰ The Australian media has been criticised for "dumbing down" the political debate and its tendency, in conjunction with the government, to "resort to promoting a polemic debate, reinforcing stereotypes and a focus on personalities" (Dillon and Westbury 2007:177).

In 2007 a report was released by the Northern Territory (NT) Government called *Little Children are Sacred*⁷¹, which asserted “that sexual abuse of Aboriginal children is common, widespread and grossly under-reported” (Wild and Anderson 2007:16). Despite noting that “the problems do not just relate to Aboriginal communities” and that “the number of perpetrators is small... [with] some communities... where there are no problems at all” (6), this report requested: “That Aboriginal child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory be designated as an issue of urgent national significance” (7). Less than one week later the Howard government initiated the NTER. Media accounts of this national “crisis” created a “moral tsunami”, which greatly eclipsed any objective assessment of the NTER’s approach (Stewart 2008).

The media played a large role in perpetuating the moral frenzy regarding Aboriginal child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities⁷². The allegation by the Howard government’s Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, that “pedophile rings were operating” in Mutitjulu, a town near Uluru (Elks 2007), among other such Aboriginal settlements, were picked up and carried in local and national newspapers for months (Barrass 2007). Gradually it emerged that there was no evidence such organised rings existed in any of Australia’s Indigenous communities (McKenzie 2009), yet the demonisation of Aboriginal culture, people and behaviour continued.

While a 2009 article in the Melbourne newspaper, *The Age*, headlined “Pedophile ring claims unfounded”, it went on to state that “indigenous children are six times more likely to be abused” than non-Indigenous children (McKenzie). Placed in the context of the article, a reader would infer that this latter quote pertained to sexual abuse when, in fact, it did not (Sheehan 2010). The Productivity Commission report that McKenzie’s article cites as the source of this number does indeed state that Indigenous children experience substantiated abuse at six times the rate of non-Indigenous children; yet it also notes that child neglect is the primary form of abuse against Indigenous children⁷³, whereas, for non-Indigenous

⁷¹ The full title of this report, written by Rex Wild and Pat Anderson, is *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle ‘Little Children are Sacred’*.

⁷² This media frenzy, and the lack of evidence upon which it was grounded, is a topic of John Pilger’s 2013 film *Utopia*. See also Barrass 2007.

⁷³ Indeed, there has been a long-standing crisis in Indigenous parenting, as is demonstrated by this finding. This crisis is grounded in complicated social and historical factors, to which Indigenous policy is often blind.

children the form was emotional abuse (SCRGSP 2009:4.121). Furthermore, the Productivity Commission report notes that in the year 2007-08, substantiated Indigenous child sexual abuse occurred at the rate of 7.7 percent, while substantiations of non-Indigenous children sexual abuse occurred at the rate of 11.8 percent (4.121). Therefore, rates of child sexual abuse among non-Indigenous Australians are more than 50 percent greater than they are among Indigenous Australians.

This is not to say that remote Indigenous communities, or Indigenous communities in general, are free from dysfunction; indeed, many feature high rates of substance abuse, domestic violence and welfare dependency, among other things (Dillon and Westbury 2007:4). Yet responsibility for these outcomes should be assessed in the context of the historical record, particularly the brutal dispossession experienced by Indigenous people under colonial regimes and past and present government policies disproportionately affecting them (Dillon and Westbury 2007:3). Social and economic exclusion, relegation to society's margins, overt racism and policies of child removal have all contributed to present day signs of dysfunction.

As children and young adults, many Indigenous people witnessed senseless violence, the untimely deaths of loved ones, and a lack of direction and sense of hopelessness in their peers and care givers. Suicide, poor parenting, sexual abuse, unhealthy lifestyle habits, violence and substance abuse are all prevalent within societies' underclass, and in the context of Indigenous Australia, should be seen as products of the colonial encounter and subsequent government policies (Atkinson 1992:9-10 in Adams 2005:166). However, during the media tsunami unleashed by the *Little Children are Sacred* report, little attention was given to the conditions under which Indigenous Australians had been forced to exist over the past two centuries. Instead, sensationalised media accounts of child sexual abuse overstated their preponderance and ignored underlying structural causes; dwelling solely on the deficits of Indigenous people, rather than critically examining ways in which Australia's public institutions had persistently failed this population.

Gary Robinson writes that "the tendency to reduce complex issues of social change and development to single-focus interventions may be inherently problematic in communities where multiple stresses and pervasive social change overwhelm the effects of intervention on individuals" (2011:2). Such was the case of the NT Intervention.

While the *Little Children are Sacred* report recommended the empowerment of Indigenous communities through appropriate support and services (Wild and Anderson 2007:13), with “the critical importance of governments committing to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities” (21), this recommendation was disregarded. Instead, the Intervention featured, among other things, the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, allowances for the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land and property, the “scrapping [of] the permit system”⁷⁴, mandatory health checks⁷⁵ for all children, blanket welfare income-quarantining⁷⁶ and the linking of income support and family assistance payments to school attendance (Havnen 2008; FaHCSIA 2007). In conjunction with this, \$400 million was cut from Aboriginal programs and services.

In the immediate aftermath of the NTER, which was launched with a budget of \$1.5 billion dollars, few positive outcomes were evident (Stewart 2008). In NT increases were seen in assaults and property crimes (Havnen 2008). NT rural and remote community service organisations were flooded with Indigenous clients in need of assistance, depleting their resources and undermining their ability to provide emergency assistance. Social service organisations in Darwin saw a 300 percent increase in requests for assistance as people travelled to urban centres, once the resources of their local organisations were exhausted (Havnen 2008). The increased need for emergency relief services may well be linked to the

⁷⁴ Under the permit system, all non-members of the local Aboriginal Land Council required a permit to access prescribed Aboriginal land. These could be obtained via the relevant Aboriginal Land Council prior to entry. Under the NTER, permits were no longer required for “common areas, road corridors and airstrips for prescribed communities on Aboriginal land” (FaHCSIA press release, June 21, 2007).

⁷⁵ These health checks did not include examination for sexual assault, due to the invasive nature of such procedures. It is therefore questionable why such health checks were undertaken in the first place (Stewart 2008). Furthermore, Dr Hilary Tyler’s report, *Central Australian Specialists Submission to the Review Board of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)*, noted that despite the NTER’s nearly 11,000 such health checks, only one child was found to have an undiagnosed condition and that condition was not related to sexual assault (2008:5).

⁷⁶ It should be noted that the efficacy of income quarantining is a source of on-going debate. Numerous residents of rural and remote Indigenous communities have praised this policy as it has reduced the prevalence of violence and “humbug”, in which kin make claims to the welfare income of relatives (Stewart 2008). Yet, at the same time, income quarantining shames Indigenous people: they are forced to wait in separate grocery store lines, which frequently are longer, and often receive inferior treatment from store staff (Chrischona Schmidt, personal communication, January 6, 2012). A recurrent criticism of income quarantining is that many Indigenous people have difficulty accessing, or do not know how to access, the income that is quarantined. In response, they simply live on a fraction of the welfare payment to which they are entitled.

fact that NT residents were given eight weeks to register for income quarantining and, should they neglect to do so, all pensions and social security benefits were cut off.

In effect, the Intervention usurped Aboriginal organisations in the Northern Territory: many were taken over by non-Aboriginal organisations at the threat of funding removal and community councils were terminated (Stewart 2008). This successfully silenced institutional forms of Indigenous discourse (Fogarty 2008). The moral panic unleashed on the nation by the *Little Children are Sacred* report was a ploy by which the Howard government seized upon and sensationalised a legitimate issue – that of child sexual abuse – and used it to justify draconian restrictions upon the freedom of rural and remote Aboriginal residents.

This can be seen as a paternalistic and cruel effort by White Australia to govern Indigenous lives and communities as they saw fit (Altman 2008; Havnen 2008; Stewart 2008). However, having cemented the notion of Indigenous “responsibility” for their own circumstance via regimes of mutual obligation, and the purported disinclination of Indigenous people to better themselves and their communities, the Howard government was able to avoid a great deal of negative criticism for initiating the Intervention (Humpage 2008:424).

It was with great hope for change in national policy that many Australian citizens welcomed the 2007 election of Kevin Rudd, with thousands of people travelling from around Australia to Parliament’s Federation Mall on February 13, 2008 to attend the issuance of the National Apology (Minion 2008:14). In the words of Chris Serra, head of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, the apology made “a profound difference” and gave “people confidence that here is a government that is prepared to do things *with* Aboriginal communities rather than *to* Aboriginal communities” (Coorey 2008:4, emphasis added). For many Aboriginal Australians, this National Apology was seen as a beginning rather than an end: Aboriginal musician Archie Roach commented that “once this is done, perhaps we can then make inroads into other issues” (McKenna 2008:4); issues such as compensation to the Stolen Generations, an end to the NTER and welfare-income-quarantining, the (re)strengthening of Native Title and facilitating Aboriginal voices to

(re)emerge within Indigenous Affairs through dedicated community consultation (Massola 2008:4).

However, after six years of Labor Party rule, little changed in Indigenous policy. No remuneration was discussed for members of the Stolen Generations; Aboriginal Affairs continued to be administered in a bureaucratic, top-down manner, with little or no input from Indigenous communities; the *Racial Discrimination Act* remained suspended until 2010; and income quarantining is still in operation, with the Labor government expanding the scheme nation-wide for certain individuals⁷⁷. It is therefore apparent to me and other academics of Aboriginal Australia that self-determination, even in the weak sense in which it was promoted by the Whitlam Labor government⁷⁸, is no longer on the political agenda.

While successive Australian governments have consistently voiced concern regarding Indigenous Australians to the global audience, the majority of legislation designed to ameliorate racial injustices has been mere lip-service. For example, on April 3rd, 2009 *Channel 7 News* reported the great ceremony and celebration that followed Prime Minister Rudd's pledging of "support" for the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*; something which was praised as a "watershed moment". It was much to my surprise later that week, when discussing this with several of my Aboriginal informants, that I discovered this "support" did not mean that Australia had wholly committed to this Declaration, but rather was merely publicly endorsing it. There was bitterness in her voice as one of my Aboriginal informants stated "it's all a lie". A telling quote regarding Australia's depth of commitment to the UN Declaration came from Jenny Macklin, then federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, in which she stated: "This declaration is not legally binding and will not affect Australian laws" and was instead "symbolic" (Macklin in Drape 2009).

⁷⁷ The 2007-2013 Labor government expanded mandatory income-quarantining to persons who were referred by state bodies or officials, such as Centrelink social workers, those employed by the state or territory child protection body, or, if in rental arrears for over a month, the state housing authority (Karvelas 2013). Currently, the new Tony Abbott Liberal-National Coalition government is promoting an expansion of mandatory income-quarantining to cover more welfare recipients, particularly the long-term unemployed (Karvelas 2013).

⁷⁸ It has been argued that "the institutional failures of the Australian state" has meant that "self-determination was never effectively enabled" (Dillon and Westbury 2007:193).

It is this type of public relations campaign that obfuscates the true intentions of Australian governments, which are more concerned with national image than the quality of life of First Australians. Ravi de Costa commented in 2000 that the Howard government's "attitude to Aboriginal issues has been both deceitful and antagonistic, and clearly out of step with international developments" (280). Under the guise of "reconciliation" policy, Australia's government has subsumed Indigenous issues within those of the larger population, granting them only the status of a disadvantaged minority; denying their unique status as dispossessed and colonised peoples and blithely portraying them in a stereotypical form that is acceptable and interesting to White Australia. These stereotypes, used in the constant efforts to eradicate "the capacity for any otherness to constitute itself into a national counter-will" (Hage 1998:110), has greatly hindered the furthering of Indigenous self-determination:

Reconciliation must be attentive to the facts of systematic conflict; that broadly understood, the history of Aboriginal oppression is the history of destroying a unique way of social organisation. Without the recognition of fundamental difference, there will continue to be no real understanding of what it is that indigenous peoples are seeking... Australians and their leaders have avoided this... by using reconciliation to project an image of Aboriginality into public space that fits into a pre-conceived national identity. (de Costa 2000:280)

Conclusion

The Intervention was perhaps the apex of what I perceive to be the erosion of federal government progress towards enabling Aboriginal self-determination, brought on by Howard's Coalition government. Yet this government's abolition of ATSIC has had far more covert effects on Indigenous Australians⁷⁹. Brought about by the Howard government's dissolution of ATSIC and furthered through the Labor (2007-2013) and Coalition governments' (2013- present) continuation of regimes of NPM in Indigenous Affairs policies, the quiet de-funding of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations remains largely unknown to broader Australian society.

⁷⁹ ATSIC was not a faultless body: it featured cronyism, nepotism, localism and regionalism. Each of these factors could jeopardise some Aboriginal organisations, while promoting others. However, the 2003 review recommended that despite its weaknesses ATSIC should not be discarded, but rather that its "representative structure" be strengthened (Jonas and Dick 2004:5). I think it unrealistic to expect ATSIC to have avoided all aforementioned flaws, which are common to many government institutions, particularly in light of the body serving as an experiment in national Indigenous representation.

In this thesis I argue that against the backdrop of Australia's history of violent and oppressive Indigenous Affairs policy, Aboriginal Australians are being further disempowered as their corporations are placed in jeopardy. The excessively scrutiny and demonisation of Indigenous corporations is undermining their ability to foster Indigenous autonomy. The removal of such organisations from the human services mix means a removal of the carapace that protects effective Aboriginal approaches to service delivery from White interference.

The most recent forms of threat to Aboriginal corporations manifest in the neoliberal workings of NPM, which has come to dominate the allocation of Indigenous-specific service funding. However, prior to embarking on an exploration of the ways and means of NPM, I will first discuss the lived experience of Aboriginality in Mt Druitt. The lived reality of Indigenous life in Mt Druitt brings to light the daily struggles against disadvantage and racism, and for resources that White Australians take for granted as entitlements. It is not enough to just assert Indigenous cultural difference, as preconceived notions of what this entails are often stereotypical and essentialist. Rather it is necessary to explore the manifestations of these cultural differences: their heterogeneity and dynamism. Similarly, it is not enough to merely claim Indigenous disadvantage. While quantitative indicators such as Census data clearly indicate that Indigenous Australians are indeed socioeconomically disadvantaged, this does not convey the multifarious daily oppression, memorialised and ongoing grief, and marginalisation experienced by the nation's urban Aboriginal citizens.

The following chapters will examine the quantitative socioeconomic characteristics of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal populations, before turning to a more qualitative exploration of the realities of Indigenous life in Mt Druitt. The lived experiences of Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents will then be tied into the Indigenous-specific human services offered by Winangali Aboriginal Corporation, the organisation at the heart of this thesis. Only after having established the context of Indigenous peoples' need and their struggles for recognition will this thesis move on to discussing the current frameworks through which Australian governments are managing Indigenous persons and their human services.

This thesis argues, and will illustrate, that present government schemes of Indigenous Affairs policy undermine Indigenous autonomy and further marginalise an already disadvantaged population. The current and ongoing paternalistic approach to Indigenous Affairs has done, and will continue to do, little in the quest to “close the gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. If anything, it is only further cementing their position as an underclass within Australian society.

4. The Face of Mt Druitt

Thank god I'm getting outta here.

- Lindy, Indigenous Mt Druitt Resident

Mt Druitt is a region of Sydney with a bad reputation (Gwyther 2008:59). Frequent media reports of brawls, child neglect and abuse, and violent home invasions can be found in either of Sydney's major newspapers – the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The inner city residents of Sydney refer to people from the city's outer western suburbs as “westies”; a term that denotes low class, low morals, and “bogan”⁸⁰ behaviour (Cowlshaw 2009:3). While some people from the area wear this identity as a badge of pride (Morgan 2006b:6), others are deeply troubled not only by this image but by past events and other ongoing occurrences that contribute to this image.

This was expressed by two young Aboriginal women in their early twenties; one a single mother, Shanae, who stopped by Winanga-Li to use the organisation's printer. Chatting with Betty and me as they used the computer, Shanae's housemate Lindy stated that they were “finally” getting out of Mt Druitt. Lindy went on to describe how she and Shanae had been at a local petrol station the previous day when a fist fight broke out between two other customers. In her account, one of the men had decided that another man was looking at his girlfriend in a way that he did not like. A loud and aggressive confrontation developed into a violent punching match. Lindy noted that Shanae's infant child was with them and declared that no child should be exposed to such random acts of violence. For her, such unpredictable violence was all too typical of Mt Druitt, and she thought at the time “thank god I'm getting outta here”.

It is not by choice or chance that so many people from low socioeconomic circumstances have become residents of the Mt Druitt area. Rather, it is the result of historic attempts at reducing Sydney's inner-city low-income crowding and subsequent failed attempts at social

⁸⁰ “Bogan” is a derogatory term used to describe persons from a lower class background with little education who exemplify this through their speech, clothing, attitude and behaviour. It is similar to the term “chav” in the UK (George Morgan, personal communication, February 12, 2013).

engineering. This chapter will explore the forces driving the rapid migration to the Mt Druitt area during the 1960s and examine the role of public housing in the region's population growth as well as in its socioeconomic marginalisation. Working from Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Census data, the chapter documents the multifaceted dimensions of disadvantage in Mt Druitt. While all residents of Mt Druitt experience disadvantage, data indicates that the area's Indigenous residents are the most impoverished of an already underprivileged population. Public institutions – such as education, criminal justice, local government, human services, etc. – bear upon the opportunities and agency of Mt Druitt residents and in many cases compound the disenfranchisement of local Aboriginal Australians. The political marginalisation of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community that results from low levels of educational attainment silences their voice when proposals for more effective Aboriginal-specific human services are made. This community's political disenfranchisement then perpetuates their dense socioeconomic marginalisation within the region, as cries for early childhood, youth and education programs go unacknowledged.

Welcome to Mt Druitt

The “Mt Druitt” area, as defined for this thesis, sits on the south-western edge of the Blacktown LGA (Local Government Area) and is made up of a number of suburbs⁸¹. This region encompasses a high proportion of recent immigrants (33.15 percent of Mt Druitt residents) (ABS 2011), from countries such as Fiji, Tonga, Samoa (Horsley and Bagnall 2003), the Philippines (Pe-Pua 2013), Sudan (Cassity and Gow 2005; Vickers 2007), India and Iraq, as well as from New Zealand and the United Kingdom (ABS 2011). More importantly, Mt Druitt contains an unusually large population of Indigenous Australians (6.76 percent of the area's population), as well as a high proportion of socioeconomic disadvantage. This will be clearly demonstrated through my analyses of statistical data below, from the ABS *2011 Census of Population and Housing*. Indigenous Australians are notoriously undercounted in Census data, with Mt Druitt residents being no exception (Smith 1991:12; Taylor and Biddle 2008; Biddle 2009b:33; Taylor 2011:289-290). This arises in part from distrust of ways in which Census data will be used, such as fear that

⁸¹ The suburbs that make up what I call “Mt Druitt” are Bidwill, Blackett, Dharruk, Emerton, Hebersham, Lethbridge Park, Mt Druitt, Shalvey, Tregear, Whalan and Willmot.

results might jeopardise one's standing with State Housing, taxation or pension authorities. The propensity for such an undercount thus indicates that Indigenous residents likely make up greater than 6.76 percent of Mt Druitt's population⁸².

A comparison of Mt Druitt with a parallel grouping of Sydney's Inner West suburbs – Marrickville, Sydenham and Petersham (abbreviated MSP)⁸³ – demonstrates Mt Druitt's heightened socioeconomic disadvantage. MSP has roughly the same population size as Mt Druitt; however, while Indigenous people make up 6.76 percent of Mt Druitt's population, they compose only 1.6 percent of MSP's population. The closeness of MSP to the city's centre suggests that residents benefit from the amenities typical of Australia's capital cities (Biddle 2009b:13, 15). While MSP lacks the affluence of Sydney's North Shore, it is today more or less comfortably middle class.

The statistical area of MSP was selected as a comparator as it is the area in which I grew up. When I moved to this region as a young child in 1985 it would not have been considered middle-class, but rather was heavily working-class. Crime was prevalent, evident in the wrought-iron bars covering windows, and the majority of the mansions dating to the early 1900s had been converted into boarding houses for transients. MSP was highly populated with first generation immigrants, many of whom had a poor grasp of the English language. However, the children of these immigrants, and I myself, benefited from residing so close to the city's centre, especially due to the quality public transportation. School excursions and after-school activities made heavy use of the museums (e.g. the Powerhouse Museum, Australian Museum, Art Gallery of NSW), theatres (e.g. the Enmore Theatre, Capitol Theatre, Belvoir St Theatre) and Sydney Opera House's symphonies and operas. We were exposed to upper-middle class ideals from a young age and grew up thinking that such things as the fine arts and sciences were for us and not just for affluent others. Thus I, and many of the youths with whom I grew up, have overcome the economic disadvantage that marked the neighbourhoods of our childhood. As we shall see, this is not an opportunity afforded many of the youths who reside in Mt Druitt.

⁸² According to the ABS, 8.6 percent of Indigenous Australians (56,650 persons) were not counted in the 2011 Census (<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2940.0Technical%20Note12011?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2940.0&issue=2011&num=&view=>, accessed December 12, 2013).

⁸³ Level 3 Statistical Area, Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham #11703 (ABS 2011).

As expected in regional areas, the population density of Mt Druitt is lower than that of suburban MSP. With a population of 54,884 Mt Druitt sits on 20.9 km², while MSP holds 50,612 residents on 12.7 km² (ABS 2011); giving Mt Druitt approximately 2,626 per km², and MSP 3,985 people per km².

The Blacktown LGA ranks as one of the top ten most disadvantaged areas of the Sydney Statistical Division by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Disadvantage⁸⁴. Located within the Blacktown LGA, Mt Druitt scores approximately 802.1 on the SEIFA Index (<http://profile.id.com.au/blacktown/seifa-disadvantage>, accessed 27 Feb, 2013), meaning that it is significantly more disadvantaged than the national average of 1005.2; while MSP scores 1011.3 (<http://profile.id.com.au/marrickville/seifa-disadvantage>, accessed 5 Nov, 2013). Further, this index ranks the suburbs of Bidwill, Blackett, Emerton, Hebersham, Lethbridge Park, Shalvey, Tregear, Willmot and Whalan as the top nine most disadvantaged of the LGA's 45 suburbs; all with scores well below that of the most depressed LGAs in the Sydney Statistical Division (<http://profile.id.com.au/blacktown/seifa-disadvantage>, accessed February 20, 2013). Interestingly, of the top three most disadvantaged suburbs – Bidwill, Tregear and Willmot – each feature an Indigenous population of more than ten percent, with Bidwill being the most disadvantaged and having an Indigenous population of 13.8 percent (ABS 2013).

It is an all too common trend that Indigenous Australians are concentrated in areas with the highest levels of disadvantage (Biddle 2009b:16; Dillon and Westbury 2007:20). Nicholas Biddle notes that regions such as Mt Druitt:

have the greatest potential for entrenching disadvantage amongst their residents. They represent the dual difficulties of being relatively far away from the large number of high paying industries, established tertiary institutions and other services that cluster around the city centres, whilst potentially lacking in the amenities... These include... recreational facilities, adequate public transport as well as health, education and other services. (2009b:15)

⁸⁴ The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage is calculated based upon socioeconomic factors such as “low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations” and other indicators of disadvantage (SEIFA 2006).

One such indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage is the lower level of educational attainment in Mt Druitt than may be found closer to Sydney’s centre. As shown in Table 2.1, far fewer residents of the Mt Druitt region continue their education to Year 12, with many ceasing public education at Year 10.

Table 2.1 Highest Level of Schooling Completed

Level of Schooling	Mt Druitt	MSP
Below Year 10	20.6%	11.5%
Year 10 or Equivalent ⁸⁵	31.9%	15.0%
Year 12 or Equivalent	36.4%	63.9%
Not Stated	11.1%	9.6%

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

When Mt Druitt residents continue with tertiary education, they are likely to choose vocational training, which does not require the completion of Year 12, rather than university. In Table 2.2 vocational training is represented by the categories of “Certificate” and “Diploma”. The practical skills attained through vocational training allow some residents of Mt Druitt to earn a living wage, even though they may have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than those who obtain academic degrees.

Scholars assert that “census and survey-based studies reveal a clear positive relationship between economic status and level of educational achievement as measured by standard indicators, such as highest level of schooling completed, and post-school qualifications” (Biddle 2006 in Taylor and Westbury 2012:27). Therefore, the significant gap in rates of high school and tertiary education completion between Mt Druitt residents and those of MSP is one explanatory factor for the large variation between the areas’ SEIFA index ratings.

⁸⁵ Year 10 or equivalent also includes students who completed Year 11 or its equivalent, but did not complete Year 12.

Level of Tertiary Education	Mt Druitt		Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham	
	A	B	A	B
Postgraduate, Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate	4.2%	1.7%	16.4%	10.5%
Bachelor Degree	14.8%	6.1%	34.7%	22.2%
Advanced Diploma or Diploma	11.1%	4.6%	14.0%	9.0%
Certificate I, II, III, or IV	36.3%	14.9%	17.4%	11.1%
Not stated	33.7%	13.8%	17.5%	11.2%
Percentage of Population aged 15 and over with Post-school Qualification		41.0%		64.0%
Total Population	16,848	41,089	27,638	43,195

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

The low level of literacy noted above is evident throughout the Mt Druitt community. A sign posted in the window of a grocery store adjacent to the Mt Druitt shopping mall testifies to this (Figure 2.1). It is likely that such errors are in part due to the large number of recently arrived immigrants in Mt Druitt for whom English is their second language⁸⁷.

Figure 2.1 Misspellings



⁸⁶ The percentages listed in columns “A” are the number of affirmative responses as a percentage of all who noted tertiary qualifications, while those in columns “B” represent those with tertiary education as percentages of the total number of Census respondents aged 15 and over.

⁸⁷ According to 2011 ABS data, 24.1 percent of Mt Druitt’s residents are immigrants for whom English is a second language. However, only 3.8 percent of Mt Druitt residents reported that they did not speak English well or at all. After English, the most commonly spoken languages, as a percentage of Mt Druitt’s population, are: Indo-Aryan languages, such as Hindi and Urdu, at 6 percent; Southeast Asian Austronesian languages, such as Filipino and Tagalog, at 5.5 percent; Arabic at 4.3 percent; and Samoan at 3.7 percent (ABS 2011).

Yet this literacy deficit can also be attributed to the older generations of Indigenous Australians in Mt Druitt who were denied the opportunity for secondary education⁸⁸. Low educational attainment passes on through generations when parents are unable to assist their children in learning and it is therefore the public education system that carries the burden. It is well known that “many Indigenous students perform substantially below their age or grade level in terms of literacy and numeracy benchmarks”⁸⁹ (Taylor and Westbury 2012:27). This may be a causal factor for why, in 1996, one Mt Druitt high school’s entire graduating class essentially failed the HSC (see Chapter 7). Indeed, the Mt Druitt region’s high schools have some of the poorest NAPLAN outcomes in the entire state: looking at the 2010 ranking of NSW high schools, out of 562 those in Mt Druitt ranked 541, 544, 548, and 557 (http://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2010/schools_data%20/Secondary%20NSW%20Ranked.pdf, accessed March 22, 2013).

One outcome of a community’s low level of education is a “lack of political voice”, since policy decisions are often driven by “representation in the media, persuasive letter to parliamentarians or newspapers, and policy research” (Biddle 2009b:25). Furthermore, low levels of educational attainment have been linked with increased contact with the criminal justice system, and the likelihood of an Indigenous person being charged or imprisoned decreases when they have higher levels of education (Weatherburn et al. 2006:5). Therefore Mt Druitt’s low level of education serves to further disenfranchise residents from political processes. Yet this was not what was intended when Mt Druitt was initially settled.

Settlement

Prior to the 1950s Mt Druitt was largely bushland, with scattered farms, situated at the foothills of the New South Wales (NSW) Blue Mountains. The area’s development came from a push to ameliorate inner-city crowding for low-income residents. Due to increased urban migration from rural towns, the increased fertility of the baby boom and the promise

⁸⁸ Jeremy Beckett notes that in the 1960s there were few Indigenous persons who had completed high school (1988:11). Additionally, Nicholas Biddle asserts that research has “shown that the level of education completion of older cohorts in an area was positively associated with the education participation of 15–19 year old Indigenous Australians” (2009b:1).

⁸⁹ These benchmarks are set by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and are nationally accepted by educators “to be the minimum level required for students at particular key stages in their educational development in order to make adequate progress” (Taylor and Westbury 2012:31).

to provide “homes for heroes” of the Second World War, by the 1960s Sydney’s population had grown rapidly, with many working-class residents living in cramped conditions (Morgan 2000:181; Morgan 2006b:1). With government efforts to expand the city’s housing stock, private investors capitalised on the image of a suburban alternative for Sydney’s residents and Mt Druitt suited their purposes owing to the great expanses of cheap open land.

In 1966 Mt Druitt opened its first suburban neighbourhoods and housing estates, which rapidly grew in population (Gwyther 2008:59). In 1961 the Mt Druitt population stood at fewer than 7,900 people, yet by 1976 the area had become home to 53,571 residents (www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/Discover/Blacktown/Our_History_Heritage/Becoming_a_City/Suburb/Historys/Mt_Druitt, accessed November 5, 2013). Housing estates catering to the urban poor were a project of social engineering, as the housing stock was to be offered for sale to tenants, with the intention that homeowners would come to comprise the majority of inhabitants of the initial estates (George Morgan, personal communication, January 29, 2013). However, in practice this led to some neighbourhoods becoming middle-class (such as nearby Plumpton) while others, featuring large clusters of Housing Commission dwellings, declined into slums (such as Bidwill) (Morgan 2006b:4).

Aunty Margaret, a Gumbaynggirr woman, was a part of the first phase of Mt Druitt’s settlement. Her childhood home was in Nambucca Heads, in coastal northern New South Wales, where she and her nine siblings were born. As a young child, Margaret developed a severe chronic ear infection. Treatment for this condition required her to be regularly hospitalised in Sydney for three months stretches. Margaret would travel to Sydney accompanied by her mother, as her father then worked on the railway in the Kempsey area, and her mother would stay with her father’s cousin in Redfern. In the early 1960s, when Margaret was twelve, her family decided to relocate to Sydney to facilitate her treatment. They first settled in Redfern, where they were already familiar with the Aboriginal community. Previously, other Aboriginal residents of Nambucca Heads had migrated to Redfern and, through her father’s cousin, Margaret’s family had developed long-standing social ties to the Redfern community.

While living in crowded rental accommodation in Redfern, Margaret recalls that the “Aboriginal Protection⁹⁰ Board gave us a house out ‘ere” in the Mt Druitt area. Although not certain, Margaret believes her family settled in the area between 1962 and 1966 – prior to the boom in construction of State Housing estates – with their house being located in what is now the neighbourhood of Whalan. “There was no houses on the hill, nothin’. Not even Mt Druitt shopping centre was there when we moved out ‘ere.” Indeed, Margaret’s was one of the first Aboriginal families to settle in the area. When the family was offered accommodation they were given a choice between Mt Druitt and La Perouse. Margaret recalls that her family preferred Mt Druitt because the houses were brand new, while those in La Perouse were older and somewhat shabby.

Asked if she faced racism in Mt Druitt when she and her family first moved to the area, she responded “Not in them days.” I asked her when she thought the discrimination began and she replied “I don’t know. I s’pose when they [other Aboriginal families] all started movin’ out ‘ere and when there got [to be] too many I think.” Margaret went on to say that today she sees Mt Druitt “as a bit rough... Sometimes fights happen right in front of you. You see ‘em just belt into someone else for no reason.”

The initial State Housing residents of Mt Druitt were far different from those of today’s estates. Early residents of Mt Druitt public housing, such as Margaret’s family, had to prove themselves worthy of the new housing and subsidised rent (Morgan 2006b:2), in a manner akin to “mutual obligation” policy discussed in the previous chapter. These residences were only available to parents with dependent children who could demonstrate that they were inadequately housed and could not afford more appropriate housing (Morgan 2000:182). Applications for housing were reviewed by petty officers who exercised great discretionary power in deciding whether or not an applicant could meet “Commission standards in the areas of ‘civic pride’ (in maintaining the exterior of the dwelling and the garden), neighbourliness, living a modest and respectable domestic life and ability to meet regular rental payments” (Morgan 2006b:2). The full-time employment of Margaret’s father, first at a saw mill, then for the railway, is likely to have helped convince Housing

⁹⁰ During the 1960s this body was known as the “Aboriginal Welfare Board”, which had previously been called the “Aboriginal Protection Board” (Morgan, personal communication, January 26, 2013). The name of the body was changed in 1940 in response to the *Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act*.

Commission officers that her family was worthy, and the nine⁹¹ children certainly demonstrated the family's need. George Morgan notes that for many Aboriginal families who relocated to the area under the NSW Housing Commission's 1969 Housing for Aborigines scheme, demonstrating "civic pride" meant adopting a nuclear family lifestyle and weakening their ties to extended family and kinship networks (2000:181-82). Neither Margaret nor her sister, Shirley, recalls ever being dissuaded from or penalised for socialising with other Aboriginal people, although Margaret noted that "I had a lot of good friends [during my childhood], but there wasn't any Aboriginal friends, most of my friends were white." Shirley recounted her memories of large numbers of family members travelling from Nambucca to visit them in Mt Druitt on the school holidays: "you slept where you called 'dibs'. I remember, once I slept under the kitchen table, 'cause everyone else had gotten all the good spots."

While Shirley and Margaret do not recall invasive interference by the Housing Commission or scrutiny by the Aboriginal Welfare Board, this may have been a product of their age. Margaret, being the oldest, dropped out of school at age 14 to care for her younger siblings and Shirley was only six when the family moved to Mt Druitt. It is likely that Margaret ceased her schooling in order for the family to uphold a "respectable appearance", although she does not see it like this. Margaret simply knew that her mother needed help raising her eight siblings, as her father was then working as a truck driver, away from home for days at a time, while her mother worked at local factories.

A telling fact is Shirley's recollection of being "billeted" out over the Christmas school holidays. For reasons unknown to her, the Aboriginal Welfare Board insisted that she and her younger siblings be placed with white families in locations such as Melbourne, Taree, Canley Vale, and Leichardt. While at the time the sisters understood this as their "mum and dad getting a break from the kids", they later heard that this could have led to them being "stolen". Their sister, Lucy, had conducted research on the Stolen Generations and had met an Aboriginal woman who had also been "billeted" out, ostensibly over the Christmas holidays, but then had never been allowed to return to her family. Shirley noted that she, Margaret and Lucy had wondered if they and their siblings were ever in danger of

⁹¹ One of Margaret's brothers passed away at age three from gastroenteritis.

something similar happening. Yet it never did; perhaps because Margaret sacrificed a portion of her childhood and education to help raise her siblings.

The suburban landscape of Mt Druitt was at first depicted idealistically as a “panacea for Sydney’s ills”, providing the urban poor an escape from the city’s slums (Morgan 2006b:2). But as public investment in the region’s infrastructure waned (Hodge 1996:32), so too did the reputation of Mt Druitt. Ever-increasing urban migration occurred – particularly as a product of chain-migration⁹² for Aboriginal families – in response to the city’s abundance of industrial employment opportunities, which were frequently better-paid than those found in rural areas.

Additional strains on the regions of western Sydney were the growing immigrant populations. Rather than the European migrants who arrived just after World War II, the 1970s brought an influx of Indochinese and Middle Eastern immigrants, often refugees, to NSW. Those that settled in the western Sydney area were frequently low-skilled and lacked resources, while their more privileged counterparts established themselves in the less marginal areas of Sydney’s northern and eastern suburbs (Gwyther 2008:67). Mt Druitt’s abundance of low income and public housing residences⁹³, surrounded by industrial-zoned land, came to draw a disproportionate population of “unskilled and socially disadvantaged” residents (Gwyther 2008:56).

The public housing stock could not keep up with the influx of demand (Morgan 2000:185) and applicants were no longer evaluated on the basis of “civic pride”, but rather on need (Morgan 2006b:2). By the mid-1970s rising demand, due to increases in single parent families, unemployment and welfare dependency, led to restrictions on eligibility for Housing Commission tenants. As the demand for government-subsidised housing increased, public housing became “residual housing” for those members of society who

⁹² Chain-migration is a common method by which Aboriginal Australians relocate from rural or remote regions to urban areas. A family member (or members) will establish themselves in an urban centre and then other family members join them. The newcomers will initially reside with, and be supported by, those who are already established until they themselves become established (Gale 1981; Gale and Wundersitz 1982:10; Morgan 2006a:xxii, 46; 2006c:21; Peterson 2003:113).

⁹³ It noteworthy that 33.2 percent of Mt Druitt’s residents were born in other countries and that 24.0 percent of the area’s households reside in Housing Commission dwellings.

were likely to become homeless should the state refuse to house them (Morgan 2006b:1). Indeed members of the Mt Druitt community commented to me that, currently, people prioritised for public housing were those suffering from drug or alcohol dependencies, mental illness, or those with small children; thus making the public housing waiting list impossibly long for working low-income individuals. By the early 1980s the reputation of Mt Druitt had declined and these western regions of Sydney came to be depicted as “suburban ghettos” (Morgan 2006b:3).

The perception that trouble started when “there got to be too many”, to use Aunty Margaret’s words, is well-documented in literature on racism⁹⁴. A feature of Mt Druitt is the presence of certain ethnic groups – such as Middle Eastern, Indo-Chinese, Fijian, Indigenous and, more recently, Sudanese – all of whom settled in the area, not by choice, but rather due to market forces. However, unlike other areas of Sydney that also feature large amounts of Housing Commission residences and locational disadvantage – Cabramatta for example – in Mt Druitt no one ethnic group dominates the landscape (Gwyther 2008:57). Instead, establishments catering to a particular ethnic or cultural group, often featuring signage in that group’s language, rest alongside mainstream stores.

This forced residential co-mingling has created tension not only between white Australian and non-white residents of Mt Druitt, but between non-white ethnic groups. On a number of occasions I was dismayed to hear several of my Indigenous informants discuss the “problem” of the “boat people”; asserting that they were arriving in the country and taking advantage of the welfare system⁹⁵. The common sentiment expressed was that if anyone should be receiving support and assistance from the government it was Indigenous Australians, having been so badly wronged over two centuries by successive Australian governments, not recent immigrant arrivals.

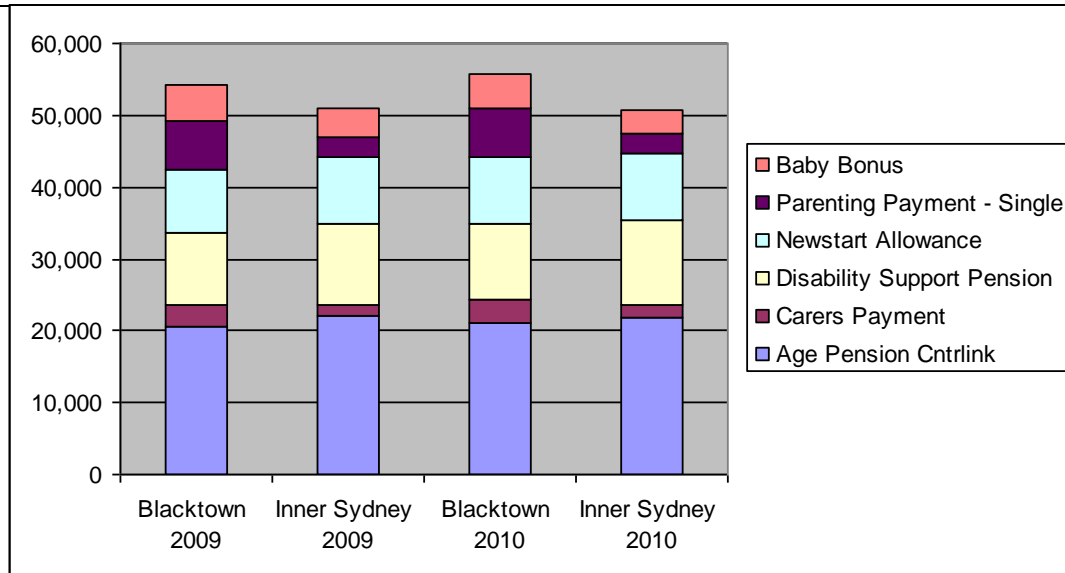
⁹⁴ See, for example, Gwyther 2008:59 and Hage 1998:32-38.

⁹⁵ During fieldwork I did not pursue questions regarding Indigenous and inter-ethnic tensions; however the data I did collect suggested there was little interaction between Indigenous and recent immigrant populations. Many of the views held by Indigenous informants regarding first-generation immigrants echoed conservative media reporting on “boat people”. Occasionally another Indigenous person would interject into the conversation that they “had a friend” who was a recent Pakistani immigrant (for example), but that this “friend” wasn’t “like all the others”.

Income and Welfare Reliance

In 2006 98 percent of Sydney's 145,000 public housing tenants relied upon some form of social security payment⁹⁶ and only 13.1 percent were employed full time, in comparison to 39 percent of Sydney's broader population (Morgan 2006b:3). Figure 2.2, based on ABS Census data, compares the number of government pensions and allowances received by all

Figure 2.2 *Number and Type of Government Pension, Payment or Allowance awarded in Blacktown LGA and the Inner Sydney Statistical Area in 2009 and 2010*



(ABS 2009; 2010)

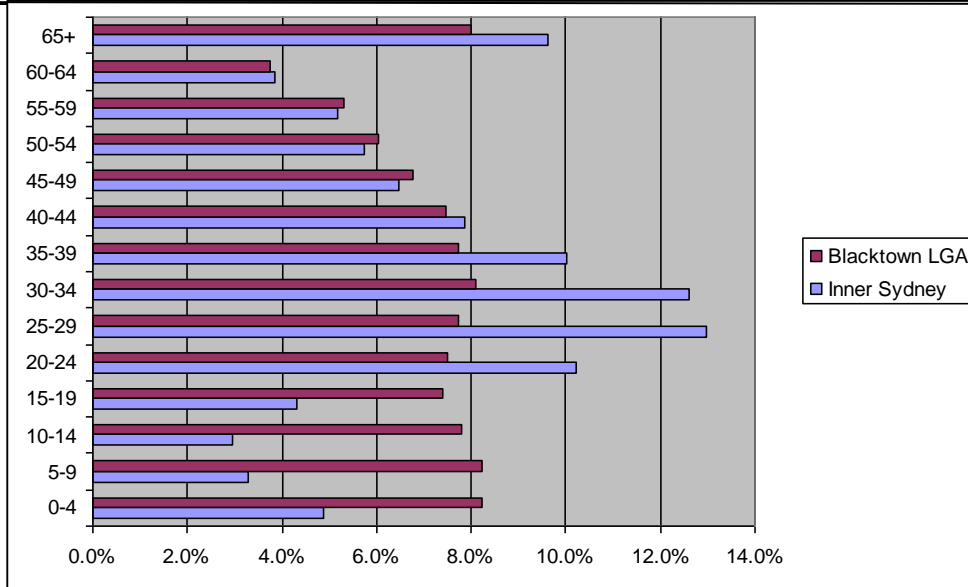
residents of the Blacktown LGA with those of the Inner Sydney Statistical Subdivision⁹⁷. This table indicates only a slightly higher rate of reliance on government support in Blacktown than in the city, yet it is notable that specific types of payment are strikingly higher in the Blacktown LGA: namely the Baby Bonus, the Single Parenting Payment, and the Carers Payment; all of which are received by residents of the Blacktown LGA at double the rate of those residing in Inner Sydney. When one compares the demographics of both locales it becomes apparent that the Blacktown LGA has a significantly higher number of

⁹⁶ Looking specifically at the Indigenous population of NSW as a whole, 52 percent drew their main source of income from government allowances and pensions (Taylor 2005:17, drawing on the 2002 NATSIS survey).

⁹⁷ ABS Census data on number and type of government pensions, payments and allowances was accessible at the smallest level for the Blacktown LGA; thus, it was not possible to provide this data for Mt Druitt or MSP. As this chapter specifically addresses the locational disadvantage of Mt Druitt, in an effort to highlight the rates of receipt of government benefits between the Mt Druitt region and a region closer to Sydney's CBD, I have selected the Inner Sydney Statistical Subdivision (which encompasses MSP), the population size of which (313,154) is comparable to the Blacktown LGA (271,710) (ABS Census Data 2011).

persons aged 20-40 (see Figure 2.3). Blacktown’s youthful profile is one explanation for the higher rate of persons receiving the Baby Bonus.

Figure 2.3 *Demographics of Blacktown LGA compared with that of the Inner Sydney Statistical Division*



(Amalgamated ABS Census Data, 2011)

My analysis of more localised Census data indicates that within the Mt Druitt area 58.3 percent of all households⁹⁸ contain children; while in Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham only 35.1 percent of households feature children (ABS 2011). Of all households containing children in Mt Druitt, 39 percent of those are single-parent; while only 26.5 percent of such households in MSP are single parent (ABS 2011). Indigenous households in both locations have roughly double the rates of single-parent families than do other families, as is demonstrated in the table (2.3) below.

Similarly, the higher rate of Carers Payments reflects higher needs for assistance in Mt Druitt. This is likely due in part to the ill health of many Indigenous adults. The Indigenous residents of both regions reported higher levels of need for assistance than did the population as a whole. While in Mt Druitt the difference between Indigenous residents and

⁹⁸ Here, and elsewhere in this Chapter, I employ the ABS definition of “household”: “A household is defined as one or more persons, at least one of whom is at least 15 years of age, usually resident in the same private dwelling. Under this definition, all occupants of a dwelling form a household and complete one Census form” (<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/cpexplanatorynotes?opendocument&navpos=230>, accessed 14 October, 2014).

the region’s population as a whole was minor (6.8 percent versus 6.2 percent respectively), there was a more marked difference in the MSP area with 6.2 percent of Indigenous residents in need of assistance versus only 4.7 percent of the region’s population as a

Table 2.3 *Indigenous and non-Indigenous households containing children in Mt Druitt and Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham*

Family Type by Household	Mt Druitt		Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Single Parent	62.7%	36.5%	60.4%	25.7%
Coupled Parent	33.8%	60.7%	29.9%	68.9%
Other	3.5%	2.8%	9.8%	5.5%

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

whole. Furthermore, in Mt Druitt a higher number of Census respondents reported providing unpaid assistance to those in need, than did residents of MSP (12.1 percent versus 9.5 percent respectively); with higher rates of this provision among Indigenous respondents than in the regions’ populations overall.

Comparing the percentages of Mt Druitt residents and those of MSP who reside in public housing, it emerges that while in MSP only 3.2 percent of the region’s residents live in State Housing dwellings, in Mt Druitt 24.0 percent of residents occupy such residences (ABS 2011). In fact, one suburb of Mt Druitt, Bidwill, has 65.0 percent of residents living in public housing and an Aboriginal population of 13.8 percent (ABS 2011). Indeed Bidwill is one of the most notorious of Mt Druitt’s suburbs, most notably for events deemed by the media as riots in 1981 and again in 2007 (see Chapter 7).

Aboriginal Population

A comparison of the housing tenure of residences inhabited by Mt Druitt’s⁹⁹ Indigenous population with those of the non-Indigenous population reveals a striking trend (see Table 2.4). According to 2011 ABS Census data, Indigenous Mt Druitt residents are more than

⁹⁹ ABS data comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Mt Druitt was only available for ten of the eleven suburbs I classify as “Mt Druitt”: therefore Tregar is not considered in any of the statistical analyses of this section.

twice as likely to live in Housing Commission residences as their non-Indigenous counterparts. They are also less than half as likely to own or be purchasing their residence. This indicates that Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt are far more likely to live in precarious economic conditions and to be dependent upon state subsidies. Home ownership is a major component of household wealth, providing a household with greater economic security and collateral for additional loans (Taylor 2005:18). John Taylor argues that the lack of Indigenous home ownership is both a cause and effect of low economic status, particularly in regard to inter-generational flows of property ownership (2005:18).

<i>Table 2.4 Housing Tenure by Indigenous Status in Mt Druitt</i>		
Housing Tenure Type by Household Type	Indigenous Households	Non-Indigenous Households
Purchasing or own housing	23.7%	50.9%
Housing Commission residence	50.3%	20.3%
Other Type of Rental Housing	21.3%	24.9%
Not stated/Other	4.7%	3.9%
Total Residences in Category	1,242	14,702

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

When one compares the average income of households for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Mt Druitt residents there does not appear to be a great discrepancy. However, there is a notable trend in which a greater proportion of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents have weekly incomes below \$649, and a greater proportion of non-Indigenous residents have weekly incomes above this amount (see Table 2.5).

Yet Table 2.5 does not account for the number of people residing in each household. When one looks at the number of residents per household, it becomes evident that Indigenous households have a higher number of residents per household on average (see table 2.6).

<i>Table 2.5 Average Household Weekly Income in Mt Druitt by Indigenous Status</i>		
Average Weekly Income	Indigenous Households	Non-Indigenous Households
\$0 - \$199	4.8%	3.5 %
\$200 - \$399	13.0%	12.1%
\$400 - \$799	25.3%	22.1%
\$800 - \$1,249	18.1%	18.7%
\$1,250 - \$1,999	13.8%	18.2%
\$2,000 - \$2,999	7.4%	9.9%
\$3,000 +	2.3%	3.4%
Not stated or partially stated	15.2%	12.0%
Total Households	1,243	14,703

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

With there being significantly fewer one and two person Indigenous households and significantly more Indigenous households with five or more members, the aforementioned household income discrepancy has far greater implications. This indicates that in Mt Druitt a greater portion of Indigenous households are living in economically straitened circumstances than are non-Indigenous households.

<i>Table 2.6 Average Number of People per Household in Mt Druitt by Indigenous Status</i>		
No. People per Household	Indigenous Households	Non-Indigenous Households
1 - 2	33.9%	45.4%
3 - 4	38.7%	35.0%
5 +	27.4%	19.7%
Total Households	1,248	14,698

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

Analysing the levels of employment for Indigenous Mt Druitt residents and comparing them to non-Indigenous residents, the lower household income is explained. In Mt Druitt, Indigenous residents are less likely to be in the labour force and those who are in the labour force are more than twice as likely to be unemployed (see Table 2.7).

<i>Table 2.7 Labour force participation in Mt Druitt by Indigenous Status</i>		
Labour Force Participation	Indigenous Persons	Non-Indigenous Persons
Percentage of population aged 15 years and over in the labour force	42.8%	49.9%
Percentage of labour force unemployed	25.3%	12.1%
Percentage of population aged 15 years and over not in the labour force	51.1%	42.7%
Labour force participation not stated	6.1%	7.4%
Total persons aged 15 and over	1,908	35,383

(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

Nicolas Peterson (2005) notes that Indigenous Australians' lower levels of participation in the labour force, when compared with other Australians, is likely a product of the previous Australian policies of Aboriginal wage labour. During the eras of Protection and Assimilation, wages paid for Aboriginal labour were a fraction of those of White Australians. Additionally, these wages were often held by mission administrators and station managers and were not given to the workers themselves (Beckett 1988:8, 10). Peterson argues that Aboriginal Australians were accustomed to a largely cashless economy that depended on hunting and foraging, as rations from administrators and managers were meagre (2005:10). Thus when welfare payments to Indigenous persons became widespread between 1975 and 1977, with entitlements being paid directly to the Aboriginal person, the cash-in-hand from welfare payments surpassed what many had received before under wage labour (Peterson 2005:11). In conjunction with this, enforced policies of equal wages led to mass lay-offs of Aboriginal workers and made it much more difficult for Indigenous persons to find work (Beckett 1988:11). Overwhelmingly it has only been the last two generations of Aboriginal Australians who have seen solid benefits from participation in the

labour force, education and training, and it is therefore not surprising that their involvement in paid labour lags behind other Australians.

Infrastructure

Compounding the marginalised nature of low-income Mt Druitt residents, public investment in infrastructure has long come in at little more than a trickle. Human geographer Stephen Hodge notes that western Sydney has experienced a “historic underprovision of human services compared to the Sydney region as a whole” (1996:32). The notoriety of Mt Druitt has resulted in a slight influx in public investment, but with few results. A major reason for this is that when funding is opened to tendering, the objectives and means to achieve improvements in infrastructure and services are developed with very little local consultation. A classic example is provided by Stephen Hodge in his article *Disadvantage and ‘Otherness’ in Western Sydney*, where he discussed attempts by the Parramatta City Council to address the under-provisioning of arts infrastructure (1996:37).

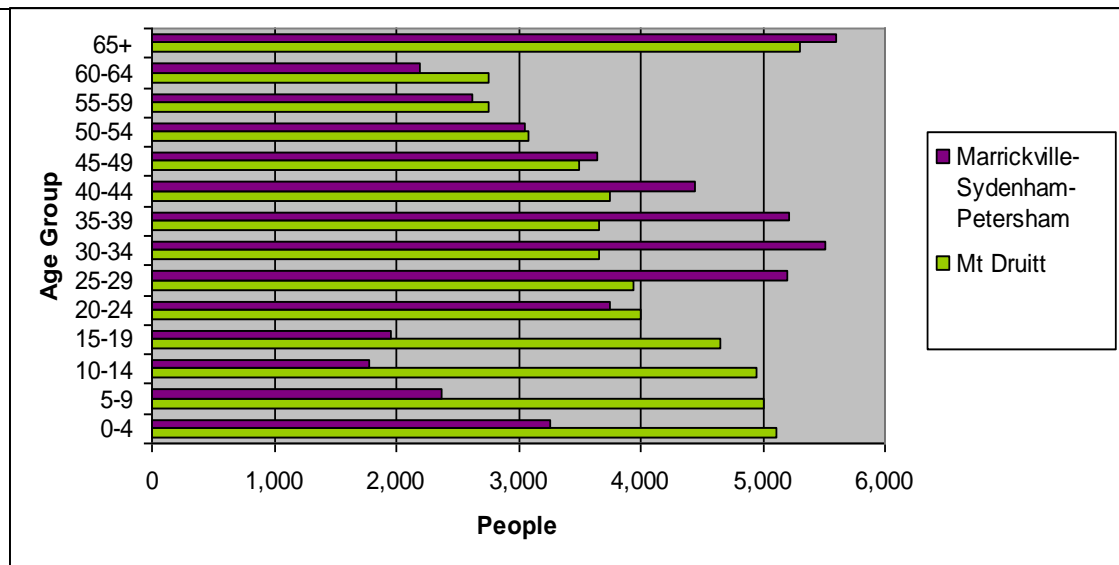
To redress the lack of public art institutions in this western Sydney suburb, the Parramatta Riverside Theatre was built. Yet no local consultation was undertaken to learn whether or not this project fit local needs. As a result, the facility is underutilised and dependent upon subsidies for its sustainability, despite being planned as a self-funding institution (Revallion 1991 in Hodge 1996:37). Furthermore, the subsidies now required to maintain the Riverside Theatre detract from other, more relevant, public arts investment in Parramatta. Compounding the issue are media accounts that report the “failure” of funded projects, without investigating or criticising the project’s design and implementation – e.g. the lack of community consultation – which then “may influence decision makers to cancel or curtail existing funding” (Hodge 1996:37). This lack of critical analysis of projects deemed “failures”, by both media and government bureaucrats, is evident in Aboriginal Affairs policies of the last two decades and will be elaborated upon in Chapters 10 through 12.

Many of the crimes that occur in Mt Druitt are attributed to the young, yet the lack of services means that there is little locally to engage young people and offer guidance. The *Blacktown City Social Plan 2007* cites “Concerns about teenage gangs at night linked to

lack of youth activities and facilities” (33), as well as the “Need for safe recreational facilities and community spaces” (45). With low high-school completion rates, high youth unemployment and a lack of inexpensive and easily accessible recreational activities (Hurni 2012:14-17), there is very little indeed to keep young people engaged.

The Blacktown LGA’s aforementioned youthful population profile is also evident when comparing the more localised data of Mt Druitt and MSP (see Figure 2.4). However, when

Figure 2.4 Comparative Age Distribution of Populations in Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham Statistical Division and the Mt Druitt Area



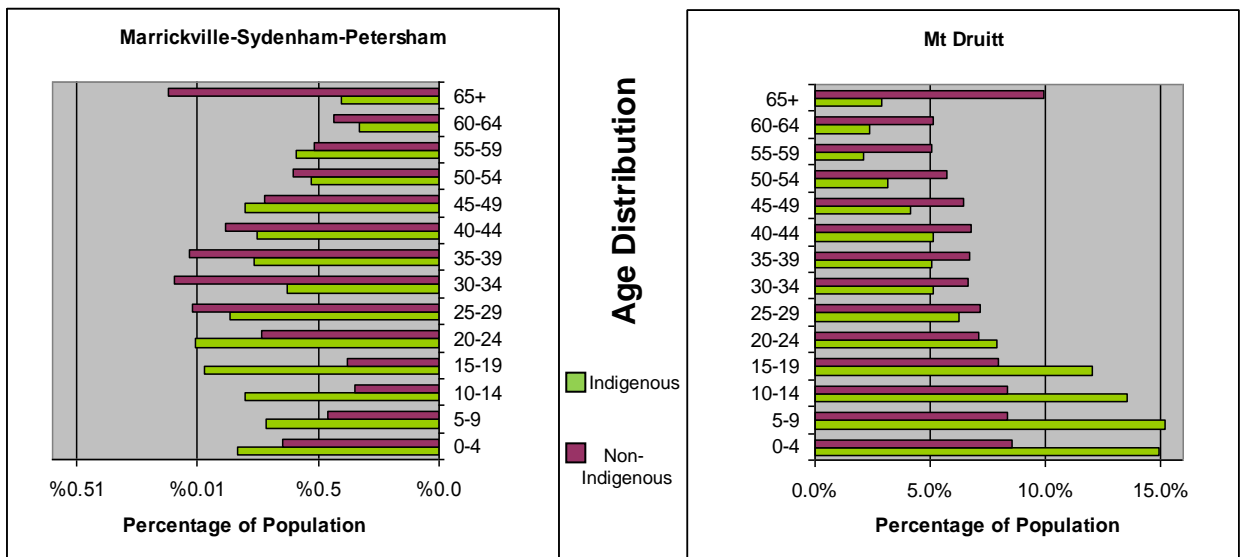
(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

one separates the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Mt Druitt and Inner West Sydney a further trend appears: both Indigenous populations have significantly more youthful profiles than do their non-Indigenous counterparts (see Figure 2.5). This trend is typical of Indigenous demographic patterns throughout Australia. Taylor asserts that this fact can be explained by relatively high levels of Indigenous adult mortality, while other Australians have fewer children and live longer than was previously the case (2012:16).

The youth of the Aboriginal population and the prevalence of single-parent families in Mt Druitt are somewhat alarming in light of the effects of Australia’s Aboriginal child removal policies during the 1930s-1970s. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families, as

noted previously, contributed to the breakdown of Aboriginal kinship networks and mechanisms for protecting, censuring and caring for children. Those raised in institutional or abusive foster settings are often ill-equipped to provide the emotional, physical and dietary nurturance necessary to create future generations of productive and contributing

Figure 2.5 Comparative Age Distribution of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Populations in Marrickville-Sydenham-Petersham Statistical Division and Mt Druitt Area



(Amalgamated ABS Census Data 2011)

Aboriginal citizens (Cunneen 2001:43-44; see also Cowlshaw 2009:79-91). Chapter 7 will provide examples of the negative outcomes of poor parenting skills within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

It is clear that the Mt Druitt area has an essential need for youth activities, education and training. In conjunction with this is the need for Indigenous adults within Mt Druitt to build their own human capital so that they can better support the next generation. As it is, Aboriginal youth experience difficulty developing life skills and are thus not well-positioned to take advantage of social and economic opportunities (Taylor and Westbury 2012:18, 23). Unless effective programs and services are put in place, the region's socioeconomic disadvantage, particularly that of Indigenous residents, will only be perpetuated and is likely to increase.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the extreme socioeconomic disadvantage faced by Indigenous Mt Druitt residents. This marginalisation is, in part, an unanticipated by-product of the government's poorly conceptualised suburban planning and social engineering. For example: the large concentration of State Housing residences, the insubstantial flow of public investment, and the inferior quality of the area's public schools. All of these factors have a combined influence that perpetuates future generations of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents' disengagement from education and the workforce.

However, in spite of this bleak socioeconomic forecast, there are organisations that are engaged with Mt Druitt's Indigenous population; some more successfully than others. One of the organisations that, for over twenty years, has been making a difference in the lives of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents is Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation. This organisation tailors its services to the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community through ongoing consultation and on-the-ground engagement. This, however, begs the question, who are and what is the "Mt Druitt Aboriginal community"? The following chapter will explore this question, firmly grounding itself in theory as well as ethnographic data. There we shall examine the various interpretations of "Aboriginal community" and its related topic of Aboriginality, in an effort to understand the distinctiveness of this Mt Druitt sub-population and its insistence upon special status as Australia's First Peoples.

5. Aboriginal Community

A white person can be considered black, but a black person can never be considered White.

– Raymond Gibson¹⁰⁰, Aboriginal scholar

The terms “Aboriginal” and “community” are frequently used by government bureaucrats who deal with Australian Aboriginal policy, by human service providers dealing with delivery models, by journalists in the media, and by people who consider themselves to be “Aboriginal”. Despite these terms’ common use, there are many diverging and conflicting perceptions of whom and what they denote. The majority of those who employ these terms present the categories as clearly defined and bounded, attributing uniform characteristics and behaviours to people, and presenting them as facts. However, the great variation in definitions of “Aboriginal” and “community” leave these categories of identity and belonging highly ambiguous.

This chapter is about components of identity. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper note that identity is frequently used in social and political practice, but that this does not make it an adequate category for analysis, as its meaning is uncertain (2000:5). The term identity can mean sense of self, collective sameness resulting in solidarity, a commonality that forms the basis for social mobilisation or political action, a sameness resulting from social or political action, or “the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary ‘self’” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:8).

Thus, terms such as “community” and “Aboriginal” can connote multiple things and are used and understood by actors in various and conflicting ways. In this chapter I will describe the ways in which these terms are used by Aboriginal people in the Mt Druitt area, yet refrain from using the term “identity” and instead use the more precise terms of “identification”, “sense of self”, “commonality” and “connectedness” (Brubaker and

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Gibson, a Wiradjuri man, is a mature-aged PhD student at the University of Western Sydney whose family has lived in the Mt Druitt area for 20 years. I made his acquaintance through a colleague at ANU. His input has been an invaluable contribution to the conceptualization and composition of this thesis.

Cooper 2000). The meaning and use of the terms “Aboriginal” and “community” by both non-Aboriginal outsiders and by Aboriginal people themselves will be explored in an effort to demonstrate how the ambiguity of their meanings has resulted in the further marginalisation of persons holding this sense of self.

What does it mean to be “Aboriginal”?

Historically all Aboriginal Australians, regardless of mixed descent, were subjected to colonial regimes of discrimination and oppression (Rolls 2005:64). There is therefore a shared history of subjugation among Aboriginal Australians, the only variation being the generational distance from ancestors who experienced the worst oppression; although in Chapter 7 I argue that many Aboriginal Australians are still experiencing extreme oppression.

Many people assume that there are certain physical attributes that demarcate Aboriginal persons from other ethnic or cultural groups. Yet when one looks around the crowded shops of the Mt Druitt “Westfields”, or even Winanga-Li’s facility, it is rarely apparent who is Aboriginal. Although some people have features that are typically Aboriginal (darker skin, broader noses, for instance), these features are not unique to Aboriginal people. In urban areas there are far more Aboriginal people whose appearance leaves their descent questionable. With marriage, cohabitation and procreation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people being frequent (and steadily increasing)¹⁰¹, those who identify as Aboriginal can appear to be Irish, Pacific Islander, Indian, Lebanese, Greek, etc. Unless one asks specifically about a person’s descent, and the person desires to identify, that person’s Aboriginality may go unrecognised in day-to-day life. Anatomical appearance means little in asserting Aboriginal descent; although I have heard Aboriginal people frequently joke about characteristics that mean a person *must* be Aboriginal, such as having “skinny legs”.

The category – “Aboriginal” – is itself vague: what is it a category of? Is it social, racial, descent-based or cultural, or perhaps a mixture of two or more of these things? During fieldwork I have heard the category “Aboriginal” invoked by Mt Druitt residents in each of

¹⁰¹ According to the 2001 Census, 68 percent of Indigenous couple families (approximately 45,000 families) include a non-Indigenous partner (Peterson and Taylor 2002:11).

the aforementioned ways: “Aboriginal people take care of each other” (social), “Aboriginal people have skinny legs” (race), “my parents were Aboriginal so I am Aboriginal” (descent), and “Aboriginal people practice the oldest living culture in the world” (cultural).

The meaning of being Aboriginal shifts depending on the context in which it is deployed. It can be used in a relational sense to signal to other Aboriginal people that “we have some common grounds for establishing a relationship” or strategically in a categorical sense (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15) to signal to non-Aboriginal people that “I deserve special rights or acknowledgement of my minority status as a First Australian”. “Aboriginal” is a loaded category that can mean any number of things depending on the intentions of the person identifying as such. This is a common aspect of identification, with the ways in which people differentiate themselves from others being “fundamentally situational and contextual” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:14).

In contemporary Australian society there are certain entitlements, real and imagined, to asserting Aboriginal descent. The real entitlements to being Aboriginal emerge from remedial efforts by the state that earmark scholarships, traineeships, public housing and employment, etc., specifically for people possessing a Certificate of Aboriginality¹⁰². What I classify as the imagined entitlements are related to a person’s identity, contributing to one’s sense of self and view of themselves as belonging within this world.

The potential to access the real and imagined entitlements of identifying as Aboriginal explains the propensity for persons of mixed Aboriginal descent to identify first and foremost as Aboriginal. When one formulates their sense of self, there is “a selective construction of the past which resonates with contemporary influences” (Cohen 1985:99). Although some members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community will state “my great-great grandfather was a convict”, none have let these other aspects of their descent eclipse their Aboriginality. Yet for those with stereotypical Aboriginal features, they have learned that others will not permit them to identify as anything other than Aboriginal.

¹⁰² A Certificate of Aboriginality is a legal document, issued by an Indigenous corporation, which verifies that a person is Aboriginal. In certain cases, should a person be unable to obtain a Certificate of Aboriginality, a statutory declaration may be accepted in its place.

Many persons over the age of 40 experienced an era when they were not *allowed* to identify as anything other than Aboriginal, due to the rules enforced by various officials upon those of Aboriginal descent¹⁰³, as noted in Chapter 2. When I asked Lewis, an employee of Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation and long-time Mt Druitt resident, what made him Aboriginal, he responded that “people have been telling me that I was my whole life” and so he knew he was.

My Aboriginal colleague Raymond Gibson commented to me a number of times that “a white person can be considered black, but a black person can never be considered White.” What he is alluding to is the fact that people who look to be white can still legitimately be considered by themselves and others as Aboriginal, but that people who to some degree look to be black can never be considered White, regardless of their ancestry and familial background. There does indeed appear to be truth to Gibson’s observation and it speaks to the perpetuation of the colour binary of White and “Other”. The construction of Whiteness emerged from European colonisation, as it was necessary to assert the superiority of White identity in order to justify colonial conquest and the displacement and violence inflicted upon Indigenous Australians (Hage 1998:58).

While being Aboriginal has almost always been foregrounded as the primary affiliation claimed by my informants, it is not possible that being Aboriginal could constitute the sole basis for any individual’s sense of self; for this would ignore socioeconomic class, gender, geography, familial practices, religion, etc. This confusion supports Brubaker and Cooper’s assertion that while concepts such as Aboriginality may be widely used as a category of practice, they are not helpful as categories of analysis (2000:25). Rather than using Aboriginality as a category of analysis, this and the following chapter take Aboriginality as a category *for* analysis.

What it means to be Aboriginal is at times taken for granted; something that everyone assumes they and others know (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike), but

¹⁰³ John McCorquodale notes that there have been more than 67 definitions used within Australian legislation between colonial invasion and 1997 (1997:24). The large number of definitions is a result of different types of legislation specific to Indigenous Australians (e.g. liquor restrictions, welfare, police offences, employment, heritage, etc.) held by each state both before and after federation (McCorquodale 1986:*passim*).

rarely stop to reflect upon. At other times Aboriginality may be pondered and debated, frequently in a quest to prove one's own superiority to others within that category. However, when I asked a handful of people who identified themselves as Aboriginal what it meant to them to be Aboriginal, no two people gave the same answer. It appeared that the more people tried to put their finger on its meaning, the more the meaning eluded them.

This is not an uncommon feature of identity. The labels "Australian," "Asian" and "Aboriginal" are – like all labels – merely attempts to categorise human beings and attach bundles of characteristics to them without spending too much time or effort thinking about it. It is a practice of simplification if not stereotyping; a practice that leads to the reification of certain attributes while ignoring others in an attempt to define and bound a category of human beings.

Legal Definition of Aboriginal

The first federal¹⁰⁴ legal definition of who should be called "Aboriginal" emerged in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which defines as "Aboriginal" "a person who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia but does not include a Torres Strait Islander" (Section 3). This definition was elaborated upon in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*, which demands that those who wish to claim ownership of Crown land demonstrate a continued connection to a "body of traditions, observances, customs and beliefs of Aboriginal people, including those traditions, observances, customs and beliefs as applied to particular persons, sites, areas of land, things or relationships" (Everett 2005:9). Ownership of land is the ultimate resource upon which Aboriginal Australians might hope to lay claim. Yet in order to do so, they must prove through historic artefacts and written accounts an unchanging¹⁰⁵ connection to traditions of which there are few written records (Everett 2005:43, 181; Kuper 2003; Johnson 2011:191). These criteria impose a "repressive authenticity", in which Indigenous peoples must prove their authenticity within limited

¹⁰⁴ Even after Federation each state had its own definition of who could be classified as "Aboriginal", most frequently with reference to "blood" (McCorquodale 1986:11-15). In NSW the "one drop rule" was used, by which "any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood" was deemed to be Aboriginal (McCorquodale 1986:12; see also Macdonald 2010:56). John McCorquodale notes that prior to this, the Commonwealth "quite deliberately refrained from providing an unambiguous, and consistent meaning" for the term "Aboriginal", with *laissez-faire* as a policy motive (1986:10).

¹⁰⁵ In Chapter 6 I argue that *no* cultures' traditions are unchanging, as culture is dynamic.

Western definitions of “traditionality” (Macdonald 2001:186; see also Adams 2005:14; Short 2007:869; McCorquodale 1986:9). Making such claims even more difficult is the bodily harm inflicted upon Aboriginal persons if they were seen to practice any of their traditions (such as ceremonies, speaking in an Aboriginal language, etc.) during the era of Assimilation (Macdonald 2001:179).

In 1981 the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs introduced a three-part definition of “Aboriginal” as someone who: 1) is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, 2) identifies as such, and 3) is “accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives” (DAA 1981). This is the most common definition of “Aboriginal” and is frequently employed in legal situations, such as determining entitlement to Certificates of Aboriginality or when becoming a member of a local Aboriginal Land Council, which grants members access to land acquired through the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*. Yet with the heterogeneity of community perspectives, there are at times disagreements about who is *really* Aboriginal¹⁰⁶. Geoff Stokes (1997) asserts that “the question of who is a ‘real’ Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander is central to conflicts over who has access to political or economic resources” (in McConaghy 2000:193).

While Australia’s present policy of self-identification¹⁰⁷ would suggest that it is up to the individual, the DAA’s legal definition implies that it is up to the community to acknowledge the person as Aboriginal¹⁰⁸; but then who and what is the community? Is it the community of a person’s Aboriginal ancestors, is it their community of residence, or is it the community in which they regularly participate? Furthermore, what if there is debate within that community as to the validity of a person’s claim to Aboriginality? This is one example in which the State assumes Aboriginal people to live or be involved in a bounded community that holds a uniform opinion, or to at least feature a system of governance by which formal agreement may be reached. Yet this is not the case.

¹⁰⁶ Gillian Cowlishaw asserts that Indigenous claims to distinctiveness seek to “require that Aboriginal identity be linked to embeddedness in an Aboriginal social world” (2009:188).

¹⁰⁷ Self-identification is used when one conducts any type of self-reporting such as is demanded of Census respondents, job applications, educational enrolment, interactions with police, etc.

¹⁰⁸ For a sampling of how definitions of Aboriginal decent grounded in community acceptance have played out in Australian courts, see McCorquodale 1997:31-32.

Validation of claims of Aboriginality are founded upon descent from a verified Aboriginal ancestor, yet the topic becomes murky when a person has had little involvement in an Aboriginal community. Should a person have only one Aboriginal ancestor several generations back and have been raised with little or no contact with other Aboriginal people, the ability for that person to make claims of Aboriginality is likely to be questioned by their local Aboriginal community. Cowlshaw notes that: “The most open and angry discussions occur where Aboriginal service organisations have employed someone who has established formal Aboriginal identity but is not accepted as such by those being served” (2009:176). On the one hand such a person will be challenged because they had not experienced the marginalisation so prevalent among Aboriginal people, while on the other they will be challenged for not relating to and communicating with people in ways commonly attributed to Aboriginal people. This is a topic of great contemporary debate amongst Aboriginal Australians and I will elaborate upon this in Chapters 8 and 9.

By creating such different definitions of Aboriginality, the Australian government has essentially created three different levels of Aboriginal authenticity, only two of which offer real entitlements. At the lowest level is self-identification, the entitlement of which is imagined: to be counted in records as Aboriginal, but only so far as a Certificate of Aboriginality is not demanded. The second level corresponds with the DAA’s legal definition, which entails the real entitlement of being able to access resources earmarked specifically for Aboriginal people (such as scholarships, housing, employment¹⁰⁹, etc.) via obtainment of a Certificate of Aboriginality¹¹⁰. The third and highest level of Aboriginality is defined by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*, which, with the most stringent (and sometimes unrealisable) demands for evidence, offers an individual the opportunity to obtain the greatest entitlement: land.

With this gradient of Aboriginal authenticity and the correlating entitlements at each level, is it any wonder that Australian Aboriginal people bicker about who is *really* Aboriginal?

¹⁰⁹ Being Indigenous is a genuine occupational qualification and is authorised under section 14(d) of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*.

¹¹⁰ In addition to the Certificate of Aboriginality, certain bodies have begun to accept Statutory Declarations as a form of validation of Aboriginality. This developed in response to litigation by people claiming Aboriginal status who, for various reasons, were unable to obtain a Certificate of Aboriginality and were thus denied access to Aboriginal-specific resources.

Furthermore, the proof demanded at the pinnacle of the authenticity hierarchy coincides with all that is reified in Aboriginal culture: “traditional” activities such as hunting, playing the didgeridoo, dancing and practicing ceremonies such as corroborees; “traditional” knowledge, such as of bush foods and medicine and the Dreaming; and “traditional” relationships such as connections to land, animal totems and the extended family.

This special status, bestowed increasingly at each gradient of authenticity, is continuously under threat by the encroachment of city life and Western lifestyles, and magnified by miscegenation and the lack of clear geographically bounded locales. In response, although perhaps not always consciously, Aboriginal groups have themselves reified certain aspects of their identity in an effort to more clearly demarcate the differences between Aboriginal Australians and other Australians through the practice of strategic essentialism¹¹¹.

In this process of reification, both Aboriginal Australians and other interested parties (such as politicians and tourism entrepreneurs) underplay the diverse experiences of being Aboriginal. The aforementioned “authentic” and “traditional” Aboriginal characteristics have been seized upon and promoted within Australia’s media, creating a dichotomy of Aboriginal existence. Those exhibiting reified “traditional” practices are portrayed as a colourful, resilient and likeable people that demonstrate what the nation has to offer both its non-Indigenous citizens and international visitors (Mills and Keddie 2010:429). However when Aboriginal people fail to live up to these stereotypes, two separate but related things happen: (1) the individual is deemed to be “out of touch” with their culture, and thereby told not to assert Aboriginal status until they “get in touch with their roots”¹¹²; and (2), the image of Aboriginality takes on negative characteristics, such as dysfunction, attributed to this culture loss (Adams 2005:78-81, 261-276; Cunneen 2001:39-40; McConaghy 2000:210-12; Sullivan 2011:50, 75).

¹¹¹ For examples of strategic essentialism amongst Indigenous Australians, see Beckett 1988:3, Brady 1995:1490, Merlan 1998:227-228, Brubaker 2000:6, Couldry 2000:107, Kuper 2003, Adams 2005:79, and Morgan 2006c:28.

¹¹² While participating in a mainstream focus group, a young Aboriginal woman from Mt Druitt stated that she did not see the relevance of being taught Dreaming stories or “Aboriginal” art and she was then told by the non-Indigenous facilitator that “perhaps” she was “out of touch” with her culture and “needed to get in touch with [her] roots.” For an example of an entire Aboriginal organisation being deemed inauthentic due to an inability to demonstrate “a general awareness of indigenous culture” (FaHCSIA 2009c:3), see Chapter 12.

This simplification silences the reality of diversity within Aboriginal groups, while promoting an image of uniformity. It reinforces a cultural binary that reduces the colonisers and the colonised to fixed, unproblematic, and mutually exclusive categories¹¹³.

Yet from a positive standpoint this can also “facilitate political empowerment and strategic alliance” (Walker 2001:14), as collective identity provides a strong basis for organisation in battles against injustice (Keddie 2013:23). The transformative possibilities presented by the “creation of a more explicit commons”, which is built upon the internationally validated rhetoric of community (Walker 2001:8), allows for the pushing of local interests onto the state and national policy agenda (Walker 2001:14; Walmsley 2006:8). George Morgan (2006c:20) states that “the term community is central to the vocabulary of representation” and in this sense, “community is a fundamentally strategic concept deployed in pursuit of political mobilisation” (Walker 2001:7). Barry Smith asserts that “almost no services or service funding will come into a particular [Aboriginal] settlement unless the residents can or will play the community game” (1989:3).

Theories of Community

The term “community” has multiple definitions and its implications when used are often vague. Diane Smith notes that in the Australian Indigenous context a

‘community’ can be defined as a network of people and organisations that are linked together by webs of relationships, cultural identity, traditions, rules, shared histories, or simply common interests and goals. Indigenous communities are diverse in their cultures, historical experiences, governance histories and location. In Indigenous Australia, communities include not only discrete remote locations and rural settlements... but also ‘communities of identity’ whose members share a common cultural identity but are residentially dispersed across a region or set of locations. There are also Indigenous ‘communities of interest’ comprising different groups who unite for a common purpose, but may have different cultural identities and rights... (Smith 2008:208)

The expansiveness of this definition is exceptionally apt for the Aboriginal “community” of Mt Druitt. These urban Aboriginal residents are linked through “webs of relationship” to

¹¹³ See, for example, McClintock 1992:85; Hollinsworth 1992:148-149; McConaghy 2000:189, 211; Batty 2003:45; Mercer 2003:430; and Rolls 2005:64.

rural and urban settlements, resulting in both shared and divergent historical experiences, through which varying degrees of a common cultural identity has manifested in a “community of interest”.

All persons who perceive themselves to be members of a given community will hold different interpretations of the characteristics and boundaries of that community. This feature of community entails a blurriness of borders, meaning that boundaries cannot be clearly demarcated or defined. Arjun Appadurai asserts that “for polities of a smaller scale, there is always a fear of cultural absorption by polities of larger scale, especially those that are nearby” (2002:50), while Anthony Cohen asserts that a community’s boundaries “increase in importance as the actual geo-social boundaries of the community are undermined, blurred or otherwise weakened” (1985:50). Such communities tend to reify differences between “us” and “them”.

Reification

Urban Aboriginal communities are quite likely to experience the aforementioned threat of cultural absorption, jeopardizing not only their sense of self as Aboriginal, but also their access to entitlements as members of a group that has been awarded special status.

In order to access such entitlements, Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt “play the community game” and at times present an image of homogenisation, making essentialist statements such as “we all know that the best way to get the word out about Aboriginal services is to put it to the community” (March 15, 2011). While this statement was made in an effort to differentiate the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community from surrounding mainstream society, this picture of homogenisation within the community is, of course, an imagined construct (Morgan 2006c:25). The aforementioned quote, given during a Mt Druitt Aboriginal community meeting¹¹⁴, presents the case that if efforts are made to inform key community members of local Aboriginal services, then word of mouth will spread the information throughout the entire community. Yet this could only be the case if *all* members of the Mt

¹¹⁴ This community meeting was held in an effort to investigate how government funding for Aboriginal youth services was being spent.

Druitt Aboriginal community were in consistent and frequent communication with each other¹¹⁵.

In this instance, the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community was highlighting their particular strategy for spreading information: while mainstream service organisations are likely to advertise a program in print, owing to their lack of appropriate community contacts who could ensure the information became known throughout the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal organisations are more effective in getting information out, for they utilise their extensive social networks. Therefore, while the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is not homogeneous, in that not all members have equal levels of engagement with certain key social networks, there are certain practices that are commonly held (although to differing degrees) that differentiate their practices from those of the surrounding mainstream society. This is fairly typical of urban Aboriginal groups, as Diane Smith asserts that:

The resident Indigenous ‘community’ in such [urban] locations is not homogenous. More often, it comprises a mixed constituency of large extended families and related individuals, who come and go. These families form social networks within their urban location that stretch outwards to connect to other family members and ‘communities’ in surrounding regions.¹¹⁶ (2008:208)

As a community’s ideology and objectives vary over time, with no culture being static, so too do the imagined boundaries of the community. This means that such boundaries are constantly being reinterpreted and renegotiated. This dynamic aspect of community is, in part, a product of information flows in the community’s social imaginary. Such flows of information have been defined by Appadurai to consist of the ethnoscape, the mediascape, the technoscape, the financescape and the ideoscape (2002:50). Appadurai’s use of the suffix -scape represents the fluidity of the imaginary and is a useful theoretical model as it takes social complexity into account. Each of the different -scapes represent forms of information flows, such as those found within ethnic groups, different forms of media and technology, etc.¹¹⁷ An individual’s sense of self and, accordingly, perception of

¹¹⁵ While this is not precisely the case, I do find it likely that word would reach more people if it was “put” to the community than if it was advertised in print through posters and flyers, due to levels of literacy and the distrust of non-Aboriginal bodies.

¹¹⁶ In support of this assertion, see Macdonald 2000; Peters-Little 2000:412; Smith 2000; Sutton 1998.

¹¹⁷ For a more in depth description of Appadurai’s -scapes, see his work *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996).

membership within a community or communities are grounded in their historical, locational, linguistic, ideological, economic and political situatedness. As Appadurai's various -scapes exist only in the social imaginary, these too are shaped by the same six types of an individual's situatedness. As no individual has the same background or interpretation of their background, heterogeneous social complexity is the rule rather than the exception.

In this sense the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is imagined, as there is never holistic homogeneity in any group of peoples' background, objectives and sense of self. Therefore, in agreement with Benedict Anderson (1983) and Cohen (1985) "community" can be understood as a symbolic construct that exists within the imagination of its members. Appadurai elaborates on the concept of the "imaginary", drawing from Durkheim's idea of *imaginaire*, which Appadurai defines as "a constructed landscape of collective aspirations" (2002:49). As the aspirations of members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community vary, although share overlapping themes, their sense of community is imagined. Yet for anyone who has witnessed the mobilisation of social capital when celebrations or protests are organised on behalf of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, the assembly of such a large number of people for a common purpose indicates that there is a solid reality to the noun "community". Anderson (1991:6) states that "all communities... are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (in Everett 2005:79). Therefore, the imagined nature of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community does not deny its existence, but rather permits the differing interpretation of community boundaries.

Following Fredrik Barth (1969), I agree that a community develops in opposition to other groups, in the sense that it highlights perceived differences in ideology between itself and others. The Mt Druitt Aboriginal community asserts a difference not only from other Mt Druitt residents, many of whom are similarly socioeconomically marginalised and of minority status (such as immigrants), but also from the behaviours, values and objectives of mainstream Australian society. The flagging of this difference grounds their self-identification as Indigenous Australians.

According to Barth, communities “entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (1969:9). Cohen points out that symbols of community, which I believe to be akin to Barth’s “discrete categories”, are “effective because they are imprecise” (1985:21), and function as a form of polysemic heteroglossia (George Morgan, personal communication, February 23, 2012). As the meanings of symbols are subjective, their vagueness allows for variations in interpretation, which in turn allows individuals to project their own imagined meaning onto the symbol.

Thus, the symbol “Aboriginal” receives various definitions by members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. One woman, during a community meeting¹¹⁸, stated “I know who I am and I know where I’m from.” She was signalling that to be considered Aboriginal, one had to have knowledge of their ancestry and their tribal lands. Yet when members of the Winanga-Li community were asked what it meant to be Aboriginal, individuals objected to the idea that it should be reduced to knowledge of ancestral lands, for a number of the community’s members knew very little about their traditional lands, but were indisputably accepted by others in the community as Aboriginal.

During informal discussions on this topic a common theme that arose was the shared history of oppression inflicted upon Aboriginal people by White colonial actors. Emerging from this narrative was a binary of Aboriginal people and “Others”, thus fitting the “opposition” model asserted by Barth. Clearly many people within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community felt that their resilience in the face of oppression and violence, which the “Other” meted out to Indigenous Australians both in the past and the present, was characteristic of their Aboriginal sense of self.

Throughout Australia’s history Aboriginal people have been Othered and excluded from mainstream society, first as non-citizens during invasion and the Protectionist policy era, then as second-class citizens under Assimilation, as citizens of special status during the Self-Determination policy era, and presently, under the present policy that Patrick Sullivan

¹¹⁸ This community meeting was held in May 2011 in an attempt to determine which organisations had the right to define themselves as Aboriginal.

calls “normalisation”¹¹⁹ (2011:100), as dysfunctional citizens needing White governance and discipline. This legacy of Otherness has formed a foundation upon which community has been built. Imposed by White Australia, this Otherness was further reified when, in the 1970s, the Commonwealth government began labelling areas, both rural and urban, with dense Aboriginal populations as “communities”.

“Aboriginal Community” as Political Rhetoric

During the late 1960s and early 1970s government bureaucrats seized upon the growing popularity of the term “community” (Smith 1989:10; Peters-Little 2001:190). In order to signal the shift from Assimilation to Self-Determination, bureaucratic language ceased discussing Aboriginal “settlements, missions, and pastoral properties” and instead referred to these as Aboriginal “communities”. However, upon a review of government documents, “little evidence of a marked change in attitude to or lessening of control of Australia’s Aboriginal population” was revealed (Smith 1989:16). Within the conceptualisation and implementation of the 1970s Self-Determination policy, the validity and existence of bounded uniform Aboriginal communities that functioned as “self-governing social units” was taken for granted (Smith 1989:12); a contributing factor to the unsuccessful rollout of Self-Determination policy.

Barry Smith (1989:12) argues that in government policy and legislation the use of the term “community” represents Aboriginal community as a socially organised, democratic group of people who practice civil equality towards one another and who share common goals, objectives and social solidarity. However, few Aboriginal “communities” share these characteristics, which Colin Tatz asserts (1974:17) very much conform to “western notions of representativeness and representative structures” (Smith 1989:6). Smith contends that it is far more likely to “find *multiple* communities of solidarity (including families)” within one geographic area (1989:17, emphasis added). Yet twenty-five years after Barry Smith’s critique of governments’ use of the term “community” in Indigenous contexts, Diane Smith

¹¹⁹ While the State’s preferred terminology for present Indigenous Affairs policy is “closing the gaps”, Sullivan employs the term “normalisation” to more readily indicate that “the new era turns its back on the vision of a semi-autonomous, decolonised and modernised discrete realm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where they would largely manage themselves in culturally appropriate ways.. [and] is characterised by the intention to re-engage the state with its Aboriginal peoples, and normalise their relations within their communities and with the wider population” (Sullivan 2011:100).

notes that this “overly simplistic view of ‘community’ has become entrenched in government policy, program and funding frameworks” (2008:209).

Use of the vague term “community” within Australian Aboriginal policy therefore disguises the legacy of colonialism within Indigenous lives, and is used to impose a “blanket solution to Aboriginal problems” (Smith 1989:8; see also Morgan 2006c:28). Barry Smith, citing David Pollard (1988:38), argues that the government’s choice in terminology was conscious as it “give[s] the impression that something (self-determination) is happening when it isn’t, and cannot happen, in view of the constraints of ‘the economic and social norms of the wider community’” (Smith 1989:7). The use of the term “community” in Aboriginal Affairs policy has ensured that when policies have failed, which they overwhelmingly have (Sullivan 2011:*passim*), blame for their failure rests solely upon Aboriginal people (Smith 1989:7).

Barry Smith concludes that the blanket use of the vague term community is “based on a shaky if not false foundation” (1989:20) and can:

- (1) act as a barrier to self determination;
- (2) deprive some residents of access to services, goods, jobs, training and so on;
- (3) set geographic communities up for administrative failure, and therefore create feelings of guilt and cause lack of confidence; and
- (4) deny Aboriginal people the opportunity to work through the development process, with specialised professional support, and in their own time. (Smith 1989:19)

Indeed, I have witnessed these effects within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. During Aboriginal community meetings held in Mt Druitt, of which there were approximately five during a two year period, community members came together to negotiate the objectives and behaviours that should define the voice of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. Representatives of government departments such as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Department of Children’s Services (DoCS) were invited to attend, in order for these bodies to gain the community’s perspective. Upon reviewing meeting reports that two government representatives submitted to their offices, I realised that these bureaucrats had interpreted each meeting as a symptom of dysfunction within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

One report, given by a representative of FaHCSIA, dealt with a meeting held to dispute the awarding of funding for an Aboriginal-specific program to a non-Indigenous organisation.¹²⁰ Although approximately fifty Aboriginal people attended the meeting, the official wrote that they “weren’t representative of the community”, and that the opinions voiced during the meeting could therefore be discounted. A DoCS report on another meeting, this one attended by 170 people, asserted that those present at the meeting found the community discussions fractured and that the majority were just expressing “sour grapes” against another community faction. In both cases the community meetings, which were in actuality an “opportunity for the community to work through the development process” (Smith 1989:19), were seen by government officials to be illustrative of the dysfunction of Aboriginal people and their form of social organisation¹²¹.

This demonstrates that by assuming the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community to be self-governing and homogeneous, the government has accomplished Smith’s points (3) and (4) – “set[ting] up geographic communities for administrative failure” and “deny[ing] Aboriginal people the opportunity to work through the development process... in their own time” – thereby achieving (1) and (2) – “act[ing] as a barrier to self determination” and denying some residents access to resources. There appears to be little awareness on the part of government officials that communities “are not ready made but have to be created” (Morgan 2006c:28).

Indigenous Governance: Is the American Indian Case Comparable?

Smith’s (1989) assertion that Aboriginal people need to be given “the opportunity to work through the development process, with specialised professional support, and in their own time” has come to form a major recommendation promoted by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED)¹²². Formed in the mid-1980s, the

¹²⁰ This Community meeting will be contextualised and elaborated upon in Chapter 12.

¹²¹ Indigenous academic Frances Peters-Little asserts that it is unrealistic to expect the cultural and political divisions among Aboriginal people within a “community” to disappear simply because they are now consulted by governments. Further, she argues that: “It is particularly unrealistic to expect all loyalties to kin and tribes to disappear if structures of “community” boards are based on Western notions of “representativeness” (2001:190).

¹²² See, for example, Cornell 2006; Hunt 2006; Middleton 2010:12-13; and the HPAIED website <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview>, accessed November 16, 2012.

HPAIED began to investigate “the emerging pattern of Indigenous economic success” in the face of deep-rooted poverty (Cornell 2006:13). Looking specifically at American Indians, the Harvard Project sought to explain why some Indian nations were overcoming intractable poverty, while others remained entrenched within it. To date, their conclusion has been that “self-determination and self-government are essential bases for improving the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous peoples” (Cornell 2006:1).

Yet in order for effective self-determination and self-government to be realised, a system of government that is accepted as legitimate by those being governed is essential. This is what Stephen Cornell calls a “culture match”, as it represents “congruence between formal governing institutions and Indigenous political culture” (2006:14). This does not demand *absolute* sovereignty of indigenous peoples, but can accommodate self-government within the broader nation’s system of government (Cornell 2006:15-16). As sovereignty in this sense exists on a continuum, the term “self-rule” is more appropriate than “sovereignty” and the essential question determining self-rule is “who is exercising decision-making power... within a given policy domain or set of decisions” (Cornell 2006:16)? When the answer is, to a greater extent, the indigenous nation, then indigenous self-rule is occurring; something that is certainly not the case in Australia.

The colonial legacy experienced by American Indians diverges greatly from that of Indigenous Australians. The United States’ history of signing treaties with Indian nations between 1778 and 1871, and the inclusion of American Indian tribes within Article 1, Section 8 of the United States (US) Constitution, formed legal grounds upon which demands for Indian self-rule and sovereignty of land could be realised (BIA website, <http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/>, accessed July 26, 2013). Yet in Australia, no treaties were ever signed, and the Indigenous inhabitants were denied legal recognition as a sovereign people that held land rights (Beckett 1988:7). While both American and Australian indigenous populations were forcibly removed from their land, in many cases American Indian tribes maintained ownership of the land to which they were moved (BIA website, <http://www.bia.gov/FAQs/>, accessed July 26, 2013). Additionally, while Australian Aboriginal policies predominantly ignored “tribal” boundaries during such relocations, this was not done to the same extent in the US (Cornell 2006:3). Over time American Indian

tribal boundaries, which had been fluid pre-contact, hardened and came to form the foundation of their internal organisation and governance¹²³ (Cornell 2006:3, 21, 25).

Facilitating the development of self-rule amongst American Indians was their incorporation of the US federal government practice of using blood quantum to define “Indianness” in the late 19th century (Schmidt 2011:1). Although US courts ruled in 1905 (*Waldron v. United States*) that tribes had the right to determine membership eligibility without reference to blood quantum, the majority of federally-recognised tribes continued to require blood quanta in varying degrees (Schmidt 2011:5). To this day, blood quantum remains a feature of many tribes’ requirement for consideration of membership. It has been argued by some that this internalisation of the importance of blood quanta by American Indians reflects the colonial legacy of oppression. Yet the fact that it was Indian tribes themselves who *chose* this to be a criterion for membership, at the same time reflects indigenous agency¹²⁴.

For better or worse, this long history of demarcating legal tribal membership, essential for determining access to their land base, has led American Indians to face far less uncertainty when attempting to distinguish who has the legitimate authority to represent them and make decisions on their behalf (Cornell 2006:21). While there is still dissent amongst American Indian tribes over the importance of blood quanta in determining one’s access to Indian-specific resources¹²⁵, there is more autonomy and less uncertainty than there is within Australia’s Indigenous affairs.

As Australia is a younger nation than the US, it cannot be surprising that the nation lags behind in working to resolve indigenous/colonial relations. America too went through stages in indigenous policy marked by protection (the “Reservation Period”, 1871-1887),

¹²³ American Indian tribal boundaries aided in the development of administrative and governance structures, as the persons and places falling under such structures were clearly demarcated. As this is not the case in Australia, and a large proportion of Indigenous residents now reside in urban areas, the establishment of culturally-matched systems of Indigenous administration and governance will face additional challenges.

¹²⁴ The application of blood quantum, a colonial construct, in Indian tribal definitions of membership illustrates the complexity of colonial settler societies. The bounding of one’s group, demarcating it from the settler society, in order to receive special benefits and programs demands definitive criteria; criteria which frequently conform to Western ideas of objective evidence. Thus while American Indians exercised agency by electing to employ blood quanta, this decision occurred within broader societal structures shaped by colonialism.

¹²⁵ See, for example, Hamill 2003 and Krouse 1999.

assimilation (the “Allotment Period”, 1887-1934 and continuing on in other policies up to the 1960s) and self-determination (beginning in the 1960s and formalised in 1970). However, the major difference in the rights of indigenous peoples between the US and Australia remains grounded in the presence or absence of treaties¹²⁶ and the amount of time and extent of opportunities granted through which groups could organise, prior to the introduction of self-determination policy.

When Self-Determination was introduced as a formal US government policy in American Indian Affairs “rhetoric... outstripped the reality”, as the intention of policy-makers was to devolve the administration of American Indian socioeconomic support to tribal bodies (Cornell 2006:10). However, Indian nations that were already organised “moved quickly to assert self-governing powers, variously redesigning governing institutions previously designed by outsiders, taking over management of resources, retooling development strategies, and displacing federal decision-makers in an assortment of reservation matters” (Cornell 2006:18). While in some cases this usurpation of White governance occurred rapidly, in others it has unfolded over decades as indigenous leaders took steps towards reorganising their governance practices (Cornell 2006:18).

This development process of formulating and instituting an indigenous governance system accepted as legitimate by those that it governs has not occurred for Aboriginal Australians. All formal systems of Indigenous governance, including those of Australia’s Self-Determination era, have been imposed by White governments¹²⁷.

When Bob Hawke’s Labor government introduced the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989 (ATSIC Act)* to parliament, then Minister for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), Gerry Hand, stated that there was an “urgent need to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a real say in the decision making process... a real say in the management of their own affairs” (Coe 1994:35-36). Yet while ATSIC was established in an effort to promote Indigenous self-determination, the top-down institution

¹²⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of the historical conditions shaping the differences between Australian and American indigenous affairs, see Hunt 2006:14.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Beckett 1988:15; Sanders 2002:6-8; Rowse 2000:1516-1518; Smith 2002:27; Mercer 2003:426-436; Hunt 2006:14; Dillon and Westbury 2007:206-211; and Sullivan 2010:3.

of the ATSIC system by the non-Indigenous federal government defeated self-determination before ATSIC was even off the ground (Coe 1994:37; Cunningham and Baeza 2005:467).

Policy written in the rhetoric of self-determination did little to allow Indigenous Australians the opportunity to negotiate their own governing bodies, but rather imposed upon them a system of bureaucratic control. Thus, with the lack of a “culture match”, the legitimacy of bodies such as the NAC, the NACC and ATSIC was challenged and their policies were ultimately deemed failures¹²⁸.

The closest Australia’s Aboriginal population has come to developing a governance “culture match” is found in Indigenous organisations¹²⁹. These small-scale bodies are more often than not representative of, and accountable to, the Aboriginal people their constitutions define as their constituents. Many such organisations are grounded in a “very localised polity” (Hunt 2006:14); built organically upon the social and kin relationships of founding members. This enables fairly stable governance, yet it is only a first step, for those Aboriginal persons with the weakest social links to the governing members often find that their voices do not carry equal weight as do those more closely connected. As a result, not all Aboriginal persons residing in the organisation’s target area of service are represented equally (Cornell 2006:22).

Additionally, as Indigenous decision-making practices are often grounded in “social and political representation” (Smith 2008:205), where those closest to governing members are consulted regarding their opinions and beliefs on what should happen, this can result in decisions being made by persons who lack expertise and technical knowledge of governance and the feasibility of their recommendation. Such practices demonstrate that certain aspects of Indigenous culture are not easily reconciled with those of corporate management (Hunt 2006:16).

¹²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of ATSIC’s policy “failures”, see Chapter 3.

¹²⁹ Whimp 1989; Johnston 2001:27.1.3-27.4.19; Sanders 2002:5-7; Rowse 2002; and Sullivan 2010:4-5; 2011:55-57.

Thus, while local Aboriginal organisations can and do function as institutions of Indigenous governance on a small scale, their practices would need significant modification for this governance system to translate to one that functions effectively at a level on par with, or beyond, the “Aboriginal community” (Smith 2008:205-206; Morgan 2006c:19). In order for this to occur, Indigenous Australians need to be given the time, space and resources “to work through the development process” of realising a governance system that provides a “culture match”.

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation is an organisation that has organically developed a governance system that both reflects and challenges the above assertions. While Chapter 8 details the governance culture of Winanga-Li, below I will explore how Winanga-Li and its members fit within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

Community in Mt Druitt

When trying to understand the use of the term “community” among Aboriginal people in Mt Druitt, I find Barry Smith’s definition – “that communities of solidarity (including families) exist within the ‘geographic communities’” (1989:17) – most helpful. During a discussion of the use of this term with my colleague Raymond Gibson – an Aboriginal man with family ties to the Mt Druitt region – he shared his interpretation of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community; an interpretation which I later discovered resonated remarkably with Smith’s assertion. Gibson told me that he saw the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community as a collection of social and familial groups. He saw these groups as formulated through friendships, family relations, and the activities of Aboriginal organisations. Within each group there could be found a greater commonality (although not absolute unanimity) of opinions and practices than is present within the broader Aboriginal community. Yet Gibson acknowledged that these groups were also dynamic, with allegiances and common values constantly under renegotiation.

Considering my experience with Indigenous persons and groups located in Mt Druitt, I therefore conclude that the community should be seen as a geographic area made up of numerous “communities of solidarity” (to use Smith’s terminology) or “groups” (to use

Gibson's); what I will call sub-communities for the remainder of this chapter¹³⁰. These sub-communities are frequently based upon extended families¹³¹ (Smith 2008:208) – although not exclusively, as divisions can cut through family lines – and supplemented by additional members who become involved through the social connections of the family's members.

When the term “community” has been used by my informants in Mt Druitt, they are often speaking of people in the local area who they believe to share a sense of common experience, identity, aspiration and purpose. The fact that they only *imagine* these things are shared in common denotes the lack of fixity in boundaries of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

The glue that binds these groups together is a sense of social connectedness: friendships, shared history, shared activities, enjoyment of one another's company, trust, varying amounts of obligation and indebtedness, acceptance, and a little effort to maintain the relationship. Such cohesion is reinforced through interactions shared at particular places, such as at Aboriginal organisations, local pubs, sporting venues, etc. It is also reinforced through the exchange of news from places outside of Mt Druitt. For example, at one Winanga-Li event a group of people keenly gossiped about a proposal to tear down a pier in Port Macquarie. During this discussion, each person recalled memories involving the pier, such as days spent swimming and fishing nearby. Such shared remembering reinforces a sense of commonality with other members of the group.

The importance of recognising the community's porous boundaries was underscored when I tried to conceptualise how certain individuals fit into the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. In order to illustrate the complexity I will discuss the circumstance of Stephanie. Stephanie was a pregnant 16 year old non-Aboriginal woman who came to Winanga-Li to inquire about educational courses that would satisfy certain Centrelink requirements. Accompanying Stephanie was Linda, who asserted that she was Aboriginal

¹³⁰ Beyond this chapter I will continue to use the term “Mt Druitt Aboriginal community”, although the reader is to understand that this term does not denote a homogenous, unified, self-governing and clearly bounded social group, but rather the residents of Mt Druitt who identify themselves as being Aboriginal and together make up the “Mt Druitt Aboriginal community”.

¹³¹ When using the terms “family” and “kin”, I am referring to consanguineal, affinal and fictive kin relationships.

and the mother of Stephanie's boyfriend, and therefore the grandmother of the unborn child. While Stephanie was not Aboriginal, her child was likely to be identified as Aboriginal through his father's lineage¹³². In this case I pondered whether or not Stephanie could ever be considered a member of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community? As a result of discussions with members of the Aboriginal community and observations of other mothers in this situation I concluded that, should Stephanie desire, over time she would be able to build connections and relationships within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community to the effect that those with whom she has become socially invested will come to accept her as a community member. While Stephanie would never be considered by everyone in the Aboriginal community to be a legitimate member whose views would be taken seriously when speaking about issues of importance to that community, those within her sub-community may accept her as such.

This assumption was borne out when I was told that Cheryl, the wife of community member Uncle Ted¹³³ for over 20 years, was not Aboriginal. Cheryl was heavily engaged in Aboriginal issues and was socially connected to numerous Aboriginal people throughout eastern Australia. While I had not witnessed Cheryl speaking on behalf of the community on a public stage, I had seen her voice her opinions and beliefs regarding Aboriginal issues amongst small groups of other Aboriginal people. In these more intimate settings no one attempted to censure the subject matter and Cheryl's views appeared to be taken seriously and accepted without animosity or reproach.

A further example is the case of Geena, a young Aboriginal woman whose partner, Robert, was of Jordanian background. Geena explained that she had been bringing Robert to events within the Aboriginal community for two years. She said that she was aware that there were times when people censored their conversations in his presence, but that their behaviour towards him was always inclusive: they would make statements such as "you're going to

¹³² According to the 2001 Census, 94 percent of children born to one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal parent are identified by their parents as Aboriginal (Peterson and Taylor 2002:11). Nicholas Biddle attributes the relatively rapid growth rate of the urban Indigenous population in part to the "higher rates of births of Indigenous children to non-Indigenous mothers" (2011:6).

¹³³ Uncle Ted is an Aboriginal artist and elder within the broader-Sydney Aboriginal community. He regularly works with Indigenous inmates at local gaols, teaches art therapy, and provides art classes to Aboriginal youth.

marry an Aboriginal woman, so you're one of us" and "brother, grab another beer!" Yet while Geena's boyfriend was accepted by the Aboriginal community members he had come to know, in that he came to be considered "one of us", the fact that these same people would censor their conversation around him indicated that he was still considered an outsider when sensitive topics arose. Thus Robert was accepted, but his non-Aboriginality was still relevant.

A factor that likely affects the extent to which community members identify people such as Stephanie, Cheryl and Robert as outsiders is the length of time and level of engagement such people have with others in the Aboriginal community. Two years of sporadic interaction may be long enough to establish a sense of ease in the other's presence, but it does not appear to be long enough to establish complete trust of the other. This explains the different positions held by Robert and Cheryl in relation to their Aboriginal sub-communities; however, neither Robert nor Cheryl would ever claim to be Aboriginal.

The above accounts illustrate the porous and fuzzy nature of the boundaries of what is commonly called the "Aboriginal community". A primary aspect of a person being accepted into this community is their desire to be included and to gain a sense of belonging; something which may be accomplished through continued engagement with other community members. While someone like Stephanie or Cheryl will always be recognised as the non-Aboriginal mother of an Aboriginal child, their continued presence within their sub-community will lead some to feel that "she's one of us."

Even non-Aboriginal people may be accepted members of Aboriginal sub-communities, influencing the group's views and objectives with additional flows of information, yet these non-Aboriginal members are not permitted to speak out on the public stage of the broader Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. To do so would result in social censure, such as expressions of ridicule and ire against both the sub-community and the non-Aboriginal individual, by others within the broader Aboriginal community.

One example of this type of behaviour occurred when prizes were awarded during children's competitions at Winanga-Li's NAIDOC¹³⁴ Family Picnic Day in 2008. Both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal individuals were invited to judge the children's "contemporary" dance competitions, and I therefore mistakenly thought that these same people would judge the children's "traditional" dance competitions. Betty, Winanga-Li's Executive Officer, rushed up to the stage while I was preparing to hand the microphone over to the judges (as I was the emcee) and explained to me that the judging of the "traditional" dance must be done solely by Aboriginal people. When I later asked her about this, she explained that non-Aboriginal people "really shouldn't" be judging things related to Aboriginal culture. While she was not overly concerned about such things, she explained, other members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community could become upset and this might result in negative feelings towards Winanga-Li.

Within any relationship actions or opinions may result in one distancing oneself from another person or group of persons due to disagreements. This can lead someone to become a more peripheral member of a sub-community or to create an altogether different sub-community in opposition. Yet this does not take the person out of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. This ability to opt out of a sub-community is what maintains the collective's internal governance and solidarity. However, one cannot easily opt out of the Aboriginal community, for this would require a person to cease participation in all of the local area's activities involving other Aboriginal people, so that this manner of conflict resolution is frequently not desired nor available. This indicates that the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community features mutually hostile sub-communities, making whole-of-community governance unwieldy due to disputes regarding the legitimacy of persons who seek to politically represent the region as a whole.

The social connections that serve as the basis for the sub-communities within Mt Druitt's Aboriginal community form during a vast array of gatherings, many of which are not

¹³⁴ NAIDOC Week is one week during each year, usually the first week in July, where Australians come together "to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (<http://www.naidoc.org.au/about/>). Emerging from the 1938 "Day of Mourning and Protest" the name of the week is an acronym for "National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee", which in 1991 became responsible for the organisation of a national week-long celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition (<http://www.naidoc.org.au/naidoc-history/>).

Aboriginal-specific, where Aboriginal people from the area are present. One such gathering is the “badge draw” held at a local Mt Druitt pub. The badge draw is a weekly event where all pub patrons are assigned a number, and once a week a drawing is held. The person identified by the winning number then has one hour to report to the pub to collect their prize (which is usually a sum of money, although on special occasions can be an expensive meat platter). In order for participants to increase their chances of winning, they form relationships with other participants so that, should their number be drawn when they are not present, someone can alert them by telephone and they can then report to the pub to collect the prize.

Other such gatherings where social connections build relationships within the Aboriginal community include birthday parties (particularly the large gatherings typical of an 18th, 21st, or 60th birthday), children’s school and sporting events, funerals, Aboriginal-identified employment (where the job involves working within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community) and the programs and events put on by Aboriginal organisations¹³⁵. By participating in such activities, individuals who have few or no family members in the area can become attached to the local Aboriginal community.

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation, a sub-community of the larger Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, was in fact built upon the connections and resources of one extended family that had worked throughout the Mt Druitt region for twenty years prior to the organisation’s formation¹³⁶. Through the humanitarian volunteer work of an older generation, now largely deceased, connections among several Aboriginal families were forged, with many (though not all) members of the younger generations continuing to participate in the activities of Winanga-Li. This is fairly typical of Aboriginal corporations, as Smith asserts that “Today, families of polity (cf. Sutton 1998)¹³⁷ form the backbone of Indigenous communities and

¹³⁵ I refute the conclusion of Yuriko Yamanouchi’s 2007 PhD dissertation in which she asserts that Aboriginal organisations form *the* “building blocks” for Aboriginal community (312). My data demonstrate that there are numerous Indigenous people in Mt Druitt with no involvement, or only peripheral involvement, in the activities of Aboriginal organisations; yet through their social and familial relationships are connected to Aboriginal others, giving substance to their sense of self and identification as Aboriginal.

¹³⁶ For a more detailed account of the formation of Winanga-Li and the role played by family and social connections, see Chapter 8.

¹³⁷ Peter Sutton’s use of the phrase “families of polity” denotes cognatic descent groups, usually sharing a surname, that govern the terms of their group’s social cohesion and are of “central importance to the conduct

many local organisations, thereby linking an extended family group identity to organisational identities and forms of political representation” (2008:210).

The Winanga-Li sub-community has grown through the activities of the organisation as well as through the social connections of its members. There have of course been schisms in the past where previous members have conducted themselves in ways that were at odds with the objectives and principles of Winanga-Li’s community and these individuals broke away to form their own sub-community.

One such schism occurred when a mature-age student, Paul, plagiarised the paper of another Winanga-Li member, which nearly resulted in academic probation for the student whose work was plagiarised. Paul refused to admit to his act, but for unknown reasons the University did not pursue the matter. While Paul could still be considered a member of the larger Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, he is no longer considered a member of the Winanga-Li sub-community. Such conflicts can be definitive of the imagined boundaries between sub-communities within the Aboriginal community (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, March 12, 2011), yet that does not make them immutable. There are a number of people within Winanga-Li’s sub-community who still associate with Paul, with whom their relationship pre-dates their involvement with Winanga-Li, and upon whom they pass no judgement. This clearly illustrates that the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is not homogeneous, that factions are a feature and that boundaries are blurred.

While these sub-communities are self-governing in the sense implied by governmental use of the term “community”, the sub-communities do not frequently unite to act as the “Mt Druitt Aboriginal community”. Rather, the various sub-communities of Mt Druitt will only mobilise, work together and take action for a common purpose on rare occasions: for example, during times of protest or celebration. Yet sometimes even communal gatherings do not entail a common purpose for all those present. One such occasion is Winanga-Li’s Family Picnic held during NAIDOC week. In 2011, this event had been in operation for 16 years and drew approximately 1,700 people. Participants came from multiple sub-

of Aboriginal business” (1998:60). Generally “families of polity” have focal members, often grandmothers, and these individuals “often make strenuous efforts to keep as many of their descendant as possible under their own descent group identity” (1998:66).

communities of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, including members who in the past had broken away from the Winanga-Li sub-community. On this occasion, participants put aside their difference to come together, some to celebrate NAIDOC and others to take advantage of the free food and children's activities the event offers. On another occasion the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community united and mobilised during a public community meeting held with regard to the alleged misuse of over six million dollars in government funding by an organisation – Gagil – that was supposed to be providing Aboriginal youth services¹³⁸. Although on this occasion there were three Mt Druitt Aboriginal community members who supported Gagil, the vast majority of the people in attendance (approximately 170) were united against this organisation.

There are therefore occasions when the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community will unite and mobilise, even though, on a day-to-day level, the community is divided into sub-communities of solidarity; each with its own objectives, goals and forms of self-governance, which can place them at odds with other sub-communities. These sub-communities, such as that of Winanga-Li, interact with each other and, regardless of whether the interactions are characterised by dissent or agreement, it is these interactions within the geographic area of Mt Druitt that constitute the “Mt Druitt Aboriginal community”.

However, Australian governmental bodies dealing with Indigenous policy and services fail to recognise or to work with these sub-communities; instead they have reified “the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community” and treat it as a singular homogenous body. Both government and social service bodies assume that this regional unit is cohesive and self-governing, and sub-communities are unknown to them. This assumption regarding locality-based communities is not only wrong (Morgan 2006c:19), but, as demonstrated above in the FaHCSIA and DoCS representatives' reports, can be harmful to Aboriginal people.

¹³⁸ For more details regarding Gagil and its alleged misuse of funding, see Chapter 9.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the uncritical application of the elusive terms “Aboriginal” and “community” stand as barriers to successful Indigenous policy implementation. The deployment of these terms for formal government purposes presupposes a clearly bounded category of homogenous identity and perceives dissent within this category as indicative of Aboriginal dysfunction.

I have established that within Mt Druitt, the Aboriginal community is made up of many sub-communities; each of which is dynamic, operating as “self-governing social units” and demonstrating greater homogeneity than may be found in the broader population, but none of which exhibit categorical homogeneity. Occasionally these sub-communities unite to exercise their voice as the “Mt Druitt Aboriginal community”, but the reasons for this unification differ both between and within sub-communities.

The benefit of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents consolidating into the “Aboriginal community” is that they become visible as a special group of Australian citizen whose voice may be heard throughout broader society. The drawback of such occasional mergers is that the idea of a unitary Aboriginal community becomes reified, masking social complexity and the dynamic nature of cultural groups, and maintaining the status quo by excusing governments from dealing with localised Aboriginal groups due to claims of dysfunction. Furthermore, this perceived dysfunction is used to justify why self-determination is not feasible, without accounting for centuries of undermining Aboriginal governance practices.

Although a number of precolonial cultural governance practices remain prominent amongst Aboriginal groups, such as the ability of a matriarch to wield power over kin and the social embeddedness of alliances, this is not well-suited to the type of governance expected of groups by White Australia, as it is not formally democratic. However, the HPAIED has argued that an essential component of Indigenous groups extracting themselves from seemingly intractable poverty is self-rule, grounded in a governance system that is a “culture match” to those being governed. As the governance of Indigenous Australians has always been imposed by agents of White society, it is no wonder that all attempts to allow

an Aboriginal voice in policies affecting Indigenous citizens (such as the NACC, ATSIC, and now Tony Abbott's Indigenous Advisory Council) have lacked legitimacy in the eyes of Aboriginal people.

The historical conditions under which American Indians have consolidated into contemporary tribes and institutionalised self-determination diverge greatly from those in Australia, where no treaties were ever signed. Yet this does not mean that the establishment of a culturally matched system of governance is impossible; but rather that Indigenous Australians need to be allowed to “work through the development process, with specialised professional support, and in their own time” (Smith 1989:19).

As argued above, many of the practices reified as “Aboriginal” held cultural meaning during a very different time and under very different social conditions than those found in Australia today. With attempts to stamp out Aboriginal culture under Assimilation policy and the ever-growing encroachment of Western life into Aboriginal domains (Levitus 2009:77), the Indigenous practices glorified by White Australia hold only limited salience among Mt Druitt's Indigenous residents. The following chapter will investigate the prominence of a number of stereotypical Aboriginal practices within Mt Druitt and explore their heterogeneous meanings to members of the Mt Druitt community. This will be undertaken in an effort to illustrate ways in which Indigenous Mt Druitt residents characterise themselves as practicing a culture alternative to that of White Australia, grounded in their identification as First Australians in difference.

6. Expressions of Aboriginality in Mt Druitt

*Perhaps you should get in touch with your roots.*¹³⁹

As discussed previously, the meaning of Aboriginality in Mt Druitt varies with the person and the situation. The “Aboriginal community” of Mt Druitt is heterogeneous and behaviours that establish community between individuals vary. The Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is made up of multiple sub-communities, many of which are interlinked through social and kinship relations, so that growing up in the same town, enjoying the same activities, and coming from related family networks connect Aboriginal individuals within these sub-communities.

This chapter will explore behaviours, ideology, and activities that are identified by anthropological literature as characteristic of Aboriginal culture and investigate the extent to which these characteristics occur within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. Although there are important debates regarding the complexities of Aboriginal culture and tradition, full exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, this chapter describes various Aboriginal practices within the Mt Druitt community to establish a context within which different approaches to Aboriginal-specific service delivery may be explored, as we shall do in later chapters.

While this thesis may at times appear to be offering traits definitive of Aboriginal people, it should not be read as such. Rather, the reader must understand that I am describing what *one* of my informants has told me about how he or she does or sees things. Although in certain cases these approaches or opinions may be shared by numerous people within and beyond their sub-community, I do not believe there to be anything that could be said to be shared by *all* Aboriginal people in Australia, or even the Mt Druitt community, other than the belief that Aboriginal Australians have been, and continue to be, oppressed and discriminated against.

¹³⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, this is what a non-Indigenous facilitator of a focus group said to a young Aboriginal woman from Mt Druitt when she stated that she did not see the relevance of being taught Dreaming stories or “Aboriginal” art.

One's way of speaking and acting signals to others "this is who I am and how I behave", providing a platform to establish commonality. Examples of this behavioural signalling are wearing the Aboriginal colours of black, yellow and red¹⁴⁰ or using terms such as "Aunty", "Uncle", "brother" and "sister" for people with whom there is no consanguineal or affinal relation. While some Aboriginal people will respond in kind, not all Aboriginal people desire to engage in certain types of identifying behaviour. An example of this was related to me by Lewis, who has a number of stereotypical Aboriginal physical features. While on a train a man who appeared to be Aboriginal walked up to Lewis and said "brother, can you spare some change"; using the term "brother¹⁴¹" to indicate that he and Lewis shared an affinity as they were both Aboriginal. Lewis told me that in his mind he was thinking "I'm not your brother", but gave the fellow some change; something he said he would have done regardless of the person's assertion of Aboriginality.

When I discuss behaviours of Mt Druitt residents that do adhere to reified notions of Aboriginality, such as invoking the term "brother", it does not mean that I am suggesting that they are definitive of Aboriginal people or shared by all. What a reader should take from such characterisations is that a group of people in Mt Druitt, for various reasons, conceptualise themselves as a special category of Australian, an Aboriginal Australian, and signal this identity to others in a variety of ways.

Aboriginality at Winanga-Li

One example of an expression of Aboriginality at Winanga-Li occurred during a meeting of the organisation's sewing group. Students were assigned to make a patchwork quilt and the material they used was to be of their choosing. When one student brought in fabric printed with dot patterns reminiscent of western desert Aboriginal art, her classmates and the organisation's staff showed great enthusiasm for her choice. Although the student had no connection to western desert Aboriginal peoples, this was not an issue and did not detract from her choice of fabric. Instead this student was seen to be supporting the creations and

¹⁴⁰ Several of my informants have commented to me that they are wary of people who wear solely Aboriginal colours, as they wonder what such people "are on about": suspecting that they are trying to assert Aboriginality despite having only tenuous links to Aboriginal family and community, thereby gaining access to the real and imagined benefits of Aboriginal identification.

¹⁴¹ A discussion of the term "brother" or "bro" can be found later in this chapter.

expression of another Aboriginal group with whom she was tied through her sense of Australian indigeneity¹⁴², indicating the presence of Pan-Aboriginality¹⁴³. By receiving praise and perhaps a little envy for this fabric choice, the student's Aboriginality was reinforced, facilitating pride in her sense of self.

It is not the objective of any of Winanga-Li's programs to teach people how to be Aboriginal; instead expressions of Aboriginality are spontaneous and flexible¹⁴⁴. This flexibility is essential due to the heterogeneity of beliefs and experiences within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. While Mt Druitt is the traditional land¹⁴⁵ of the Darug, few members of Winanga-Li's sub-community identify this tribal affiliation. In addition to past Aboriginal Affairs policies that forcibly removed people from their traditional land, the ill health of many Aboriginal Australians and the lack of adequate medical services in rural and remote areas led families to migrate to urban centres so that their loved ones could receive adequate medical attention, as was the case for Aunty Margaret, discussed in Chapter 4.

Therefore, few of the people who utilise Winanga-Li practice location-specific traits reified as authentically Aboriginal: for example, speaking traditional language (beyond a few practical or crude words)¹⁴⁶, holding sacred knowledge, or practicing ceremony. Yet there

¹⁴² Members of Winanga-Li's community exhibited solidarity with other international indigenous groups and individuals – a sense of shared plight in the face of colonialism. This was accomplished through participation in global indigenous conferences, artist workshops and exhibitions, and travel, among other things.

¹⁴³ George Morgan asserts that for many Aboriginal people, Pan Aboriginality has “a symbolic rather than a political appeal” as most “still want the primary operation of self-determination to be local” (2006c:26). There is suspicion of an “institutionalised national Aboriginality”, which has been evinced by the widespread Indigenous criticism of national Aboriginal bodies such as the NACC and ATSIC. I propose that an effective national Aboriginal body needs to be grounded in local communities that then participate in larger regional, state and national tiers so that a governance culture match can be achieved.

¹⁴⁴ Winanga-Li's Aboriginal community is generally eager to learn about different forms of Aboriginal expression. These emerge in narratives about people's background. However, certain older community members do not naively accept all such accounts as legitimate and will vet these assertions through their extended social and kinship networks beyond Mt Druitt.

¹⁴⁵ The term “traditional land” is used to denote the land associated with one's tribe and clan.

¹⁴⁶ The Darug language is no longer spoken with any fluency. However, two incorporated groups of Darug people, the Darug Custodians and the Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation, have each independently undertaken a language revival. The former group re-created a version of the Darug language based on historical records and oral tradition within members' families, while the latter group has done so with assistance from academics such as historians, linguists and anthropologists (Everett 2005:182). Within the broader Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, use of this re-created language receives mixed reception: some admire the tenacity of those involved in the Darug language revival, while others mock its use and dismiss it as “gobbledy-gook”.

are a number of people in Winanga-Li's community who can demonstrate practices that are, or have become, pan-Aboriginal: men who play the didgeridoo, those who hunt and cook bush meat, and children who participate in "traditional dance"¹⁴⁷. These practices have been modified from their pre-colonial locations, contexts and forms, such as bush meat being hunted with motorised vehicles and guns, yet this does not mean that they are not "traditional" Aboriginal practices (Macdonald 2001:191).

What is "tradition"?

The Western model of tradition assumes "an inherited body of customs and beliefs" that are handed down, unchanging, from one generation to the next (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273). Yet no culture is, or has ever been, unchanging (Handler and Linnekin 1984:274; Couldry 2000:95; Hollinsworth 1992:143). The ascription of primordality to tradition implies a "false dichotomy between tradition and modernity as fixed and mutually exclusive states" (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273). As the authenticity of any tradition is constructed only in the present, tradition cannot be conceptualised without an interlinking of the past and the present (Handler and Linnekin 1984:286; Linnekin 1991). Thus, practices labelled "traditional" have never existed in a fixed state, yet are still historically grounded.

Thus, in contrast to the Western model, tradition should be seen as a symbolic representation of the past, constructed in the present (Linnekin 1991; Macdonald 2001:186). It is a "symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively interprets them" (Handler and Linnikin 1984:287) in reference to present political claims to power (Tonkinson 1993:599; Macdonald 2001:187).

¹⁴⁷ Winanga-Li offers a program of children's "traditional dance". This began when the organisation was approached by Uncle Fred, a male elder who had long been engaged in children's activities within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, particularly as a foster parent. Uncle Fred had previously taught traditional dance to children and suggested he offer a program in partnership with Winanga-Li. In 2014 this program had been operating for three years and, to my knowledge, has been received positively by the broader Mt Druitt Aboriginal community (that is, no one has ridiculed it for being inauthentic).

Seen in this light, assertions of Australian Aboriginal tradition are able to exist outside of the pre-colonial context, or that of remote Australia¹⁴⁸, and to be adaptive to changing conditions within and beyond Aboriginal society. This enables urban Aboriginal people to enact a living culture that is not grounded solely in demoralising culture “loss” and victimhood (Adams 2005:223-227), but rather is characterised by resilience and agency.

Therefore, while playing the didgeridoo and performing traditional dance may have occurred in very different contexts and held different meanings during pre-colonial eras, they remain a performative enactment of Aboriginality. They reaffirm the persistence of Aboriginal people by demonstrating practices that diverge from those of White Australia, grounding collective belonging through enactment and enjoyment of particular forms of self-expression. The divergence of such activities from mainstream forms of self-expression then lends validity to Aboriginal people’s claims of special status and entitlements to certain benefits.

Tribal Identification

Another practice attributed to authentic Aboriginal personhood is that of tribal identification. While most Aboriginal participants in Winanga-Li’s activities were aware of their tribal¹⁴⁹ background, it was pointed out to me that this was a rather recent development. Lewis and Betty noted that prior to the 1970s “nobody talked about what tribe they were from” and that at that time many “didn’t even know”. Lewis only learned of his Ngunnawal tribal ancestry through archival research and when requested to identify, he more frequently invokes his Wiradjuri roots, as this was the land to which he felt a stronger connection, having spent his youth there. Tribal identification is frequently left unmentioned and I have only witnessed it being invoked on a handful of occasions. One such occasion was during the 2011 and 2013 Debutante’s Ball¹⁵⁰, hosted by Winanga-Li.

¹⁴⁸ There are Aboriginal Australians who ascribe to Western notions of tradition and who insist that urban Aboriginal people have “lost their culture”. This is most frequently voiced by Aboriginal people who reside in remote regions of Australia and who have managed to evade the most oppressive Aboriginal Affairs policies due to their relatively recent contact with White society and their distance from government hubs. See, for example, *Insight*, “Aboriginal or not?”, first aired August 7, 2012 by SBS, <http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/episode/overview/490/Aboriginal-or-not>.

¹⁴⁹ Members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community use of the term “tribe” interchangeably with the terms “nation” and “language group”.

¹⁵⁰ There is a history of debutante balls in Aboriginal Australia dating to the 1960s (Cole 2010:205).

When the Debutantes were being presented, a brief description of each young woman and her partner was read out, and this included the identification of their tribe. Another occasion on which I witnessed tribal identification was during an Aboriginal community meeting: an audience member stood up and stated “I am a proud Gamillaroï woman...” In both cases the invocation of one’s tribe lent legitimacy to the person’s presence and to the gravity of the latter woman’s claims. This tribal identification locates and grounds Indigenous Australians, authenticating their identity to each other. This form of identification has come to be expected of Indigenous people by both Indigenous others and White Australia; thus necessitating, or at least providing the impetus for, the re-discovery of tribal identity (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, August 24, 2013).

It is telling that identifying one’s tribe only recently became a common practice, emerging in tandem with the era in which support for Aboriginal rights, such as land rights, were popular. This era of Self-Determination policy was the first in which pride could openly be taken in one’s Aboriginal identity. Yet, at this time, it was not enough to merely assert Aboriginal descent; rather, it was expected that one would legitimate this connection by demonstrating knowledge of their tribe.

When asked, Lewis and Betty said that they believed discussion of one’s “tribe” became popular as justification for special entitlements to Aboriginal persons. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976* demands that those wishing to claim ownership of Crown land demonstrate a continued connection to a “body of traditions, observances, customs and beliefs of Aboriginal people”. When one specifies tribal background and the “country” for which that tribe “cared”, the person is asserting a continued connection to their “body of traditions... and beliefs”. This 1976 Act implies that “authentic” Aboriginal people know their tribal background and this is likely to have been internalised by Aboriginal people, with tribal identification being incorporated into practice.

However, not all Indigenous people know their tribe: When their Aboriginal father died, Tracy and her sister Emma accompanied their White mother to live with their maternal grandmother. Tracy and Emma’s grandmother greatly resented the fact that her daughter

had married an Aboriginal man¹⁵¹ and manipulated their mother, preventing the girls from having any contact with their Aboriginal family. Tracy and Emma do not hold this against their mother, for they realise that had she gone against their grandmother's wishes, they would likely have become homeless. However, they both expressed regret that, growing up, they had not had contact with their father's people. Currently Tracy and Emma are tracing their family tree, with the help of several Winanga-Li community members, to learn more about their father's side of the family. They then intend to take a trip to visit their Aboriginal relatives and to "learn more about who we are".

By far the most frequent expressions of Aboriginality in the Mt Druitt community are enacted in people's discussions of family and where their family is from, particularly in relation to missions, reserves and "fringe-dweller" areas located between old missions and their nearest city. As noted above, very few members of the Winanga-Li community are Darug, although most belong to the regional group – Koori¹⁵² – which they share with the Darug. While their immediate family may have resided in the Sydney area for decades¹⁵³, their extended families are often scattered throughout NSW. It is extremely common for people to travel to towns throughout NSW¹⁵⁴ to visit kin. Indeed this was the case for approximately eighty percent of roughly 150 people within Winanga-Li's sub-community for whom I have obtained such data.

¹⁵¹ Tracy's grandmother refused to let Tracy or Emma in the house and instead they had to live in a shed in the backyard. She recalls her grandmother yelling "I'm not going to let those mongrels inside till they've had a bath." Yet they couldn't have a bath because it was in the house. Instead they bathed out of buckets in the backyard.

¹⁵² The term Koori is regional and denotes one who is Aboriginal Australian and whose tribal land is located in NSW. Other regional Aboriginal groups are: Nunga – South Australia, Murri – Queensland, Koorie – Victoria, Nyoongar – Western Australia, and Yolngu – Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (Baxter and Gallasch 2000:2).

¹⁵³ Almost all people within Winanga-Li's sub-community have kin living in the Sydney area with whom they maintain relationships; within both the western Sydney region and the suburbs surrounding the inner city, such as Glebe, Waterloo, Camperdown, Marrickville, La Perouse, and Coogee. Very few have kin living in Redfern, previously a neighbourhood with a large Indigenous population, due to its recent gentrification. Yet many are still linked in some way to Redfern as it continues to function as a hub for Aboriginal-specific services. Visits to kin in inner-city areas tends to occur roughly a dozen times a year, as the commute via public transport takes over an hour. Telephone communications usually occur on a similar basis, while internet correspondence (email and especially Facebook) occurs on a much more frequent basis.

¹⁵⁴ Examples of towns frequently visited by members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community to see kin are: Moree, Dubbo, Brewarrina, Tamworth, Bathurst, Kempsey, and Burke (among others).

Connections to Land

The notion that Aboriginal people feel strong connections to their traditional land is highlighted in older anthropological literature¹⁵⁵, as well as discussed in contemporary contexts in reference to rural and remote locations¹⁵⁶. Yet this connection to one's traditional land is often absent in Mt Druitt, where members of the Aboriginal community have far fewer connections to these locations, in part due to policies that removed Aboriginal people from their land (Macdonald 2001:176; Morgan 2006a:xxii; Morgan 2006c:19), and in part due to the dispersal of kin from these areas for employment and health reasons (Morgan 2006c:21; Yamanouchi 2007:127-132).

While few members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community have a connection to their traditional land, older generations frequently maintain a fondness for the rural areas in which they grew up, wishing to return to that place to live at a later date. Many older Mt Druitt residents were born on or around Aboriginal missions and reserves, as will be demonstrated below in the accounts of the Brewarrina mob and Betty's parents.

The Brewarrina Mob

A dozen or so Aboriginal persons, aged over 60, who grew up on the mission 14 kilometres outside of the rural town Brewarrina belong to Winanga-Li's sub-community. Brewarrina was not their traditional land, but rather was where their tribes were forced to relocate in the early 20th century. When not living a transient life during their late teens to early 30s, these older Mt Druitt residents settled either in Brewarrina or on its Mission, which was only closed in 1965. Members of this Brewarrina mob gradually relocated to Sydney in a process of chain migration. One member moved to Sydney for work, another to access its superior healthcare, and brothers, sisters, cousins, and their nuclear families followed to experience city life, be with family and earn money.

Some of their family members still reside in Brewarrina and they visit back and forth fairly regularly, usually for funerals. Uncle Dan tells me that travelling to Brewarrina is not an

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Reay 1949:106; and Inglis 1961:201.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Moisseff 1999:39-42; Macdonald 2001:189, 193; Altman and Whitehead 2003:3; Wohling 2009:6; and Berry et al. 2010.

easy trip to make, as going via public transport entails taking a train and two buses; travelling for over 24 hours. Thus, he does not return unless he can catch a lift with someone else travelling to the town; a drive that takes nearly 16 hours. Yet someone from the Brewarrina mob makes the trip almost annually and news of, and greetings from, the town's residents are always communicated. Telephone calls are made back and forth every few months and, despite their age, they gradually became avid Facebook users. These residents are tied through their common location of origin in addition to kinship, as intermarriage (or de facto partnership) among three extended families links them all.

While the Brewarrina mob is invested in maintaining a connection to their land of origin, they do not do so for their "traditional" land, as this connection was broken generations earlier.

Betty's Parents

Some members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community spent their childhoods moving around a great deal, although usually within the state of NSW. Betty's father, John, worked constructing dams throughout the state, which caused her family to relocate every few years. However, they frequently were able to reside on their traditional Gamillaroi land – the land along the Barwon, Bundarra, Balonne, and upper Hunter rivers and the Liverpool plains of north-western NSW (Fison and Howitt 1991:27). While John grew up on the Caroon Mission, his wife, Betty's mother Belinda, had grown up 30 kilometres away in Qurindi, a fringe town located halfway between the Mission and Tamworth; although they did not meet until decades later when both were independently visiting Redfern.

John served in the Army during World War II and had spent most of the War in a Japanese prison camp. Having been in Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped, John suffered from lung problems from his early 30s on¹⁵⁷. His ailing health brought him and Belinda to Sydney in 1972 to facilitate his access to advanced health services.

¹⁵⁷ John was repeatedly denied a POW pension and other benefits that were received by other Australian servicemen. Betty unhesitatingly attributes this to racism and the fact that he was Aboriginal.

When Belinda and John applied to Aboriginal Housing for a residence in Sydney they, like Margaret's parents, were given the choice of either La Perouse or the Mt Druitt area. Due to established ties with the La Perouse Aboriginal community, Betty was surprised that John elected to settle in western Sydney; but when she challenged him on this decision he responded that Mt Druitt was nearer to the mountains, the Nepean River and was "closer to home" – Gamillaroi land. Having lived much of their lives on their traditional land, even while travelling to work on the dams, John and Belinda felt a strong connection and respect for their land, which they instilled in Betty. While it was only during Betty's youth that she occasionally lived on her traditional lands, she carries with her a reverence for Australia's natural landscapes, sacred Aboriginal sites and the spirits which guard the land. This is evinced when she describes the value of travelling to visit Lewis's family in Fingal Head.

Ella, Lewis's niece, resides in Fingal Head on land owned by the local Aboriginal Land Council, to which her Aboriginal husband belongs. As the area is held in a collective trust, little development has occurred, and numerous historic Aboriginal sites surround Ella's house and neighbours are primarily of Aboriginal descent. Although not her traditional land, Betty still feels a sense of connection to "Fingal" (the ocean, mangroves and sand dunes) and dreamily recalls her appreciation for its Aboriginal places ("the swimming hole" and the "old birthing site"), its serenity and the spirits she believes to live on there. Lewis has a less spiritual connection to land. He says he values his visits to Fingal for the largely untouched landscape and solitude. His appreciation of Fingal Head is similar to the value he places on Dubbo, his land of origin.

Lewis's Parents

Lewis spent his early childhood in Dubbo, where his father worked at the local abattoir. Although his father grew up in Euabalong (southwest of Dubbo), which is Wiradjuri country, Lewis's paternal family originated from the Yass area (near Canberra, ACT), which is the traditional land of the Ngunnawal. Lewis's mother was born in Uralla (inland north-eastern NSW), the land of the Gamillaroi. When asked which tribe he most identified with, Lewis stated that "I grew up in Dubbo so I... have a stronger affiliation with Dubbo". Although in this interview Lewis elected to identify with the place-name Dubbo, in

situations where tribal affiliation is demanded Lewis identifies himself as Wiradjuri, despite not being a Wiradjuri descendent.

When Lewis was ten years old his family relocated to Sydney's Inner West, as his father "liked the idea of living in Sydney". Lewis was very unhappy after the move, and even today frequently states that he's a "country boy". While he did move back to Dubbo as a young man, Lewis eventually settled permanently in western Sydney when he met Betty and they started a family. This was in large part because Betty wished to be near her parents in the Mt Druitt area.

Lewis travels back to Dubbo at least once a year, both to visit family members and to get back to the country. However he resists attributing his yearning for the countryside of Dubbo to any innate Aboriginal connection to the land; he will only resolutely state that he prefers the weather and the solitude of the area to that of Sydney.

Younger generations that grew up in urban areas similarly hold a fondness for areas in which they have spent time visiting family. However, intimacy with a location entailed within the reified concept of "connections to land" appears to be lacking for many. While they may have learned traditional knowledge of sacred sites while visiting with family, such as Betty's knowledge of the Aboriginal birthing site and swimming hole at Fingal Head, they have little or no intimacy with their tribal land and certainly would not know how to "care" for their "country"¹⁵⁸.

The preponderance of Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents asserting a connection to land, even when not their traditional land, may be linked to the ideology of the 1970s Aboriginal rights era, as was suggested by Lewis and Betty in reference to the increased occurrence of Aboriginal people learning about and identifying their tribal origins. As noted previously, the rhetoric of Aboriginal rights ties special entitlements to those who can demonstrate a continued connection to a "body of traditions... as applied to particular persons, sites, areas

¹⁵⁸ "Caring for country" is a term commonly used to refer to Australian Aboriginal practices of land management, particularly natural and cultural resources. This includes, among other things, controlled burning of the landscape, monitoring weeds and feral pests and surveying for illegal fishing vessels (Morrison 2007:253-4).

of land, things or relationships” (Everett 2005:9). This 1976 legislation reflected a simplistic and essentialist notion of Aboriginal culture, and gave Indigenous people a static formula of practices that had to be demonstrated to prove their Aboriginality. Thus, while many urban Aboriginal Australians have lost a connection to their traditional land, perhaps they have attempted to make up for this by promoting a sacred connection to other sites that hold significance to them, such as Betty’s reverence for the Aboriginal swimming hole and birthing site at Fingal Head.

This sense of landedness may be an unconscious enactment of what Aboriginal people know to be expected of them, resulting from the internalisation of criteria for Aboriginality that was established by White Australia. Over the last fifty years Indigenous Australians have been subjected to White Australia’s definition of who and what they are (Peters-Little 2001:187). This in turn has affected their *habitus*¹⁵⁹, in that legislation, such as the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*, has altered the structural conditions of Indigenous existence. As they have internalised, and thereby reproduced, their subject-position within Australian society, Indigenous Australians may have unconsciously projected the continued importance of landedness, despite changes to cultural ties to land.

Pierre Bourdieu (1996:38) states that “... the most obscure principle of action... lies neither in structures nor in consciousness, but rather in the relation of immediate proximity between objective structures and embodied structures-in habitus” (Lizardo 2004:381). Bourdieu’s “structures-in habitus” are the structures internalised by actors, to which they are acculturated and accept as “normal”. Here, Bourdieu is asserting that the greater the influence of objective structures, such as government legislation, on the environment to which an individual is acculturated, the more these objective structures will affect the practices perceived by the actor as normal.

¹⁵⁹ I use the term *habitus* in the sense in which it is discussed by Pierre Bourdieu in his 1990 work, *The Logic of Practice*. Here he states that *habitus* consists of “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (1990:53).

An example of this acculturation process is revealed in Alkirra's recollection of visiting her tribal Bundjalung land, near Lismore, as a child:

We'd go back for meetings... and live on the land for like a week or the two weeks that we're there visiting, or while the elders are meeting, and discussing what they're doing with certain issues that have come up... We'd go and, you know, play or learn. We'd have other Uncles and Aunties that may not have necessarily been involved in the meetings but... were there to look after the kids and show them around... So a lot of us- it was important that we knew where all of the sites were, so we'd like, a lot of the boys would, they'd go for a walk with the boys and they weren't allowed to go down to where the girls sites were... And vice versa. Yeah, so there were a lot of those times.

Such experiences instilled in Alkirra a view that Aboriginal people visited their tribal land, where children would be instructed by their elders on sacred sites and the adults would conduct "business". But this type of experience is not typical for many of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal youths, nor is it possible.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which pressure from White society played a role in those Aboriginal practices highlighted and passed down to younger generations; however, it is certain that this handing down of "traditional" practice did not occur within a vacuum. Although Alkirra grew up in the Sydney area, and was thus in greater proximity to White society's "objective structures", this was not the case for her kin who lived on rural Bundjalung land. While they were no doubt exposed to these objective structures, it is likely to have been to a lesser degree.

There is also the factor of the experiences of parents and the role they play in fostering certain perceptions of Aboriginal practice. Shirley, speaking of her Aboriginality, states that she's "proud of where I'm from and who I'm from. To me it- it's our culture, it's our- it's my mum and dad's, the- you know, it's just something that they've always made us to be proud of." Parents and other carers who play a significant role in a child's development instil certain values through the recollection of experiences, telling a child about "who" and "where" they're from, and by fostering opportunities for the child to have similar positive experiences that they did as a child, as was the case for Alkirra. Although some urban Aboriginal people may not have had direct experience of Aboriginal cultural practices,

particularly because of child-removal policies, there are others who have. While those raised on missions were prohibited from practicing ceremony, speaking their language and living on their land, stories related to land, the involvement of elders in guiding behaviour, and the importance of kin were still recollected and passed on.

I therefore believe that values, such as connection to land, are grounded in Aboriginal cultural practices that have been modified to accommodate the dynamic circumstances in which urban Aboriginal Australians live, and are not merely a facet of strategic essentialism, although this may also play a role. This harkens back to the assertion made by Jocelyn Linnekin: that all traditions, such as connection to land, “are invented, in that they are symbolically constructed in the present and reflect contemporary concerns and purposes rather than passively inherited legacy” (1991:446). Grounded in interpretations of past Aboriginal practices, traditions of landedness have been adapted to accommodate the present circumstance of urban Indigenous Australians.

Such accounts of travelling to visit family and friends as those above pertain to most Winanga-Li community members. The primary motivation for such trips is to reconnect with family members and others in their social networks, rather than to visit their traditional land. While some do feel a connection to the land of their destinations, this was not the case for all, and for very few was it their tribal land. Further examples of journeys made by Aboriginal residents out of Mt Druitt are given below in the section entitled “Living Arrangements”. I will now elaborate on the importance many Aboriginal people place on one’s location of origin.

Relatedness in Aboriginal Identification

Many academics working with Aboriginal populations note that one of the first questions asked of a person newly introduced to an Aboriginal community is “where are you from?”¹⁶⁰ The speakers will then try to establish a common link with certain people or places in the area named. This practice occurs frequently within the Mt Druitt community and is used to establish relatedness, form a social relationship, and/or to vet someone’s

¹⁶⁰ For example, see Weiss 2002:232; Bennett and Zubrzycki 2003:67; Honeyman et al. 2004:492; Fisher 2009:293; Gibson 2010:144-5; Macdonad 2011:62; and Keddie 2013:30.

claim to Aboriginality. Having a mixed American-Australian accent I am asked by all types of people where I am from, not solely by Aboriginal Australians; but within the Aboriginal community the question can be a weighty one. The question “where are you from” within Aboriginal settings is akin to asking any neophyte “what are you doing here” and the question will almost always be the first asked of a newcomer.

While chatting with Lewis in Winanga-Li’s offices, Candice – an Aboriginal worker from DoCS¹⁶¹ – poked her head in the room. She asked Lewis if he had ever heard of someone called John Andrews. Lewis replied “I don’t think so” and Candice went on to state that she had recently met this fellow at an Aboriginal sporting event and that he had told her he was from Dubbo, Lewis’ hometown. With this locational information, Lewis asked “what did you say his last name was again” and Candice repeated it. Lewis smiled and said, “oh, yeah. I know that name; there are a lot of that mob in Dubbo.” He continued by saying that while he didn’t know John, he knew a number of people with that surname who might be related to him. Candice went on to say that she had gotten a funny feeling about him – that he was “a bit strange” – and Lewis replied that some of his family members had gotten themselves “into trouble” and he wouldn’t be surprised if John was a “bit off”.

In this case Candice had met someone and wanted to get a better sense of who this person was by asking trusted others from his location of origin. Based on the assumption that within certain locations (such as Dubbo) many Aboriginal people know one another – or at least a member of the extended family – a person may query another from that location about the nature of a particular individual.

Similar results for both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people can emerge from the question “what do you do”? Within Western society there is a conflation of work, social placement and identity (Gibson 2010:145) to the effect that answering the question “what do you do” enables one to attach a bundle of values and attributes to the respondent. Gaynor Macdonald (2004:15) asserts that an important difference within Aboriginal

¹⁶¹ Candice had previously worked for another Mt Druitt-based Aboriginal community organization and, through that, with Winanga-Li. While she had recently taken a job with DoCS – with whom Winanga-Li was having a problematic relationship – Candice, Betty and Lewis attempted to maintain their friendship by avoiding discussions of DoCS practices while together.

worldviews and practices is that a relational ontology is frequently found, which “sees people [as being] defined through relationships rather than [work] roles” (Gibson 2010:145; see also Keddie 2013:31).

A prime example of the heightened value Aboriginal Australians place on relationships is embodied in the notion of “caring and sharing”, commonly ascribed to Aboriginal communities. Caring and sharing, a form of demand-sharing, is attributed to the Aboriginal domestic moral economy¹⁶² (Macdonald 1998:88-90; Peterson and Taylor 2003:108). Below I will discuss the prevalence of Aboriginal sharing practices within anthropological literature and within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

Caring for Family

“Caring and sharing” is a practice commonly attributed to Aboriginal people, both by themselves and non-Aboriginal academics. Nicolas Peterson and John Taylor, citing an Indigenous man, Kevin Gilbert (1978:304-5), assert that “caring and sharing... [are] the first two rules of Aboriginality” (Peterson and Taylor 2003:108). Gaynor Macdonald explains that, for the Wiradjuri of NSW, “sharing” is a distinct feature of their community and differentiates them from non-Aboriginal persons who “do not share” (1998:88). These and other sources¹⁶³ argue that the practice of sharing resources amongst one’s kin network, most frequently upon demand, provides a means by which needs are met during times of scarcity. Yet Macdonald and Peterson and Taylor argue that “caring and sharing” signifies more than just a survival strategy in times of economic hardship; it symbolises the centrality of kinship in Aboriginal social organisation and the establishment of the Indigenous self: it is *the* means by which such relations are produced through performative social action (Peterson and Taylor 2003:108).

¹⁶² Peterson and Taylor define their use of “moral economy” as a system that governs the “allocation of resources” by privileging “the reproduction of social relationships at the cost of profit maximisation and obvious immediate personal benefit” (2003:106).

¹⁶³ See, for example, Reay 1949:114-115; Barwick 1964:21; Lickiss 1971:207; Rowley 1971:313; Gale 1972:45-46, 120; Daly and Smith 2003:14-15; Sercombe 2005:11; and Lahn 2012:299.

While these authors assert the central importance of caring and sharing in Aboriginal culture, my experience¹⁶⁴ in Mt Druitt was not wholly in agreement with the documented almost unconditional obligation of aid to relatives within the extended family, differentiated only by kin relatedness (Macdonald 1998:92). Rather, what was explained to me by Mt Druitt residents was that individuals make choices based on experience and emotional closeness to kin¹⁶⁵ that lead them to maintain a level of reciprocity and care with some relatives, but not with others.

In her 1998 work on “caring and sharing” among the Wiradjuri of NSW and Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Gaynor Macdonald asserts that her informants did not share indiscriminately (1998:92). She notes that individuals who allowed themselves to continuously be taken advantage of by “bludgers”¹⁶⁶ were often thought of as “stupid”, “gullible”, and “irresponsible” (Macdonald 1998:94); yet the definitions of what was acceptable versus that which was abusive were not clearly explored.

In my discussions of familial obligations with members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, I inquired as to whether or not it was expected that demands from relatives be met, and if not, were there consequences? It was explained to me that, while situated within an extended family, relationships of intimacy emerged only between certain members and that this had little to do with genealogical closeness. Unless relationships were seen to be equal and reciprocal and maintained in an equal and reciprocal manner, there would usually be a breakdown in that relationship, removing the embedded sense of obligation.

An example of this is revealed in the relationship Lewis has with his son¹⁶⁷ Jeffrey (both of whom are Wiradjuri). Jeff was a rebellious youth and in his mid- to late-teens took up with

¹⁶⁴ My observations of the way in which “demand sharing” operates in Mt Druitt are similar to those documented by Gillian Cowlshaw (2009:156-57).

¹⁶⁵ In Marika Moisseeff’s 1999 work, she states that individuals do not have equal obligations to all kin, but that the level of obligations is determined by feelings of “closeness” (42). She does not elaborate further, but this statement seems to generally coincide with what I learned about familial obligations within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. However, later in this publication Moisseeff alludes to particular demands (use of car and telephone, money for groceries), which appear to occur much more frequently, with feelings of obligation entailed, in the community of Davenport, South Australia, than was my experience in Mt Druitt (50, 53, 54).

¹⁶⁶ A “bludger” is one who consistently makes demands but rarely contributes or shares in return.

¹⁶⁷ Jeffrey is not Lewis’ biological son, but rather the son of his ex-wife. When her relationship with Lewis ended, she more or less abandoned Jeffrey and Lewis took on the parental role.

a bad crowd, getting involved with drinking, petty theft and then hard drugs. While Jeffrey was living this destructive lifestyle, Lewis felt that he was justified in rebuffing Jeff's sporadic requests for financial assistance, and contact between the two became a rare occurrence. Yet within six years and after a stint in gaol, Jeff made a commitment to get his act together, get off drugs, and to get "skilled-up"¹⁶⁸ for employment. Once Jeff demonstrated his commitment to turning his life around, Lewis once again resumed a close and sharing relationship with his son. They now speak frequently, visit each other when one of them can take time off from work, and each would support the other financially if needed. However, now that Jeff has his life back on track, his requests for assistance are much more limited, as the relationship has once again fallen into a reciprocal balance.

Another example of familial obligation that conflicts with norms described in Aboriginal literature relates to the obligation to attend funerals. An uncle Lewis was not particularly close to or fond of passed away. Due to their poor relationship, Lewis felt no need or desire to attend the funeral in Dubbo and did not plan on doing so. When I asked Lewis if he was concerned that people might talk badly about him should he not attend the funeral, he said that this was always a possibility, but that it didn't concern him as the people who would think poorly of him clearly didn't know him well or they would have been aware of his strained relationship with his uncle. However Lewis was close to his cousin, the son of the deceased uncle, and he realised that his cousin was not coping well with the death of his father. Days before the funeral, the cousin telephoned Lewis and asked him to come and see him and lend his support. As Lewis had a strongly-established reciprocal relationship with his cousin, he decided to attend the funeral.

While Lewis does feel an obligation to assist some members of his extended family, there are limits to what he is willing to do: one night a nephew of Lewis's appeared on his doorstep at 3 a.m. The nephew, Joe, proceeded to tell Lewis that he had just killed a man and that he needed Lewis's help to get out of town. Lewis listened to his nephew's story: Joe had been drinking at a local bar, gotten drunk and into a fight and proceeded to punch his opponent in the head until he lay on the ground motionless. Lewis responded by telling

¹⁶⁸ This term, frequently used within Koori communities, means to obtain the skills necessary to accomplish a specific task.

Joe that he needed to go to the police and explain what had happened, for if Joe ran, the situation would snowball and he would wind up in even greater trouble. Although Joe did not take Lewis's advice and go to the police, he understood his uncle's position: Lewis had a wife, two young children and a job; things that would be jeopardised if he aided and abetted a criminal. No animosity arose due to Lewis's refusal to help his nephew in this situation. As it turned out, Joe had merely knocked his opponent out and both ended up bruised and hung over, but no long-term harm or trouble resulted.

The one apparent exception to the rule of relationships founded on reciprocal respect and obligation appears to occur between adults and children under the age of approximately 14. In line with Macdonald's assertion that among the Wiradjuri, children should never be refused a demand (1998:92), I have found a propensity in Mt Druitt for adults to regularly fulfil the duties of care and provision of essential resources to children – regardless of whether the child is respectful or “cheeky” – particularly if the child is related to the adult. Since Macdonald does not elaborate on the extent to which the demands of a child should be met, or if only demands for essential goods are to be delivered, I cannot say that there is an identical parallel to her experience among the Wiradjuri and mine in Mt Druitt.

Within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community there is sharing of essential resources with families with young children, even if those involved are not related, although it is heightened when there is a kin connection. When the parent(s) of the child are known to be “on the grog”¹⁶⁹ or drug-users, food will be given to the family and sometimes money will be given directly to the child, though money is rarely – if ever – given to the child's parent(s). Andrew, Lewis's 12 year old grandchild by his son Jeff, lived with his drug-addicted mother. While Lewis would never give money to Andrew's mother (although she occasionally asked), he regularly encouraged Andrew to come to his house for meals and to Winanga-Li to hang out; with Andrew frequently taking Lewis up on his offers. Often Lewis also assisted Andrew by providing him with transportation and occasionally by giving him money. Andrew was “a good kid” and even though he sometimes misbehaved, Lewis was willing to attribute this behaviour to the child's dysfunctional mother and her problems.

¹⁶⁹ “Grog” is Australian slang for alcohol; thus “on the grog” means that one is on an alcohol binge.

An additional example comes from a not-uncommon practice at Winanga-Li: members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community occasionally approach the organisation for basic food stuffs when they have nothing else to feed their family and their pay day is too far away. Although the organisation receives no funding for food-assistance¹⁷⁰, staff will provide modest groceries (such as bread, tea/coffee, milk and sugar) every time such a request is made, frequently making special trips to the shops and using the organisation's limited reserve-funding to pay for the goods.

Although the trend of “caring and sharing” among the urban Aboriginal people I worked with did not appear as unrestricted as has been portrayed in literature, and refusals of requests more common¹⁷¹, there was a propensity for self-sacrifice on the behalf of family members, particularly in aid of those with ailing health. Many incidents of self-sacrifice were to the detriment of carers' health, financial stability, employment, and personal time. In cases of illness within the family, certain family members (though not all) sacrificed no end to comfort and care for their disabled relative.

One example of this was when Aunty Margaret¹⁷² had both of her legs amputated at the knee, due to complications from diabetes, while at the same time being diagnosed with ovarian cancer and undergoing chemotherapy treatment. After an initial two-month stretch in hospital, doctors would not permit Margaret to return to her apartment, where she lived alone, and it was necessary for her to either find a family member to reside with or enter a group home. Despite having four able-bodied adult sisters living in Mt Druitt, none was willing to take her in. Her consanguineal niece, Susan, however, could not stand the idea of her aunt being “put in a home” and invited Margaret to live with her, her husband and their three young daughters. Susan's residence had to be renovated so that it be made wheelchair

¹⁷⁰ The organisation has applied numerous times for food-assistance funding but has been consistently denied due to arguments that other services in the area provided this and it would be a duplication of services. This ignored the fact that other services were not as accessible as Winanga-Li for certain members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

¹⁷¹ I found it more common for people to state or hint that they needed something in the hope that someone would offer them the goods or service. This was most common in relation to transportation. I believe this was the preferred approach because it didn't entail a direct request and therefore would not potentially elicit a direct refusal.

¹⁷² Aunty Margaret passed away approximately 18 months after her amputations, at age 61, from complications due to a massive heart attack. Her funeral was attended by over 400 people and attendees came from as far as Tasmania.

accessible, and Susan was forced to resign from her employment to care for Margaret¹⁷³; but Susan felt she had no choice, as no one else was willing to take Margaret in.

While Margaret had maintained a close relationship with her sisters throughout her life and had even helped to raise them, when she was desperately in need of care, they did not deliver. According to second-hand information, Margaret's sisters only rarely visited her during her frequent stretches in hospital in the three months leading up to her amputations. Several Aboriginal informants commented to me that her sisters "should be ashamed" that they were not providing care for Margaret and that "poor Susan has to take it on when she has her own young family."

Therefore, while "caring and sharing" is something touted as being specifically Aboriginal, I found occurrences of this type of behaviour to be only slightly greater among the Aboriginal people of Mt Druitt than in wider Australian society. I base this impression upon accounts shared with me by non-Indigenous Australians, who made parallel statements about how trying it was when an elderly or ill family member needed to transition into a care facility. While these non-Indigenous Australians sacrificed time to ensure their loved one was placed in a reputable facility, very rarely did they take the relative into their own home. In contrast, within Winanga-Li's sub-community certain individuals had gone to great lengths to avoid family members being put in group homes. As in Margaret's case, not all members of an Aboriginal family were willing to undertake such self-sacrifice, but there was frequently one individual¹⁷⁴, such as Susan and her nuclear family, who was willing to do so.

Literature on Aboriginal caring and sharing often makes note of kin demands for housing and board. This coincides with assertions that overcrowding is a feature of many Indigenous Australian households. I will now examine the propensity for overcrowding in

¹⁷³ While Margaret was provided with a skilled "at-home" care nurse for a limited number of hours each week, and was visited by the community nurse once a week, she initially needed 24-hour a day care as she adjusted to her wheelchair dependence.

¹⁷⁴ Other examples of family members who provided daily care for ill or aging relatives in the Aboriginal community are: Betty, who cared for her wheel-chair bound mother for five years until she passed away; Lewis's mother, Virginia, who cared for her heavily disabled great-grand daughter, who suffered from a rare degenerative disease until her death in 2013; and Dorothy, who, with assistance from other kin, cared for her husband Bill, who suffered from a rare neurodegenerative disorder, until he passed away in 2013.

Mt Druitt Aboriginal households and link this to the creation and maintenance of kinship relations.

Living Arrangements

While overcrowded housing is a common topic in depictions of Aboriginal living arrangements¹⁷⁵, this was not an issue that I found prevalent in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. The majority of households were composed of nuclear families; very rarely did an extended family live in one residence. A causal factor for this is that government housing is strict in its enforcement of maximum occupancy, charging additional rent should the allotted number be surpassed. A contributing factor may also be the greater availability of public housing in the western Sydney area. While there are long waiting lists for State housing, people are knowledgeable about the application process and do not hesitate to put their name on the list.

There is a preference amongst many extended families to reside within proximity to kin. This is not true of all members of an extended family, but many families that originate from outside of the Sydney area end up with members living within approximately ten kilometres of each other. The degree to which one spends time with another family member depends upon the emotional closeness of the relationship, as well as other obligations such as work and the needs of their immediate family, rather than locational and genealogical distance. Of course, locational proximity can facilitate greater emotional closeness. The extent to which one will go to relocate their residence to be nearer to kin depends upon emotional closeness, as well as the reliability of the family member to deliver certain resources, such as childcare, emotional support and transportation.

Although households tend to be composed of nuclear families, they do experience overcrowding in certain circumstance. Extended family members residing outside of the Sydney area will occasionally travel to Mt Druitt to spend time with relatives¹⁷⁶. This type

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, Reay 1949:184; Beasley 1970:185; Lickiss 1971:206, 212; Gale 1972:11, 131, 173; Gale and Wundersitz 1982:62-63; Smith 1991:9; Moisseeff 1999:64; Daly and Smith 2003:3; Morgan 2006a:xii, 48-49; and Yamanuchi 2007:42.

¹⁷⁶ Additionally, a family member may become temporarily homeless or will be attending an educational/training course outside of their local area and will be housed by kin. This does not occur

of demand sharing occurs in line with the discussion above; that is, not every member of the extended family will be allowed to stay for a length of time, but rather those with whom a reciprocal relationship has been established. An example of this tendency follows.

Lewis and Betty live with their two daughters in a three bedroom house. Once a year this family will travel up to Fingal Head, occasionally bringing friends, and reside with Lewis's niece, Ella, for periods of two to three weeks. In turn, Ella and her family annually travel to western Sydney and stay with Lewis and Betty for a similar period of time. There is rarely a set date for departure – when family visits, one is never sure if they will stay for days, weeks, or even months.

Ella is married and has four children (all of whom are under the age of 12), and when she comes to visit, so too does her nuclear family. Hence, when Ella visits western Sydney, Betty's three bedroom household is inhabited by 10 people for several weeks. Similarly, when Betty's family visits Fingal Head, Ella's three bedroom house becomes overcrowded¹⁷⁷. This overcrowding creates difficulties and everyone grumbles a bit about the mess and lack of peace and quiet; but the disruption such visits cause is far outweighed by being with family and maintaining relationships that enable them to continue to travel beyond their place of residence.

During such trips no monetary contribution is ever requested, although visitors will often offer money, their labour, or the purchase of groceries or household goods. While there is an understanding that some visitors have little money, it is expected that some contribution will nevertheless be made. When no such contribution is offered, this is remembered for years and sourly discussed with other visitors. Yet this does not exclude the possibility of a return trip for the ungrateful party. They will often be permitted other opportunities to visit; however, if they continue to fail to contribute to the household during their stay, they will no longer be welcome. Rather than telling such people that they are not welcome because of their lack of household contributions, requests to visit will be deflected with excuses,

indiscriminately and the conditions under which a person will be allowed to reside in another's home mirror those described when travelling and residing with family, as discussed below.

¹⁷⁷ I accompanied the family on one trip to Fingal Heads and during the two week stay, four other families also visited overnight (although not at the same time). One night Ella's three bedroom house accommodated 22 people, with some camping in the backyard.

such as it not being a good time because children are back in school or a family members is about to start a new job.

When such trips are made to visit family and friends, it is extremely rare for visitors to stay in a hotel. Most all members of the Mt Druitt community with whom I have talked have reported similar accounts of visiting family and sharing their house while there. Therefore, while overcrowding does occur in many households for brief periods throughout the year, it does not appear to be an omnipresent feature of any household.

“Aunties”, “Uncles” and Elders

Another feature commonly attributed to Aboriginal persons, this one borne out in my experience, is the use of the term “Aunt” and “Uncle” to address respected elders in the community, regardless of cognatic relationship. The term “elder” is pan-Aboriginal and appears to have been adopted from Native American contexts, although literature on historic governance practices of Aboriginal Australians suggests that their political structures were gerontocracies (Everett 2005:73). While the elders of the Mt Druitt community are looked to for guidance and support by both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal institutions involved with the community, their power is not absolute. Their opinions are frequently solicited, but their advice is not always acted upon. However within the Winanga-Li community, those identified as elders do serve as a guiding force for the organisation.

There are five respected elders who sit on Winanga-Li’s Management Committee¹⁷⁸, all of whom are addressed by “Aunt(y)” or “Uncle” and their first name. For example, committee member Aunty May is in her 70s, has lived in the Mt Druitt area for 50 years and has always been a “community person”. She volunteers regularly on a number of projects within and outside of Winanga-Li, such as the St Marys Prisoner Support Unit (visiting incarcerated Aboriginal persons with whom she has had no prior relationship) and Mt

¹⁷⁸ Winanga-Li’s Management Committee is elected from members of the organisation. As employees, Betty and Lewis do not have voting rights at Management Committee meetings, although they do attend. The position of Director is elected and has almost always been held by a community elder. All decisions regarding the organisation and its governance are decided by Management Committee vote. Should conflict arise within the organisation, the dispute will be brought before the Management Committee, who will mediate a resolution. The role of the Management Committee is defined by Winanga-Li’s unique Rule Book.

Druitt's Koori Asthma Club. Aunty May also participates in mentoring projects for Aboriginal youth, as well as frequently participating in many of the programs offered by Winanga-Li, such as the cooking class.

People are considered elders by the Winanga-Li community not only because of their age¹⁷⁹, which is generally over 50, but because they, like Aunty May, have a long and consistent history of volunteer work in the community. The term denotes an earned respect¹⁸⁰ and while age does appear to play a role, the defining characteristic is selfless work for the betterment of others.

Betty recalls elders being identified to her as a young woman when visiting her parent's house in Mt Druitt:

I'd come home and there'd be, you know, Aunty May, she'd be there. And dad's cousin um, she'd be there, another Aunty you know, and they'd be talkin' business... Talkin- and... they used to... talk about setting up this, or doing this, or- you know... when I come home and visit and... they'd be there, you know. And mum'd say 'this is Aunty so and so and, mm, pay your respects and sit there and listen.'

This is similar to other accounts, related to me by my informants, of how young Indigenous people are taught about their elders: who they are, what they do, how to treat them and learn from them.

While some people emerge as elders in the context of Aboriginal organisations, others come to be known for their work within Indigenous community networks, such as those mentioned in Betty's recollection. Aunty Lena, who conducts much volunteer work with Winanga-Li, came to be known as an elder in the community prior to engaging with the organisation. She earned this title through her extensive work within family and social networks. One example of Lena's contributions occurred when a well-known community member, Shirley, suffered a massive heart attack. Nine members of Shirley's extended family gathered at the hospital to await news of her condition and had been there for seven

¹⁷⁹ Aboriginal Australians have widely asserted that age does not automatically earn one the title of "elder", but they must also have "knowledge, experience, respect and authority" (Cranney and Edwards 1998:15).

¹⁸⁰ For example, see Keddie 2013:30.

hours. Without being asked to do so, Aunty Lena cooked up a large pot of curry and rice and took it down to the hospital for the worried family members. It is this type of selfless act which, when undertaken consistently over the years, leads to a person becoming known as an Aboriginal elder.

Some elders are associated with a particular Aboriginal organisation, like Aunty Rose, who is a member of Winanga-Li's Management Committee. Aunty Rose, when not travelling to visit widely-dispersed kin, has always been heavily engaged in volunteering at the organisation. She elaborated to me her dedication to Winanga-Li by stating that "not all Aboriginal organisations are good. There's some I wouldn't even spit on." Aunty Rose's loyalty to Winanga-Li is grounded in her unpleasant experiences when trying to access services at other Aboriginal organisations. Similar views were related to me by other members of the Winanga-Li community and this theme will be discussed in Chapter 9.

While the key feature of an elder lies in their selfless acts, one can also earn the title by imparting wisdom gained from life experience. Uncle Ted is an Aboriginal artist who is Betty's second cousin. While Uncle Ted only occasionally volunteers with Winanga-Li, he has a long history of volunteer work with groups interested in arts, particularly youth, prisoners and elderly people. In his art workshops Uncle Ted will discuss his own work and the work of other Aboriginal artists; although he also has deep knowledge of classical Western arts, which he will sometimes share.

Literature on Aboriginal elders at times asserts that these individuals exhibit an "authentic" Aboriginal way of being in this world. For example, Cowlshaw wrote that elders "fulfil demands for the symbolic recognition of classical Aboriginal culture" (2009:180). From my experience with the Winanga-Li's sub-community, this is true only to an extent. While elders do perform acts such as "Welcome to Country" ceremonies or teaching children "traditional dance", these performances are not the reason they hold their title. The definitive acts undertaken by Winanga-Li's elders, as related to me by Betty and Lewis, did not adhere to public enactments of a reified Aboriginality; but rather, illustrated a caring for, and investment in, the Aboriginal people around them – such as Aunty Lena making the pot of curry when Shirley was in the hospital.

Although only five Mt Druitt elders serve on Winanga-Li's Management Committee, there are at least another ten who sporadically participate in the organisation's activities. In the wider Mt Druitt Aboriginal community there are dozens more individuals who are considered to be elders. While some eagerly embrace the title there are others, such as Uncle Barry, who are more hesitant to accept it. The reason for this ambivalence is that there are people in the community who have awarded themselves the title and have attempted to self-importantly use it for their own personal advantage. Such people demand the respect of others when they have not earned it and use the title to manipulate others in an effort to achieve personal objectives.

Some older Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents have successfully misappropriated the term "elder" for themselves, such as "Uncle" Frank who is rumoured to be a long-time dealer of drugs. Yet not all people who try to do so go unchallenged. During a Mt Druitt Aboriginal community meeting late in 2011 regarding children's services, an older Aboriginal man stood up and introduced himself as Larry, a member of the community for 30 years. He went on to state that he had become a respected elder, at which point numerous people in the audience started booing him and yelling for him to "sit down" and "get out". The dissenters knew that Larry was a convicted paedophile and were signalling that the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community did not accept him as an elder, nor would they allow him to promote himself as one.

Uncle Barry sees people such as Frank and Larry misappropriating the title of elder and, in an effort to distance himself from such people who have cheapened the title, has made objections to others bestowing that title on him. However this has rarely dissuaded others from employing the title when referring to him.

The titles "Aunt(y)" and "Uncle" are also used to address slightly younger men and women within the Winanga-Li community, particularly when such persons have performed work that serves the community at large. One example of this is Uncle Sam who, while in his late 40s, worked as an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO) at the Mt Druitt Police Station. However not everyone would employ this title when referring to Sam; it was used only by persons younger than approximately 30. When the title Aunt or Uncle is used for

such younger people, it does not denote that they are elders but rather that they are someone important in the community who deserves respect, similar to the terms' use in familial situations for fictive kin.

Bro, Sis and Cuz

Other frequently used terms to address people in the Aboriginal community are “cuz” (short for cousin), and “bro” and “sis”. Like Aunt(y) and Uncle, these terms do not necessarily denote cognatic kinship, but rather a close relationship between the speaker and the addressee; although they are also used in their literal meaning. Bro and sis are frequently used to address others in one's age-set and between those seen to be on the same social plane; while cuz is generally used for people of consanguineal or affinal relation, also within one's age-set.

Unlike the term “cuz”, the usage of the terms “bro” and “sis” transcends the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal divide (as blurry as this may be). One example of this can be found in the previous chapter's account of Geena and Robert, where a member of Geena's Aboriginal family and age-set said to her non-Aboriginal boyfriend Robert “brother, grab another beer.” Similarly the term “sis” was used in reference to me while I was helping to prepare for a Winanga-Li event: Shirley was sitting at a table buttering bread and I was standing at a counter behind her searching for barbeque sauce. Shirley said over her shoulder “sis, can you grab me another loaf of bread.” At that point I had only been working with Winanga-Li for a period of several months and I did not realise that Shirley was speaking to me. Nobody else in the kitchen made a move to hand her a new loaf of bread, so I turned and asked “were you talking to me?” and she said “yeah”. While Shirley is not in my age-set (she is about twenty years older) she was signalling that she and I were on a similar social level in that we were both volunteering for the Winanga-Li event.

The use of relational terms such as Aunt, Uncle, bro, sis and cuz, within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is frequent. This further supports the prevalence of a relational ontology within Winanga-Li's sub-community, as described by Macdonald (2004) and Gibson (2010).

Spirituality

There is no one religion that unifies the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. Various forms of Christianity are the most common spiritual belief systems practiced by community members. This is likely due in part to earlier generations being removed to Christian-based missions and reserves, from 1883 to the 1960s, by the Aborigines Protection Board and Aborigines Welfare Board (Adams 2005:22). Aunty Rose, mentioned above, grew up on the Hollywood Mission near Yass in southern NSW and fondly remembers the Catholic Sisters who worked on her mission. Today she still considers herself a Christian, however she rarely attends Mass. She stated to me that “you don’t need to go to church to worship. God is everywhere.”

Christianity in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal Community

The Mt Druitt Indigenous Church, patronised by dozens of families in the area, is a non-denominational Christian church. While the church’s property and facilities are owned by the Anglican Church, the pastor’s position is funded by the Presbyterian Church. The pastor of the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church and his wife are both Aboriginal and regularly participate in various programs of Winanga-Li. One would not know the vocation of the pastor, as he is a quiet man not prone to proselytizing beyond the walls of his church. Rather, his actions and words reflect a belief that the Aboriginal community is struggling to obtain wellbeing and that he is strongly invested in helping members of this community meet their needs.

The Mt Druitt Indigenous Church runs a variety of youth programs, including youth groups, camps and Sunday School, which are funded almost solely¹⁸¹ by donations. Receiving no government funding, the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church manages to operate these programs with a budget of about \$10,000 per year; with approximately 90 youth participating weekly in its programs. The pastor comments that the youth programs run by the church are “not all about religion”, but rather take a “holistic approach” to engaging the area’s Aboriginal youth. The objective of these programs is to try and “stop kids from getting into trouble because there’s nothing better for them to do” when they are not in

¹⁸¹ Winanga-Li has successfully aided the Mt Druitt Indigenous church to apply for small one-off grants to fund several of their youth camps.

school, rather than being solely religious in nature. While many of Winanga-Li's clients do not regularly worship at the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church, a large number are familiar with its pastor and his wife through their involvement in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community and exhibit comfort and warmth towards the couple and their family.

Although there is a strong presence of Christianity in the Mt Druitt community, there are a number of people who do not wish to associate themselves with any religion. When I asked Tracy, who participates in Winanga-Li's sewing group, if she practiced any form of religion, she said "no, I'm a heathen." I asked her what this meant and her response indicated that she wasn't using the term "heathen" for its literal definition (that is, one who practices a polytheistic religion), but rather that she had been told by her White maternal grandmother that she was a heathen. Tracy explained that she didn't believe in any religion and when I asked if she believed in a higher power, she said "I don't know." However Tracy does believe in ghosts and currently is living in a house that she believes to be haunted.

Tracy's sister, Emma, does believe in God and describes herself as a Christian. She stated that she saw no need to go to church to have a relationship with God and that she rarely ever attended Mass. The majority of Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents with whom I have talked about religion stated that, like Emma, they were Christian but did not attend any Church; although they may have done so when they were children. When probed about these childhood trips to church, almost all of them said that it was just something they did as a family rather than because their family life was governed by religion. They all appeared to see going to church as something to do, like going to the movie theatre, rather than a spiritual experience. Interestingly, about half of these people reported that it was only the children in their family who had to attend church. When I asked why the adults did not accompany the children, the most common response was similar to Aunty Margaret's: "I don't know. Probably because they had done their time already."

Those people who indicated that they were atheists were in the minority, with the majority stating resolutely that they were Christian, even if they rarely attended church. This coincides somewhat with national 2006 ABS Census data on religious affiliation for

Indigenous Australians, in which 73 percent reported being Christian and 24 percent reported no religious affiliation. On a local level, when taking a sample of the suburbs included in the Mt Druitt region¹⁸² and amalgamating their 2006 Census data on Indigenous religious practices, 77.8 percent reported Christian religious affiliation and 10.5 percent reported no religious affiliation. On both a national and a local level only one percent reported practicing a “traditional” Aboriginal religion.

Traditional Beliefs, Spirits and Ghosts

While Christian religions are prevalent among the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, accounts have been related to me that more closely coincide with what I believe to be traditional Aboriginal beliefs. Such accounts reflect beliefs that can be linked to totemism, sacred sites, ancestral spirits and spirits of the land.

The first such account was related to me during a discussion of emu egg carving, which occurred when Aunty Margaret spontaneously gave me a carved emu egg. While I have been told that carving emu eggs is traditionally a male practice, it was Aunty Margaret who had carved the egg. She then proceeded to tell me that she cannot eat emu as it would make her sick. When I asked what happened if she ate emu, expecting a description of food allergy, Margaret proceeded to describe an occurrence experienced by her maternal aunt thirty years earlier. This aunt had eaten emu and within 24 hours had developed a large boil on her shin. The aunt soon fell ill with other symptoms such as weakness, cold sweats, and pain throughout her body. Over the next two weeks the boil continued to grow and the symptoms worsened.

Travelling with her husband, the aunt went back to her traditional land and met with the local medicine man. He proceeded to perform a healing ceremony upon the aunt, during which the boil on her leg was lacerated. While chanting and gesturing, the medicine man extracted an emu feather from the lacerated boil, at which point the healing ceremony drew to a close. Upon closure of the ceremony, Margaret’s aunt was healed of her symptoms and over the next few days the boil disappeared, never to reappear. The aunt interpreted her

¹⁸² The suburbs included in this sample were Blackett, Dharruk, Emerton, and Hebersham.

illness as a direct result of eating emu. When asked, Margaret said that while emu was not her aunt's totem, the women in their line of matrilineal descent concluded that this illness was a sign that they could not eat emu meat. Thus, Aunty Margaret would not eat emu as she believed it would make her ill.

Many members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community also believe that spirits guard sacred sites throughout Australia. Should one disrespect these spirits, misfortune follows. A most illustrative account of this was related to me by a past employee of Tranby Aboriginal College who now resides in Mt Druitt and works in the Aboriginal community. The story involves an overnight camping trip planned by Tranby staff. Both staff and students went "out bush" to Warrumbungle National Park, in central northern NSW, to camp by an Aboriginal site. Most of those in attendance were Aboriginal, although the non-Aboriginal Spanish teacher and her 10 year old son joined the group. After setting up camp, the group went for a hike. Along the way, the son picked up a rock to take home as a souvenir. Witnessing this, Aboriginal members of the group explained that this was disrespectful of the spirits guarding the site, and told him to put the rock back where he found it. The child refused and the group returned to the campsite to start dinner and gather around the campfire. That night marked the beginning of a chain of unfortunate events that befell camp participants, the first being the eruption of fighting amongst the group. Then during the night one member of the group experienced an asthma attack so severe that there was concern she would not live. The group decided to pack up and leave. Around 2 a.m. while making their departure from the camp site, floating lights began to appear in the distance, believed by those present to be Min Min light¹⁸³. During the group's return trip to Sydney the bus in which they were travelling broke down, stranding them on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere for hours.

In the month following the group's return to Sydney three of the group's members died, two due to cardiac arrest and one in a tragic cycling accident. Along with the deaths, another three of the group's members were struck by serious illnesses and were

¹⁸³ Min Min light is the Aboriginal name for the phenomenon of lights appearing to hover on the horizon at night. The lights often appear fuzzy and circular and have been reported to follow people, though retreat when walked towards (Pettigrew 2003:11). The majority of sightings have been reported in Channel Country, a region of Australia's outback that is mostly located in Queensland but also includes areas of South Australia, Northern Territory and New South Wales.

hospitalised. Fighting erupted amongst Tranby staff members and a negative air settled around the College. There was a pervasive belief that all of these events were tied directly to the son of the Spanish teacher taking away the rock and disrespecting the site to which they had hiked. In response, all members of the original group who were able travelled together back to the site where they had hiked and camped. Once there, a smoking ceremony was performed, the child returned the rock to its original location, and gestures were made to pay respect to the site by all present. After this, accidents and illnesses ceased befalling members of the group, but it was said that Tranby College remained shrouded in negative energy. A smoking ceremony was eventually held at Tranby, although not before the employee quit her job at the College.

When this account was related to me, none of the four Aboriginal women present expressed the belief that this was all just coincidental. In fact, they responded by saying things along the lines of “you have to watch yourself in those places”: that if they got the feeling or were told a site was sacred that they would actively steer clear of the place so as to avoid offending spirits.

As is demonstrated above, there is an overarching belief in spirits in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, sometimes expressed in accounts of “ghosts”. While not all people who share supernatural experiences with others describe the apparitions as ghosts – some will say they are spirits of the land, others will simply state they “don’t know” what it was they saw – community members are eager to join in the discussion and contribute their own encounters with forces that science seemingly cannot explain.

While discussions of hauntings and ghosts take on a light jovial tone, discussions of Christian faith are much more sombre and rarely joked about. For example, when Allison was relating to other members of the Winanga-Li community her experience with what she called “a ghost”, there was jocular and excitement amongst her audience. However when Allison discussed her Catholicism, her face was deadpan and her audience was quite serious. Discussions of sacred sites also tended to be more sombre in tone and this appears to be due to an underlying reverence for, and perhaps fear of, ancestral spirits amongst conversation participants.

Of all the people (approximately 35) with whom I have discussed supernatural encounters, only one person has said that she had never experienced anything of the like. However, she also did not scoff at the experiences of others or attempt to scientifically explain them. I therefore find that the majority of people in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community either believe in these spirits or were open to their existence, as no one ever attempted to resolutely refute that they exist.

Conclusion

Above I have explored practices found within Mt Druitt that have a specifically Aboriginal essence. Some of these practices, such as the common query of “where are you from”, reflecting the salience of a relational ontology, mirror accounts of Aboriginal behaviours found in anthropological literature. Others, such as connection to land, appear to have been modified from pre-colonial practices to fit the present conditions within which urban Indigenous Australians now live. Very few of the practices common in Mt Druitt fit the reified perception of Aboriginality depicted through mainstream media sources, such as painted-up Aboriginal performers dancing at corroborees and singing in their language to the accompaniment of didgeridoo and clap-sticks. However, some activities, such as children’s “traditional dance” and the playing of the didgeridoo, do hold to these stereotypes.

The preservation or revival of such reified practices, despite the changing contexts in which they occur, is likely to have been shaped in part by the expectations of dominant White society, as cultural adaptations have not occurred within the vacuum of an isolated or static environment. As Aboriginal Australians are subject to the legislation of the White State, these structures have affected their habitus and covertly shaped Indigenous understandings of their own Aboriginality. I argue that despite the bearing of non-Indigenous structural forces upon Indigenous habitus, which result in modification of Aboriginal practices, these practices become no less “traditional” than those of pre-colonial times, as tradition is never static and is always defined in the present.

The dynamic and heterogeneous nature of Indigenous cultural practices makes the development of a singular “culturally appropriate” formula to Aboriginal-specific human service delivery difficult, if not impossible. The central importance of cultural heterogeneity in the delivery of Aboriginal specific services will become evident in later chapters of this thesis; particularly in reference to the way in which government bodies determine the allocation of funding for such services and how this perpetuates a form of structural violence. Now, however, having illustrated the various forms Aboriginality in Mt Druitt takes, I will examine the oppression and marginalisation experienced by members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

7. Marginalisation and “Otherness” in Mt Druitt

It's the slums, Mount Druitt. You just feel intimidated being here.

– Mt Druitt Resident (Warne-Smith 2010)

In October 1981 *The Daily Telegraph* released the front page headline: “Savage Night of Violence: 1000 Kids in Wild Rampage” (Powell 1993:101), reporting that “1000 boys and girls from rival schools fought a bloody, no-holds-barred battle that held a Sydney suburb in terror” (Peel 2003:17). This was a highly sensationalised and embellished account of what was to become known as the Bidwill riots. While this event was actually little more than a small number of Mt Druitt youths fighting amidst a crowd of hundreds of onlooking students, the use of the term “riot” and the following description evoked images of looting, extreme injury and massive property damage, none of which occurred.

Bidwill is alleged to again have had riots in January 2007, when a newspaper article, entitled “Dispute between families sparks riot”, described an escalating family dispute that “culminated in two groups of men and youths, armed with knives, bottles, sticks, wooden posts and tree branches clashing in the street” (AAP 2007). The report went on to note that “despite the rudimentary weapons, police said there were no injuries or damage”. Once again, the event was blown out of proportion. It is telling that an analysis of all stories between January 1987 and April 1990 in which the *Sydney Morning Herald* used the word “riot” reveals that 40 percent of these stories were related to Aboriginal Australians (Paradies 2005:17).

This chapter explores local knowledge of Mt Druitt and its Aboriginal population, constructed by media, but also by Aboriginal residents. The formulation of local knowledge occurs when experiences are interpreted and these interpretations are then circulated throughout a community. Multiple informational flows of interpretative accounts run throughout Mt Druitt and at times they overlap. Yet these flows of information overwhelmingly paint Mt Druitt and its residents in a negative light, reinforcing their marginalisation and Otherness.

The constructed knowledge of dysfunction within Mt Druitt results in the hyper-surveillance of all residents by State authorities, but of Aboriginal persons in particular. This is due to both overt and covert racial profiling, which in turn fuels perceptions of dysfunction. For example, the heightened policing of Indigenous residents produces greater incidents of their encounters with the justice system, which then reinforces the belief that Aboriginal Australians are deviant and must be monitored.

In an effort to relate the multifarious forms of oppression experienced by Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents, I will examine the local knowledge(s), experiences, and behaviours of my Aboriginal informants. In each case I will attempt to link the experience of marginalisation to overarching structural forces at work within Australian society. This chapter builds on earlier discussions of the effects of neo-colonial policies on Aboriginal people, as well as on Chapter 4's discussion of life in Mt Druitt. Societal institutions will be demonstrated to inflict structural violence upon Indigenous Mt Druitt residents, resulting in loss of opportunities, freedom and health.

Investigating experiences of Aboriginal oppression is a necessary component of this thesis as it justifies demands for Aboriginal-specific social services in the face of increased mainstreaming. Aboriginal people's pervasive experience of discrimination is one of the prime reasons why Indigenous persons exhibit widespread distrust of White agents of authority and demand that Aboriginal-specific services be delivered by Aboriginal persons.

Prior to embarking on an exploration of informants' experiences of racism, I will first establish the theoretical grounding upon which my analysis is constructed. This largely rests upon an explanation of the structural forces at work within Australian society.

Structural Marginalisation

Chapter 4 analysed the locational disadvantage of Mt Druitt residents, which is one of the structural forces that perpetuate the marginalisation of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents. Another such structural force is the racist nature of Australian society (Hage 1998:78; Paradies 2005:2; Morgan 2006a:33; Collins 2002:23; Cunneen 2001:24-25; Mercer

2003:426), apparent in informants' accounts of discrimination by non-Indigenous persons at the level of the individual.

Structural forces fall into two categories: "social acts" and "social processes" (Wilson 2009:5). Operating at the micro-level, "social acts" are the overt behaviour of individuals within society. Therefore, acts of discrimination against Aboriginal persons based on private prejudices are "social acts". Social processes, however, can influence social acts, and are far more covert; operating at the macro-level of the institutions and processes that govern society as a whole. Thus, locational disadvantage is a "social process", as beneficial institutions of, for example, arts, recreation, and education are either absent or inferior in Mt Druitt, compared with those of the inner city; while institutions of surveillance, such as police, prisons and gaols¹⁸⁴ are more abundant.

Structural Violence

Marginalisation resulting from social processes leads to "structural violence". The term "structural violence" was coined by Johan Galtung in 1969 (Galtung 1990:291), although the concept was further developed later, not only by Galtung, but also by numerous academics within medical and social sciences¹⁸⁵. Nancy Scheper-Hughes defines structural violence as:

the invisible social machinery of inequality that reproduces social relations of exclusion and marginalization via ideologies, stigmas, and dangerous discourses... attendant to race, class, sex, and other invidious distinctions. Structural violence 'naturalizes' poverty, sickness, hunger, and premature death, erasing their social and political origins so that they are taken for granted and no one is held accountable except the poor themselves. (2004:13)

According to Galtung, structural violence is naturalised and legitimised by way of "cultural violence", in which the dominant cultural group ascribes some negative facet to another cultural group and uses this to justify their oppressive treatment (1990:291).

¹⁸⁴ While Mt Druitt itself does not have a gaol or prison, there are six within the western Sydney region, while the inner Sydney region holds only two.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Bourgois 2001; Scheper-Hughes 2004; and Farmer 2004.

Paul Farmer states that: “Structural violence is violence exerted systematically – that is, indirectly – by everyone who belongs to a certain social order” (2004:307). Those who do not belong to this privileged social order, which in Australia is constructed primarily in lines with a dominant class of White Patriarchy (Hage 1998:262), thus experience marginalisation of political voice, socioeconomic class, culture, opportunity, and resources acquisition. Galtung (1993:106) notes that this marginalisation eventuates in an “avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs” (Parker 2012:167), resulting in early mortality, incarceration, harassment, repression and exclusion (Galtung 1990). Examples of each of these outcomes within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community will be discussed later in this chapter, as well as the way in which they ensue from structural violence.

When exploring the structural forces that marginalise Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents I will examine issues of class¹⁸⁶, which undoubtedly plays a role in prejudice, and analyse how this contributes to racial discrimination. While the majority of Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents with whom I spoke do not identify with class divisions, one cannot overlook socioeconomic positioning in accounts of the behaviours and perceptions of this community.

Wendy Bottero and Sarah Irwin write in their 2003 article on social inequalities: “People do not have to explicitly recognise class issues, or identify with discrete class groupings, for class processes to operate” (469). Fiona Devine and Mike Savage concur, stating:

What establishes the relationship between class and culture (i.e., what establishes the classed nature of cultural dispositions) is not the existence of class consciousness, or the coherence or uniformity of a distinct set of cultural dispositions. Rather, the relationship is to be found in the way in which cultural outlooks are implicated in modes of exclusion and/or domination. (2000:195)

“Cultural outlooks” – such as distrust of police and other figures of authority, and styles of dress, speech and body language¹⁸⁷ – that imbue actors with a sense of belonging within the

¹⁸⁶ When using the term “class”, I am referring to one’s socioeconomic position in Australian society.

¹⁸⁷ Allon Uhlmann (2006) explores class within Australian society and, when comparing those belonging to what he terms “dominant-faction” and “the dominated group”, notes the stark difference: “The language used was rather different (more ‘crude’ in the second one), clothing style was different too (less trendy, and much cheaper clothes in the second group), as was appearance in general (heavier tattoos in the second group, more people with bad teeth...), and the interaction was generally more boisterous” (151).

Aboriginal community, can be identified by those outside of their community as dysfunctional, deviant and threatening (Bourgois 1989:627). These cultural outlooks can attract and/or exacerbate confrontations with figures of authority, such as teachers, potential employers, and social service providers. Such confrontations are frequently interpreted by informants as racist in nature and furthers their inclination to avoid opportunities in education, training and employment unless delivered by an Indigenous person; thereby relegating them to marginal roles in economy and society for the rest of their lives (Bourgois 1989:628; Biddle 2009a). The cultural outlooks of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal population, formed in the context of these discriminatory experiences, therefore contribute to their marginalisation. These cultural outlooks are not comprehended by the privileged social order, as they are at odds with White values and expectations.

Arenas in which structural violence features in the lives of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal population include government agencies of policing and justice, education, health, and public and private social services. It is also a feature of the marketplace, where Indigenous Australians are sometimes treated as undesirable customers and employees. Members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community have related instances of discrimination within each of these areas, and examples will be given below. All such encounters are grounded in unequal power relations between Aboriginal and White Australia.

Based on Aboriginal informants' accounts of interactions with institutions and figures of authority, it is clear that unequal power relations play a role in reinforcing perceptions of both racial discrimination and Aboriginal dysfunction. In using the term "perception" I do not intend to imply that there is not a solid reality to the racism experienced within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community or the dysfunction associated with this community. Rather, I am indicating that every person interprets events and behaviours differently. Some individuals may attribute events to racial profiling (racism); others to cultural outlooks such as manner of speaking, dressing and deportment (classism); while others still will perceive figures of authority as "just doing their job". However, when a large portion of the community interprets events as racist and these accounts are shared with other community members, local knowledge of authority figures leads to a widespread sense that such figures cannot be trusted.

Ways in which Aboriginal people experience interactions with formal structures and relate their accounts to others can stimulate or maintain this distrust of, and resistance to, authority figures. However it can also lead to internalised perceptions of dysfunction, which can result in large numbers of Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents believing that certain avenues of socioeconomic upward mobility are not available to them.

Media Construction of Mt Druitt's Dysfunction and Deviance

The 1991 Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Racist Violence criticised the media for, among other things, its “perpetuation and promotion of negative racial stereotypes, a tendency towards conflictual and sensationalist reporting on race issues and an insensitivity towards, and often ignorance of, minority cultures” (Mercer 2003:432). In her 1993 work *Out West: perceptions of Sydney's western suburbs*, Diane Powell notes the demonising nature of news stories regarding western Sydney: “the constant repetition of stories of problems and neglect, about the excess of disadvantage, crime, violence, unemployment and lack of facilities, services, wealth, education and so on, creates an image of the western suburbs as Sydney's ‘other’” (xvii).

This Othering of Mt Druitt residents has both ideological and structural implications. Ideologically it reinforces the stereotype of lawless and brutal “westies”; resulting in internalised feelings of failure, defect and inadequacy for the area's residents (Bourgeois 1989:628). Furthermore, it confirms for non-residents that the population of the region is innately damaged and beyond help, which in turn reproduces marginalisation (Hodge 1996:33).

One example of this occurs in the context of public transportation. The public buses of western Sydney, Westbus and Busways, have on multiple occasions suspended their services to parts of Mt Druitt for a period, claiming the area unsafe for their vehicles and employees (Daily Telegraph 2011b). This results in residents being denied public transportation and creates another hurdle for them in getting to work, school, health and social services, etc. Media portrayals of western Sydney shape structural responses to the area's needs, yet it also has a bearing upon Mt Druitt residents' self-perception and self-

esteem, as evinced in their assertion that “too much media attention on crime in the area contributes to [a] strong negative impact on self-esteem” (Blacktown City Council 2007:33).

Another media blitz affecting the self-esteem of Mt Druitt residents occurred in 1997 when the Sydney newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* published a photo of Mt Druitt High School’s 1996 year 12 graduating class under the headline “The class we failed” (Mahar 2010). That year, all 28 graduating students from Mt Druitt High School obtained tertiary entrance ranking scores below 45, essentially failing the high school exit exam, and meaning that they were in the bottom 45 percentile of all graduating students within their year 7 cohort (NSW Vice-Chancellors’ Committee 2011:3). The students of this graduating class decided, with their school’s support, to sue *The Daily Telegraph* for defamation as it portrayed them “as a bunch of abject, stupid, hopeless, failures” (AAP 2000)¹⁸⁸. George Morgan notes that “any one of a number of schools could have been chosen for this purpose but the newspaper chose Mt Druitt because of the area’s notoriety” (Morgan 2006b:4).

Perhaps media representatives have become aware of the impact their loaded language has had upon local residents, for when a large melee broke out in Mt Druitt in early 2011 it was not labelled a riot, but a “brawl”. This event occurred at the Mt Druitt shopping centre when two rival groups of young men, one from Granville and the other local to Mt Druitt, met for a confrontation prearranged on Facebook. Fortunately, “members of the Pacific Islander community that are law abiding” tipped off police and when the fighting broke out, a large number of “local police and specialist officers from the riot and dog squads intervened, backed by helicopters” (ABC 2011). This event caused much excitement and concern in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, with many eager to interject that they knew someone who had been affected by the incident (as shoppers and workers).

Although the media sensationalises some accounts of violence in the area, there is a nugget of truth to assertions that assault is more prevalent in Mt Druitt than in other areas of

¹⁸⁸ The students won their lawsuit and class members were awarded a rumoured \$20,000 each for defamation. Other results of this incident were that Mt Druitt High School changed its name to Chifley College Mt Druitt Campus and school league tables, which rank schools according to academic results, were no longer made available to the public (although this latter decision has since been reversed).

Sydney. While crime and safety are reported as major concerns for all sectors of the Blacktown LGA, this concern is heightened in its western sector, where Mt Druitt is located (Blacktown City Council 2007:33).

Yet what the media and other Sydney residents fail to realise is that crime and dysfunction in Mt Druitt are not the result of inferior persons, but rather of structural violence. Philippe Bourgois writes that the “structural desperation of a population lacking viable economy and facing systematic barriers of racial discrimination and ideological marginalization becomes charged at the community level into self-destructive channels” (1989:628). The Mt Druitt Aboriginal community’s acts of crime, violence and substance abuse can be seen as a “culture of resistance” against a White society that offers few paths to economic success and upward mobility to those who do not conform to its ideals (Bourgois 1989:629). Ironically, many of the cultural and behavioural adaptations made by Aboriginal Australians have only perpetuated their marginalisation, through the development of “adverse norms and values” (Biddle 2009a).

Interpersonal Violence in Mt Druitt

When one enters Mt Druitt, coming along Carlisle Avenue from the M4 motorway, there is a sign along the road that states: “The community says NO to domestic violence”. The Blacktown LGA does indeed have a higher record of domestic violence-related offences¹⁸⁹ when compared with its inner city counterparts. In 2010-2011 there were slightly fewer than seven arrests for domestic violence-related offences for every 1,000 residents in the Inner Sydney Statistical Division¹⁹⁰, while in the Blacktown LGA there were just over nine such arrests for every one thousand residents (Lawlink 2011).

I was present at Winanga-Li when two separate occasions of domestic violence broke out in and around the organisation’s property, both involving Aboriginal families. The first was between two brothers, one of whom was accused of stealing money from the other. The

¹⁸⁹ This includes domestic assault, breaches of “Apprehended Violence Orders” by perpetrators of domestic abuse, stalking and child abuse.

¹⁹⁰ The population size of the Blacktown LGA (271,710) is comparable to the Inner Sydney Statistical Division (313,154) (ABS Census Data 2011).

alleged thief – who was high on “ice”¹⁹¹ – ran inside Winanga-Li, after accidentally shattering a window in his agitation and spraying blood throughout the office. He hoped to hide so that his older brother – the alleged victim of the theft – would not beat him. The second occasion of domestic violence, this time occurring just outside the property of Winanga-Li, was between a man and woman who were fighting over the custody of their toddler child. While the incident began with much yelling, it turned physical when the woman, who appeared to be drunk or under the influence of drugs, began to push and hit the man. The police were called and arrived just after the man had taken the child away in his car; the woman was sitting in Winanga-Li’s driveway sobbing. The aforementioned incidents occurred between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. and involved police and ambulance, and in both cases one of the participants was taken to hospital.

Indeed, the Blacktown LGA has higher rates of all those crimes that occur within private and family settings – such as domestic violence, breach of “Apprehended Violence Orders” (AVOs), and “harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance” – than does Sydney’s inner city¹⁹² (Lawlink 2011). Yet this is not what gets the newspaper headlines. Instead it is child abuse and neglect in Mt Druitt, also occurring at significantly higher rates than in the inner Sydney area¹⁹³, which frequently attracts media attention.

The issue of child neglect and abuse is a difficult one for all Australian communities. When a case of appalling abuse is reported, social workers are attacked for their failure to act. Yet articles also appear about over-zealous care workers who remove children who by all rights should remain with their families. For the Indigenous community, children’s issues have a particular saliency.

¹⁹¹ “Ice” is the street name for homemade methamphetamine.

¹⁹² According to amalgamated NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2010-2011 data, events of these crimes occurred at the rate of just over 14 events for every 1,000 residents of the Blacktown LGA and just over 10 events for every 1,000 residents of the Inner Sydney Statistical division (Lawlink 2011).

¹⁹³ Domestic assaults against children and youth were not recorded for the Inner Sydney Statistical Division in recent years. However, the inner Sydney LGAs of Marrickville, Leichhardt, and Sydney together hold a comparable population size to that of the Blacktown LGA and their records have been amalgamated to produce the following results, described as the “inner Sydney area”. In the one year period prior to March 2012, Blacktown recorded a rate of 279 domestic assaults against children and youths per 100,000 residents, while the inner Sydney area recorded 209 such assaults per 100,000 residents. The following year ending March 2013 Blacktown recorded 327 domestic assaults against children and youths per 100,000 residents while the inner Sydney area recorded only 134 such assaults per 100,000 residents (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2013).

“Parents charged at Bidwell, child neglect, kids locked on balcony” (Daily Telegraph 2008), “Woman jailed for murdering toddler son”, (Sydney Morning Herald 2009), and “Mum, stepfather on murder charge” (Daily Telegraph 2011a) are only some of the newspaper headlines regarding child abuse and neglect in Mt Druitt over the last five years. The last headline above dealt with the Kiesha Abrahams case, in which a 6 year old Aboriginal girl was reported missing from her apartment in Mt Druitt and was later found murdered. Evidence indicated a history of child abuse, with Kiesha having previously spent time in state care (Warne-Smith 2010).

Several clients of Winanga-Li were somewhat familiar with the family and I was told by a community member that Kiesha’s mother, Kristi Abrahams, had called NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS)¹⁹⁴ to request assistance with the child less than a week before she was reported missing. Some members of the Aboriginal community blamed DoCS for not doing enough to intervene in a case where a child’s safety was so clearly jeopardised. Conversely, however, many Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt have also expressed anger at DoCS for unwanted or complicated intervention in child neglect cases.

One such case involved the Aboriginal grandparents of a toddler, who was then in State care, seeking advice and assistance from Winanga-Li in an effort to obtain custody of their grandchild. The child’s father was in gaol and its mother had substance abuse issues, which was initially why the child had been taken into care. However, DoCS made no effort to foster the child with relatives (known as “kinship care”), despite the “NSW Aboriginal Child Placement Principle” which stipulates that, should an Aboriginal child be removed from parental care, attempts should be made to place the child with members of its extended family prior to pursuing other options (McHugh 2009:18). Lewis, who met with the grandparents, told them that they had every right to custody of their grandchild, especially since they were already fostering children from their extended family and had proved capable providers. However, Lewis said that the only way for the couple to obtain

¹⁹⁴ DoCS has since been reorganised and renamed, with child protection services now falling under the Department of Families and Community Services (FaCS).

custody would be to hire a lawyer¹⁹⁵ to handle the case, as DoCS had proven unwilling to work with the grandparents independently.

Mt Druitt residents are overwhelmingly critical of the civil servants working for government departments such as DoCS. An article on Kiesha Abrahams in the national newspaper, *The Australian*, quotes Mt Druitt residents: “It’s the slums, Mount Druitt. You just feel intimidated being here. It’s happened before; it’ll happen again” and “[s]omeone needs to do something about this shit. All these housing commissions [sic]. The crime rate is so high. You’d never want to raise a child around here” (Warne-Smith 2010). This sentiment is echoed time and again in discussions of Mt Druitt’s environment and the failure of the State to ameliorate these conditions. While the local government council, police force, social service organisations, and various state departments such as DoCS, concur that something needs to be done, very little is actually being achieved on the ground. Recently there has been a push to invest in early childhood development, which is a small step in the right direction.

Other common forms of violent crime in Mt Druitt are car-jackings¹⁹⁶ and “home invasions”. Although no instances of home invasion befell any of my informants during my fieldwork, many had been victims of theft. Aunty Margaret has had two vehicles stolen from her Housing Commission apartment’s parking lot, and a young Aboriginal woman named Tina had her Housing Commission residence robbed three times during a six week period. Tina was fairly certain that her non-Indigenous neighbours were the thieves, as they knew when she and her daughter left and returned to the house. The last time her house was burgled the thieves took her refrigerator; something she doesn’t think would have been possible should they not have known exactly when she was likely to return. Despite filing police reports and alerting authorities that she believed she knew who was responsible, Tina was told by police that they could not legally enter her neighbour’s house to see if her

¹⁹⁵ The NSW Aboriginal Legal Service currently provides legal advice and representation regarding Indigenous children’s care and protection, and family law (ALS, <http://www.alsnswact.org.au/pages/get-a-lawyer>, accessed January 6, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ One evening in 2010, while driving home from Winanga-Li, an attempted carjacking befell Betty. She narrowly avoided the situation by speeding up as the perpetrators, armed with bats and crowbars, grabbed for her door-handle.

stolen property was there. She did file a complaint with the Housing Commission, but their policy on disputes between neighbours was that they would only provide mediation. Tina has put in a request to be rehoused elsewhere and is now once again on a waiting list.

The incidents of crime, violence and substance abuse noted above result in, and are the result of, internalised hopelessness by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents. This hopelessness arises from past and present structural forces covertly, and sometimes overtly, working within Australian society to marginalise and oppress. Such structural forces have caused Indigenous Australians to be relegated predominantly to neighbourhoods that feature high rates of crime and violence (Biddle 2009a). As we have seen in Chapter 4, the Mt Druitt area went from being conceived of as a middle-class haven to a dumping ground for social housing recipients. However, as is demonstrated above, it is not solely Aboriginal persons who are the perpetrators of crimes in Mt Druitt.

In order to overcome this self-destruction in Mt Druitt, particularly in reference to the above instances, there is a need for better human services, such as those catering to drug and alcohol abuse¹⁹⁷, family counselling and conflict resolution, and children's recreational activities that promote social connectedness and wellbeing. Simply increasing police surveillance and expanding prisons and gaols are only a band-aid on a festering wound.

Accounts of Aboriginal Oppression in Mt Druitt

Having explored more generalised accounts of marginalisation in Mt Druitt, I will now turn to local knowledge of oppression specific to the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. Below I will provide several accounts of inequality experienced by my Aboriginal informants in the areas of justice and policing, education, the marketplace and health services. In order to explain *why* this inequality occurs, I will attempt to also explore the “empirical reality” that led to each experience (Greig et al. 2003:84). Contextualising accounts will shed light on structural forces working within each instance to preserve the power of the White nation and oppress the Aboriginal minority.

¹⁹⁷ A current policy regarding persons suffering from substance abuse is to grant them a disability pension, as their addiction makes them unable to work. However, granting such a welfare payment without mandating the seeking of treatment appears to be wasteful and facilitate addiction.

Interactions with Law Enforcement Officers

The accounts below occurred during my period of fieldwork at Winanga-Li and were related to me by members of the Aboriginal community involved in each event. I must acknowledge at the outset that I only heard the Aboriginal actors' sides of the story, and while this may appear to lead to a rather one-sided account of events, it is important to recognise that the circulation of such accounts throughout the Aboriginal community shapes members' perceptions and knowledge of, relationships with, and responses to, figures and structures of authority.

Alan

In October 2009 Alan, an 18 year old developmentally disabled Aboriginal Mt Druitt resident, was arrested. The incident occurred around 2 a.m. on a Saturday night near the Emerton shops when he went to meet up with his friend Josh, who was also developmentally disabled and Aboriginal, and a number of other Aboriginal and Pacific Islander youths, two of whom were Alan's brothers. While hanging out at the closed shops near the 24-hour McDonalds, Alan and his friends, all of whom were darker-skinned, got into a confrontation with seven teenaged white local youths. The incident was triggered when the white youths started yelling racial slurs at Alan and his friends. Alan's friends retaliated with swearing and insults, with one of them grabbing a baseball cap off of one of the white boy's heads. Someone, alerted by the yelling, called the police. When the police arrived Alan's friends ran off, but the police were able to capture Alan, his brother Ben, and Josh. All three were handcuffed, put in the back of patrol cars, and taken to the Mt Druitt Police Station where they were held and later charged with aggravated theft (accused of stealing the hat and a t-shirt). While none of the three Aboriginal boys had a police record, several of the white youths did; yet none of the latter were arrested or charged, although the police did bring them to the Mt Druitt Police Station.

This is reminiscent of a 1995 study in which Garth Luke and Chris Cunneen found that in NSW, Indigenous youths were far less likely to receive a caution, as opposed to a charge, than were non-Indigenous youths (Cunneen 2001:135). This study revealed that when the alleged offender had no prior criminal record or history of cautions, only 5.7 percent of

Aboriginal youths received a caution¹⁹⁸ in comparison to 12.9 percent of non-Aboriginal youths (Cunneen 2001:136). Cunneen comments on this tendency by stating that there is an

increased likelihood of detection as a result of police numbers and surveillance... in predominantly Aboriginal communities, [which further increases the] likelihood of... an adverse police discretionary decision to charge (rather than caution) an Aboriginal young person in the first instance. (2001:45; see also CtGC 2013:36)

The night of the arrests, a friend of Alan's sister – Ellen – who had evaded capture, immediately called Betty, as Betty was well known to Alan's family and the friends of their nine children, many of whom have consistently participated in the activities of Winanga-Li. Betty arrived at the Mt Druitt Police Station at 3:30 a.m. accompanied by her 23-year-old daughter Kala (a university law student), and explained to the desk sergeant that she was the "support person" for Alan and Ben and asked to be allowed to speak with them. As Ben was under the age of 18, the police permitted Betty to meet with him; however, when Betty explained that Alan was developmentally disabled and therefore also entitled to a "support person" despite having just turned 18, the police denied her request. They stated that there was no evidence that Alan had such a disability and that the police officers didn't believe he was disabled. Betty demanded to speak to the detective in charge of the case and waited in the Station's lobby for him to emerge.

While Betty and Kala waited, Ellen entered the Police Station. As she approached Betty, Kala overheard one of the Station's desk sergeants snicker to another "oh, another coconut¹⁹⁹", to which both officers laughed. Kala strongly felt that the police officers present were acting with racial prejudice.

When the detective appeared in the lobby, Betty stated that that they had breached Alan's rights by not allowing him to make a phone call or have a support person with him. In actual fact, Alan had been brought into the Police Station at 2:30 a.m., read his rights only at 3:30 a.m., and had not been allowed to make a telephone call to the Aboriginal Legal

¹⁹⁸ A more recent Queensland study suggests that Indigenous youths who received a caution from police, rather than a court summons, for a first time offence demonstrated less frequent and less serious recidivist behaviour (CtGC 2013:36).

¹⁹⁹ "Coconut" is a pejorative term used by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to refer to an Aboriginal person who does not act in ways stereotypical of Aboriginal people. The term denotes black on the outside, but White on the inside.

Service (ALS) until 5:20 a.m. The detective became increasingly agitated while arguing with Betty, at one point yelling at Betty “you and me, we are gonna go toe to toe!” Another sergeant overheard the escalating argument between Betty and the detective and entered the Station’s lobby; telling Betty that she needed to calm down and leave the Station or else she would be charged with abusive language. At this point Kala intervened, exclaiming “don’t you talk to my mother that way! Your officers have been using way more offensive language, saying ‘cunt’ this, ‘bitch and shit’ that, ‘arsehole’, and they have been using this language in front of minors” (referring to other youths unrelated to the incident also in the Station’s lobby). The sergeant then turned and left the room. While the confrontation between Betty and the detective continued, Ben was released from the holding cell and emerged in the hallway of the Station. Seeing him, the detective exclaimed “I’m gonna get you”, pointing at Ben. At this point the detective’s co-workers interfered, gently grabbing his arm and pulling him out of the room and hall area.

While Ben was released into Betty’s care, Alan remained in the Station’s holding cells until his remand hearing two days later. Both he and Josh were charged with aggravated theft and at the hearing it emerged that they had been accused of stealing a backpack along with the hat and the t-shirt, and that the “theft” was aggravated because Josh and Alan had made the alleged victims “fear for their lives”. The boys each were appointed different judges and solicitors, resulting in quite different remand outcomes.

Josh was assigned an older and more experienced solicitor and was released into his family’s custody; perhaps due to the fact that his solicitor had made a point of informing the judge that the alleged victims had used racial slurs and had incited the incident. Alan’s solicitor, however, was young and rather inexperienced and his judge deemed Alan to be “a threat to the community”, thus denying him remand.

This resonates with a 1997 study in which Indigenous youths in NSW were found to be incarcerated at 27.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous youths (Cunneen 2001:23); echoed a decade later in a national study that found the rate of Indigenous juvenile detention was more than 26 times that of non-Indigenous juveniles (CtGC 2013:35). Evidence from the Australian Institute of Criminology suggests that the incarceration rates of Indigenous

Australians are in fact growing, with a 2007-08 study stating that 24 percent of the nation's prison population were Indigenous, while in 1992 they comprised only 14 percent of those incarcerated (CtGC 2013:35).

Alan was sent to what Betty called a "hard" gaol for what was supposed to be three weeks, but turned out to be six. He then faced arraignment before a Supreme Court judge. It is telling to note that in NSW during 1996, "the rate of Indigenous appearance in court on criminal charges [wa]s 13 times that of non-Indigenous Australians" (Weatherburn et al. 2006:1).

Betty, who was extremely fond of Alan, told me that she knew he didn't comprehend what was going on and that she could imagine him "being locked up in gaol crying because he couldn't understand why his mum hadn't come to get him". Betty called administrators at the gaol to which Alan had been sent and informed them that he was developmentally disabled and asked if they would "look out for him", to which they agreed. Lewis commented to me that should other Aboriginal men be in the same gaol, they would likely "keep an eye on" and "take care of" Alan. Two days after he was sent to gaol, Alan was finally allowed to call his family. He appeared to be holding up "ok", as they commented that "he didn't seem too frightened".

In the weeks following the arrests I had the opportunity to ask a local Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer for the Mt Druitt Police, Sam, why an ACLO had not been called when the Aboriginal boys were arrested. He responded by saying that he was "too expensive" – that because it was outside of his regular daytime hours, he would have had to be paid overtime salary and the police would therefore not call him in "after hours".

Betty complained that the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) was "dragging their feet" and that nothing was getting done. She felt that she had to "hound" ALS representatives to find out what type of documentation should be obtained to aid in Alan's case (such as certification that he reads at the level of an eight-year-old and has the mental functioning of a twelve-year-old). The ALS appeared not to have pursued Alan's case at all, neglecting to get any witness statements and ignoring his inappropriate treatment by the police, in that he

was denied a “support person”. Betty did much of the groundwork, getting a certified statement of Alan’s disability and letters of support from his school and the pastor of the church with which he and his family were heavily involved.

Alan’s parents were almost wholly absent from the quest to gather supporting evidence for his case. While his parents remain married and his Aboriginal mother was trained as a nurse, she has not worked in over ten years (due in part to chronic health problems). Alan’s mother has numerous health issues, particularly in relation to her skin and lungs. She suffers from severe asthma, which is not helped by her heavy smoking. Alan’s father, who is originally from Papua New Guinea, receives a disability pension, as he has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and also had polio while young, resulting in mobility problems. The family lives in a public housing residence, which was in an alarming state of disrepair. During my fieldwork the floor to their house was so rotten that their refrigerator fell through it, and it had taken three weeks before Housing NSW began to attempt repairs. During Alan’s legal ordeal, the family’s home had been undergoing extensive renovations due to decay throughout the structure. The family slept in tents in their backyard for a two week period while these renovations took place.

While I do not doubt that Alan’s parents love him deeply, they did nothing to help extricate him from the situation. Indeed, requests Betty made to his mother to obtain certain documents went unmet unless Betty went to the house and helped his mother look for things. Alan’s family situation is all too common amongst the Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt. Ill health, unemployment, a sense of hopelessness, poor living conditions – all of which can result in depression – can lead to paralysis when action is demanded.

In the end, Alan spent six weeks in gaol and then, upon appearing before the Supreme Court, was released on bail. He was given a sentence of community service and two years of probation, during which he had to regularly meet with a probation officer.

Miriyan

One afternoon Miriyan, the 17 year old daughter of Lewis and Betty, was at the Plumpton shops with Ben. Both have darker skin and Miriyan has features that “look Aboriginal”.

They were buying lollies and a bottle of Coke, but when they were in the process of checking out at the counter, a security guard approached them and said they had to pay for everything. Miriyan was confused and asked the security guard what he meant and he commanded that she take the stuff out of her pockets. She responded by stating that she didn't have anything in her pockets and he again requested that she empty her pockets. She repeated that she didn't have anything in her pockets and he repeated his demand more forcefully. Miriyan pulled her pockets out of her pants and showed the security guard that her pockets were indeed empty. He responded by saying he thought he saw her pocket store merchandise. Miriyan took this with good grace and was not too bothered by the event. However, when she told me of this incident *I* was bothered: should I have been treated like that in a store in which I was a paying customer I would have been outraged.

Results of Heightened Policing in Mt Druitt

Within the aforementioned account of Alan's legal struggle and Miriyan's harassment by a security officer, features of discrimination and marginalisation emerge. In a 1997 Amnesty International newsletter, the organisation noted that "Aboriginal Australians have been ill-treated and abused by state officials, and suffer systematic discrimination. Incidents of ill-treatment by police have gone unpunished" (Cunneen 2001:128). This systematic discrimination amounts to structural violence as it jeopardises the freedom, health and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australians.

Some of the above accounts overtly feature racial issues, such as the comment regarding "coconuts" and the arrest of the black, but not the white, youths in Alan's case; and the targeting of darker-skinned people for surveillance and search in Miriyan's case. Yet other features may be attributed to class, such as Alan's parents' inability to mobilise on his behalf. Others still can result from locational disadvantage, such as the prevalence for over-policing in low-income areas with large Aboriginal populations in locations like Mt Druitt (Cunneen 2001:45; Morgan 2006b:3; Keddie 2013:33). Yet all features of the above accounts are "indicative of the stigmatisation that arises out of structural inequalities" (Cunneen 2001:41): black people are socioeconomically situated below White and therefore more likely to commit crimes; those of the lower classes deserve what they get because they don't do anything to better themselves; people who live in Mt Druitt are all

thugs and bogans and need to be kept in line. The social conditions of poverty, resulting from colonialism and marginalisation, are themselves criminogenic.

When one who is marginalised faces such prevailing assumptions on an almost daily basis, it can be hard to persevere in endeavours to rise above their situation. While non-Aboriginal people face similar class, locational and structural difficulties, many do not have to endure the added racial dimension of discrimination, nor do they have to live with the knowledge and repercussions of older generations of family members being treated as if they were less than human.

As noted above, such structural marginalisation can also be found within the public education system, the marketplace, and health service. Below are accounts of each, related to me by those Aboriginal resident(s) of Mt Druitt involved.

Repression in Education

Kala, the aforementioned daughter of Betty and Lewis, won a prestigious scholarship while in year 11 that provided her the opportunity to undertake a two-year study program abroad in Canada to gain her International Baccalaureate Diploma. Upon completion of her program Kala contacted Aboriginal Education Officers²⁰⁰ (AEOs) at high schools local to the Mt Druitt area, in an effort to inform other Aboriginal youths that this program was available to them. She was met with little enthusiasm and the one AEO who granted her a meeting told her that she didn't "think any of the kids would be interested" at her school and declined Kala's offer to talk to the students. I was surprised that this AEO would not even entertain the possibility that this would be a positive experience for the school's students and was curious to find out whether this AEO was effective in her job.

I asked James, a young Aboriginal man who had attended the school, and who was now undertaking a Bachelor's Degree at the University of Sydney, what he thought of this AEO and he responded that he "really liked her." I then related Kala's experience with her to

²⁰⁰ The job position of an Aboriginal Education Officer requires the candidate to hold a Certificate of Aboriginality. Their role is to facilitate the education of Indigenous students and, at times, mediate between the school and Aboriginal families.

James and he chuckled and said “that really doesn’t surprise me.” When prompted further about why he liked this AEO, James responded that he didn’t know but that “she was nice.” From our further conversation I got the impression that this particular AEO was friendly and empathetic to the students but did nothing to expose them to new opportunities or push them in new directions; rather, she let them remain in their comfort zone and sympathised with their hesitancy to pursue endeavours with which they had little familiarity. This reveals a tension between the “culturally appropriate” aspects of an AEO’s job position, which demands the willingness to support Indigenous priorities in the face of those that are mainstream, and their ability to encourage students to meet their academic potential. However, I do not believe that these two facets of an AEO’s role are mutually exclusive.

While empathy and friendliness are important to the work of AEOs, I believe there is also the need for them to expose students to opportunities that they and their parents had not previously considered as options. Many students in Mt Druitt receive little support or guidance from their parents in academic pursuits, as parents are simply not familiar with the opportunities available. Furthermore, students may not be fully aware of the benefits – both academic and experiential – that may flow from such educational opportunities and therefore need additional encouragement to pursue them. Such encouragement would be an essential part of the necessary skill-set of an effective AEO.

A further example of the systemic shortcomings of the public education system in Mt Druitt is the lack of information disseminated amongst Indigenous students about special university entrance programs. While high schools in Redfern and other inner-city areas are visited annually by speakers from the Aboriginal centres of universities who wish to inform Indigenous students about the alternative entrance schemes²⁰¹ available to them, very little of such information is spread within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

Andrea, Ben and Alan’s sister, was in her final year of high school and assumed that upon graduation she should plan on finding paid employment, believing that her Australian

²⁰¹ Most universities feature a special admission scheme specifically for Indigenous students. Such schemes will consider Indigenous students for admission when their test scores would otherwise exclude them. Often bridging courses are required and additional academic support is offered throughout the students’ tenure, such as tutoring under the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.

Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores would not be enough to gain her admittance into university and, furthermore, realising that her family could not afford the tuition. When asking her about her plans for the future, Lewis was surprised to hear that Andrea was aware of neither the special entry programs offered by many of Sydney's universities, nor the Higher Education Contribution Scheme – Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP)²⁰² offered by the Commonwealth government. Lewis was aware that the University of Western Sydney (UWS) would soon be hosting an information day for Indigenous students and told Andrea about this. At first Andrea was hesitant, she was concerned that she “wasn't smart enough” to go to university and worried that she would never be able to afford it. When Lewis asked her if she would like to go to the information day at UWS she only responded “maybe”. Lewis realised that Andrea needed an additional push and extra support to pursue this opportunity, something that Andrea's parents were not likely to provide. Concerned that Andrea could miss out, Lewis offered to drive her to the information day and attend it with her, to which Andrea agreed. Lewis's efforts demonstrate that “culturally appropriate” educational support need not exclude pushing Aboriginal students beyond their comfort zone.

Andrea has now successfully completed her fourth year of part-time coursework in early childhood education. When I asked her about her studies Andrea beamed with pride, telling me that although it wasn't always easy, she really enjoyed what she was learning and liked her lecturers. Andrea is the first member of her family to have pursued a university education, paving the way for her younger brothers and sisters; something that is unlikely to have occurred had it not been for Lewis's support and encouragement and Andrea's participation in her local Aboriginal organisation, Winanga-Li.

When hearing talk within the community about tertiary education, the most common topic is TAFE and its practical education courses, as evidenced in the ABS Census statistics noted in Chapter 4. While Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents see a university education as desirable, it is frequently discussed as if it were something only for other people. Rather

²⁰² HECS-HELP is an interest free, income contingent loan that students will not have to begin repaying until their income reaches the minimum repayment threshold, which in 2010-2011 was \$44,912 (<http://www.gooduniguide.com.au/School-Leavers/Paying-Your-Way/Degree-costs-and-loans?gclid=CLGiofuE560CFYUnpAodZWyn6Q>, accessed January 24, 2012).

than youths completing year 12 and then immediately entering university as did Andrea and James, it is much more common for people to end their schooling with high school, sometimes in year 10, and only decades later begin university, as was the case for Lewis and Betty. When I asked members of Winanga-Li's Aboriginal community why they did not go straight into tertiary education one of the most common answers was that they or their partner had just fallen pregnant and they did not think it would be possible, knowing that they would have to work to earn money to support their new family²⁰³. Other reasons given for not pursuing tertiary education straight out of high school were that they weren't interested because they wanted to make money or weren't ready for the responsibility and needed a break from schooling. On several occasions people noted that they were "wild" in their late teens and as one respondent put it, more interested in "wine, women, and song".

While community members had in-depth knowledge of the various government pensions available to those who were low-income or unemployed, there was very little local knowledge of government assistance schemes to aid in tuition and other educational costs aside from ABSTUDY (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme). Even in the case of ABSTUDY their knowledge of the extent to which it covers educational and living expenses beyond high school is somewhat limited. The deficit in knowledge of Indigenous scholarships, HECS-HELP, special entrance programs for Indigenous students, and the full benefits of ABSTUDY amount to a perception that only "really smart" or wealthy people go to university and that most Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents did not fall into either category.

Here the structural violence of locational disadvantage intersects with the classist cultural outlook that pathways to university education were not within their purview. Added to this are negative experiences with teachers, perhaps grounded in racism, who write them off as "trouble-makers" in the classroom, and which gives them the impression that they are "not smart enough".

²⁰³ As noted in Chapter 4, Census data reveals that Indigenous Australians have higher fertility rates, beginning at younger ages, than do non-Indigenous Australians; although this trend of heightened fertility is gradually declining (Taylor 2011:295).

Another form of structural violence that features in Indigenous difficulties in accessing tertiary education is the fact that the occupation of an AEO simply requires a Certificate of Aboriginality and strong communication skills²⁰⁴. Particularly at the high school level, AEOs should be required to receive training that imparts sound knowledge of opportunities for students' tertiary education and ways to facilitate their students' access to these pathways. Information on Kala's study abroad scholarship opportunity is one such pathway that could have broadened the horizons of other Mt Druitt Aboriginal students; while high school information sessions on HECS-HELP, university scholarships, and alternative Indigenous entrance schemes are others. Yet these opportunities are missed by Mt Druitt's Aboriginal students because school administrators ignore the availability of these programs, and the AEOs are expected only to be empathetic, "nice", and good communicators.

Exclusion in the Marketplace

While Mt Druitt's Aboriginal youths experience covert oppression from social processes along their pathways to tertiary education, they also experience overt discrimination through the social acts of others throughout their daily lives. What follows are several accounts, related to me by members of Winanga-Li's Aboriginal community, which illustrate that, even as paying customers at shops, restaurants, and health services, Indigenous people face discrimination.

The above account of Miriyan and Ben's harassment by a local store's security officer is just one example of this. Another was related to me by Betty. She and Lewis were in the food court of the Mt Druitt shopping centre and decided that they would each purchase lunch, but from different vendors on opposite sides of the food court. Betty (who is fair-skinned and could easily "pass" as non-Aboriginal, should she choose) left Lewis (who is darker-skinned and is stereotypically Aboriginal in appearance) at a roast chicken stall and made her way over to a sandwich shop. Upon paying for and receiving her sandwich, Betty returned to where Lewis was still waiting in front of the chicken shop. Standing next to him she asked what was taking him so long, to which Lewis replied that he still hadn't been served. As Betty stood next to Lewis the shop attendant looked around for the next

²⁰⁴ This is to ensure they will interact with students and their families in "culturally appropriate" ways.

customer to serve and asked Betty for her order, despite the fact that Lewis had been standing there for at least ten minutes and Betty had just walked up. This infuriated Betty and she confronted the shop attendant, loudly asking “are you racist!” The shop attendant looked embarrassed and stammered apologies, claiming not to have seen Lewis and then asking him for his order. Both Betty and Lewis believed this incident to be a result of the shop attendant’s racism, as the only difference between Betty and Lewis was their skin colour.

Such events serve to remind the actor that they are seen by some as undesirable and second-class citizens. Furthermore, as these events are recounted to others in the Aboriginal community, the marginality of their position within mainstream Australia is reaffirmed. This reinforces a perception that non-Aboriginal people cannot be trusted and perpetuates the cultural binary.

Health Services

Indigenous Australians experience health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and mental disorders, at significantly higher rates than other Australians (Vos et al. 2009:473). If Indigenous Australians experienced a burden of disease at the same rate as the non-Indigenous population, 59 percent of Indigenous illnesses would have been avoided in 2003 (Vos et al. 2009:472).

One explanatory factor for the prevalence of ill health amongst Aboriginal Australians is “minority stress”²⁰⁵. Minority stress is a term coined by Ilan Meyer (2003) to explain the heightened rate of mental disorders found among lesbian, gay and bisexual persons. Yet minority stress is not only ascribable to non-heterosexual persons, but to anyone who is a member of a stigmatised social category (Meyer 2003:675). According to Meyer and other researchers, this phenomenon is a product of recurrent and ongoing prejudice, stigma, exclusion and discrimination experienced by minority groups, making their social

²⁰⁵ While minority stress may contribute to the enormous gap in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, it cannot explain all diseases suffered at higher rates by Aboriginal persons, such as Type 2 Diabetes. Lifestyle choices, such as preferred foods and lack of exercise contribute to the Indigenous burden of illness, yet such choices are often constrained by economic circumstance, as some healthier foods and athletic endeavours can be cost prohibitive and involve time investment.

environment more stressful than those of the mainstream population (2003:674-75). The stress is created by experiences of prejudice, often leading to “expectations of rejection”, attempts to hide or conceal one’s identity, the internalisation of negative stereotypes, and coping processes that can be harmful to one’s health²⁰⁶ (Meyer 2003:675).

My research suggests that experiences of prejudice do indeed play a large role in Indigenous health outcomes, as it is commonly felt amongst Mt Druitt’s Indigenous residents. These experiences have led many to expect discrimination when attempting to access health services, thus dissuading them from accessing treatment at early stages of illness. Such a large number of accounts demonstrating the abysmal treatment of Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents by health service providers have been related to me that it is impossible to recount them all. Below I will detail several of the most egregious cases.

Allison

Allison, a fair-skinned Aboriginal woman who regularly participates in Winanga-Li’s activities, was referred by the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) to the Westmead hospital for tooth pain. Upon being brought into the surgery and positioned in the dentist’s chair, two dental assistants proceeded to examine her teeth. Within Allison’s earshot, these dental assistants began to comment on the condition of her teeth: “Have you seen her teeth!... She’s tryin’ to tell me that she brushes them!... Oh my god, it’s disgusting!” Understandably, this encounter deeply distressed Allison and during a meeting of the now-defunct Aboriginal Wellbeing Group²⁰⁷ offered by Winanga-Li, she tearfully recounted her feelings of shame and helplessness. Everyone present during the meeting offered great empathy and support, and encouraged Allison to make a formal complaint against the

²⁰⁶ For example, substance abuse, suicide and risk-taking behaviour; all of which occur at higher rates among Australia’s Indigenous population (Vos et al. 2009:470)

²⁰⁷ The Aboriginal Wellbeing Group was a community-initiated project undertaken by Winanga-Li in an effort to address the health concerns of community members. During the group’s meetings a healthy lunch and snacks were provided while members gathered to “yarn” about their current situations (including, but not limited to health). With assistance from a non-Aboriginal community nurse, health professionals specialising in topics of concern to group members were booked and gave presentations during meetings. During my participation in the group, presentation topics included diabetes, asthma and the heart and circulatory system, as well as recurring participation from a dietician and a licensed fitness physiologist. Despite successful attendance and health outcomes, the group was discontinued after three years as, despite repeated efforts, the organisation failed to obtain funding for the program.

dental assistants. Allison followed this advice and “went back there and I told the dentist and they weren’t impressed. They actually treated me really good from then on.”

If it hadn’t been from the support Allison received from Winanga-Li’s program it is likely that Allison would not have asserted herself, thus maintaining the notion that as a low-income Aboriginal woman she could not expect caring treatment from dentists or other health professionals. Such feelings can result in Aboriginal people shying away from preventative health care services, which in turn results in the need for more invasive and expensive health care treatments. This is likely to be an explanatory factor for the consistent under-utilisation of health services by Aboriginal Australians²⁰⁸. Indigenous Australians frequently seek medical treatment only at late stages of illness and they access non-hospital specialist services in far fewer numbers than do non-Indigenous Australians (AHMAC 2008:146). Furthermore, Indigenous Australians are six times more likely to be admitted to hospital for ambulatory care-sensitive conditions²⁰⁹ (AHMAC 2008:148) and of these conditions, 78 percent are those potentially preventable (7).

Studies have revealed that while Indigenous Australians are more likely to be hospitalised, they are less likely to receive medical or surgical procedures during hospital treatment. During the two year period of June 2004 to June 2006, hospital procedures were recorded for only 55 percent of Indigenous Australians, versus 80 percent of non-Indigenous Australians (AHMAC 2008:146). An example of this lack of treatment for Aboriginal persons can be found in the following narratives of Luke and Lewis.

Luke

Luke, an Aboriginal man from Dubbo who had been diagnosed with stomach cancer²¹⁰, was visiting relatives in Mt Druitt and realised that he had forgotten his pain medication. He went to Mt Druitt Hospital’s Emergency Room in an attempt to obtain a prescription for his medication, and was forced to wait for several hours. He was finally seen by a

²⁰⁸ On a per-person basis, the average health expenditure on Indigenous persons is 17 percent higher than for non-Indigenous persons; while the rate of occurrence for diseases and mortality are 200 to 300 percent higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (AHMAC 2008:7).

²⁰⁹ “Ambulatory sensitive care conditions” are those that result from a lack of effective, timely and adequate non-hospital care (AHMAC 2008:148).

²¹⁰ According to a Mt Druitt community nurse, stomach cancer is one of the most painful forms of cancer.

technician who administered a dose of pain medication and Luke was returned to the waiting room to wait to see a doctor. He remained in the waiting room for ten hours more and received no further medical care. At this point his pain had returned in severe form and he pleaded with the staff for more medication, yet they refused him, as their policy was that they could only administer one dose of medication prior to seeing a doctor. Luke became agitated and vocal, causing security to be called and he was forcibly removed from the hospital. Within 12 hours he was brought back to the hospital “Dead on Arrival”: he had gone home and hanged himself because the pain was too great to bear. Luke’s body was discovered by his 16-year-old nephew.

An insider to the hospital system, who was consulted when concern arose that Luke’s case would result in a wrongful death lawsuit, reported to me that the reason why he was not prioritised to be seen by a doctor was that the ER employees believed him to be a drug addict. She went on to state that his skin colour and identification as Aboriginal on hospital paperwork were likely factors in this presumption. Exemplifying cultural violence (Galtung 1990:291), the excuse used by hospital employees to justify the lack of treatment was that, as this man was Aboriginal, they needed to wait until an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) could arrive at the hospital to ensure “culturally appropriate” service delivery prior to granting the patient a meeting with a doctor. As a result, no wrong-doing was found to have occurred during the ensuing investigation and no one was held accountable for Luke’s early death.

The disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons’ access to hospital procedures reflect “systematic practices, not ill-intentioned but still discriminatory” (AHMAC 2008:146). These systematic practices are indicative of structural violence within Australia’s health care system. A further case supporting this assertion was recounted to me by Lewis and Betty.

Lewis

Throughout his life Lewis has maintained a regular workout routine²¹¹, although he is considered overweight for his height (he is only 5'4"). Like most Aboriginal men, Lewis is prone to circulatory and cardio-pulmonary illnesses, yet he had experienced no such health problems prior to the age of 50. One day while working out at the gym Lewis began to experience pain radiating from his left arm. Thinking he had torn a muscle, he left the gym and went home. After several days the pain had not abated and he mentioned it to his wife Betty (who, as has been noted, is a trained nurse). Betty insisted that he go straight to the emergency department, which he did. Upon seeing a doctor Lewis was told that he had probably just torn a muscle and was sent home to rest without any tests being performed²¹². That evening when Lewis told Betty of the doctor's instructions, Betty became concerned and irritated. She contacted a heart specialist with whom she had previously worked and related Lewis' symptoms, asking for advice. This doctor told Betty that Lewis needed to immediately return to the hospital and demand certain tests be performed; that Aboriginal Australians have exceptionally high rates of heart disease and that, if necessary, Lewis needed to remind the emergency department staff of this. Betty ordered Lewis to return to the hospital and, despite his hesitancy, Lewis did so. This time tests were performed on his cardio-vascular system and the day the results were received, a triple bypass surgery was scheduled for Lewis. He was told that if he had let his condition go for another week, it was likely that he would have had a massive heart attack.

As a result of such negative experiences, many members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community abstain from contact with the health care system except in emergency situations, so that the lack of preventative treatment often leads to severe (and costly) illnesses. This trend is confirmed by Anne Daly and Diane Smith, who report that Indigenous persons have twice the hospital admission rate and are far more likely to experience acute episodes of ill-health (2003:13). Parallel assertions were made by Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz in 1982 (4-5), indicating that little has changed in these regards over the past thirty years.

²¹¹ As a young man Lewis was a boxer. He has continued workout routines from this training throughout his life, although he no longer boxes. He has periodically subscribed to gyms and also has workout equipment at home, which he regularly uses.

²¹² It is pertinent to note that Lewis had private health insurance, which would have paid for any tests or procedures. Therefore the hospital had no financial motivation for its staffs' lack of action.

Service providers as well as community members are aware of the need for better health care services for Indigenous people, particularly in “education programs aimed at early detection for prone diseases such as diabetes” (Blacktown City Council 2007:36, 96). Yet despite the money the State and federal governments purport to be pouring into Aboriginal health, these dollars have not resulted in better health outcomes for Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents.

The Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is resigned to the fact that they are treated as second-class citizens. Accounts of oppressive experiences, frequently voiced to other Indigenous people, often elicit from the audience similar accounts of discrimination. As accounts of oppression circulate through the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, their marginal place within the western Sydney landscape is reaffirmed. Yet they have learned that to openly challenge structures and figures of authority only attracts increased scrutiny, as Ben and Alan learned when they experienced increased police surveillance after their initial encounter²¹³. Similarly, Betty believes that she, and Winanga-Li through association, has become known by representatives of government bodies as “a trouble-maker” who is constantly “stirring the pot” and “making them look bad”. Overt acts of resistance against such agents of authority draws their ire as it challenges their ability to manage the Aboriginal population as they see fit. Thus, for many Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents, avoidance and evasion of encounters with White institutions, such as those of health, justice and education, appear to be the coping mechanism of choice.

As few members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community are like Betty, who has the will to openly challenge the oppressive structures imposed upon them, open acts of Aboriginal resistance seem few and far between. Since the White media appear content to present only stories of Aboriginal dysfunction, this becomes the view of the mainstream population. However, the realm of the arts permits a more subversive narrative of White Australia’s repression of the Other.

The overwhelming marginalisation of Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal residents is the subject of local Indigenous playwright Nakkiah Lui’s 2013 moving fictional piece, ironically titled

²¹³ For further examples, see Cowlshaw 2009:21- 23, 41.

*This Heaven*²¹⁴. The play tells the familiar story²¹⁵ of an Aboriginal family shattered when the father dies in police custody and the police officers at fault are “let off with a slap on the wrist”. The theatrical account of Mt Druitt poses the question: “does doing nothing make you as complicit as the perpetrators” of injustice (Belvoir 2013). The play reaches a climax when the Aboriginal daughter, a promising law student, joins the riots that erupt following the paltry sentence given to the police officers at whose hands her father died. It ends with a gun-shot ringing out through the darkness, implying her death.

Local knowledge of Mt Druitt, like that portrayed in Lui’s play, imparts that challenging oppressive structures of authority invites danger and retaliation. Thus, resignation to the dominance of these structures, and efforts to avoid them when possible, is a feature of everyday life in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Indigenous Mt Druitt residents experience compounded marginalisation and structural violence in their daily lives. Whether through sensationalised media reports regarding their dysfunction, State-run bodies of law, health and education, or in the pervasiveness of racial discrimination and other “social acts” in the marketplace, members of Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal community are reminded time and again that they are second-class citizens who only exist on society’s margins.

Aboriginal organisations offer a counter-narrative to Indigenous existence: that Aboriginal people are resilient in the face of adversity. Such organisations foster agency, political voice, and community, in addition to offering human services. Their close interactions with local Aboriginal residents provide them with insight into problems experienced and solutions likely to be effective. While Aboriginal organisations are not a panacea and difficulties exist within specific organisations – as is similarly the case with White organisations – I believe that they *must* come to play a far more central role in the delivery

²¹⁴ *This Heaven* ran from February 7 to March 10, 2013 at Sydney’s respected Belvoir Street theatre. It received wide praise from local and national Australian newspapers and was Lui’s first full-length play. Subsequently, Lui won Belvoir’s Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright’s Award.

²¹⁵ The sequence of events in *This Heaven* parallels those that occurred in 2004 on Palm Island, Queensland, when Cameron Doomadge died while in police custody and civic disturbances ensued.

of Aboriginal-specific human services. The following chapter will explore one such Aboriginal organisation – Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation – to provide an example of the successful form and function of Indigenous community-controlled organisations within Australia.

8. Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are undoubtedly those which receive the most broad-based support from the Aboriginal people as the appropriate agencies to address issues of concern... overwhelmingly the organisations have stood the test of time and are by far the most effective and informed means by which Aboriginal opinion may be articulated.

- Elliott Johnston, Commissioner of RCIADIC (1991:27.1.3)

Previous chapters have explored ways in which Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents have experienced, and continue to experience, marginalisation. The SEIFA Index ranks Mt Druitt as significantly more socioeconomically disadvantaged than other regions of Sydney. Numerous other indicators – such as mortality rates, rates of incarceration and contact with the criminal justice system, and levels of education and income – consistently reveal “gaps” in wellbeing and achievement²¹⁶ between Indigenous and other Australians (Cunneen 2001; Taylor 2005; Biddle 2009b:6; and Hunter 2012:193).

Human service organisations generally aim to ameliorate disadvantage and inequality for their target clientele, yet each will have its own approach to designing, implementing and delivering services. This chapter explores the way in which the Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation approaches service delivery to Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal community.

Needs in Mt Druitt

Chapter 4 provides some insight into the needs of Mt Druitt residents. With a largely youthful profile in this region, there is a heightened need for age-appropriate activities to engage children during stages of early-childhood development, youth, and young adulthood. Such services are lacking in Mt Druitt and, for those that are available, the absence of easily accessible public transportation greatly hinders participation (Hurni 2012:14-17).

²¹⁶ It should be noted that measures of achievement, such as income, education and homeownership, are all grounded in White Western values and do not necessarily reflect the priorities of Indigenous Australians. For discussion of the issue, see Kowal 2008 and Eckersley 2010.

The early disengagement of young Mt Druitt residents from education, particularly Indigenous Australians, compounds their marginalisation. This lack of education and skills then feeds into the poor workforce-participation rates found in Mt Druitt. Once again, it is Indigenous Australians who are more likely to be disengaged from the labour force and, when they do participate, Indigenous Mt Druitt residents are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Social Capital

The lack of engagement in employment, education and other activities leads to isolation and a diminution of “social capital”. This theory asserts that a person’s social capital rests upon their engagement in numerous social relationships, with those holding a large (and diverse) number of social relations having higher social capital than those with few²¹⁷ (Lahn 2012:294).

The standard approach to social capital posits that there are three kinds of social relationship: “bonding”, “bridging” and “linking”²¹⁸ (Lahn 2012:296-97). While Australia’s approach to Indigenous disadvantage underscores the necessity of Aboriginal persons building their bridging and linking social capital to improve their socioeconomic status, Indigenous Australians frequently experience their bonding social capital to be of greater value and necessity (Lahn 2012:302).

In Mt Druitt, I have observed many Indigenous individuals who take part in little social interaction beyond a small circle of close friends and, should they reside locally, their extended family. These interactions often feature requests for goods and services and responses to such requests. This might entail requesting or providing transportation, the baby-sitting of children, “having a feed” together, or watching pay-television or movies at another’s house. Indeed, these activities within one’s bonding social network are essential

²¹⁷ An important criticism of social capital theory is that it does little to take into account ways in which the networks with which one identifies, shares a common outlook, trusts and relies upon, can further their marginalisation (Lahn 2012:295).

²¹⁸ Bonding social capital is characterised by the close social relationships between people such as family and close friends. Bridging social capital consists of the broader social relationships such as acquaintances and co-workers. Linking social capital is comprised of the relationships one has with others beyond their everyday life; “those entirely outside [their] community” (Lahn 2012:296-97)

to meeting the daily needs of Mt Druitt's Indigenous residents, who frequently live in poverty. Such networks of family and close friends are an essential resource to Aboriginal Australians in particular, as, unlike bridging and linking networks, there is little threat that they will experience discrimination within this form of social relationship.

Rather than Indigenous people venturing out to inexpensive artistic, sporting or multi-cultural public events, they are far more likely to remain inside watching television²¹⁹. In fact, when I asked one woman about her engagement with Winanga-Li, she stated that she had recently begun coming to the organisation again because she had promised her now-deceased mother that she would "get out of the house more". She went on to note that her mother had previously insisted that she attend the organisation's sewing group with her, and, prior to her death, had made the woman promise to "get off the couch, stop watching television all day and find something to do with [her]self".

Australian Indigenous policy regarding economic disadvantage assumes that Aboriginal Australians fail to gain employment because they lack the bridging and linking relationships provided by broader social networks (Lahn 2012:296-97). However, Julie Lahn asserts that although the relationship between employment and social capital is unclear (297), it appears that Indigenous Australians more frequently locate employment through their bonding relationships, unlike non-Indigenous Australians, who do so via their bridging and linking relationships (301-2). My observations of the social networks of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents supports Lahn's assertions; however it is also the case that, for the residents with whom I interacted, one key form of bridging and linking relationship was important: that provided by local Aboriginal organisations such as Winanga-Li²²⁰. Winanga-Li serves the important role of connecting members of the Aboriginal community with activities and resources that they are unlikely to access without additional support²²¹.

²¹⁹ At first I was quite surprised by the high percentage of Indigenous households, often receiving some form of government assistance, that subscribe to pay television. Pay television costs a minimum of \$49 per month for a basic package. Through conversations with Indigenous informants I discovered that watching pay television was an integral aspect of their day-to-day lives and the most common leisure activity.

²²⁰ I must acknowledge, however, that my engagement with the community frequently was initiated through the activities of Winanga-Li, which is likely to skew my results towards those who interact with the staff and members of the organisation.

²²¹ Examples of clients being linked by Winanga-Li to resources outside of their immediate bonding network include: regular posting of Indigenous-specific employment and training opportunities in the Sydney area (at

One example of this can be found in Winanga-Li's Aboriginal youth Australian Football League (AFL) team.

While many Indigenous families and youths enjoy sports, both as participants and spectators, children are not heavily engaged in local sporting clubs; although are likely to sporadically play pick-up games with friends and family at one of Mt Druiitt's numerous open grassy areas. One persistent barrier to accessing youth sports leagues is transportation, which is compounded when a parent or guardian will not commit to ensuring that their child will reliably participate in sports practice and game days. In 2013 Winanga-Li sponsored and helped to recruit a co-ed Indigenous AFL team in the ten and under age category²²². While parents were thrilled to have their child participate, almost none were willing to transport their child to games and practice, and only two parents actually attended any games. To everyone's amazement the team came second in the entire league. The benefits²²³ of participating in youth sports would therefore have been denied to these children should Winanga-Li not have been willing to organise the team and transport the children to and from games, with the help of Winanga-Li volunteer and the team's coach, Uncle Fred.

It is not that Indigenous parents fail to recognise the benefits that their children receive from participation in team sports, or that they themselves don't enjoy sports; rather, many Indigenous adults are trapped by inertia, likely growing from and feeding on depression and feelings of hopelessness. Surrounded by narratives of crime, violence and drug and alcohol abuse and having experienced racism, oppression and past personal failures, the motivation

times directly referring clients to such opportunities), taking clients to the theatre (children saw *Wicked!* while adults attended *This Heaven* and several other Indigenous-themed plays), hosting community-wide events such as their annual NAIDOC Family Picnic Day (which has included booths set up by other human service providers) and Christmas Carols events. Winanga-Li also connects people with Indigenous-specific human service providers within the organisation's own bonding, bridging and linking networks.

²²² Winanga-Li's sponsorship and implementation of the football team was possible owing to the organisation's fundraising activities, such as renting out rooms of its property. Additionally, Lewis and Betty volunteered their time, without remuneration, to help transport children to practice one day a week after school, as well as devoting one day every weekend during the season to transport team members to and from games.

²²³ Youth team sports provide children the opportunity to build their self-esteem and team work abilities. It also broadens their social network, gives them cardio-vascular exercise and engages them in positive recreational activities.

of Indigenous Mt Druitt residents “to get off the couch” is constricted. Television offers the path of least resistance to entertainment and requires little effort.

Just as Alan’s parents were unable to contribute in wresting him from the justice system, as we saw in Chapter 7, many Indigenous Mt Druitt adults become paralysed and fail to move beyond their comfort zone. As a result, social isolation is common and social capital is low. Lahn draws attention to qualitative and quantitative research that strongly suggests discrimination within Australian society to be a key contributor to the social exclusion and low bridging and linking social capital of Indigenous persons (297-298). Inertia constricts motivation to engage in employment and job-skills training, and such activities are often only undertaken when made conditional for receiving government welfare payments.

This inertia must be overcome, not only for the wellbeing of Mt Druitt’s Indigenous adults, but for that of their children as well. Without change, the next generation of Mt Druitt’s Indigenous residents is likely destined for the same apathetic and isolated life that plagues many members of the current generation. This chapter demonstrates that the holistic approach taken by Indigenous organisations such as Winanga-Li offers a viable pathway to ameliorating this form of disadvantage.

Unlike the aforementioned woman who identified the need to end her isolation, most Mt Druitt Indigenous residents do not see their limited social interactions as a problem. They may feel lonely, depressed and unproductive, but they feel helpless in improving their condition. Coming to an Indigenous organisation like Winanga-Li is often not initially done in an effort to build social capital, but rather to meet the conditions of welfare allowances, such as participation in educational courses, or to support a friend or relative while they access the organisation’s services. Yet engagement with Winanga-Li has far greater benefits than simply obtaining skills and meeting welfare requirements, for it is an arena in which people build their social capital and self-esteem. Only after several months of participation at Winanga-Li do clients begin to reap these rewards and on numerous occasions they have commented to the organisation’s staff and to me how they have

benefited from the social support and engagement the organisation provides, and the skills it engenders²²⁴.

Foundation of the Organisation

Winanga-Li is an Aboriginal Corporation established under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* in 1993²²⁵. Starting out of the trunk of Betty's car, then relocating to a Housing Commission property in Emerton, the organisation is now, and has been for the past 14 years, located on two hectares of land owned outright by the organisation. A converted four-bedroom house sits at the front of the lot, with bedrooms transformed into offices and meeting rooms. The homey comfort of the facility, which includes couches as well as desks and chairs, lends itself to feelings of acceptance, friendship and family. Pride in Indigenous Australian culture is displayed throughout the facility via paintings, posters and artefacts. For eight years all courses were run out of this building. However, in 2008 Winanga-Li received long-requested funding to install a pre-fabricated classroom at the rear of the property²²⁶, which is now in full use from Monday to Friday. Besides serving as a classroom, this large space is also rented out as a venue for meetings. Government departments such as Housing and Health frequently hold their meetings with Aboriginal liaison workers there, as do other Indigenous organisations, such as the AMS. The converted house now serves primarily as the administrative centre of the organisation.

Founding members of the organisation included Lewis, Betty, and her mother Belinda. Belinda, who was never a paid employee of Winanga-Li, had always worked to enhance the wellbeing of those around her: "She's always been respected as a community worker." Betty recounted to me how, during her childhood living amongst the travelling community of dam-building workers, her mother had looked out for other families (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to ensure that their children weren't taken by the Welfare Board:

Mum was the type of person like, they [her mother and her friends] used to always find out when Welfare would come into town. I don't know how they even knew,

²²⁴ For an example of an approach similar to Winanga-Li's in building clients' self-esteem, see Keddie 2013:33.

²²⁵ This Commonwealth Act of incorporation has since been updated and renamed the *CATSI Act 2006*.

²²⁶ Winanga-Li had to pay approximately one third of the costs of the construction of this portable, with money raised by the organisation itself.

but, you know? They'd go down and they'd clean up... You know, they [the other families] had quite a number of kids and mum used to always go down there and clean up their house, take all of our clothes, dress the kids; take the food from our fridge, put the food into their fridge. Taking care of their kids so their kids wouldn't get taken... My mum used to do that, you know. She used to do it for black families, but she used to do it for more white families than black families.

Belinda²²⁷ was widely known throughout the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community prior to the founding of Winanga-Li. Betty noted: "Aunty June, since the first time she come here, she says, 'I know your mother. Your mother stopped us from getting kicked out of our house.' She says 'I'll always remember that.'" Belinda watched the Aboriginal population of Mt Druitt grow, becoming a key person in pushing for Aboriginal-specific services in the western Sydney region. Betty appears to have inherited her mother's ceaseless drive to improve the lives of those around her: when her mother proposed that she take the helm in starting a new Aboriginal corporation that would provide adult education to Indigenous community members, Betty eagerly agreed.

The organisation has always consisted solely of Aboriginal staff and Management Committee²²⁸ members, and has therefore been governed exclusively by Aboriginal persons²²⁹. The "governance culture"²³⁰ of Winanga-Li has emerged gradually over the organisation's twenty-year history. The founders' vision for the organisation has been crucial to its success, and is grounded in organic community development, which I will elaborate upon below.

²²⁷ Belinda passed away in 2010 from respiratory and cardiac failure at the age 82.

²²⁸ As noted previously, Winanga-Li's Management Committee is elected from members of the organisation. All decisions regarding the organisation and its governance are decided by Management Committee vote.

²²⁹ Although the organisation's Constitution permits non-Indigenous persons to become members of the Management Committee, it is stipulated that these members will not have the right to vote on any matter.

²³⁰ Diane Smith defines "governance culture" as "the system of formal and informal traditions, collective values, and culturally-shared mechanisms for behavioural accountability, incentives and censure that direct staff, management and leaders to conform to the organisation's policies, vision and goals. The formal components of an organisation's governance culture may include its written policy documents, dispute and appeal procedures, vision statements and strategic plans. Its informal aspects are typically unwritten, but nonetheless prevail in people's behaviour and interaction within the organisation; they tell individuals how to do things and how to relate to each other" (2008:223).

Organic Community Development

“Organic community development” is not a term I have imposed upon the model of governance and service-delivery practiced by Winanga-Li; rather, it is a term Lewis and Betty use to describe the organisation’s approach. There is not a great deal of literature on the organic community development model; however, in the journal *Australian Social Work* Christine Potito et al. define it as a service that “can grow organically in a manner consistent with general community development practices, whereby one or two key stakeholders in the area take a lead role in engaging other relevant agencies and driving the model to fruition, followed by ongoing maintenance and development” (2009:382). When talking of “organic development” in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, Valerie A. Brown and Jan Ritchie state that “community is essentially organic (plant-like), rather than mechanistic (machine-like)” (2006:212). Another account invokes organic community development as “the spontaneous reflexive manner in which immediate community needs were met by people not formally employed for this specific work” (Borella et al. 2011:31). All of these uses capture certain aspects of “organic community development” as practised by Winanga-Li, but none conveys the full ideology and vision entailed in Lewis and Betty’s use of the term.

When Betty and Lewis speak of “organic community development”, they highlight the “natural” grass-roots character of their approach to program development and service delivery, in contrast to the “engineered” top-down approach of large mainstream organisations. The social networks that function to put people in contact with Winanga-Li are seen as the natural way to recruit participants, drawing upon face-to-face relationships rather than impersonal advertising. The conversations that occur between staff and clients, which keep Winanga-Li informed of the needs and preferences of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, are also seen to be organic in contrast to reading reports or consulting with people with whom there is little or no prior relationship. By drawing heavily on such forms of sociality and connectedness, Betty and Lewis have found that they are able to create a supportive, caring and comfortable environment in which clients can voice their needs and concerns as well as receive human services²³¹.

²³¹ A similar environment is described in Amanda Keddie’s 2013 work regarding a “non-traditional” secondary school that caters to Indigenous women in suburban Queensland (21).

Winanga-Li's organic community development aligns the organisation's activities with the needs expressed by members of the Mt Druitt community. This model closely mirrors an assertion by Partick Sullivan regarding the importance of Aboriginal organisations:

Mainstream not-for-profit sector organisations are not normally run by the people whose needs they propose to meet. Aboriginal not-for-profit sector organisations, on the other hand, are usually directed by a board elected from the client group, and much of the staff is also usually recruited from this group. (2011:77)

However, it would be remiss to assume that organic community development, as practiced by Winanga-Li, is power-neutral.

When discussing the “organic intellectuals” who naturally emerge within every social group, becoming the experts on that social group, Antonio Gramsci aptly points out that these “intellectuals” emerge “organically” not solely by virtue of their abilities and position vis-à-vis the group, but also by virtue of their abilities and position beyond the group. As the emergence of social groups does not occur in a vacuum, the “natural” shape taken by any group is heavily influenced by the “ensemble of the system of relations” of the dominant cultural (Gramsci 1971:51). Betty and Lewis emerged “organically” as leaders of Winanga-Li, not solely due to their cultural knowledge or well-respected position within the Aboriginal community, but also owing to their university degrees and knowledge of the processes and procedures necessary to establish a corporation and meet its requirements as a legal entity.

While nepotism is a frequently discussed charge against Aboriginal organisations²³², I have not seen Betty or Lewis practice favouritism towards particular clients of Winanga-Li, although I have heard such complaints voiced by some community members²³³. One example of this occurred during the baby competitions of Winanga-Li's 2010 NAIDOC event. As I walked around the event getting carers to sign their children up for the baby

²³² See, for example, Macdonald 1998:92, 98; Cranney and Edwards 1998:29; Rowse 2000:1525; Hill et al. 2001:477; Peters-Little 2001:190; Hunt and Smith 2006:73, 84; Smith 2008:210-11; and Moisseeff 2011:269.

²³³ Will Sanders, drawing on the work of Barry Hindess, points out that allegations of nepotism are common against all persons located “close to decision-making processes in any area of public life” (2006:9) and that “senior managers in Indigenous communities should expect accusations of maladministration and incompetence, or even corruption, and should be prepared to weather such accusations” (2006:10).

competitions²³⁴, I overheard one woman comment to another – “it’s not worth signin’ up. The same ones [children] win every year.” This woman clearly felt that the organisation practiced favouritism towards certain children and families when prizes were awarded during this event. When I mentioned this comment to Betty she was disappointed that community members would feel that way, especially because she always tried to treat everyone the same. She commented that “no one even remembers who won last year” and that if the same child had been awarded the prize more than once, it was an unintentional mistake.

Despite the best efforts of Winanga-Li to be neutral in service delivery, it is important to recognise that not everyone is equally positioned to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the organisation. For example, should someone not have learned that abusive and threatening behaviour is unacceptable, and learned to work through conflict resolution processes, they may be denied access to certain services at Winanga-Li²³⁵. Another example arises when Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents are not socially connected to the Aboriginal community and do not hear through word of mouth, or see posters placed in offices of other local Aboriginal corporations (such as the AMS) advertising a program opportunity, and, therefore, remain unaware of the organisation’s services. Yet to ensure that every Indigenous resident of the region is equally able to access Winanga Li’s services would be to demand Winanga-Li’s staff have a “supranatural level of consciousness” (Fischman and McLaren 2005:436). Furthermore, as programs are frequently full, and the organisation’s funding is limited, demand can outpace supply.

Winanga-Li staff and Management Committee members make great attempts to avoid bias within the organisation through transparency of decision-making. They also actively strive to prevent injustice within the local Mt Druitt community, as has been demonstrated in the

²³⁴ The baby competitions at Winanga-Li’s NAIDOC events feature four categories: one each for boys and girls aged 0-2 and 3-5. They are judged upon how the children (or their carers) respond to questions such as “What is your favourite food” and “What is your favourite thing to do”, with preference going to those whose responses align with healthy habits and family togetherness.

²³⁵ In 2012 a woman, Karen, attended one of Winangas-Li’s sewing classes on three occasions. However, prior to her participation, Karen had had an altercation with another student of the sewing class. Each time she attended class, Karen made nasty comments about the other woman within her earshot, eventually initiating arguments. After an attempted mediation between the two women, in which Karen refused to apologise and admit wrong-doing (instead threatening physical violence), Betty felt that she had no choice but to ask Karen to leave and no longer attend the class.

cases of Alan's arrest and Allison's encounter with the dental assistants. The work of Winanga-Li staff and Management Committee members leads them to actively and creatively develop approaches to service delivery that attempt to prevent injustice, or to intervene when it occurs.

Winanga-Li's Organisational Approach

Many successful Aboriginal corporations do not interact with their clientele in the manner expected by bureaucracies of the Australian government, or even by other charity organisations providing human services. This was recognised during the foundation of legislation for Aboriginal corporations, as discussed in Chapter 2. Providing a legal pathway through which Indigenous organisations could receive public funding, the *ACA Act 1976* and the *CATSI Act 2006* created an interface – a transactional boundary – between Aboriginal communities and government bodies (Levitus 2009:78, 80). Via this avenue Indigenous corporations were granted relative autonomy in designing and delivering programs to meet their communities' needs.

While I cannot pinpoint all of the elements that comprise Winanga-Li's successful interactions with their Aboriginal clients – nor do I wish to reify or reduce such interactions to a set formula – there was one feature that particularly struck me during my fieldwork, largely because it at first appeared so counter-productive to the efficiency of the organisation; namely sociality. It was not until I became acculturated into the organisation and its Aboriginal community that I realised that this was a definitive feature of Winanga-Li's organisational approach; an approach that reflected key cultural priorities of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal population.

During my first months of volunteer work with Winanga-Li, I was frustrated by the staff's propensity for turning their attention immediately to walk-in clients, although this disrupted such activities as meeting deadlines for funding applications, writing program reports, planning events, or even ongoing administrative tasks. When a client entered the facility without forewarning, seeking advice, guidance, or a yarn, a staff member would drop whatever they were working on to greet the client, offer them a beverage and find them a

comfortable place where they could chat²³⁶. I soon realised that this was not the staff's excuse for a coffee-break or a demonstration of lackadaisical work-ethic, but rather a distinctive aspect of the approach taken by this organisation to conducting business: it is the people who come first; not the funding body, administration, or paperwork. What appeared on the surface to be employees stopping to chat and catch up with community members, was, in fact, employees conducting business; indeed, it was this business that was central to the effectiveness of their work.

When familiar members of the community stopped in for a yarn, this was not an excuse to gossip or merely catch up socially; rather, it was time taken out of a hectic schedule for the staff of Winanga-Li to inform themselves of the happenings in the Aboriginal community (such as events and programs, people needing assistance, situations to which Winanga-Li needed to respond). At other times, when a client (including those new to Winanga-Li) dropped in seeking personal assistance, the immediate attention and empathy they received from staff members was a reassurance that their concerns were taken seriously and attempts at resolving them would occur with the utmost care and urgency. As was pointed out to me by Betty, by the time clients reached the organisation they were often “already in crisis mode”, and therefore were very much in need of compassionate treatment. I cannot overstate the willingness of Winanga-Li's employees to give clients their undivided attention, empathy, and support; making every effort to make them comfortable and welcome.

Although, on occasion, this approach resulted in Winanga-Li missing an administrative deadline (such as not submitting a report by its due-date), in all but one case²³⁷ the organisation always informed the body to whom the report was due, and obtained an extension. This serves as an example of how the organisation mediates between Australian governments' demands for accountability and Indigenous community priorities.

²³⁶ An almost identical approach is noted in the interactions between Indigenous staff and the parents of Indigenous students at a secondary school in Queensland (Keddie 2013:30).

²³⁷ In 2004 the organisation was two weeks late in submitting its Annual and Financial reports to the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC, which oversees organisations incorporated under the *ACA Act*) and it was immediately de-registered. The organisation was reinstated after submitting the late reports and paying a fine. The context of such rapid de-registrations will be discussed in Chapter 11 with regard to an ORAC crackdown on organisations' compliance.

While all programs administered by Winanga-Li have been successfully acquitted, the labour and time demanded by such administrative requirements (such as data collection, report writing²³⁸ and tender composition) are perceived as heavily onerous tasks. Such administrative requirements are resented, as staff feel that they must continually spend time justifying the organisation's actions; time taken away from service delivery to their impoverished clients. The resentment of this burden on the organisation's resources is not uncommon. Citing Diane Austin Broos (2003:128), Patrick Sullivan (1996:95-97) and Kathryn Thorburn (2006), Robert Levitus notes "the difficulties that office-bearers and staff face in attempting to effect positive change in the face of multiple expectations that are both incompatible amongst themselves and unsympathetic to the overall operating environment" (2009:79). Yet as a "carapace", this mediating role between government funding bodies and their clientele is a duty intrinsic to Aboriginal corporations.

Sociality as Productive Work

At the heart of the Winanga-Li's approach to service delivery is an emphasis on horizontal engagement between staff and clients²³⁹. This approach highlights the priority given to personal relationships within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community and does not appear to be unique to Winanga-Li: rather, it is a common approach among many Aboriginal workers in NSW. Lorraine Gibson (2010:157) writes that for an Aboriginal employee of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Wilcannia: "Working... is engaging with other Aboriginal people about the issues affecting them in their own terms and ways". Yet this approach is invalidated by Western cultural values: "This view sees the constant meetings and sitting around yarning about various social issues by Aboriginal people... as valueless inactivity" (Gibson 2010:157).

Elizabeth Povinelli asserts that Western notions of productivity are strongly related to "fixed notions of the nature of work", in which work is productive only when "producing

²³⁸ The types of administrative tasks required of Winanga-Li by funding bodies will be discussed in Chapters 9 through 11.

²³⁹ It is telling to note that Winanga-Li staff and Management Committee members rejected my use of the term "client" for the people who used Winanga-Li's services. Instead they preferred the term "community member" or simply used general, gender specific terms like "woman", "girl", "man", "bloke", or "fella" (often with descriptors such as "young" and "old") or "Aunty" and "Uncle" (used in the fictive sense). The use of these terms, as opposed to "client", indicates the pervasiveness of horizontal relationships throughout the organisation.

something of economic value as determined by dominant culture” (Gibson 2010:157). Yet this notion of “productive” work wholly misses the importance of Winanga-Li’s approach, which not only reaffirms and reproduces the Aboriginal relational ontology (Gibson 2010:145), but allows the organisation to tailor its needs to the community it serves and thereby to connect clients with the social services necessary for their well-being.

Narrow Western definitions of “productive” work can be found in Aboriginal units of mainstream services, such as the Mt Druitt Police Station. In one instance during my fieldwork, Sam, then the ACLO for the Mt Druitt Police Station, commented that his (non-Indigenous) boss would not let him change his work hours to coincide with an Aboriginal community event that was likely to be attended by a number of at-risk youth. Sam’s response was “we’re not doin’ it on our own time. Nup. Fine, well we’re not doin’ it at all. It’s work-related and we won’t be there. If you [his boss] get a complaint, you look after it.” Sam believes that, since his employment depended upon the time-consuming maintenance of relationships within the Aboriginal community, it was not fair to assume that he should also conduct this work during his free time, particularly when the event or meeting would not be a part of his everyday social life. Should this be the procedure, the majority of his work as an ACLO would occur without remuneration. Here, one can see how the line between sociality as enjoyment and sociality as a form of labour is blurred by the nature of Aboriginal-identified employment positions within the structures of White Australia.

It is important to note that this is not unique to Aboriginal service providers, as is evinced in Natasha Cortis’ 2006 PhD thesis. Speaking of the social connections necessary to successfully deliver family support services, Cortis concluded that:

the findings confirm the importance of ‘helping relationships’ to the quality of service delivery in family support, despite the invisibility of service relationships in existing performance indicators. The complexity of worker-client bonds highlights the difficulty of evaluating social services using simple numerical counts of client or service episodes, and plays into broader debates about strategies for revaluing care work, and the role of care recipients. (2006:iv-v)

In this excerpt, Cortis notes the challenges of quantifying “worker-client bonds”; something that is necessary to legitimise the productive nature of the social relationships developed between service providers and service recipients, in the current funding environment. Many Aboriginal organisations, such as Winanga-Li, would concur (Baldry et al. 2006:368; Keddie 2013:30-35). This theme will be developed in Chapters 10 through 12, in which Australia’s current human service funding framework is explored.

While the successful delivery of many human services may depend upon forming and establishing social relationships within the community, the necessity of such job characteristics is omnipresent within Aboriginal-identified employment positions. The maintenance of social relationships between service-providers and the Indigenous community, conducted through organisational approaches such as Winanga-Li’s, is seen by community members to be integral to successful Aboriginal service delivery.

It is Winanga-Li’s approach to clients and their concerns that leads members of the local Aboriginal community to prefer to come to this organisation when a problem arises, rather than attempting to directly access mainstream services, where local knowledge holds that they are likely to be forced to wait in lines, talk to impersonal staff in office-like environments, and never be sure that the service-provider will treat them with the dignity they deserve. This is likely to be a key factor in the under-representation of Aboriginal clientele in mainstream health-related services (AHMAC 2008:160) noted in the previous chapter.

There is no one specific attribute of Winanga-Li’s approach to communication that facilitates clients’ feeling of comfort when accessing their services. Rather, a multitude of aspects emerge from the time that the client enters the property. An Aboriginal flag flies outside of Winanga-Li’s office, signalling to all who enter that this space is welcoming of Aboriginal people, as do the cultural symbols throughout the facility. Clients are greeted as soon as they walk in the door, and asked how they can be helped. Should a client be accompanied by someone (children, friends, family members), they too are included in the conversation. The client is usually not the sole focus of conversation, as kin, their area of origin and current residential location frequently feature, as do small-talk and jokes. These

are conversations among peers, with the employee casually signalling to the client that they have commonalities and that the service provider is not superior to them. This horizontal engagement promotes a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, enabling trust, while the sincerity and attention of employees assures the client that they can freely express their concerns.

Sociality therefore appears to be perhaps the key component of successful service delivery to Mt Druitt's Aboriginal community²⁴⁰: It is through the community's social network that people discover local services and programs; it is the Aboriginal service provider's sociality that puts recipients at ease and helps them to feel that they are being taken seriously; and it is the sociality that exists between Aboriginal and other service providers that enables them to link clients with additional services (Aboriginal and mainstream) and ensure that all needs are addressed.

The programs offered by Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation are not unique in the sense of core services provided; it is rather the staff's approach to working with clientele that differs. People use the services and attend the programs offered by Winanga-Li, not because there is no alternative, but because they prefer the organisation's approach to service delivery.

Working Conditions at Winanga-Li

Another reason why Winanga-Li is so greatly valued by its Aboriginal sub-community is that the organisation's employees, particularly Betty, tend to "bend over backwards" to "make everyone happy." When programs are scheduled, such as the Debutante Ball, contracts with participants are established and levels of committed participation are agreed upon. However, it is the case that when a participant fails to meet their contractual obligation, meaning they should be ejected from the program, this does not always happen. Betty will go out of her way to locate and talk to the participant, giving them the opportunity to justify their absence(s). She realises that unexpected barriers to participation

²⁴⁰ Amanda Keddie asserts that "relationality, and more specifically, kinship and social networks" are central in the lives of Indigenous people (2013:23); acknowledgement of which is necessary for Indigenous services to be effective.

arise, such as obligations to care for an ill family member or the lack of available of transport, and will almost always give the participant the benefit of the doubt. This has led her to feel that some participants are “taking advantage” of the organisation and her generosity, as this creates more work and indicates a lack of respect towards her and the organisation.

During the hectic implementation of large events, such as the Debutante Ball and the NAIDOC week barbeque, Betty frequently experiences great stress due in large part to her desire to please everyone. While Lewis acknowledges that Betty has a tendency to create more work for herself, he also realises that her dedication and caring for program participants is one of the reasons why Winanga-Li is so beloved by the community. The flexibility of rules²⁴¹ established for each program makes on-going participation easier for clients, while at the same time creating a greater burden on organisation staff. Though it is frustrating for Lewis and project volunteers that Betty is so accommodating, she is rarely admonished for this. Thus, while the flexibility of Winanga-Li’s programs is of great benefit to the community, allowing for higher levels of participation and heighten positive outcomes, it makes the organisation and execution of programs burdensome to staff and volunteers. This is one of the challenges to sustaining the organisation, as staff burnout ²⁴² is always a danger.

In fact, burnout has in the past led Betty to leave Winanga-Li to work in the public health sector. This option was comfortably available to her as she could be assured that her partner, Lewis, would step into her shoes and keep the organisation operational. Lewis too has left the organisation for periods to work in government social service departments, only to return to the organisation when Betty experienced burnout. Throughout the organisation’s twenty year history either Betty or Lewis, or both, have staffed the

²⁴¹ Examples of rule flexibility are: allowing clients to occasionally bring their child(ren) to adult education courses (such as when the child is home from school sick, or has been suspended), allowing people to miss more than the permitted number of classes, excusing students who occasionally take more cigarette breaks from class than is expected, and allowing people to enrol after a program’s registration deadline.

²⁴² In a 2006 study, Baldry et al. note a prevalence for Aboriginal-identified service providers to “burn out”, as the work expected of them goes beyond that of mainstream service providers (369). For example, they are expected to meet the needs of all individuals within the entire Aboriginal community – both genders and all age groups – whereas this is not the case for mainstream human service organisations, which frequently provide more target-specific services (Sullivan 2011:77, Ivanitz 1998:13-14).

organisation: when one of them has stepped down to work in alternative employment, the other would take the helm, with an additional employee. The absent partner has only returned to work at Winanga-Li when the additional employee has left the organisation for alternative employment.

As the salaries offered by Winanga-Li are extremely uncompetitive, although they adhere to the current Social and Community Services (SACS) Award pay scale²⁴³, all past employees have left Winanga-Li for higher paying jobs. However, all have remained involved in the Winanga-Li community; volunteering on projects and attending events sporadically. Both past and present employees of Winanga-Li believe the work of the organisation to be integral to the wellbeing of the community and regard it highly; yet at the same time they find the salaries offered and the hours required unsustainable. Thus, while the work itself is rewarding in relation to community outcomes, and employees obtain valuable training, the demands made on staff given the pay received, is not. Drawing on Dwyer et al.'s *The Overburden Report: Contracting for Indigenous Health Services* (2009:41-2), Sullivan notes that:

salaries and service conditions in Indigenous sector²⁴⁴ organisations are lower than the public service and commercial organisations... Governments siphon off valuable individuals [from the Indigenous sector] who seek greater security and remuneration, often because of their obligations to their families. (2011:64-65)

This makes it difficult for organisations such as Winanga-Li to recruit and keep competent and skilled employees.

As a result, Winanga-Li has, on numerous occasions, taken on Aboriginal employees with few job skills and little experience. The organisation's staff train these employees, giving them valuable job skills. While this training enables Aboriginal workers with little prior job experience to build their skills and move on to significantly higher paid work in public service, it constantly drains the organisation's staff of time.

²⁴³ For more information on Winanga-Li salaries, see Chapter 10.

²⁴⁴ Tim Rowse coined the term "Indigenous sector" to refer to "Indigenous political institutions with a mix of representative, service delivery, policy making and land owning functions" (2004:39). These not-for-profit bodies serve to "actualise the Indigenous right to self-determination" (Rowse 2002:3).

Betty and Lewis believe that the organisation could function more effectively if they had greater funding, which would allow them to hire additional employees and pay more satisfactory wages. While in the past they have obtained funding to employ a third or fourth employee, this funding has been time-restricted (varying between one to three years). The organisation's activities and services expanded during these periods of supplementary staff, yet once the staff members left the organisation, activities and services provided were not cut but only gradually scaled back. Betty states that, since a program is needed by the community and the community continues to expect the organisation to meet these needs, it is difficult to abandon even after funding ceases. In lines with Winanga-Li's ethos of organic community development and Betty's desire to "please everyone" the organisation's staff often feel obliged to cater to these needs, frequently over-burdening its employees.

Services of Winanga-Li

All programs at Winanga-Li have been developed and implemented at the behest of the Aboriginal community. This aspect embodies the autonomy Indigenous corporations can provide to their Aboriginal communities in designing and delivering programs suited to their local cultural values, primarily those regarding social embeddedness. The long-term tenure of staff and Management Committee members in the Mt Druitt area has enabled a close awareness of the happenings and needs within this community. Therefore, the programs and services offered by Winanga-Li cater specifically to their clients in ways that are sensitive to their life situations and the daily challenges they face.

Clients of Winanga-Li

Winanga-Li's clients frequently have had multiple interactions with Centrelink. The majority of the people who use Winanga-Li are unemployed for various reasons: some are on a disability or old age pension, some are carers for disabled relatives, some have education or skill deficits, and some suffer from health problems that interfere with their ability to locate and/or maintain long-term employment.

As already noted, it is common for people to attend the educational programs offered at Winanga-Li to comply with a condition of their pension. For example, ABSTUDY

recipients are required to be enrolled in an “approved” educational course of study. Should a recipient of ABSTUDY fail to meet the minimum number of hours of study required, Centrelink is likely to suspend payments. Aside from meeting Centrelink requirements (which could equally be met through mainstream educational programs), the social connectedness offered by Winanga-Li provides an incentive for continued ongoing involvement with the organisation, with a number of clients and families attending programs up to three days a week.

While clients of Winanga-Li do use mainstream programs, such practices are more often than not one-off, rather than ongoing, unless no Aboriginal-specific program alternatives are available. Winanga-Li’s clients may not participate in programs year-round and may disappear for a while, but they always seem to resurface. On numerous occasions at Winanga-Li I have witnessed incoming phone calls from past clients, or their unannounced appearance, after long periods of absence, for no reason other than to catch up with staff, other clients and the organisation’s activities. As family and social networks play an important role in people’s familiarity and involvement with Winanga-Li, frequent updates are heard on the status of past program participants and this information is constantly shared, even when not solicited by staff.

Adult Education

The adult education provided by Winanga-Li diverges from mainstream programs, for they are both hands-on and context-driven; being built around tangible objectives such as cooking, sewing, and landscaping. Winanga-Li recognises that a large number of Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal adults are functionally illiterate and innumerate and that job training can only succeed if a solid foundation is laid.

The level of education taught through Winanga-Li’s courses is basic, providing an appropriate and non-threatening point of (re)entry into education for participants. The courses offered increase participants’ basic capabilities, enabling them to pursue employment, further vocational training and/or the NSW High School Certificate.

Overwhelmingly, participants in Winanga-Li's adult education courses have not completed high school, and many suffer from low self-esteem for a variety of reasons: A number of women who attended courses during my fieldwork had previously been involved in both physically and mentally abusive relationships; several participants had learning, mental or other health disabilities; some had been mistreated or marginalised within mainstream educational institutions²⁴⁵, while still others had left school early in order to find work and contribute their household's income. The ages of participants currently enrolled in educational courses at Winanga-Li range from 16 years to those in their mid- to late-60s and there are between seven and eighteen students per class.

The method of teaching at Winanga-Li, which will be described below in reference to specific courses, appears to hold great appeal for many members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, as these TAFE-sponsored courses are frequently close to full-capacity. As one associate of Winanga-Li put it: "the programs are so successful because they [the students] don't even know they're learning." There was always a jovial and light-hearted atmosphere when I walked into the classroom, giving the feel of a group of friends working together on a project rather than a teacher governing a classroom of students.

The programs Winanga-Li offers in its rear portable classroom (which is wheelchair accessible) enables this jovial environment: participants can freely help themselves to tea and coffee, listen to the radio while working (when the teacher is not offering instruction to the group from the front of the room), easily step outside to make a phone call, have a cigarette, or get fresh air²⁴⁶, and the restrooms are located within the classroom and are easily accessible. Furthermore, while not all instructors are Aboriginal, they are closely vetted by Winanga-Li staff and Management Committee members, and community elders participate in each course.

²⁴⁵ Amanda Keddie's 2013 work on a secondary school catering to Indigenous women in suburban Queensland notes similar challenges faced by the school's students. She notes the prevalence of the marginalisation of Indigenous persons within mainstream educational institutions (2013:22), as well as "the poor academic performance of Indigenous students and their low levels of school retention (relative to their non-Indigenous counter-parts)" (2013:24).

²⁴⁶ While students are allowed to take breaks throughout the class period, they are not permitted to do so while the instructor is speaking to the groups as a whole. Additionally, students who take such breaks more than once every hour are gently teased (by the instructor as well as other students), effectively discouraging them from doing so.

Sewing

The first program developed by Winanga-Li, twenty years ago, was a TAFE-sponsored sewing course that also incorporated literacy and numeracy. It has always been successful, with class numbers expanding as rapidly as the organisation could purchase sewing machines. However, other non-Indigenous organisations noticed this success and began offering similar programs. Approximately six years ago, TAFE reported that they would no longer partner with Winanga-Li to offer this type of sewing course as there were “too many duplicate services”. Upon learning this, the organisation’s staff and Management Committee decided that the course was too successful and important to discontinue and unanimously agreed that the organisation would find money in its operating budget to hire the TAFE sewing teacher and offer this course independently.

The organisation now offers two sewing courses, one that is accredited and meets ABSTUDY’s requirement as an “approved” program of study, and one that is more of a social gathering. This latter group is comprised primarily of women who have previously taken Winanga-Li’s accredited sewing class. It meets on a weekday evening, as the members are all employed. The success of this second sewing group is indicative of the success of the first. Not only did their participation in Winanga-Li’s adult education course eventually lead to finding employment, but the relationships they formed with one another, the sewing teacher, and the organisation were so meaningful that they choose to continue to participate in this activity even when the incentive of ABSTUDY payments were removed²⁴⁷. The key factor to this success lies in the social connectedness formed between project participants, the organisation and its staff.

Catering, Numeracy and Literacy

Winanga-Li’s catering (cooking), numeracy and literacy course was first initiated six years ago in response to long-term consultation with the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, which indicated that more adults would be willing to (re)engage with the education system if they were also participating in activities that they enjoyed and saw as useful. In partnership with an Aboriginal instructor at TAFE, who had been a long-standing member of the Mt Druitt

²⁴⁷ Further, participants in the evening sewing group are charged a small fee to participate (\$8 per meeting), while those who attend the accredited daytime course attend for free.

community²⁴⁸, Winanga-Li designed and began to offer a cooking course that also developed the literacy and numeracy skills of participants. This was accomplished by having students undertake tasks such as converting recipes for more or fewer people, reading and writing restaurant reviews, and examining the nutritional information of food products. The course has since been modified to incorporate a catering component, where students learn about formal food presentation and the fundamentals of event planning. This program tends to function at full capacity, again indicating the popularity of Winanga-Li's approach to adult education.

Winanga-Li's Other Adult Education Programs

Screen-printing is an adult education course that has been ongoing for approximately four years. It has been wildly successful, in that it functions at close to full capacity each term, and the products created often garner praise and significant monetary reward. Some students of this course also participate in the Winanga-Li sewing program and apply screen-printing to items they have sewn themselves. Examples of this are the patchwork quilts sewn by Uncle Dan, which he then screen-prints with the logos of National Rugby League teams. He has been offered \$250-\$300 for a number of the quilts he has made, as have other students who have made comparable patchwork quilts.

Examples of other programs previously offered by Winanga-Li include landscaping, digital photography, various computer literacy courses (for example, Introduction to Excel and Introduction to Word), and a "Learn Your 'L's" driving skills course. These programs were discontinued for a number of reasons. Problems were experienced with the non-Indigenous digital photography teacher, in that she was frequently late to class (up to 45 minutes) and was occasionally disrespectful to staff and students, causing enrolments to wane. The driving course was discontinued because the promised use of a vehicle owned by another community organisation (specifically for this purpose) fell through and Winanga-Li decided that it was inappropriate, for liability reasons, to continue to use its own vehicle. The computer courses and landscaping course were discontinued as, after the initial success

²⁴⁸ This Aboriginal instructor has lived in the Mt Druitt area for decades and her large family has, from the start, been heavily involved in wider Sydney Aboriginal communities.

of their first year, enrolments dropped to only two or three students, making it difficult to justify continued program expenditure.

Community Development: Building Social Capital

In conjunction with the educational aspects of Winanga-Li's programs, a further benefit experienced by participants is that of community-building; enhancing the bonding and bridging social networks of clients. Class attendance and other forms of participation in Winanga-Li's activities provide an arena in which all persons are respected and accepted; building friendships, social capital and social supports for those who might otherwise be isolated. An example of this is illustrated in the case-study below, undertaken by Winanga-Li:

Student X, who had attended school to Year 11, enrolled in a Clothing Production Certificate course [at Winanga-Li]. The student was fearful of education from previous experiences and had very poor self esteem, literacy and numeracy skills and was on a disability pension. Early evidence in the course indicated that the student was a slow learner.

Th[is] student... was very timid and lacked confidence and the ability to achieve. The development of the student's social and emotional wellbeing has taken a considerable amount of time. The student now has a part-time [employment] position... Her confidence and self esteem has had an impact on her family... with [her] children continuing on to Year 12. Improved literacy and numeracy skills have [also] had a positive effect on communication and family budgeting skills. This student now supports other new students with similar issues, thus building social capital in the Indigenous community. (WAC 2007)

This aspect of community development is a prominent feature in Winanga-Li's objectives. While initially this feature was spontaneous and unplanned, Winanga-Li began to formally foster community in 1996, when it held its first annual NAIDOC Family Picnic Day. Originally this event consisted of volunteer face painters; egg and spoon, wheelbarrow, and sack races; and a free BBQ lunch for the approximately 50 persons present. In its 16th year, Winanga-Li's NAIDOC Week event had grown to include a Service Expo, where organisations offering various Aboriginal services booked and hosted stalls. In addition, the event included a formal stage where youth competitions were held, such as Mr and Miss NAIDOC, and traditional dance, which allowed the community's youth to demonstrate their cultural engagement via public speaking, music, song and dance. The number of

attendees grew exponentially, with the 2011 Service Expo and Family Picnic Day having had roughly 1,700 participants²⁴⁹. There is very little advertising of this event, aside from posters deposited at other local Aboriginal corporations and flyers being sent to the Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) at local primary schools. The majority of attendees find out about the event by word of mouth, demonstrating the ever-growing social network of Winanga-Li.

Funding Support for Winanga-Li

Winanga-Li therefore is an organisation that provides significant services to its community. Yet funding is ever a problem. As the NAIDOC Week event grew, for instance, so too did the cost of putting it on, as it is free to attendees: in 2010 the event cost \$11,400 (WAC 2011:8). The federal Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs), operated by FaHCSIA²⁵⁰, release money to fund events during NAIDOC Week and, while Winanga-Li has received several thousand dollars from this pool, it is rarely given the full amount requested²⁵¹. As a result, Winanga-Li has had to use its own funds, spending \$3,400 in 2010 to facilitate the event (WAC 2011:21). The money Winanga-Li uses in cases such as their NAIDOC week barbeque comes from what Betty calls “the number two account”, which is funded by the rent charged to third parties that rent one of the organisation’s meeting rooms, from the fee collected for the recruitment of Aboriginal marketing focus-group participants and from the money earned from the stalls at the NAIDOC Service Expo²⁵².

Programs Without Funding

Because of the widespread benefit Winanga-Li’s NAIDOC event brings to the community, the staff and Management Committee support the continuation of this event, although its

²⁴⁹ Due to lack of funding, which will be discussed below, Winanga-Li’s NAIDOC week event has been scaled back since 2012. The event now only includes the barbeque, children’s activities such as rides, face painting, a petting zoo, and demonstrations by Winangas-Li’s choir and children’s traditional dance. The event now attracts approximately 300 people and advertising no longer includes sending flyers to local primary schools.

²⁵⁰ FaHCSIA was renamed FaCS in 2013.

²⁵¹ In contrast, in 2010 Blacktown Council received \$17,000, the full amount requested, in order to sponsor a NAIDOC week dinner dance; attended by only two hundred people, who had to pay for their tickets.

²⁵² In 2010-11 the rental of Winanga-Li meeting rooms brought in \$20,800, focus group recruiting generated \$4,420, and NAIDOC Service Expo stalls earned \$1,100, with the total income raised by the organisation (excluding funding grants) amounting to \$71,937 (WAC 2011:13).

size has been scaled back since 2012 due to lack of funding. Similarly, other programs have been developed that Winanga-Li must fund without public (and often not even private) support. Examples of non-funded programs initiated at the suggestion of, and in consultation with, members of the Aboriginal community are the Debutante's Ball, children's traditional dance and drama classes, the Winanga-Li Choir, the Aboriginal Wellbeing Group, the composition and annual updating of the local area Darug Services Guide and the offering of referral services to Aboriginal clients in need of support and assistance.

These two latter services go hand in hand, as the Darug Services Guide provides the contact details of all Aboriginal service providers in the western Sydney region, including Aboriginal organisations, non-governmental organisations with Aboriginal units or services, and Aboriginal Liaison Officers within government departments. Despite the time-intensive nature of maintaining a current list of these resources, this aspect of Winanga-Li's work is not remunerated, nor is its importance recognised by funding bodies. Similarly, Winanga-Li's provision of referrals and assistance in accessing other social services goes unacknowledged and unremunerated by funding bodies. However, since members of the local Aboriginal community continually approach Winanga-Li for help in accessing other social services, the organisation believes that the Darug Service Guide and referral service constitute core programs.

Given the poor socioeconomic foundation of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal population, many of the programs and services offered by Winanga-Li are rehabilitative in nature, focusing on empowering individuals. Patrick Sullivan, citing Lyons (2001:38), asserts that:

the importance of the advocacy and community development functions of Indigenous sector organisations is a point of difference from the mainstream. The Indigenous sector's emphasis on self-empowerment coupled with material progress is rarely achieved in the third [not-for-profit] sector as a whole. (Sullivan 2010:5)

Yet the extent of need for such services often goes unacknowledged by external funding bodies, as we shall see, for their programs frequently have more immediate objectives such as "making the transition to work" or "continuing education".

Diane Smith notes that for the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation: “The extent of the economic, health, educational and other difficulties confronted by participants are not underestimated by the RAC, but they may well be underestimated by external funding bodies” (Smith 1995:15). Building trust and a sense of connectedness with clients is no small feat. However, they are largely unrecognised in Indigenous service funding, as will be discussed in Chapters 9 through 12. Smith asserts that “anxiety with such intangibles is all the more reinforced because they are not amenable to assessment by departmental performance indicators or statistical analysis” (1995:7).

Aboriginal Corporations as a “Carapace”

As mentioned previously, C.D. Rowley (1972:423, 429) conceptualised Aboriginal corporations as functioning as a “carapace”. By this he meant that such organisations would serve as “a protective layer that intercedes between the Aboriginal domain and the outside world, manage incoming traffic from non-Aboriginal agencies, and create interior space for the formulation of Aboriginal priorities and responses” (Levitus 2009:83). At this transactional interface, external government funds are received and converted into programs autonomously decided upon by the corporation and the Aboriginal community it serves. I find this to be a useful conceptualisation of Indigenous corporations as this is clearly the *modus operandi* of Winanga-Li, as is demonstrated by their deferral to the community when developing and implementing programs.

As we shall see in Chapters 11 and 12, Indigenous autonomy, particularly that facilitated by Aboriginal corporations, is becoming increasingly threatened due to current government proclivities for funding a small number of large mainstream organisations to provide *all* human services (Productivity Commission 2010:332). Further, growing government micromanagement of programs is overwhelming the ability of Indigenous corporations and their staff to mediate between the two domains. While Winanga-Li still exercises autonomy in its design and delivery of services, local representatives of its funding body have increasingly threatened the organisation with the removal of resources as the organisation’s governance culture does not align with that promoted as “best practice” by government. Should this occur and the Indigenous-specific service funding be awarded to a large

mainstream organisation, as is probable, the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community will likely lose what little autonomy they have over services for which they are the specific target clientele.

Conclusion

Winanga-Li provides programs and services essential for the wellbeing of their Aboriginal sub-community: enabling (re)engagement with education, an increase in social capital and community connectedness, children's creative development and expression, Aboriginal self-empowerment and self-determination, and a political voice. This work is not easily achieved, as it has taken decades to grow the community's knowledge of, and trust in, the organisation.

This chapter has demonstrated the approach of one Aboriginal organisation to meeting the needs of its Aboriginal community. The ways in which Winanga-Li's programs have been developed and executed have been described in relation to their ideology of organic community development, in an effort to demonstrate the quality and efficacy of their programs. Serving as a carapace or interface, Winanga-Li has provided its Aboriginal community with greater agency and autonomy in designing and delivering human services to meet their needs in a manner accepted as legitimate and effective by its constituents.

The following chapter will provide a broader image of human services offered in the Mt Druitt area, providing a contrasting picture of service delivery. I will explore accounts of accessing Indigenous-specific human services, including those offered by mainstream bodies, as well as non-Indigenous services. Here it will emerge that, despite their difficulties in receiving adequate funding, the quality of Winanga-Li's programs are in many ways superior to others that are available, indicating the necessity of sustaining organisations like Winanga-Li in order to "close the gap" between the wellbeing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

9. Social Service Organisations in Mt Druitt

It was felt that many staff members treated Koori people disrespectfully.

– Eileen Baldry et al. 2006:369

As we have seen, many members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community are dependent upon publicly- and privately-funded human services, as well as government pensions, allowances and subsidies, to meet their basic human needs. While the Indigenous organisations that offer these services share a number of similarities with their non-Indigenous counterparts, they differ on one crucial level: serving as an interface they are “the principal form of engagement between mainstream Australia and its Aboriginal peoples” and are “frequently a form of communal or local-level governance and the major expression of Aboriginal civil society” (Sullivan 2011:57).

The previous chapter noted the inertia and social isolation experienced by many Indigenous Mt Druitt residents, which directly bears upon their social capital, self-esteem and willingness and ability to participate in and contribute to broader society. Such deficits cannot be addressed by forcing a person to meet with employment agencies or attend educational classes, as research has shown that it is simply not enough to provide jobs when people are not willing or able to engage in employment (Fagan and Dowling 2005:79). Rather, holistic attention must be given to the individual and his or her life situation, acknowledging factors such as self-esteem, social capital, family responsibilities and life stressors. Trust, empathy and caring must be fostered in order to, in the words of Betty, “build them up” so that they can lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Many human service organisations, including those that offer Indigenous-specific services, offer programs that are compartmentalised and impersonal in order to streamline service delivery for reasons of “economy” and “efficiency”²⁵³. Yet Winanga-Li, as we have seen in Chapter 8, emphasises the importance of a holistic view of their clients’ needs and, through the caring and empathy shown through ongoing sociality, builds clients’ trust, self-esteem,

²⁵³ This will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

motivation and social capital. While this engagement is not unique to Indigenous organisations – nor do all Indigenous organisations feature these attributes – my research suggests that Indigenous persons believe they are more likely to receive this form of superior human service delivery from Indigenous organisations than they are from mainstream organisations.

The ideologies guiding different types of organisations vary widely and have direct ramifications upon organisations' governance culture, approaches to service delivery and client outcomes. Funding structures that sustain different organisational types, although relevant, will be dealt with primarily in later chapters.

There is a variety of types of organisations in the Mt Druitt area that offer Aboriginal-specific services, each receiving different levels of resources. As Winanga-Li now frequently competes against non-Indigenous organisations for Indigenous-specific funding, it is important to recognise that not all Aboriginal-specific services are delivered in the same way, nor do they meet the needs of their clients to an equal degree.

Exploring accounts given by Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents concerning their use of both mainstream and Aboriginal human services, this chapter will offer insight into how Mt Druitt's Aboriginal residents negotiate the vast array of services available to meet their basic needs. I shall examine the various organisations that currently exist in Mt Druitt; comparing the human services offered both by those that are Indigenous and those that are mainstream, with the services of Winanga-Li.

This analysis rests upon data obtained from participant observation of human service delivery at Winanga-Li, coupled with that obtained from relevant literature. The comparisons examine factors, such as service quality and accessibility, that make Winanga-Li and other Indigenous organisations valuable and, in some cases, superior to mainstream services.

Aboriginal-Specific Human Services in Mt Druitt

While not all forms of government-provided and -funded social services have an Aboriginal component, many do²⁵⁴. Today Aboriginal-specific services come in three varieties. The first, which includes Winanga-Li, are services administered by Indigenous organisations, which are managed and staffed almost wholly by Aboriginal people. The other two types are government service departments and mainstream non-government organisations (NGOs), both of which are likely to have an Aboriginal person at the service delivery interface, frequently in the position of Indigenous Liaison Officer (ALO).

The clients of Winanga-Li are often also clients of Centrelink, which administers government welfare payments and other entitlements. Additional government-provided services that feature strongly in the lives of Winanga-Li clients are the NSW Department of Housing, which administers public housing; the Western Sydney Local Health District (SWAH), which oversees local hospitals, community nurses²⁵⁵, and a range of other health services; primary and secondary schools, if children are in the household; and the public transportation provided by City Rail, Westbus and Busways.

Outside of public services, Winanga-Li clients frequently use the services provided by other Indigenous organisations: the AMS (Aboriginal Medical Service Western Sydney) for primary health care, and the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church for youth activities (although far fewer attend church services). The most common mainstream NGO services used by Winanga-Li clients are employment agencies or adult education providers – such as TAFE’s Mt Druitt branch – if on Centrelink’s New Start Allowance²⁵⁶, as such engagement is a mandatory condition of this government payment. An additional mainstream service that is widely used by Winanga-Li clients in times of need is the emergency food and financial relief²⁵⁷ provided by Anglicare at Mt Druitt, by the Salvation Army in Lethbridge

²⁵⁴ The SCRGSP noted that, of the estimated \$6.1 billion devoted to Indigenous expenditure in NSW during the 2010-2011 financial year, 85 percent was directed to mainstream services and only 15 percent was directed to Indigenous-specific services (2012:1).

²⁵⁵ Community nurses provide in-home services such as wound care, palliative care, support for people with chronic health conditions, and advice and support for new parents.

²⁵⁶ The New Start Allowance is a government pension for unemployed persons.

²⁵⁷ I was surprised to learn from ORIC documents that a Mt Druitt Aboriginal organisation, Bar Bug-gi (discussed below), allegedly spent approximately \$35,000 in 2010 and 2011 on emergency relief services. No

Park and by Hillson in nearby St Marys. Both employment and adult education services are offered in an Indigenous-specific form, as shall be discussed below.

All Aboriginal-specific services have mainstream counterparts, and with a few exceptions (such as with ABSTUDY and Austudy²⁵⁸), it is up to Aboriginal individuals to decide whether they choose to access the mainstream or the Aboriginal-specific version of a service. Health services, public schools, police stations and Centrelink offices all provide Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs) to facilitate the service's use by Aboriginal people. Services having this Aboriginal-specific dimension emerged during the mid-1970s (Sanders 2003), when Self-Determination became the new policy rhetoric in federal Aboriginal Affairs. The legislation creating Aboriginal corporations coincided with this, as such organisations were established to interact with government and service providers²⁵⁹ (Kowal 2008:339).

Both my own research and that of other scholars indicates that there are benefits and drawbacks to each kind of service. Mainstream services are more numerous than are Aboriginal-specific services, so wait times for appointments may be shorter. Indigenous Mt Druitt residents have also argued that some mainstream services are better-coordinated in their scheduling and therefore more efficient²⁶⁰. However, Aboriginal informants overwhelmingly criticise the impersonal and rigid nature of mainstream services, recounting dehumanising experiences they interpreted as racist. On the whole, members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community with whom I worked preferred to make use of Aboriginal-specific services, rather than those that are mainstream, should the option be available. Mainstream services are used when there is little choice in the matter or when a personal relationship has been established with a non-Indigenous service provider.

members of Winanga-Li's community with whom I spoke were aware of this service and it is not advertised on Bar Bug-gi's website.

²⁵⁸ ABSTUDY and Austudy are means-tested forms of financial assistance for full-time students and apprentices, administered by Centrelink. If one is Indigenous, they can only access ABSTUDY and if one is non-Indigenous, they can only access Austudy.

²⁵⁹ An in-depth discussion of the emergence of Aboriginal corporations can be found in Chapter 2.

²⁶⁰ All comments were referring to the health services provided at the Mt Druitt AMS. The AMS generally does not provide scheduled meetings with GPs and functions as a walk-in clinic, with a revolving weekly roster of doctors. Certain doctors have been identified as better than others and the days they are known to be working at the AMS frequently feature significantly longer wait times.

What is an Indigenous Organisation?

It is not always clear-cut which organisations should be classified as Indigenous, versus mainstream, as evinced during a 2012 Mt Druitt Aboriginal Community Meeting on just this topic²⁶¹. In Mt Druitt there are two significant²⁶² Aboriginal corporations, Winanga-Li and the Bar Bug-gi Drug and Alcohol Centre, which are incorporated under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 (CATSI Act)*²⁶³. Because this Act is exclusive to Indigenous Australians (demanding Certificates of Aboriginality from members during the incorporation process), some Mt Druitt community members believe that the only “real” Aboriginal organisations are those incorporated under this Act. Yet there are also organisations found in Mt Druitt that assert that they are Aboriginal and community-controlled in nature, but which are incorporated under mainstream Acts.

Although the Aboriginal Medical Service Western Sydney (AMS) is not incorporated under the *CATSI Act*, its Aboriginal identity remains unchallenged. The AMS is incorporated under the federal *Corporation's Act 2001*, yet asserts being “Aboriginal Community-Controlled” (AMSWS 2011:4). Another organisation that offers Aboriginal-specific services is the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church. Although this organisation falls under the umbrellas of both Anglican and Presbyterian churches, the fact that it was founded by, caters to, and exclusively employs members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community has given this organisation legitimacy in the eyes of the local Indigenous community. The Indigenous Church provides formal faith services, as well as numerous youth activities and programs. Informally, like Winanga-Li, the church provides emergency food assistance and client referral services. A final example of Indigenous organisations incorporated under acts other than the *CATSI Act* is the Dyinuranang Aboriginal Centre, which offers services for persons who are aged or disabled, and their carers, within the Aboriginal community. This organisation is incorporated under the NSW Department of Fair Trading's (DFT)

²⁶¹ No resolution was reached during this community meeting as to which organisations could be classified as Indigenous, despite it being the sole basis for the meeting. This reflects the heterogeneity of views within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, yet is interpreted by bureaucrats as illustrative of community dysfunction.

²⁶² As of March 2014, there were five Aboriginal corporations registered in Mt Druitt, yet three of these had only registered in the last two years, had an income of less than \$25,000 and their services were unknown to Winanga-Li's sub-community.

²⁶³ In 2006 the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 (ACA Act)* was updated and renamed the *CATSI Act*.

Associations Incorporations Act 2009 (AIA Act), and, likewise, its classification as Aboriginal has only rarely been challenged²⁶⁴.

One example of a purported Aboriginal organisation, incorporated via the DFT's 2009 Act, which has repeatedly had its Aboriginality challenged, is Gagil Aboriginal Community Association. Until recently²⁶⁵, Gagil aimed to provide youth services to the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. While funding bodies appeared to accept this organisation as "Indigenous", as was demonstrated by the \$6 million in Aboriginal-specific funding awarded to Gagil over a three year period, the Aboriginal community was more sceptical.

One determining factor in the community's acceptance of an organisation as legitimately Indigenous²⁶⁶ is community knowledge of the background of employees and Management Committee members. Should the community be familiar with these individuals due to their history of engagement in the local Aboriginal community, the organisation will likely be accepted as in touch with the needs of the community and thus deemed able to deliver appropriate services. However, should the Management Committee and senior staff be composed of individuals with no history of identifying as Aboriginal and of engaging with the local community, or should the organisation only employ one or two individuals whose Aboriginal identity is firmly established – especially if they are not in senior positions – the community may openly challenge the organisation's receipt of Aboriginal-specific funding and its ability to represent the Aboriginal community – as was the case with Gagil. In 2011 members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community mobilised to hold a community meeting in an effort to publicly voice concerns regarding the large amounts of funding awarded to Gagil, the low number and poor quality of services delivered, and to express disapproval of the organisation's practices²⁶⁷.

²⁶⁴ I heard complaints that the organisation was not governed solely by Indigenous people and that it regularly offered its services to non-Indigenous people. Dyinuranang's constitution states that anyone can become a member, and thus be elected to the Management Committee, should they obtain written consent from "two Aboriginal members of the association" (Dyinuranang Constitution 2009:11)

²⁶⁵ The organisation quietly closed down early in 2013. However, it has not yet been dissolved as an entity, as funding bodies have been unable to retrieve the substantial financial assets granted for service delivery in 2012 through to 2015.

²⁶⁶ I have been unable to find any scholarly works that deal with the issue of community dissent regarding the right of purported Indigenous organisations to classify themselves as such.

²⁶⁷ As a result of this meeting, various members of the community coordinated to file numerous formal complaints against Gagil with funding and regulatory bodies, as well as to report concerns of financial

The vital issue that separates Winanga-Li from those claiming to be Indigenous organisations such as Gagil, or from non-Indigenous organisations that claim an ability to provide Aboriginal services, lies in its level of engagement with the Aboriginal community. While the membership of most human service organisations elects a governing committee that oversees operations in accordance with the “voluntary associations” model, Aboriginal corporations frequently draw their board solely from their membership (Sullivan 2011:53). Therefore, those governing the organisation, and frequently those employed by the organisation, are the very same people whose families, friends and community benefit from its activities²⁶⁸. Not only do such Management Committees have a greater understanding of local community needs and a clear interest in providing necessary services, they also have a greater sense of urgency to do so as they are exposed daily to the disadvantage and need in their community.

Yet literature on Indigenous organisations has also identified drawbacks to this form of governing committee. Diane Smith asserts that political schisms within families and the community can make the decision-making capabilities of Indigenous governance committees unwieldy (2008:205-7, see also Levitus 2009:85). While such divisions certainly do exist in Mt Druitt, they have never been a feature of Winanga-Li’s Management Committee or been reflected in the body’s decisions. Participation in the organisation’s governing Committee has only ever occurred after an individual has become engaged with the organisation and has a clear idea of its governance culture and objectives. Should a person be antagonistic to these features, they have always either disengaged or been encouraged to distance themselves from the organisation. As Betty and Lewis are founding members of the organisation and are highly respected by community elders, their opinion carries a great deal of sway when dissent arises. While, as Executive Officer and Community Development Worker, Betty and Lewis have no voting rights within the

malpractice by the organisation’s staff to police. State funding bodies and the DFT did little to follow up on these complaints; however a federal investigator from the Australian Crime Commission learned of the case in late 2011 and subsequently the organisation lost funding and ceased operations in early 2013. At the time of writing, an Australian Crime Commission investigation into Gagil’s financial dealings is ongoing and, according to federal investigators, criminal charges are likely to follow.

²⁶⁸In some cases this vested interest can result in preferential treatment to certain family members and allegations of nepotism may arise, yet this has never occurred at Winanga-Li throughout its 20 year history. Interestingly, such events did transpire at Gagil and, as noted above, a federal investigation of the organisation’s financial dealings is ongoing at the time of this writing.

Management Committee, their opinion is continually sought out. In the several cases where disagreements arose, the views of Betty or Lewis prevailed and the challenging party disengaged from the organisation. Interestingly, all such individuals resumed their engagement with the organisation at a later date; as Betty has noted, “they always come back around”. In these cases, past antagonisms are not rehashed, although the individual will be treated with caution.

The governance practices of Winanga-Li are seen to be legitimate by community members, particularly due to their openness and transparency, and their consistency has bred stability within the organisation. This is largely due to the ongoing participation of founding members and community elders, all of whom are Aboriginal, as well as the organic development of the organisation’s objectives, practices and governance culture. These practices have never given way to nepotism or favouritism of particular families or clients, another common criticism of Aboriginal organisations, as the Management Committee has actively striven to prevent this.

Another problem that can plague Indigenous organisations, as Smith notes, is that the property and resources of the organisation come to be seen as communal goods, making them prone to theft or misuse (Smith 2008:205). While items such as Winanga-Li’s printer, computers, telephone, barbeque, coffee urn and water coolers are seen as resources to which the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community may access, they are never used or taken without permission. On two occasions the coffee urn has been borrowed but not returned and a new one needed to be purchased, which has made staff members more wary of lending it out; yet in response they have simply become more consistent and rigorous in reclaiming it after the event for which it was borrowed. The organisation also developed policies regarding the use of certain resources, such as the lap top computers available to clients, which can be used by anyone but must not be taken off of the premises. As the organisation is highly respected within the local Aboriginal community, permission for use of its resources is unfailingly requested rather than being independently appropriated, even by long established clients and Management Committee members.

While concerns regarding internal conflicts, nepotism, and the misuse of resources abound in reference to Aboriginal organisations, Tim Rowse asserts that this “is not a sign that they are incapable or incompetent, but is common in every culture” (2000:1525). As Rowse notes, the negative attributes associated with Indigenous organisations are not unique to them, but can be found in all organisational types. There are, however, certain positive attributes of Indigenous organisations that *are* unique.

When such organisations draw their governance committee from the pool of disadvantaged citizens from their local area, they engage Indigenous Australians in Western governance practices. Many Aboriginal Australians do not gain any sense of formal civic engagement from the institutions of broader society, such as the government or education. Yet participating in a local Aboriginal corporation facilitates “sophisticated practical understandings of the benefits of participatory engagement through the election of office holders, and through holding office” (Sullivan 2011:51). This is one reason why Aboriginal corporations such as Winanga-Li are able to respond so precisely to the specific needs of their community; something that few, if any, of Mt Druitt’s non-Indigenous organisations can claim. The Management Committee of Winanga-Li and the organisation’s staff have, over two decades, observed the Aboriginal community’s deficits in social capital, justice, education, youth activities, and health, as well as inertia in the face of low income and opportunity. As community members they have seen the need, but they have also seen what works to meet these needs and overcome this disadvantage. They have seen the way that deep social engagement with people and their families provides social sanctions that make it harder for them to refuse to participate, than to join in; as well as the long-term benefits of participation in activities that can broaden the social, educational, political and employment horizons of what would otherwise be very constricted and closed off worlds.

A further benefit unique to Indigenous corporations such as Winanga-Li is the autonomy given to the community in proposing, developing, and delivering human services. The views of Winanga-Li’s community are constantly sought out by staff members, giving their constituents ample opportunities to share ideas and comment on services provided or those proposed. While views and opinions of human services informally circulate within Aboriginal communities throughout Australia, very few non-Indigenous service

organisations will respond to these views and initiate discussion and change in response. This ongoing accountability to Aboriginal constituents, coupled with the guidance and feedback continuously sought out, is yet another way that the “carapace” of Indigenous corporations facilitates Aboriginal control over service delivery. Should this carapace be removed, it is unlikely that mainstream organisations would initiate an ongoing dialogue with, or respond to, Indigenous voices to the same extent or with the same urgency.

The inertia characteristic of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community is, in part, a reason why Aboriginal-specific services have declined in number. While Indigenous persons voice dismay at the de-funding of Indigenous organisations, there is little public outcry when the service funding is then awarded to a non-Indigenous organisation. Although the example of Gagil shows the activism that can emerge when Aboriginal organisations are believed to ill-serve their clientele, members of the Mt Druitt community are more likely to “vote with their feet” in relation to mainstream organisations: rather than publicly challenging the ability of an unfavourable non-Indigenous organisation to offer Aboriginal-specific services, they will simply avoid it. In some cases, other Aboriginal-specific services exist that community members can use; otherwise, an alternative mainstream service must be used.

Yet some Aboriginal people in Mt Druitt are unwilling to interact with particular mainstream services even when this prevents them from receiving a service to which they are entitled or which provides important assistance. An example that I have encountered is the Mt Druitt Aboriginal Youth Hostel, administered by St Martin’s Youth Care, which provides emergency shelter and accommodation for homeless Indigenous youth²⁶⁹. Despite the need for emergency Aboriginal youth accommodation, this service is consistently under-utilised²⁷⁰ and has functioned at less than half of its full capacity. Yet the Aboriginal community was unwilling, and perhaps unable, to call St Martin’s to account for the large

²⁶⁹ For more on St Martin’s Youth Care, see Chapters 11 and 12

²⁷⁰ As St Martin’s Mt Druitt Aboriginal Youth Hostel has had such a poor record of attracting clients, in 2013 it reduced the capacity of its emergency accommodation program from providing eight beds to just three.

amounts of money it received on their behalf and the low number and poor quality of services it delivered in return²⁷¹.

A 2006 qualitative study by Eileen Baldry et al. explores accounts given by NSW Aboriginal residents of their interactions with Indigenous and non-Indigenous providers of social services. Similar to accounts by members of Winanga-Li, Baldry et al.'s informants spoke of their firm belief that systemic marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians existed when trying to access services from non-Indigenous service providers. A key response was that "it was felt that many staff members treated Koori people disrespectfully", which led "Aboriginal people [to] go without services because of the attitudes of staff" (Baldry et al. 2006:369). The authors note that frequently people would "walk away rather than argue with someone who is not interested in helping them" (370).

Communication and Social Connectedness in Human Services

Despite Indigenous people's preference for Indigenous-specific services, the number of Indigenous corporations offering such services has declined over the last decade. Betty asserts that in the 1990s as many as twenty-five Aboriginal corporations existed in the Mt Druitt area²⁷². Examples of Aboriginal-specific services previously offered by Aboriginal organisations include childcare, women's support, and art collectives. As noted above, there are currently only four significant²⁷³ Aboriginal organisations that operate in Mt Druitt in addition to Winanga-Li. They provide services in health (from the AMS), aged care (from Dyinuranang), youth activities (from the Indigenous Church), and drug and alcohol recovery (from Bar Bug-gi).

²⁷¹ It appears that the Mt Druitt Indigenous community believes they are entitled to challenge so-called Indigenous organisations, as they are supposed to represent the community, but for some reason are not entitled to challenge mainstream organisations. I believe that this phenomenon revolves heavily around issues of accountability: while Indigenous organisations are expected to be accountable to their local community (among others), mainstream organisations are only accountable to funding bodies and their own governance committee.

²⁷² This was further supported in a conversation with an insurance agent who provides services to meet the insurance requirements of Aboriginal corporations. He reported that he had lost 50 percent of his Aboriginal corporation clientele over the last decade.

²⁷³ By "significant" Aboriginal organisations, I mean those that are widely used by Mt Druitt residents and have a consolidated gross operating income (CGOI) of greater than \$50,000.

Baldry et al. note that the “closure of specific Aboriginal services in urban areas is further increasing Aboriginal people’s sense of lack of human rights and (continuing) institutionalised racism by [White] agencies” (2006:371). This marked decline in Aboriginal organisations coincides with changes in the Indigenous Affairs policy environment, which now emphasises mainstreaming, a focus on the individual rather than the community²⁷⁴, and a whole-of-government approach²⁷⁵ with strict quantitative accountability (Sullivan 2011:48).

As noted above, all services offered by Indigenous corporations have mainstream parallels. For example, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), an Indigenous corporation, has an office in Blacktown (approximately 13 km away), while the mainstream MAX Employment and Jobfind Centres both have offices located in Mt Druitt. This is pertinent in light of a fact pointed out by Baldry et al.: that some Aboriginal people must travel “long distances to get to Aboriginal services”, should they feel uncomfortable accessing one that is mainstream (2006:371). While bureaucrats may assume that this 13 km journey is negligible and that Blacktown is easily accessible to all residents of Mt Druitt, the research of Baldry et al. argues that many NSW Indigenous residents “reported an inability to travel to services (that had been rationalized [as] centralized) because of not owning a car, poor public transport, poverty and the difficulty of travelling with children” (2006:371); mirroring accounts from my informants.

Despite these challenges, many Winanga-Li clients do opt to make the 45 minute journey by bus and/or train from the Mt Druitt area to Blacktown in order to access the AES, rather than using local mainstream employment agencies. However, certain human services lack the provision of an Indigenous-specific version, particularly specialised services, and there is no choice but to use the mainstream form. This is the case with the Disability Employment Service discussed below.

²⁷⁴ Julie Lahn notes that: “While the language of policy documents in this field tends to emphasise “community”, the targets for intervention measures are often individuals” (2012:304).

²⁷⁵ The whole-of-government approach to administration is problematic for several reasons. Foremost are: the poor communication and coordination between government departments; that no one department can be held accountable for policy failures; and the consistent failure of departments to deliver results over the past two decades. An additional criticism is that the centralised command entailed within this approach is rigid and inflexible (Sullivan 2011:103, 110-112). See also Chapters 10 and 11.

Informant Accounts of Human Services in Mt Druitt

The following are accounts by members of the Aboriginal community regarding their use of human services in Mt Druitt. Examples of the three different types of services are given: those that are mainstream and delivered by non-Indigenous service workers, those that are Indigenous-specific and delivered by mainstream bodies through Indigenous workers at the service delivery interface, and those that are Indigenous-specific and delivered by Indigenous organisations and Indigenous service workers. As we shall see, experience has taught Indigenous Australians that they are more likely to receive superior human services from Indigenous service workers than from those that are non-Indigenous, unless a prior social relationship has been established between the Indigenous client and the non-Indigenous worker.

Allison

The Disability Employment Service (DES) is one specialised service organisation that lacks an Indigenous-specific component. Allison – a client of Winanga-Li – has been using the DES of necessity for a number of years. Allison has been diagnosed with Crohn’s disease, and her illness is complicated by a hiatal hernia. This results in extreme fatigue, caused by chronically low iron; chronic acid reflux, indigestion and gas; sporadic hospital stays and surgeries during heightened “flare-ups”; and at times, depression. Being unemployed, Allison receives the New Start Allowance²⁷⁶ from Centrelink, but this requires her to be actively looking for employment via the DES. While Centrelink provides an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) at each of their offices, the DES does not.

At the Mt Druitt Centrelink office Allison prefers to be served by the ALO, Caroline, although when this is not possible she will work with a non-Aboriginal employee. While this is “okay” with Allison, she’d “rather see” Caroline, as Caroline is “really nice”. Allison finds that Caroline goes out of her way to make sure she’s comfortable and receives the service she is entitled to: “if I’m with someone else, she’ll [Caroline will] spot us; she’ll walk over and make sure [I’m being helped].” This extra step in service delivery

²⁷⁶ Allison is not eligible for the Disability Support Pension, which does not require on-going job-search and -training activities, as health professionals have deemed her able to work at least 15 hours per week, despite her serious chronic illness.

is something that Allison does not believe is offered by the non-Aboriginal Centrelink employees.

Baldry et al.'s study similarly notes that non-Indigenous service providers within government departments "evade their responsibilities for dealing with black issues by passing all Indigenous matters on to their few Aboriginal workers who are expected to go the extra yard" (2006:368). One NSW Aboriginal respondent cogently stated that "too much emphasis is put on what Aboriginal staff members are required to do for our communities as opposed to what the department should actually be doing for the community" (Baldry 2006:369). This is supported by Allison when she speaks of the incompetence of non-Aboriginal Centrelink employees: "I don't think they know what they're doin' half the time really... You just gotta get the right person. And if you get 'em on a bad day... [Allison chuckles and shakes her head]." While incompetence is not a feature of all non-Indigenous Centrelink employees, lack of interest and empathy certainly seem to be, making Allison wary of an encounter should she not be able to see Caroline.

Although the DES does not provide ALOs, Allison holds a positive opinion of its non-Indigenous service workers: "Yeah. They're good. But the lady I got, Irene, she's pretty nice. She's picked up on me a lot of times that I was depressed every time I went in there. I guess I was stressed from even thinkin' about goin' in there. But she's picked up every day; every time she was worried about me." While she does not believe the caring that Irene shows her to be the norm, Allison does find that some non-Aboriginal service providers offer adequate interpersonal interactions.

When informants like Allison describe services in Mt Druitt that they believe to be of high quality, these appear to be offered by people with a particular approach, regardless of whether or not the services providers are Aboriginal. Informants' accounts imply that helpful workers exhibit empathy towards their clients, acknowledge the complexity of client needs, and have a collectivist orientation, through which they recognise that each person's unique predicament is contextually based and ties in to the needs of their family and the area in which they live. Helpful workers take a flexible and creative approach to service delivery, rather than treating each person simply as a compartmentalised singular

“case” and being pedantic about rules and guidelines. While informants perceive it to be the norm that most service workers follow-through with clients only to the extent demanded by their employers, service providers seen to be of high quality will go to much greater lengths to ensure their clients’ needs are met.

Unfortunately, the majority of my informants had neither positive nor neutral experiences with mainstream organisations. The dehumanising encounter Allison experienced when she accessed the mainstream dental service, described in Chapter 7, underscores the justified distrust of some non-Indigenous service providers. The decreasing presence of Aboriginal service agencies is therefore of great importance (Sullivan 2011:49-66). As the experiences of Winanga-Li clients show, this Aboriginal Corporation offers more than specific services; it offers an ideology of justice and care.

Ellen

An example of service providers perceived to be self-serving and offering inferior services is found in the account of Ellen, an Indigenous woman in her early twenties. Ellen, who was on the New Start Allowance, was required to meet with her employment officer at a mainstream employment agency²⁷⁷ during a scheduled appointment once a week. Meetings were held in order for Ellen to update her employment officer regarding her job search activities²⁷⁸, and were an opportunity for the officer to inform Ellen of recent job postings or training opportunities. Through Winanga-Li, Ellen had found a training opportunity in floristry, for which many past participants had reportedly obtained employment, and she registered to take this accredited course. When she told her employment officer this, the woman responded by sending her to an information session for a different, more general, job skills training program. Ellen attended this information session, but told her employment officer during their next meeting that she would not attend the following general job skills training course and instead would follow through with the floristry certification. To this her employment officer responded that she knew nothing of her

²⁷⁷ Ellen was assigned by Centrelink to this mainstream employment agency as it was the closest to her residence. When I asked her why she didn’t request an Indigenous employment agency, she replied “I don’t know, I didn’t think I could”. At Centrelink Ellen had not been served by an ALO.

²⁷⁸ A condition of compliance with employment agencies, and in turn, the New Start Allowance, is that clients must apply to a certain number of jobs each week and provide the agency with documented proof that they have done so.

registry for the floristry course and stated that she would not approve this course for Ellen. While the New Start Allowance does allow job skills training to replace the required job hunting, it must be approved by the employment agency. Ellen's employment officer went on to tell her that if she went ahead with the floristry course, she would be reported for breaching the requirements of the New Start Allowance and that the officer would get her Centrelink "payments cut off".

What Ellen, and many other Aboriginal clients of employment agencies, did not know was that employment agencies were not only awarded thousands of dollars in government incentives for placing an Indigenous person in employment, but that they also received additional money for providing their own job skills training. Therefore, if Ellen's officer had enrolled Ellen in the general job skills training, her agency would have received additional money; however, if Ellen participated in the floristry course the employment agency would receive nothing²⁷⁹. Ellen commented to me that she had no interest in the employment agency's training programs because she had participated in several before and they had consisted solely of watching instructional videos, which she did not find helpful.

While I cannot explain this employment officer's motivations with regard to Ellen, I believe it likely that she was acting in her own self-interest as an employee and that her agency operated on the neoliberal ideology that privileges financial capitalisation above all else. The systems and processes likely in place in this type of employment agency are directed at maximising all opportunities for the agency to earn revenue, some offering employee incentives in order to do so, rather than being geared towards ensuring that clients were placed in sustainable employment²⁸⁰. While things were likely not ideal during the previous era of the federally-run Commonwealth Employment Service (operating from

²⁷⁹ The privatization of employment agencies and the offering of government financial incentives for job placement services appears to have greatly changed the dynamic of job agencies in Australia. Common tales circulated in the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community of agencies successfully taking credit (and the government's reward payment) for placing Aboriginal clients in employment, when it was the client who had independently accessed the job position (on several occasions to which I was witness, with support of Winanga-Li). This same theme came up in conversation when Ellen experienced the above incident.

²⁸⁰ Indeed, several employment agencies were exposed by the media to be undertaking such practices in 2011 (Besser 2011a; 2011b).

1946-1998), there was certainly no room for the profit motive that appears to drive many of today's privatised employment agencies.

Contrary to the governance culture of Ellen's mainstream employment agency, Winanga-Li emphasises communality and care. When Ellen came to Winanga-Li to tell Betty of her dilemma with the employment officer, Betty immediately took on an advocacy role. She called and spoke to the employment officer, who claimed that she had never told Ellen she would get her "payments cut off" and also that Ellen had never told her about the floristry course. The officer then recanted and stated that the floristry course was not approved by the agency for job skills training and that therefore Ellen would not receive approval to participate.

Betty then called the head teacher of the floristry course, whom she had known for a number of years from her community work. She explained Ellen's situation and asked for clarification of the type of accreditation the course had received, which indeed was in accordance with the type of training permitted under the New Start Allowance. The floristry teacher was taken aback by the treatment Ellen had received from her employment officer and volunteered to call the officer directly to inform her that Ellen had indeed registered for the course a week prior and that the course was accredited and met all relevant criteria of training for the New Start Allowance.

In this case the ideologies driving human service organisations emerge as key indicators of quality in service delivery. The employment agency, driven by a neoliberal ideology, was not greatly concerned with the welfare of its clients, but rather was driven to maximise revenue. On the other hand, at Winanga-Li, Betty acted according to a collectivist ideology grounded in care and concern for the wellbeing of community members and was not constrained by processes and procedures when attempting to meet clients' needs. Her personal values and the organisation's ideology motivates her to assist members of the community to obtain justice and, as she perceived Ellen's situation to be unjust, she was willing to employ her social capital (by contacting the floristry teacher); her knowledge of government policy (regarding the New Start Allowance, training and the privatisation of employment agencies), and her authority as Executive Officer of an Aboriginal corporation

to meet Ellen's needs. Motivated by her sense of justice, Betty was willing to go beyond the organisation's role as provider of adult education and enact the organisation's informal role of advocating for community members.

Angela

Another example of an Aboriginal Mt Druitt resident who finds it necessary to use mainstream as well as Aboriginal social services is Angela. A married mother of two, aged in her thirties, Angela makes use of several children's services in Mt Druitt. She is a regular participant in Winanga-Li's Early Childhood Playgroup – offered in partnership with the mainstream NGO, Families First²⁸¹ – but has also accessed several of Mission Australia's early childhood services. In particular, her children have attended the mainstream organisation's school holiday programs and weekend care services. When I asked what she thought of the services she said they were “great” and that Winanga-Li should think about offering a similar program. This comment interests me as it indicates that, should an Aboriginal organisation offer these services, she would prefer to use the Aboriginal-specific, as opposed to the mainstream, service.

I pressed Angela about her experiences with Mission Australia's services, asking what she thought of the staff and the quality of the programs. She said that she really only knew one staff member, who had been a neighbour of her friend, and that it was this Mission Australia staff member who was in charge of the programs she had attended. She went on to say how highly she regarded this woman and the quality of the programs she delivered, although she made a point of stating that because she hadn't used any of the organisation's other services, she didn't know if Mission Australia and its employees as a whole were “any good”. Angela's account indicates that she is comfortable using non-Indigenous services when she has formed a social relationship with the employee, but that, like Allison, she prefers to use Indigenous-specific services when the option is available.

²⁸¹ This playgroup has been operating out of Winanga-Li for approximately two years. The program is staffed by employees of Families First; however, prior to its commencement, Winanga-Li insisted that they employ at least one Aboriginal worker. Subsequently, Lindy – a young Aboriginal woman who had regularly participated in Winanga-Li's activities for the previous five years and had obtained the relevant training in early childhood services – was hired by Families First. Therefore, not only is the program offered on the site of, and overseen by, the Aboriginal Corporation, it has also incorporated its social capital (bridging networks) to the benefit of women from the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

Julie

A further example of services offered by both Indigenous and mainstream organisations is found in Winanga-Li's catering, numeracy and literacy course, mentioned in the previous chapter. During the last five years a number of similar courses, targeting Aboriginal Australians but offered by mainstream organisations, have sprung up in the western Sydney area. While the format behind these courses appears to duplicate Winanga-Li's, reports from Aboriginal persons who had attempted to participate in these mainstream courses reflects their crucial difference in ideology and approach. One particularly aggrieved Aboriginal woman, Julie, came to Winanga-Li early in 2012 looking for educational courses that would help her meet her pension requirements. She reported that she had started a mainstream organisation's cooking, numeracy and literacy course, offered much closer to her residence than was Winanga-Li, but wanted to quit because "they treated us like children." Julie asserted that they were locked in the classroom and had to request a key in order to access the restroom. The course instructor was reported to be impersonal and condescending – "they treated us as if we were stupid" – and Julie noted that four of the eight other students had agreed with her that the way they were treated by the instructor "was wrong". "I'm never goin' back there" she repeated again and again. Winanga-Li staff encouraged Julie to attend their cooking class to see if she liked it, explaining the distinct differences of their course to the one she was describing. They highlighted the easy-going atmosphere, described in the previous chapter, as well as noting that the course was taught by an Aboriginal woman and that two community elders participated in the course. Julie responded very positively to this, promising to return to the organisation, which she did.

Like the experiences with law enforcement officers reported in Chapter 7, narratives such as Julie's circulate within the community and contribute to the formation of local knowledge. Indeed my research yielded substantial support for the assertion that Aboriginal Mt Druitt residents are wary of non-Indigenous service providers and frequently interpret unpleasant encounters as racist and/or paternalistic. Baldry et al. also found that the majority of their Aboriginal informants believed that non-Indigenous human services staff were condescending and racist, noting that "often clients experienced a subtle but clear shift in attitude once a staff member realized they were Aboriginal", which "result in Indigenous clients feeling shamed" (2006:369; see also Keddie 2013:31).

Such shame has further negative consequences, as clients may say they understand something when they do not; they won't speak up when they know that the service provider is wrong; or they say they'll come back another time, but then never do (Baldry et al. 2006:369). It is not that Aboriginal Australians insist that their services be delivered only by other Indigenous people, but rather that all "want non-Indigenous staff members to 'know how to work with Koori people'" (Baldry et al. 2006:368). Indeed, the non-Indigenous course instructors that teach at Winanga-Li, such as the sewing teacher, have all demonstrated this ability. I believe that a key factor in the success of Winanga-Li's programs, regardless of whether or not the teacher is Indigenous, lies in the social connectedness formed between project participants and the organisation's staff and clients²⁸². As stated previously, this is fostered through a communication style that promotes horizontal relationships between staff and clients; all of which is illustrative of the organisation's governance culture.

Communication and Social Connectedness in Aboriginal Services

According to my informants, there is greater potential for open communication to develop between the service provider(s) and the recipient when the service provider is Aboriginal; although, as discussed above, this need not be the case. Baldry et al.'s study suggests that the feelings of Mt Druitt's Aboriginal community are shared by many other Aboriginal people throughout NSW: "it's more comfortable talking to an Aboriginal worker because they have more understanding"; "just seeing a black face behind the counter can relieve much apprehension"; and "Koori workers are better because they have an understanding, they know how to communicate with Koori clients and they get things done. They're also more informal and talk a different language" (2006:368). An informant of this 2006 study noted that: "Jargon and words used by [non-Indigenous] staff are used as a wall between them and the person" (Baldry et al.:370), a wall that is broken down by Aboriginal service-providers. This was supported by an Indigenous informant, cited in Julie Lahn's 2012 work on Indigenous social networks, who stated: "Working with your own people, we

²⁸² This is strongly supported in the work done by Amanda Keddie on a secondary school in Queensland that was governed by non-Indigenous persons, but which catered to Indigenous women by placing a great deal of emphasis on "relationality and, more specifically, positive and supportive relationships with family/kin and broader social networks" (2013:26-27). Further, this work notes that the non-Indigenous staff was inclusive and supportive of Indigenous staff as well as the Indigenous community, actively seeking out, and engaging with, their views, ideas and recommendations (29).

understand each other, where we come from, where we've been and our cultural backgrounds. Mainstream haven't got a clue" (301).

As is suggested by the above quote, mainstream services and their providers too often lack understanding of Indigenous orientations, such as the importance of kin, which could put clients at ease. Such services are far more regimented, requiring clients to report to a reception desk and then wait for their appointment in a cold and formal office environment. When they are seen by service providers, they are asked only about the specific situation for which they are seeking help; with conversations frequently restricted to the services that the organisation offers. Most organisations have time restrictions on how long a service provider may spend with each client and employees are reprimanded should they consistently exceed this allotted time, as will be demonstrated by the example of Peter in Chapter 12.

Indeed this is a criticism that perhaps arises out of the governments' neoliberal bent in funding arrangements for human services. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research's (CAEPR) 2008 assessment of the Indigenous Community Governance Project asserted that the present government policy framework for delivering Indigenous services "is erratic, disjointed, negatively compartmentalised into disconnected program initiatives, poorly evaluated, and ill-informed about current developmental best-practice" (Taylor and Westbury 2010:42). Due to ever-shifting priorities in Indigenous Affairs, government funded programs tend to be short-lived, narrow in focus, poorly coordinated between branches of government and with the Indigenous community, prone to superficial quantitative assessment and stubbornly adherent to past policy frameworks that have failed (Sullivan 2011).

While non-Indigenous organisations follow the changing fancies of government objectives, allowing funding to determine the Aboriginal-specific projects implemented, Aboriginal-controlled organisations are much more likely to respond to the needs of their surrounding community and then try to make available funding fit their projects. To some extent the programs of Aboriginal organisations, such as Winanga-Li, have managed to circumvent the negative practices of governments cited in the CAEPR study. They do not abandon a

project or approach simply because it has fallen out of government favour and their service-delivery approaches and objectives are fluid (rather than compartmentalised) and flexible (rather than rigid and pedantic). Further, their service-delivery is grounded in decades of experience working with their target community, which is frequently consulted regarding program outcomes and future objectives. Yet while well-run programs of Aboriginal-controlled organisations continue to ameliorate suffering and better the socioeconomic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, the financial and administrative pressures on these organisations, brought to bear by funding-bodies' increasingly oppressive administrative regimes and the opening up of Indigenous-specific service tendering to non-Indigenous organisation, is ever-increasing (Dillon and Westbury 2007:71-73).

Funding Competition

Organisations offering human services differ in base and reach and can be national, state, or local. They also have differing numbers of employees, which stems largely from the various funding levels each organisation receives and the source of funding. Another difference, as noted above, is whether an organisation is Indigenous or mainstream.

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Corporation works at the local level, with only two full-time permanent employees, occasionally one casual employee, and about a dozen able-bodied volunteers. Taking in \$319,379 during the 2010-2011 financial year (\$247,442 of which was received from public²⁸³ funding), the organisation also holds non-liquid assets of over one million dollars, as it owns freehold the land, buildings and equipment used in its operations.

Bar Bug-gi Drug and Alcohol Centre also works at the local level, yet receives nearly double the funding of Winanga-Li and has ten employees, although both organisations are classified as medium-sized by their incorporating body ORIC. In the 2010-2011 financial

²⁸³ Of this government funding, \$228,965.42 came from the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) in the form of collaborative funding (WAC 2011:19). For details on collaborative funding, see Chapter 10. The additional \$17,736.30 came from the Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) in the form of two grants: one for NAIDOC event expenses (\$8,000) and the other for administering an ICC jobs expo (\$9,376.30) (WAC 2011:21).

year Bar Bug-gi took in \$663,667 in funding, \$618,662 from public sources (Bar Bug-gi 2011:7). While Winanga-Li's primary renewable funding comes from DoCS and was valued at \$228,965 in 2010-2011, in the same year Bar Bug-gi received \$567,332 from one renewable federal funding source, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging's Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health²⁸⁴ (Bar Bug-gi 2011:9). As such, it can afford to, and does²⁸⁵, hire a professional grant writer to remain competitive in the current funding environment of New Public Management (NPM), which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Funding allocations for Indigenous services suggests that, rather than investing in preventative measures against drug and alcohol abuse by fostering programs that will build clients' self-esteem, social capital, healthy lifestyle choices and community connectivity, governments allocate greater funding to curative measures such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Perhaps this is due to the fact that outcomes of such rehabilitative services are easier to measure than those of preventative programs. While the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* notes that “addressing health risks earlier in the life span, through prevention and early intervention during developmentally sensitive periods, provides greater returns for the resources invested” (Snowden 2013:26-27), the report stubbornly adheres to the accountability and outcomes measurement of NPM²⁸⁶, which Chapters 10 and 11 argue yield poor results.

Other organisations in Mt Druitt that offer Indigenous-specific services similar to Winanga-Li's are the non-Indigenous Christian-based Mission Australia, the aforementioned St Martin's Youth Care, and Anglicare. Each of these national-level organisations employs over 300 people nationally (it is unknown how many of these employees identify as Indigenous), frequently have matching numbers of volunteers, and

²⁸⁴ In 2012 this department was renamed the Indigenous Health Service Delivery Division (IHSSD) and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging became the Department of Health.

²⁸⁵ Bar Bug-gi's 2010-2011 *Financial Report* documented \$32,440 spent on “Consultant Fees” (3).

²⁸⁶ The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* cites the use of accountability measures as outlined in the *2003-13 National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health* (Snowden 2013:40). However, this latter document highlights the importance of written reporting, as well as “health service outputs” (Department of Health and Aging 2007:43-44), which suggests a continued emphasis on quantitative NPM methods discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, as these accountability measures were adopted ten years ago, it appears that little is likely to change in this area as the 2013-2023 *Health Plan* intends to continue using the present system.

can easily mobilise for fundraising due to their broad reach. Additionally, it is important to note that church-based organisations such as these can rely upon their regional and national headquarters for regular injections of funding²⁸⁷.

To illustrate the monetary resources of large organisations, I provide data obtained from Mission Australia's 2011 Annual Report (http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/annual-reports/2011?download_id=270:annual-report-2011, accessed July 13, 2012). In 2011 Mission Australia reported almost \$430 million in "External revenues" (39), over \$124 million of which carried over into 2012 as a "surplus".

Despite the obvious imbalance in resources, it is these organisations with which Winanga-Li must compete for government funding²⁸⁸ and clientele. Despite the constant challenge to obtain government funding, which has increased over the last decade²⁸⁹, Winanga-Li has never experienced problems attracting clients to its services. This contrasts with other Aboriginal-specific programs offered by the aforementioned non-Indigenous organisations, which frequently have trouble recruiting participants.

On numerous occasions Winanga-Li has received requests from the non-Indigenous organisations to refer clients to, or to post information about, the Aboriginal-specific programs these mainstream organisations are offering. In such cases, employees of mainstream organisations are keen to reach their minimum number of participants. While such requests are always put in terms of how "unfortunate" it would be for "the community to miss out on" the program, Winanga-Li staff and community members believe these actions to arise out of more selfish interests; such as the shame of an organisation having to admit failure and hand the money back to the funding bodies, which would likely

²⁸⁷ Similarly, council-based community centres can be assured that the council will provide them with additional funding for renovation, maintenance and upkeep. Indigenous organisations have no external body to rely on to cover maintenance, incidental or unexpected expenses.

²⁸⁸ This resource imbalance is particularly pertinent to governments' human service outsourcing via competitive tender and contract. Large organisations, such as Mission Australia, employ tender writing professionals for this purpose, while small organisations, such as Winanga-Li, cannot afford to do so, putting them at a disadvantage from the very start of the funding allocation process. For elaboration see Chapter 12.

²⁸⁹ Prior to the abolition of ATSIC, funding for Indigenous-specific services was offered first and foremost to Indigenous corporations in accordance with part (b) of Section 3 of the *ATSIC Act*. In the new policy affairs environment, which emphasises mainstreaming, Aboriginal community-based organisations must now compete with non-Indigenous organisations for funding (Sullivan 2011:48, 58).

jeopardise its chances for winning future Aboriginal-specific program funding; not to mention the paternalism indicated by the request: “we can do it better”²⁹⁰.

When such requests for assistance are received, members of Winanga-Li’s community cannot help but wonder why they had not previously been consulted about the program during its development stages, particularly if Indigenous persons were the target clientele, as is suggested by best practice guidelines for working with Indigenous persons (Wild and Anderson 2007:21; Massola 2008:4; SCRGSP 2011:9; Snowden 2013:10; CtGC 2013:1). They also wonder why it is a non-Indigenous organisation that has received the (usually substantial) funding to provide a service when the organisation appears to have had little engagement with the community. Finally, they wonder whether the service will be any good or if the providers will be pleasant to work with, given the experiences of many within the community, as discussed above. Therefore, NSW Indigenous residents are often hesitant to embrace opportunities to engage in human services provided by non-Indigenous organisations (Baldry et al. 2006:369).

Conclusion

The reader should not interpret this chapter’s assertions as a statement that *all* Indigenous service providers practice a particular communication style or are superior to those that are non-Indigenous, as this is not the case. Rather I am stating that the prevalence of unpleasant interactions with non-Indigenous service providers and experiences of quality service-delivery from Indigenous providers has contributed to local perceptions that one is more likely to receive superior treatment when accessing Aboriginal-specific services that have an Indigenous person at the service-delivery interface. Therefore, Aboriginal residents of Mt Druitt may forego mainstream services to which they are entitled due to fear of discrimination and the belief that “it won’t do any good anyway”.

As will be discussed in following chapters, the government’s lackadaisical consultation with Aboriginal communities when distributing funding is partly to blame for its negligible progress towards “closing the gaps”. The money being invested in social services geared to

²⁹⁰ For example, see Keddie 2013:27-28.

Indigenous clients is not connecting with those in need of the services, but instead is fuelling the creation of administrative jobs for White managers²⁹¹. As a starting point for the delivery of Indigenous-specific services the government is currently using large charities, with demonstrable corporate structures, and government bureaucracies; both of which ascribe to neoliberal values and the New Public Management (NPM), as the following chapters will show. I argue that for Indigenous-specific services to connect with those they are intended to serve, Indigenous community-controlled organisations need to be the starting point for the delivery of these human services. As we shall see, it is just this starting point that is ignored. Aboriginal-controlled organisations in Mt Druitt have closed and are closing in large numbers, being replaced by large non-Indigenous NGOs that operate under ideologies that are at odds with those effective at Winanga-Li. This trend jeopardises Indigenous autonomy in service design and delivery by disposing of the interface that mediates between Aboriginal communities and the government.

The following chapter will investigate how neoliberal ideology, through its administrative policies of NPM, has heightened Indigenous oppression by weakening the main avenue for Aboriginal civic engagement: the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. We will explore how neoliberalism has grown to be *the* dominating force of Australian government policy through its approach of NPM. I will demonstrate that despite NPM being promoted as the *only* rational approach to managing the devolution of services from the government to the third, not-for-profit, sector, NPM is wrought with contradictions, White privilege and easily manipulated systems and processes. The blind acceptance of NPM as “best-practice” and as faultless by politicians, bureaucrats and public servants has served to undermine Indigenous Australian’s attempts at autonomy and has concealed the nation’s underlying racist character.

²⁹¹ See, for example, Patty 2012, in which this newspaper article notes a \$200,000 Job Contracts program that neither generated nor identified job opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Rather, the majority of funding was spent on “cultural awareness training” for stakeholders (Patty 2012; see also Allen Consulting Group 2011:21).

10. Neoliberalism, NPM and Government Funding for Human Services

Systems of administration, control and evaluation, however technical they may appear, are also expressions of a series of underlying beliefs and values.

– Guy Neave (1988:18 in Power 1997:93)

The Commonwealth government sets the structural context within which Aboriginal corporations must operate, and as federal priorities and objectives shift, so too do the terms and conditions under which Aboriginal-specific services are publicly funded. This directly bears upon Aboriginal corporations and indirectly affects Indigenous Australians, as avenues through which they pursue civic engagement are threatened.

The previous chapter explored different forms of social service organisations operating in the Mt Druitt area, factors influencing clients' decisions to use or abstain from specific services, and the strengths of Winanga-Li with regard to these. This chapter will examine the rise of the ideology of neoliberalism within Australian governments, in particular the institution of New Public Management (NPM) within the policy framework of government and bureaucracy. As NPM now determines how public funding for human services is distributed (O'Shea et al. 2007:50), it directly affects Indigenous-specific services and small Aboriginal corporations like Winanga-Li. While not all human service organisations rely upon government funds to sustain their operations, many do. This chapter will explore the structures and processes through which funding for human services is allocated and their underlying ideologies.

Neoliberalism

During the late 1970s and 1980s a trend swept through governments throughout the industrial world: growing concern over supposedly “out of control” public spending was met by government initiatives for fiscal restraint. Cutting across traditional political divisions, alarm at the uneven rate of “public sector borrowing, taxation, and expenditure on public services” emerged – particularly since many governments sought to lower rates

of taxation – and the current level of spending came to be seen as unsustainable (Power 1997:43). This was coupled with conservative political attacks on government services that, as public goods, were perceived to be wasteful in their spending.

The newly dominant neoliberal ideology promoted “privatizations, dismantling of social welfare apparatuses, retreat of the state from economic regulation, tax cuts, [and the] opening of national boundaries” (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002:533). It was assumed that under neoliberalism, unregulated markets would rationally monitor domestic and world economies (O’Shea et al. 2007:50). It was not that governments were incapable of funding and managing public works, as another option would have been to raise taxes and invest in infrastructure; but rather that governments had already made the ideological decisions to lower taxes and to devolve services to private industry. In the context of this new ideology and its concomitant set of assumptions, increasingly dominant after 1980, Australian governments at all levels sought not only to reduce spending, but to demand financial transparency and greater accountability within government agencies.

A key element of neoliberal government policies rests upon the outsourcing of social services, which once were the sole responsibility of governmental agencies, in an effort to promote a more limited role of government (McDermott 2008:110). In Australia, employment services are one example of this: for the fifty years prior to 1997 the Commonwealth Employment Service provided job placement services nationally (Aulich and O’Flynn 2007:162). Citing “costly, ineffective and complex programs via cumbersome and inefficient service delivery” (Aulich and O’Flynn 2007:162; see also Eardley 2003:4), the Howard government elected to outsource employment services via competitive tendering.

However, not only social programs were affected. Under the sway of neoliberalism other “public goods” including tertiary education, telephone communications, airports and rail transportation were claimed to be inefficient and wasteful in their spending, and were privatised or experienced increased pressure to adopt competitive market models (Hooper et al. 2000:196). While such privatisation was most fully implemented under the Howard government, this was only possible because of the increasing popularity of neoliberal

ideology²⁹² and the groundwork that had been laid by the previous Labor governments (1983-1996).

Changing State Responsibility

Neoliberal concerns first became visible in Australia during 1984 when the Hawke Labor government released its white paper on the reformation of public services, calling for “financial and program management reform in government agencies” (Parker and Guthrie 1993:61). Australia’s federal and state governments became increasingly committed to holding only an indirect supervisory role of the administration of social services and looked to the audit and accounting practices operating within private businesses for a new model of management (Power 1997:11). During the 1980s a “results oriented” framework was promoted within Australia’s Department of Finance, which required each department or agency to develop its own performance measurements of efficiency and effectiveness and to report them to Parliament in the form of budgets, annual reports, and corporate plans (Parker and Guthrie 1993:62). Soon, the role of economic and accounting processes came to the fore, becoming agenda-setting rather than secondary in importance. This new privileging of economic theory is what has come to be known as “economic imperialism” (Box et al. 2001:611). According to Lee Parker and James Guthrie: “Prescriptions for change were rooted in the advocacy of formal rational management, an emphasis on the necessity for clear goals, corporate plans, and, above all, internal and external accounting systems with clear responsibility lines for output performance measurement” (1993:62). As a result, individualised systems of reporting and accountability were discarded in favour of what was to become the “New Public Management” (NPM)²⁹³.

New Public Management

As NPM increasingly grew to hold policy makers and bureaucrats in its thrall, it became naturalised as the international best standard of practice (Box et al. 2011:612). Borrowing administrative practices from the private sector, NPM instituted an audit approach to public

²⁹² For the emergence and growth in popularity of neoliberal ideology in the industrialised world, see Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002), Navarro (2007) and Peck et al. (2009).

²⁹³ New Public Management (Hood 1991) is also known as the “new managerialism” (Parker and Guthrie 1993) and the “new accountability” (Cortis 2006).

administration (Power 1997:43). This meant that risk management – a system of internal managerial control – became a “central component of governance thinking and practice” (Power 2007:35). Standards and guidelines of risk management ballooned “because they substitute for the guidance of the state and provide a different locus for authority, a managerial locus which is self-validating” (Power 2007:194).

With an ideology of minimal governance, risk management and the audit substituted for governments’ attention to policy and its evaluation (Power 1997:119; 2007:40). Now there were quantifiable, seemingly objective, criteria for policy: (1) “auditable measures of performance”, (2) “systems of control”, and (3) “reliance on experts” (Power 1996:289).

NPM corresponded well with the structures and rules of government bureaucracy, as all bureaucracies have as key components standardised rule-making based on rational and seemingly unbiased factors, as first articulated by Max Weber (1968:956-972). Since NPM emphasises internal oversight, the institution of “systems of control” within bodies become essential elements of policy. Each compartmentalised branch of bureaucracy²⁹⁴, or each agency, has its own internal system of control consisting of hierarchical procedures for reporting and monitoring. With multiple levels of internal oversight, neoliberal ideology posits that nothing can go wrong, since all possibilities will have been considered during the risk analysis and risk management processes. Therefore, should a human service organisation be able to demonstrate a system of internal monitoring and established processes through which oversight is conducted, that body is deemed trustworthy and able to deliver specified services. Thus, NPM reduces trustworthiness, organisational capability and program success to procedure, in disregard of substance (Box et al. 2001:609).

Criticisms of NPM

The logic of bureaucracy dictates that public servants are merely cogs in a machine, bringing no personal interests or subjectivities to bear on administrative operations.

²⁹⁴ This is what is known as “sectoralism”, in which different spheres of government policy and enterprise operate independently and without coordination with other departments. Will Sanders (1988:2) asserts that agendas are framed around “statistically revealed problems”, thereby presenting these “agendas and institutional processes of service allocation [as]... beyond question, reproach or criticism” (Dillon and Westbury 2007:155).

However, since NPM demands that these employees prioritise the “three Es” of economy, efficiency and effectiveness above all else, subjective decisions regarding the standards of the “three Es” are regularly made (Power 1997; Cortis 2006:13). All evidence or indicators pertinent to decision making became quantitative, which was also claimed to make assessments purely objective.

Objective Disinterest

While NPM has been promoted as serving the “public good”, in practice it has become “a vehicle for particularistic advantage” that furthers the career interests of a privileged band of “new managerialists” (Hood 1991:9). These new managers are the “experts” that Power notes are integral to NPM. They are highly skilled not in the areas of public service they administer, as one might expect, but rather are knowledgeable in the system components of audit and business modelling. They operate within the bounds of neoliberalism without reflection and assume their jobs are well done when they have followed the rules of quantitative audit (McConaghy 2000:216; Power 1997; Hood and Peters 2004). This has led, for instance, to persons solely with business or financial management skills making decisions concerning tertiary education or scientific research funding²⁹⁵. Thus, the administration of Indigenous-specific funding follows procedures that often reflect neither experience with, or knowledge of, the local Aboriginal communities for whom hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds are disbursed²⁹⁶; as inspection and interaction need not extend beyond the written reporting level (Cortis 2006:12; Sullivan 2011:89).

Not only does NPM serve the interests of bureaucrats claiming managerial expertise, it also violates the traditional bureaucratic value of disinterestedness. According to Christopher Hood (1991:8) “NPM was claimed to be an ‘apolitical’ framework within which many different values could be pursued effectively.” The purported objectivity of NPM is one of its greatest attractions; after all, numbers don’t lie. Yet who decides how and what to

²⁹⁵ For example, on September 5, 2013 the Tony Abbott government vowed to cut \$103 million from “increasingly ridiculous” and “wasteful” Australian Research Council (ARC) grants in the humanities (Benson 2013; Lane 2013), despite the rigorous peer-reviewed, expert-driven grant selection processes of the ARC.

²⁹⁶ During the financial year 2010-2011, in NSW alone, \$903 million was directed to Indigenous-specific services (SCRGSP 2012:1).

quantify? As noted above, giving the “three Es” priority, and interpreting how they are to be quantified, is already a value-bound decision.

Objective Rationalism

NPM’s approach to quality assessment first determines whether or not a service provides “Value for Money” (VFM). VFM’s means of analysis emphasises elements that can be measured and audited in economic terms – efficiency and economy – over that which is more ambiguous – effectiveness (Power 1997:13, 119; O’Shea et al. 2007:50). Thus subjectivity emerges and NPM loses its appearance of “scientific rationalism”²⁹⁷.

Indeed, Christopher Hood and Guy Peters argue that NPM’s alleged “evidence-based approach” to program assessment “seems to have displayed, at best, a highly selective approach to the sort of ‘science’ and ‘evidence’ they took account of” (2004:278). In her 2006 work on human service delivery in NSW Natasha Cortis noted the “conceptual and practical barriers to measuring service outcomes” and highlighted the “political choices implicit in assessing performance” (16). For example, Cortis noted that in NSW’s delivery of human services, administrative bodies privileged “the more easily measured dimensions of service contributions, such as simple counts of client throughput, at the expense of critical information about personal wellbeing, community development and social justice” (2006:15). Furthermore, she found that the criteria decided upon frequently fail in their purpose, since they do not necessarily tie into their own goals (2006:12, 15; see also Power 1997:8; McConaghy 2000:196; Sullivan 2011:72-73, 86-87, 95). To take a specific example, Power notes that a questionnaire, even when widely recognised to be defective in design, will be “used because it exhibits a form and precision which gives it legitimacy” (2007:164), and such trails of documentation signal “a legalized form of trust” (2007:174).

The neutrality of NPM is further weakened by the lack of incentive for reporting mistakes or problems. To do so is not in the interest of public servants or funding bodies, since this would damage the reputation of the individual, the agency, and/or political party; especially

²⁹⁷ Scientific rationalism is a form of reasoning grounded in quantitative mathematical models. Pierre Bourdieu writes that scientific rationalism, grounded in Western ideology, is presented by the powerful as the *only* grounds for rational thought and action, “as if they had the monopoly of reason” (Farmer 2004:313).

if the media learned of the error (Power 2007:117; Sullivan 2011:72, 95). Boyd Hunter and Nikki Stephenson highlight a weakness in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) reporting framework, in that “there may be a potential conflict of interest for certain data or evaluations. If data is drawn solely from people providing or administering the services being assessed or evaluated, it is difficult to discount the possible incentive to overstate the efficacy of programs” (2013:6). Further, Power finds that malpractice by senior management predominantly falls outside of NPM’s system of accountability²⁹⁸ (2007:165). NPM’s failure to include mechanisms to discover and report errors reinforces the sense that it holds an infallible set of procedures. Patrick Sullivan notes that in Australia’s Indigenous Affairs context:

Routinely, its [government’s] officers set themselves the task of improving Aboriginal disadvantage in their area of intervention, and routinely they fail to do so, or fail to do so very significantly. Nevertheless, impeccable procedures are followed through standard institutional structures and these allow for reporting that all is well with the organisation and its officers, despite its lack of impact in the world. (2011:85)

NPM’s Lack of Neutrality

As suggested above, many scholars have come to the conclusion that NPM is not truly concerned with objective assessments, but is both a surveillance method and a means of signalling to those making decisions that their ideology is shared, or at least that the body can work within the bounds of that ideology and is therefore trustworthy (Power 1997:7; 2007:49, 163). Bodies that do not adopt such practices are in turn signalling that they do not share the same values and are therefore resistant to them and less trustworthy. Governmental bodies view organisations without NPM procedures in place as backward or under-developed²⁹⁹ and are therefore more hesitant to work with them because they are a funding “risk”.

During the time in which ATSIC administered Indigenous-specific service funding, Indigenous corporations were largely shielded from the full brunt of NPM reform.

²⁹⁸ It appears that this is exactly what happened in the case regarding the alleged malfeasance of Gagil, discussed in Chapter 9.

²⁹⁹ This was demonstrated during a 2009 evaluation of Aboriginal organisations in Mt Druitt. Those organisations that had instituted NPM practices, such as the now defunct Gagil, were ranked as “leading the way”, while those that had not, such as Winanga-Li, were ranked as “getting there” or “developing”.

However, once that body was abolished and the Howard government instituted “practical reconciliation”, Aboriginal organisations became vulnerable to funding dismissal should they not display the values and processes of NPM (Sullivan 2011:83).

Government Funding for Human Services

With Australian governments devolving responsibility for human service delivery to Not-For-Profit (NFP) organisations through outsourcing, the last few decades have seen “a shift to the ‘purchase of service contracting’ and other forms of ‘managed markets’” (Productivity Commission 2010:297) for human service delivery. In 2008 B. Davidson noted:

Increasingly over the last 25 years, in Australia and elsewhere, that funding has been distributed using ‘competitive’ market mechanisms. The result has been a widespread development of managed markets, also known as ‘quasi-markets’, in human services... [where the] government is the source of much, if not all, of the purchasing power of the users of services. This enables government to dictate how these markets operate in ways that go well beyond the powers of government in most conventional markets. (Productivity Commission 2010:303)

As Davidson notes, the fact that the government possess close to all of the purchasing power in relation to the quasi-market of human services means that it has the power to privilege certain approaches to, and ideologies of, human service delivery (see also O’Shea et al. 2007:51-52). Power notes that “the corporate governance explosion in the 1990s has transformed internal control into a generic regulatory and public policy object and created opportunities to develop new consulting markets in a self-reinforcing process” (2007:47), whereby the government’s purchasing power legitimates its preference for NPM control. This “market-based approach” to the distribution of service funding has exacerbated the inherent tensions in the ideologies governing NPM and those of community organisations.

Sullivan notes that the Australian governments’ increasing use of competitive tender in the distribution of human service funding has essentially paralysed the advocacy arms of NFP organisations³⁰⁰. He states that:

³⁰⁰ See also O’Shea et al. 2007:52, 59-60.

The performance indicators, or contract terms of reference... reduce or remove the advocacy role of third sector [NFP] organisations. At the same time they often put organisations with a history of pastoral care into conflict with themselves, since part of the service demanded by government can be to regulate and discipline the disadvantaged client group. Advocacy tends to attract the displeasure of government, both its political and administrative wings, as it assumes an alternate base of power with its own grass-roots legitimacy. Community groups now frequently complain that the Australian Government uses its funding to silence the voice of dissent in civil society, and freezes dissident organisations out of the policy-making process in order to further more easily its political program. (2010:6)

Growing complaints from the NFP sector pushed the Australian government to issue a terms of reference to the federal Productivity Commission, which then undertook a review of the sector in 2009. The resulting 2010 report identified numerous shortcomings of the market-based approach to the allocation of human service funding, many of which bear upon small Aboriginal corporations.

The Market-Based Approach to Service Contracting

Several of the shortcomings identified by the Productivity Commission were complaints that I frequently heard amongst service-providers in Mt Druitt. These included the short length of service contracts, the low wages demanded by the VFM approach, and the heavy-handed and arduous reporting requirements. An additional complaint noted in the Commission's report was the potential for service contracts to allow funding bodies to micro-manage service delivery (Productivity Commission 2010:297).

Challenges of Short Timeframes

The short-term nature of government contracts is problematic as it creates “uncertainty for providers and undermine[s] their ability to plan and efficiently allocate resources. It can also create an administrative burden for those organisations that are reliant on multiple short-term funding agreements. *These problems are particularly acute for Indigenous NFPs*” (Productivity Commission 2010:335, emphasis added). Principally programs addressing intractable problems or attempting to initiate intergenerational or societal change require a significantly longer time frame to see results. Employees of Winanga-Li and other Aboriginal organisations in Mt Druitt certainly felt that one- to three-year

contracts created job insecurity as well as problems regarding the community's expectations.

This latter point was illustrated regularly at Winanga-Li, as noted in Chapter 8, where clients believed that the organisation still offered services that had existed in the past but were no longer available. This frustrates clients, who have taken the time to visit Winanga-Li, and they often cannot understand why the organisation no longer offers the service. The employees are also frustrated because they desire to help the client. At Winanga-Li the employees often respond by trying to meet the client's need, despite not being funded to do so, which of course increases their burden of work.

Challenges of Low Wages

Another drawback of the short service contracts is that employees hired to provide a service funded for this short period of time have no job security, making it harder to attract skilled employees and creating feelings of inadequacy on the part of employers. This difficulty is further compounded by the low wages demanded by VFM.

In 2008, when my fieldwork first began at Winanga-Li, the Executive Officer (Betty) earned approximately \$52,000 annually and the Community Projects Officer (Lewis) earned only \$43,000. While the *Social and Community Services Award (SACS)* award very gradually increased annually, in 2010 the SACS award was replaced with the *Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHCADS)*. Under the 2013 SCHCADS pay scale the Executive Officer now earns just over \$70,000 annually, while the Community Projects Officer earns just over \$60,000. Both of these employees possess Bachelor degrees and Lewis, the Community Projects Officer, holds a Master's Degree in management. The skills held by these employees qualify them for jobs in which they could, as public servants or private sector employees, each be earning upwards of \$100,000 annually. In fact past employees of Winanga-Li, hired under short-term contracts, had earned only around \$40,000 annually working for the organisation, but have gone on to government jobs in the public service where they earn salaries from \$90,000 to

\$110,000³⁰¹. It appears that working in the NFP human service delivery sector is likely to guarantee a salary half that offered by private industry and the public service.

Excessive Reporting Requirements

The difficulty in recruiting skilled employees and the demand of doing more with less creates an obstacle for some NFP organisations in meeting their contractually required reporting obligations. Government contracts to provide human services include specification for reporting outcomes of their projects. These reports are expected to include quantitative data on all aspects of outcomes (O'Shea et al. 2007:50).

While Winanga-Li had previously submitted qualitative accounts of the benefits clients received from their services, in the last five years they have been forced to create quantitative measures to demonstrate the success of their programs. In order to collect quantitative data, all activities of the organisation need to be recorded and quantified, yet this has proven difficult, both because of staffing shortages and because many of the organisation's activities are not easily quantifiable³⁰². It should also be noted that although quantitative reports are required, no effort is made by the contracting agency to verify a report's claims.

Winanga-Li has attempted to quantify outcomes, such as improvements to self-esteem and social capital, through surveys that the organisation developed. However, surveys must be administered and evaluated by staff. While previously Winanga-Li's employees would simply talk to clients to identify the benefits received from programs, and then write an account of their clients' statements, they now have the burden of developing surveys, administering them and collating their findings. Discussing progress with clients, a meaningful area of interaction, is devalued as the emphasis on quantitative assessment grows. Constructing procedures and processes to quantify self-esteem and other factors in accordance with reporting requirements is indeed arduous. Furthermore, if auditable

³⁰¹ Dwyer et al. (2009:41-42) asserts that it is widely acknowledged that staff of Indigenous organisations "work for less material reward and under more difficult conditions than public sector staff" (Sullivan 2010:7; see also Dillon and Westbury 2007:73).

³⁰² Gillian Cowlshaw notes that "social dynamics [are] a recalcitrant arena that resists measurement, predictability and replication" (2009:223).

measures of performance have little to do with service quality, as is suggested above by Power (2007:164) and Cortis (2006:15), then not only is this task arduous, but futile.

Challenges of Quantitative Reporting

Within the provision of social services, headcounts of client throughput (known colloquially in Mt Druitt and elsewhere as “bums on seats”) fail to capture a range of highly relevant data. For example, a client headcount fails to delineate those clients treated with dignity and whose needs were met by a service from those who were treated with condescension and left a facility unaided. While helping out at Winanga-Li during a period specified by DoCS for the collection of client headcounts, I realised just how ambiguous this supposedly empirical practice was.

Confusing the matter of headcounts is the propensity for clients to receive more than one service during a visit to Winanga-Li. For example, a mother and her child attended the early childhood play group and while there, the mother chatted with Betty and learned about three other programs relevant to herself and her child. Aside from the mother and child being counted as participants in the children’s playgroup, this incident could also count as three (or even six) additional cases of service delivery, in that the mother (and the child) obtained information and referral services. But what if the conversation between Betty and the mother was overheard by other mothers who also followed through with this information, or if the initial mother told family members of these services? How many client referrals should be counted?

The social and familial connections of clients of Winanga-Li are dense, and information is often shared amongst social networks. Furthermore, friends or family members frequently accompany the person receiving the services from Winanga-Li. While a client came into the facility accompanied by two cousins in order to print out 100 flyers for a funeral, all three accessed the internet: to check their email, to update their social media page and to look for a job. How many incidents of service delivery does this count for?

In addition to knowing what to count as an incident of service delivery, is the difficulty of keeping track of the numbers. If Betty is chatting with mothers during the early childhood

play group, is she to remember each time a service was mentioned and who exactly was within earshot when the information was imparted? If multiple clients access the internet, is someone supposed to monitor their use and record the web pages visited? Is each user to be asked to specify the activity achieved from their use of the internet?

Winanga-Li staff realise that such monitoring makes clients uncomfortable and less likely to ask to use the specified service. On three different occasions I tried to help a client use the internet, asking them what web page they needed to access. They were embarrassed and said “ah, don’t worry about it,” or something to that effect. I responded by saying something like “oh, I don’t care what you need to do, even if all you want to do is play games online. Maybe you could call your friend and find the web address you need.” In each case the client was put at ease and continued to use the computer, often calling someone to get the necessary web address.

In the last three years DoCS has instituted a data collection system in which surveys are to be completed by at least a quarter of clients who receive a service (this is in addition to any surveys developed and administered by staff of Winanga-Li), for month-long periods twice a year. DoCS policy dictates that if a client attends a class twice a week that they must fill out the survey at least twice during the month-long period. This is repetitive and time-consuming and results in frustration and frequent complaints from clients about the policy. Another issue with these surveys occurs when a client comes into the facility in “crisis mode” and in a fragile emotional state. Betty and Lewis are hesitant, and often refuse, to demand that the client fill out a survey once they have received the service. One example of this was a young mother who came in with her three-month-old baby. She was about to be evicted, had nowhere else to go and was seeking information on emergency housing. She was distraught and after putting her at ease and counselling her on her options, Betty and Lewis did not feel comfortable asking her to fill out a DoCS survey on service delivery.

The requirements established by funding bodies, as they attempt to collect data on headcounts, demonstrate the complicated, repetitive and ambiguous nature of something that is generally thought to be straight-forward. Furthermore, head counts can be easily fabricated by making up numbers or by staff completing multiple surveys to raise the

service delivery count³⁰³. Therefore, quantitative indicators are not hard facts and can be as subjective and prone to error as qualitative indicators, if not more so.

Prior to new demands in reporting, Winanga-Li had included numerous photos of its activities³⁰⁴. Photos would be taken of students during classes, of the goods produced during classes (such as sewing projects and baked goods), and of persons attending events, among other things. This photographic evidence is much harder to fabricate, yet government bodies deemed it of little importance as a means of fulfilling reporting responsibilities. In the past five years such evidence has been relegated to a secondary report³⁰⁵, as the DoCS reporting format does not provide room for such evidence, instead focusing on numbers on a page. Another reporting method previously practiced heavily by Winanga-Li was the writing of case studies³⁰⁶ to demonstrate the long-ranging positive outcomes of their services. Yet such qualitative accounts have suffered the same dismissive treatment by DoCS and other funding bodies as photographic evidence.

Many employees of the human service industry are motivated by a desire to help those around them (Billis and Glennerster 1998) and they see the time-intensive and costly nature of developing quantitative performance measures as detracting from their ability to meet the needs of their community (O'Shea et al. 2007:57): time and money is taken away from the community to be dedicated instead to activities that they believe unimportant and non-productive. This is one way in which the purchase of service contracting results in the micromanagement of organisations, as the Productivity Commission had found.

³⁰³ Fabricating data was not something done at Winanga-Li, but it was something which clients and staff talked about, in either a joking or critical manner. This was a practice clearly undertaken by Gagil. In 2010 Gagil reported to a local Mt Druitt newspaper that, in the previous year, it had provided services to 8,000 Mt Druitt Indigenous youth, when in fact, according to the 2011 ABS Census, there are only 4,233 Indigenous youth (aged 0-19) in the entire Blacktown LGA.

³⁰⁴ Winanga-Li has a policy of obtaining signed informed consent forms from clients when publishing photographs of them (for example, on their web page or in their annual reports).

³⁰⁵ It should be noted that in addition to the purely quantitative report that is demanded by DoCS, Winanga-Li also undertakes reporting to its Management Committee and members via a more qualitative format that does include photos and case studies. This latter report is also submitted to DoCS and ORIC.

³⁰⁶ An example of a Winanga-Li case study is provided in Chapter 8.

Government Micromanagement of Programs

Other works regarding NSW Aboriginal organisations have also noted that funding contracts enable governments to micromanage. The 2007 dissertation by Yuriko Yamanouchi, who undertook research on the Aboriginal population of south-western Sydney, reports that the people with whom she worked felt that accepting government funding resulted in a loss of autonomy: “because they fund us, they think they own us!” (2007:287).

Staff of Winanga-Li voiced a related criticism: they believe that funding bodies micro-managed human service projects in their decisions as to who received funding, as well as the terms under which funding would be given. Viewing funding bodies as highly selective about the type of programs they thought would “work”, Betty and Lewis saw that those programs provided by large national-level charities were privileged when tenders were called for³⁰⁷, thereby promoting those organisations’ approach to service delivery. Winanga-Li staff believed that the micromanagement of human services begins in the initial stages of funding scheme development rather than only once funding has been allotted and contracts signed.

In deciding which outcomes must be achieved, funding bodies are dictating the areas of “need”. Then, in the ranking of funding applicants, they are deciding which approach to service delivery will be most “effective”, with little, if any, on-the-ground consultation with local communities (for example, see Allen Consulting Group 2011:71). By the time contracts are signed, the funding body has already determined the path that service delivery must take. This micromanagement of programs, by government bodies “that have little or no experience, and disappointing track records” in Indigenous service delivery, tragically skews services to follow the same unsuccessful and failed approaches of the past (Sullivan 2011:111; see also Dillon and Westbury 2007:55-61). It impinges upon an organisation’s flexibility and innovation to respond to unexpected circumstances, eroding the carapace of Indigenous corporations. Power writes that the “decorative and *perfectionist* formulas of

³⁰⁷ There is, in fact, a privileging of large organisations by governments in tendering processes: governments “find it easier to deal with fewer providers, and also larger agencies can employ specialist staff in areas such as tender preparation and accounting” (O’Shea et al. 2007:52).

[NPM] are unlikely to be a basis for resilience in organizations, and may even create paralysis when flexibility is needed” (2007:156). In fact, Olga Havnen, then Northern Territory Co-ordinator General for Remote Services, has criticised National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) for precisely this reason, and was dismissed shortly thereafter³⁰⁸ (2012:35).

Australian Bureaucracies and NPM: Funding Models

The Productivity Commission’s 2010 report states that:

Where governments are seeking the delivery of clearly defined outcomes, and markets are genuinely contestable, purchase of service contracting remains the preferred approach. Where a market-based approach is not feasible nor appropriate, other models of engagement should be used. This may involve the development of long-term or short-term joint ventures. Such models are likely to be particularly relevant to tackling intractable (or ‘wicked’) problems. (297)

The report identifies Indigenous disadvantage as an intractable problem warranting a collaborative funding approach (Productivity Commission 2010:327), defined as “cooperation and collaboration between government and providers in pursuit of a shared vision for improving the wellbeing of clients” (326). Indeed, this is the primary form of funding received by Winanga-Li, coming from NSW DoCS. While this funding is relatively stable, in that it is renewable triennially, it does not adequately increase in accordance with inflation or expanded programming.

Collaborative Funding

As we have seen, “collaborative” funding is a misnomer, since government funding bodies have decided beforehand what needs are to be addressed, and by what means. However, there are two additional drawbacks to this sort of funding. One is that it is constantly under threat of being revoked on the whims of the current government or departmental bureaucrats. The other drawback is that the “collaboration” entailed frequently involves the further micromanagement of organisations by departmental representatives.

³⁰⁸ In her 2012 report, which led to her firing, Olga Havnen wrote that “While NPAs provide greater clarity about roles and responsibilities they can also be too prescriptive and inflexible and lack responsiveness to improved understanding of issues, for instance the crisis response to child protection rather than early childhood development and family support” (35).

One such example of micromanagement, as we have seen, is the demand for quantitative evidence of service delivery (O'Shea et al. 2007:50). Other examples come in the form of being forced to adhere to departmental "recommendations". One such "recommendation" occurred in 2011, when DoCS insisted that Winanga-Li use a less expensive accountant³⁰⁹ for the organisation's annual audit. The organisation complied the following year, only to discover that the accountant designated by DoCS had drastically erred in numerous calculations and had not attributed income and expenditures to correct programs. It cost \$3,000 to fix this accountant's mistakes, as well as months of staff members' time and energy. After this debacle DoCS, without apology, permitted Winanga-Li to use the accountant they had used for the previous 17 years.

A further example of such wasteful micromanagement resulted from the above incident. The following year Winanga-Li's 2012 annual financial audit noted that the projects funded by DoCS had incurred a \$3,000 deficit; however the organisation had covered this cost through their own fund-raising activities. Because Winanga-Li had money from their own funds to cover this cost, DoCS became convinced that the organisation was overcharging them for the provision of services. DoCS thus insisted that Winanga-Li could not charge them both an administrative fee and a rental component for the provision of DoCS services, regardless of the fact that this was standard practice³¹⁰. What DoCS failed to realise (despite being documented in the program costs) was that the \$3,000 budget deficit was due to paying an accountant to correct the previous year's audit errors; a cost caused by DoCS and covered by Winanga-Li.

For five months the organisation received letters from DoCS challenging the organisation's viability and financial practices, which failed to cease even when Winanga-Li's accountant responded to their concerns with a letter of his own. It was not until the end of May 2013

³⁰⁹ The primary reason why Winanga-Li saw fit to use the more expensive accountant for their annual audits was that the organisation did not employ a book-keeper and this accountant had worked with the organisation since its inception and had tailored his practices to the organisation's needs. The Executive Officer undertook all bookkeeping responsibility (under the oversight of the Management Committee) in an effort to save money. Hiring a different accountant entailed changing their book-keeping software, requiring hours of training on the new software, with the only alternative being to hire a book-keeper.

³¹⁰ It appears that DoCS had forgotten that Winanga-Li was a separate entity that owned its facility and must cover the costs of maintenance and utilities. Essentially, this amounts to demanding that Winanga-Li allow DoCS to operate programs out of its facility for free or that all administrative work must be undertaken free of charge. This is unheard of in tendering or in any other form of subcontracting.

that a meeting was finally arranged in which Winanga-Li's Management Committee, staff and accountant were able to sit down with three members of DoCS. After a four hour conversation DoCS finally conceded that Winanga-Li was financially viable and was not overcharging the government for service delivery. Needless to say, a substantial amount of Winanga-Li's time and resources (as well as DoCS') were expended wastefully over this six month period in the effort to address this matter and to reinstate the organisation's good name. The stress and time involved in trying to appease such funding bodies detracts from organisations' abilities to serve their Aboriginal community.

Operational Grants

Operational grants are another form of funding sporadically received by Winanga-Li, "intended to help providers upgrade buildings, information technology systems and other types of infrastructure in order to comply with the requirements of revised service standards, accreditation systems and reporting frameworks" (Productivity Commission 2010:329). Winanga-Li previously received this type of grant to construct its portable classroom and renovate its kitchen. The organisation was able to obtain these grants, not via competitive tendering, but by building strong social relationships with Community Projects Officers from government departments, such as the Blacktown City Council and previously, with DoCS³¹¹. Indeed, even with NPM's insistence that personal relationships play no role in its operations, Winanga-Li's history suggests otherwise.

Purchase of Service Contracting

While Winanga-Li has benefited from collaborative funding and operational grants, neither of these models is ideal. However, a far more common approach Australian governments use to allocate human service funding is the purchase of service contracting model. This includes the "competitive tender and contract model" and the "negotiated tender model".

³¹¹ There is a high turnover in the community officers of government departments like DoCS. Between 2008 and 2012 this community officer changed five times. While Winanga-Li had a strong positive relationship with DoCS' community officer from 2006-2008, they have had difficulty establishing similar relationships with subsequent officers.

Under the “competitive tender and contract model” the government specifies the type of service desired and then buys it “on the community’s behalf in a competitive market environment” (Productivity Commission 2010:323). The “negotiated tender” model is similar to the competitive tender and contract, but, in this case, organisations can apply for the funding by invitation only. The negotiated tender is used when only a small number of appropriately skilled providers are believed to exist in the designated area³¹².

According to the Productivity Commission’s 2010 report, the purchase of service contracting model, which includes the competitive tender and contract and negotiated tender, “is most applicable to the delivery of relatively standardised services for which there is a widespread need in the community” (325). This model most heavily mirrors the NPM approach to administration, as it involves contractual specifications for minimum standards and demands the organisation adheres to NPM’s quality assurance framework.

Contradictions within the Productivity Commission Report

The Productivity Commission’s 2010 report specified that reforms to government funding of the NFP sector “should help ensure that government and NFP engagement in the delivery of government funded services (and associated compliance costs) does not unduly undermine the mission of community organisations, their reach into the community, or impede community participation in decision-making processes” (2010: 297). Yet it also states that “governments should ensure [the allocation of funding] is consistent with the overarching principle of obtaining the best value for money for the community” (2010:297). Thus, although stating that funded programs should be tailored to the community, the Productivity Commission nevertheless insists that the VFM approach remain dominant. The Productivity Commission acknowledges the need for context-specific programs, and hence for flexibility, yet does not acknowledge a central flaw to NPM’s rationale: that all things are not reducible to quantifiable criteria that can be audited.

³¹² One reason why Gagil had received such large amounts of government funding was because it had been nominated on numerous occasions to apply for negotiated tenders. In light of Gagil being so poorly viewed by the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, as were its programs, numerous informants attributed the favouritism shown to Gagil to a close friendship between the organisation’s Executive Officer and the person overseeing DoCS’ community projects in the Blacktown LGA.

The Productivity Commission viewed NFP organisations as having “a number of characteristics (in terms of what motivates their decision making, their structure, sources of finance and workforce) that distinguish them from other forms of agency” (2010:305). It valued NFP organisations because of “their reach into the community and community participation in decision making processes”, because they “are representative of the clients the program is targeting”, and because of their “knowledge of, and sensitivity to, client needs”, particularly in cases where “personal and societal needs are combined” (2010:305). However, the report also states that “Decision-making should be guided by the outcomes the government is trying to achieve and not perceptions about the intrinsic value of particular types of organisations” (331). These two statements reflect two competing ideologies; the first is qualitative and grassroots, while the second is NPM. This highlights one of the many paradoxes operating within governments’ human service funding policy.

Paradoxes of NPM

The Productivity Commission’s 2010 report highlights several other paradoxical effects of NPM tendering processes, particularly regarding the purchase of service contracting and its bearing upon small NFPs. One such paradox is the asymmetry of power between government funding bodies and NFP organisations, which undermines the advocacy role of organisations and narrows their margin for negotiation with funding bodies. Another is that the burden of compliance and reporting strains the organisation’s administrative capacity, particularly in light of demands for VFM. A third is that “mission drift” occurs, in which the organisation changes its mission to align with the objectives of government funding³¹³, therefore being less responsive to community needs. A final paradox is that NFP organisations “become overly dependent on government funding thereby stifling social innovation” (2010:306). In fact, the Productivity Commission found that NFP organisations lose their comparative advantage as they “adopt more bureaucratic and less flexible structures” (2010:307).

³¹³ This has also been a criticism of “standardisation”, in which organisations lose their “individuality or local character, and the tendency to respond to government briefs rather than local knowledge when designing and delivering services” (O’Shea et al. 2007:52)

Positive though the Commission's admonitions may be, it is not likely that these problems will soon be adequately addressed. One feature of NPM's resilience is its self-reinforcing nature: problems that emerge within its systems are seen as just another aspect of the regime that needs more precise measurement and an additional layer of systematic oversight that will in the future monitor the risk (Power 2007:167-168). In creating another reporting hoop through which organisations must jump, funding bodies are increasing their demand on organisations' administrative time, without additional remuneration, since funding does not increase in accordance with demands for accountability. Some organisations respond to this pressure by reorienting their priorities, yet this in turn can have negative consequences, such as the aforementioned "mission drift" and inflexibility.

Bruno Frey and Reto Jegen developed "crowding theory" to explain an additional negative consequence of NPM. They argue that, in the field of risk management, monitoring mechanisms "positively incentivize organizational participants to manage first-order risk up to the point where the density of such mechanisms crowd out the focus" of the risk³¹⁴ (Power 2007:173). Thus, external motivations of NFP organisations, such as monetary incentives for their own employees³¹⁵ and the threat of punishment by funding bodies, "crowd out" internal motivations, such as responding to need in their community. Further, this leads to yet one more reason for organisations to act in their own self-interest, covering up mistakes and failures in order to preserve reputation (Power 2007:173). A clear instance of this may be seen in the numerous requests received by Winanga-Li for assistance recruiting clients to mainstream organisations' Indigenous-specific programs. This is resultant from these mainstream organisations' lack of traction within the Indigenous community; yet such organisations refuse to admit that they are not the service providers best placed to offer the services and continue to apply (and win) Indigenous-specific funding, despite being unable to attract their target clientele.

³¹⁴ A clear example of this "crowding" can be found in the above account in which DoCS insisted that, in accordance with VFM, Winanga-Li change accountants.

³¹⁵ Despite the non-profit nature of these organisations, they, like Winanga-Li, are dependent upon funding for their continued existence. Thus, such organisations are self-perpetuating and self-protecting. A further monetary incentive, as noted in Chapter 9's discussion of the privatisation of employment services, is the governments' awarding of additional financial payments to organisations that seemingly demonstrate their positive outcomes.

Others besides scholars have recognised the drawbacks to NPM. The Productivity Commission itself argued that the more NFP organisations adjust to reporting requirements and establish policies and procedures to manage demands for accountability, the more they “undermine stakeholder participation, which can result in an erosion of trust and reduce the effectiveness of service delivery” (2010:307). As Hood and Peters note, such strategies can lead to “a perverse result exactly the opposite of the reported purposes of benchmarking and best practice” (2004:270).

Despite the negative consequences of NPM’s approach to administration, there is no indication that criticisms or failures of its procedures are having any impact. The Productivity Commission recommended that contracts should:

- Provide scope for genuine negotiation and collaboration between government and providers
- Respect the independence of service providers
- Be based on fair and reasonable terms and conditions
- Be underpinned by an explicit risk management framework
- Seek to minimise the compliance burden on providers
- Recognise the need for flexibility in service delivery
- Allow for innovation in service design and delivery. (2010:345)

Here already one can see a conflicting push and pull. For example, negotiation and collaboration is time-intensive and compromises efficiency; minimising the compliance burden results in fewer reporting requirements, yet this could also impinge upon accountability to the government; and the incorporation of flexibility, independence and innovation into an “explicit risk management framework” is tantamount to quantifying these three features, which requires subjective assessments of their perceived value.

While the Report’s final recommendations specify that when “determining value for money, governments should explicitly recognise any indirect or wider benefits that providers may be able to generate”, it still notes that “an evidence based approach should be used to assess the nature, extent and relevance of these types of benefits on a case-by-case basis” (2010:346). Despite the fact that “weighing up these issues is challenging because in areas of social policy many of the potential costs and benefits arising from different courses of action are by their nature difficult to quantify and analyse” (2010:313),

the report insists that “if properly applied, the concept of value for money is capable of taking into account any relevant wider or indirect effects and maximising overall community wellbeing. As such, there is no need to move away from the concept of value for money” (2010:331).

NPM’s quantitative audit approach to administration remains the dominant shaper of government competitive tendering processes, despite its weaknesses. Indeed, the Commission’s Report demonstrates that “the core principle guiding decision-making is usually value for money” (2010:330). Elaborating, the Report specifies that VFM is “not about achieving the lowest possible purchase price. Rather, value for money is the optimum combination of ‘whole of life costs’, quality (fitness for purpose) and risk that meets the government’s requirements” (2010:330). However, in order to calculate “whole of life costs” in monetary terms one must quantify the unquantifiable (O’Shea et al. 2007:51), making subjective assessments.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the rise of neoliberalism and its effects upon government social policy. This ideology has led to the outsourcing of human services and the implementation of NPM methods of reporting and evaluation within public policy, including the allocation of funding for human services. While NPM’s approach to assessment and accountability is purported to be objective, rational and disinterested, it is in many ways anything but. NPM promotes those that adopt a business-oriented framework in which financial capital is privileged over other objectives (O’Shea et al. 2007:51), such as the alleviation of suffering. It does this by insisting upon the VFM approach, which demands the “three Es”: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. However, as we have seen, economy and efficiency are valued above effectiveness, as effectiveness is much harder to quantify and inherently requires subjective evaluation. Furthermore, despite assertions of the disinterestedness of actors within NPM, the very regime is “a vehicle for particularistic advantage” (Hood 1991:9), by which those in positions of power and privilege exercise their will to maintain this position. The technical orientation of neoliberalism’s NPM approach to human services is self-perpetuating, with information fed into the system being used to justify an ever-

increasing need for quantification and measurement of the intangible. This treatment of social policy, as if it were a matter of technique, is unlikely to deliver the desired social change, as it fails to address or even acknowledge the complexity of human behaviour.

By exploring the funding regimes currently used by Australian governments to fund NFP providers of human services, I have demonstrated the fallacies of NPM. Human service outcomes, such as those of Winanga-Li, are intrinsically difficult to quantify, and the quantification of such outcomes can be just as spurious as other forms of reporting, if not more so. The current market-based funding schemes for Aboriginal-specific services are in many ways counter-productive to achieving lasting results in “closing the gaps”, as they encourage mission drift, the crowding-out of organisation objectives, and the micromanagement of organisations by funding bodies. All of these things result in the lessening of programs’ flexibility, responsiveness and innovation, as well as their efficiency (despite that being a stated goal of government agencies), while at the same time challenging organisations’ ability to advocate on behalf of their community. Thus, the interface buffering Aboriginal communities from government intrusion provided by Aboriginal corporations since their inception is gradually being eroded, and the communities which they serve are losing control over their services (Levitus 2009:95).

Somewhat predictably, Winanga-Li has had difficulty accessing funding distributed through Australia’s preferred form: that of the competitive tender and contract model. In light of the organisation’s 20 year history of successfully delivering Indigenous-specific human services to the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, this serves as one indicator of the failure of neoliberal ideology and its privileged management approach in crucial areas of social policy, as well as the inequitable playing field upon which government funding is distributed.

Yet I do not believe such challenges to Indigenous service funding administration – such as funding allocation, accountability, and the reporting of outcomes – are insurmountable. The concluding chapter of this thesis offers a range of recommendations that are likely to deliver more equitable and effective outcomes in governments’ administration of Indigenous-specific services.

The following chapter explores further factors inhibiting Indigenous organisations from obtaining funding to deliver Indigenous-specific human services. It will investigate racialist and racist assumptions regarding Indigenous corporations evinced in the excessive scrutiny under which they must operate and in the statements of senior public servants. Further, the clash of organisational cultures will be illustrated by examining the privileging of organisations who “speak the language” of NPM and the question of accountability to the government or to the community.

11. The Marginalisation of Indigenous Organisations within Government Regimes

The issue of accountability of Indigenous organisations has been insistently canvassed in recent years, especially by critics of the Indigenous Sector who doubt its competence and honesty. Far less attention has been paid to the problems of making Australian governments...accountable to Indigenous organisations for the Consolidated Revenue that they receive in respect of their Indigenous population.

– Tim Rowse (2002:229)

This thesis opened with a quote from a White community worker within the federal government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), in which she stated with certainty that it was popular knowledge that Indigenous organisations were prone to failure. This occurred during a 2009 workshop designated for staff of western Sydney Aboriginal organisations, and was led by representatives from FaHCSIA; the Department of Community Services (DoCS); and the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care (DADHC). During the presentation given by the local FaHCSIA representative, the topic of "risk management" arose. The speaker explained to attendees that funding bodies were concerned with Aboriginal organisations' ability to provide specified services successfully, and proceeded to state: "We all know that Aboriginal organisations have a tendency to go belly-up." Elaborating, she warned that Indigenous organisations might find their funding applications dismissed under the category of "risk management".

When asked if this meant that all Aboriginal organisations were therefore tarred with the same brush and seen as a heightened risk by virtue of their Aboriginality, the FaHCSIA representative grew defensive and contradicted her prior statement, replying that this was certainly not the case. When she was then queried regarding the potential biases of the funding selections committee, who might indeed see organisations as a risk by virtue of their Aboriginality, the FaHCSIA official responded that "we are only human" and that sometimes such things were unavoidable.

Not only does this incident illustrate the lack of true neutrality in the assessment of New Public Management's (NPM) funding tenders, but it also highlights the difficulty that Aboriginal corporations have in signalling their trustworthiness to funding bodies: by their very nature Aboriginal corporations have become deemed a risk (Dillon and Westbury 2007:71). Were the policies of NPM neutral, bureaucrats would be wholly objective in assessing possible risk factors within each organisation; however, this would necessitate going beyond the framework of NPM's "three Es" of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Indeed, it would demand attention to qualitative, non-quantifiable variables (Power 2007:112, 159, 184).

The view that Aboriginal corporations are prone to failure has been documented in Chapter 3's discussion of numerous baseless allegations of fraud that haunted ATSIC from its inception, and of the negative characterisation of Indigenous organisations as either inept or corrupt in their management of government funding. The administration of Indigenous human service funding by Aboriginal corporations, which will be discussed below, abounds with this characterisation; as Patrick Sullivan states, "the Indigenous sector is paradoxically under-acknowledged and over-regulated" (2011:61-62).

This chapter will explore the systematic marginalisation of Indigenous organisations within regulatory and funding regimes of Australian governments. By examining the methods and processes used to distribute government Indigenous service funding, I argue that the ideological basis of this system is antithetical to that of many small Aboriginal corporations. This mismatch then results in the allocation of funding for Indigenous-specific services to non-Indigenous organisations. The chapter analyses regulatory bodies and funding processes, particularly that of accountability, in terms of the theory of NPM, which, as mentioned previously, is a set of practices and policies established to further neoliberal objectives. Further, it explores whether or not the institutions that oversee and fund Indigenous corporations are racially discriminatory. This analysis leads to the conclusion that Indigenous corporations, despite their unique strengths in serving their Indigenous communities, are demonised, hampered and marginalised by government bodies and their regulatory schemes.

Reporting Requirements

As previously noted, the publicly-funded human service sector has experienced great increases in reporting requirements. This form of “performance management” is a product of the neoliberal push to devolve service delivery to private organisations, shifting responsibility for outcomes away from government and onto the community (Humpage 2008:414). Organisations are now expected not only to evaluate and report on outcomes, but also to align these outcomes with indicators defined by the government, which reflect its current (and ever-changing) priorities. This form of performance management has been resoundingly criticised for the burden it places on organisations³¹⁶. The short-term nature of government funding traps organisations into continuous cycles of applying for funding and then meeting the multiple reporting requirements attached to each funding scheme for successful program acquittal (Sullivan 2011:62). Increasing this burden is the fact that many organisations often receive several forms of government funding concurrently and must therefore tailor reports and data collection to suit the demands of a variety of funding guidelines (Levitus 2009:79). Although governments have recently attempted to synchronise human service funding application and acquittal systems across programs and departments, these efforts have been poorly implemented and ultimately unsuccessful (Sullivan 2011:63).

While the time-intensive collection of data and writing of reports burdens organisations’ staff, little additional funding is provided to compensate for this activity. Meeting the reporting requirements is not a prohibitive factor for large, non-Indigenous organisations, such as Anglicare, St. Martin’s Youth Care and Mission Australia, which, with annual budgets in the tens to hundreds of millions of dollars, can afford to devote entire departments to professional grant writing, data acquisition and reporting (O’Shea et al. 2007:52, 58-59). Additionally, due to the long-standing embeddedness of such organisations within the White market-oriented society, these large organisations frequently operate within an ideology of business modelling that relies upon NPM and therefore aligns with that of government funding bodies from the outset. This is something that is simply not the case for Indigenous organisations.

³¹⁶ See, for example Cortis 2006; Dillon and Westbury 2007; Smith 2008; Sullivan 2010; Dwyer et al. 2011; Sullivan 2011; CtGC 2013; and Taylor and Westbury 2013.

Due to Winanga-Li's limited budget, it cannot afford to hire professional grant writers or administrators whose sole job it is to oversee recording, reporting, financial and accountability matters. Exacerbating the time-intensive nature of reporting demands is the exacting nature of the reporting requirements, not only of funding bodies, but by the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act) as well, under which Winanga-Li is incorporated (see Chapter 8). It is indeed one more indication of the bias against Indigenous organisations that *CATSI Act* requirements, administered by the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), are more demanding than those of alternative Acts of incorporation (Sullivan 2011:62), such as the NSW Department of Fair Trading's (DFT) *Associations Incorporation Act 1984/2009*³¹⁷. Evidence obtained during fieldwork³¹⁸ indicates that requirements are not as strictly enforced under the DFT's 1984/2009 Act, whereas ORIC firmly insists upon its regulations being carried out to the letter, going so far as to publish annually on its website a publicly-available list of all Indigenous corporations that fail to meet their reporting requirements. No non-Indigenous organisations face such stringent levels of surveillance³¹⁹, nor are they exposed to such public embarrassment. These practices not only shame Indigenous corporations, they reinforce perceptions of their dysfunction and the need for their increased scrutiny (Sullivan 2010:8; 2011:60-62).

³¹⁷ It was only in 2009 (instituted in July 2010) that the NSW DFT updated their *Associations Incorporation Act 1984* (AIA Act) to parallel the reporting requirements of ORIC (*AIA Act 2009* Section 45:1; ORIC 2011a 8-11). Prior to this, *AIA Act* organisations needed only to submit to the Director General unaudited financial reports of income and expenditure, and assets and liabilities (*AIA Act 1984* section 26:6; 27:1:a).

³¹⁸ A local Mt Druitt organisation, Gagil, incorporated under the DFT's Act, went for three years (2007, 2008, 2010) without submitting *any* reports and received no penalty. Indeed it was not until copies of their previous reports were requested by a community member under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* that the DFT even noted the reports were missing. The DFT then allowed that organisation to submit the reports retrospectively without penalty.

³¹⁹ Francesca Merlan has commented to me that, during her work with Aboriginal communities and their organisations in Katherine, NT, she has observed that while ORIC may practice these forms of surveillance, the body's ability and/or willingness to take disciplinary action in the face of allegations of organisational mismanagement are infrequent. Merlan believes that the body is "widely regarded as not getting to the bottom of things, and being ineffectual" and argues that ORIC's "bark is worse than its bite" (personal communication, December 13, 2013). While ORIC may not take firm action in the face of alleged organisational misconduct, the case of Gagil indicates that it shares this in common with alternative bodies of incorporation, such as the NSW DFT. Furthermore, ORIC's public shaming of Indigenous organisations not in compliance contributes to perceptions of widespread organisational misconduct.

ORAC/ORIC

Since the advent of Australia's Self-Determination policy and the introduction of the *Aboriginal and Councils and Associations Act 1976 (ACA Act)* scandals regarding the management of Indigenous organisations and their financial records have been widely publicised (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:463-464; Dillon and Westbury 2007:71; Sullivan 2011:vii, 74). The rhetoric of accountability has therefore been ever-present within the context of Indigenous rights and Self-Determination. Accusations of mismanagement have come not only from above, from such politicians as John Howard, but also from below, for "in competitive politics among indigenous Australians, it is not uncommon to question the financial competence and even probity of one's opponents" (Rowse 2000:1527). This underscores the tensions of Indigenous accountability in general, to be discussed below.

The construction of Aboriginal corporations as funding risks was again highlighted in the hysteria of the early 2000s regarding the large number of Aboriginal corporations that had not fulfilled all reporting requirements to the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC)³²⁰. During the financial years 2000-2001 to 2001-2002, 76 percent of Indigenous organisations incorporated under the *ACA Act* were found to be partially or completely non-compliant with their reporting responsibilities to ORAC (ORAC 2005:38). This fuelled intense media interest, framed as suspicion of Aboriginal corporations across the board. In response to this ORAC instituted a crack-down on those corporations which did not meet full compliance standards.

In their *Yearbook 2003-04* ORAC noted that "Corporations were selected for examination because of evident problems or as part of our program of rolling examinations, which uses risk analysis of such criteria as size, purpose, time since last examination, compliance status, and history of members" or complaints (2005:38). These criteria of evaluation, founded upon the NPM model, are not necessarily those best suited to address corruption or inefficiency, as we shall see. Drastic action followed: the financial year 2003-04 saw the largest number of ORAC/ORIC de-registrations, with 282 corporations being stripped of

³²⁰ Prior to 2007 the registrar of Indigenous corporations was known as the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC). However, after the *ACA Act 1976* was updated to the *CATSI Act 2006* – the name was changed to Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC).

their corporate status³²¹. The financial year 2004-05 saw the largest number of examinations of Indigenous corporations, while 2005-06 saw the largest number of corporations put under external administration (ORIC 2008a:39). Interestingly, ORIC's 2008 report noted that 230 of 2004's deregistered corporations were later reinstated (2008b:39), evidence both of the failure of ORIC's evaluation criteria to truly uncover problematic organisations and of their initial overreaction; yet these reinstatements received no media attention.

Placing an Indigenous corporation under external administration frequently results in control of the organisation's operations being handed over to non-Indigenous administrators who adhere to NPM. This occurred in 2002 when Mt Druitt's Aboriginal Youth Hostel was put under the administration of St Martin's Youth Care³²². For the following eight years St Martin's website stated that the organisation would "*temporarily* auspice the project" in partnership with the Aboriginal community (citation withheld to avoid identification, emphasis added). Yet over twelve years later St Martin's still holds firm control over the organisation³²³.

St Martin's approach to "co-managing" the Hostel rests with the creation of an Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG), made up of Aboriginal volunteers from the local community. Yet according to my informants, many members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community who had served on the ARG became frustrated with the unwillingness of St Martin's Youth Care

³²¹ Winanga-Li happened to be one of the organisations de-registered as it was two weeks late submitting its Annual and Financial reports. Prior to 2004 these reports were accepted without penalty even when submitted moderately late. Winanga-Li was reinstated once the reports were submitted and a \$220 fine was paid.

³²² For a more in-depth account of the placing of this Hostel under outside administration, see Kelvin Knox's 2006 dissertation titled *Designing and Developing Aboriginal Service Organisations: A journey of consciousness*. However, Knox refrains from a critical investigation of (or even mentioning) the details regarding why the organisation was put under external administration. He neglects to explore the power relationships involved in the take-over or the effects the external administration had upon organisation services, its relationship to the Aboriginal community, and its governance culture.

³²³ As mentioned in Chapter 9, St Martin's downgraded the organisation's provision of beds from eight to three, due to lack of clientele. The lack of success in attracting clients has also led to the broadening of services offered at the facility to include the provision of support to young Aboriginal people, aged 12 to 18, who have had contact with the criminal justice system. Additionally, in 2013 the organisation's funding body, DoCS, obtained FaCS funding for St Martin's to undertake an investigation into ways in which they could improve client recruitment within the Mt Druitt Indigenous community due to the organisation's poor numbers of client throughput. It surprises me that DoCS would continue to fund St Martin's (even securing additional funding for it) when clearly service delivery and outcomes were so poor, rather than removing funding and awarding it to another organisation. This occurrence contradicts New Public Management's demands for economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

to work with them as partners and to implement, or even seriously consider, their recommendations. Aboriginal informants who had served on the Hostel's ARG under St Martin's commented to me that they had quit the group because St Martin's staff only paid lip-service to their ideas and never instituted any of their recommendations: "they always had a reason why it wouldn't work". One informant commented to me that "every man and his dog has been on that advisory committee, but none of them could stand it." In fact, at one point Betty volunteered to sit on the Hostel's ARG, along with three other community members. However, within a few months St Martin's administrators elected to change the day of the ARG meeting. Despite Betty having specified that Tuesday was the only day she could not attend, they changed the meeting to Tuesdays, forcing Betty to step down.

Scrutiny by Registrars

Prior to the 2007 shift from the *ACA Act 1976* to the *CATSI Act 2006*³²⁴, all Indigenous corporations were required to submit particular documents to the Registrar, which were placed on the public register (such as a list of members and financial reports). It was only after the shift in 2008 that these documents were placed on ORIC's website, where they could easily be viewed by all members of the Australian public³²⁵ (ORIC 2008b:81). This is a practice unique to ORIC, for while other Australian Acts of incorporation demand that documents be placed on the public register, it is difficult to view them (Sullivan 2011:62). Only after submitting personal information in writing and paying a fee can one obtain such documents. Thus, once again, we note that an Act that deals exclusively with Indigenous organisations discriminates by requiring a level of surveillance and public display unheard of for other organisations.

Even ORIC itself draws attention to its surveillance time and again. In their annual *Yearbook 2006-07* they proudly note that: "ORIC continued to be one of the most active regulators proportional to the number of corporations it regulates" (2008a:38) and "the

³²⁴ The *ACA Act 1976* was revised in an effort to make it more accessible and flexible to the needs of Indigenous bodies, yet Patrick Sullivan notes that it is "considerably longer and more complex than the original" (2011:52).

³²⁵ Betty has repeatedly challenged ORIC's publications of the names and address of the corporation's voluntary members. Besides the discriminatory aspect of such surveillance, the easy availability of such personal information places Winanga-Li's victims of domestic abuse at risk. She has learned to circumvent this policy by providing the address of members as care of the organisation.

trend for high numbers of regulatory actions compared to the total number of corporations shows ORIC continued to be a very active regulator³²⁶ (2008a:39).

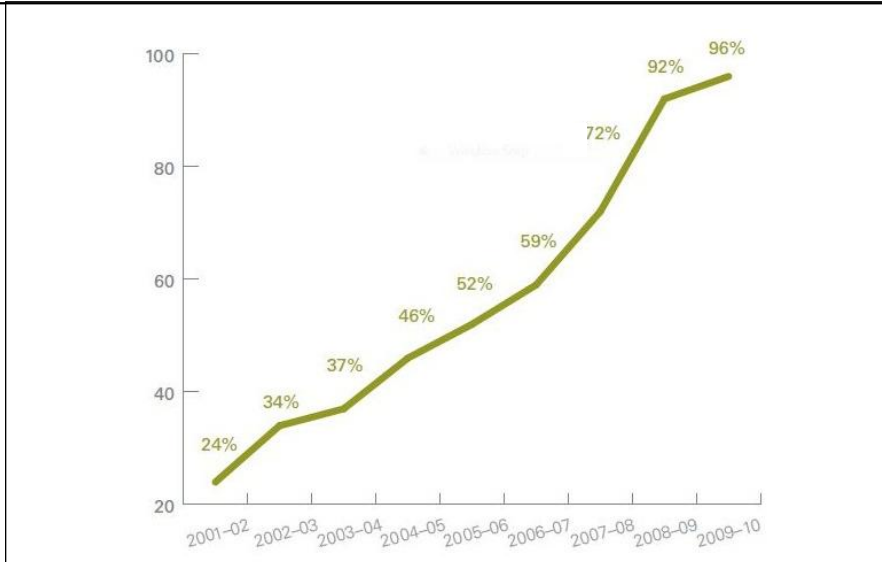
According to Tom Calma, then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, revisions to the *ACA Act 1976* were made because the Act “may have been discriminatory [and] because it was failing to protect Indigenous corporations in the same way as non-Indigenous corporations were protected under the law” (2007:114). Yet Patrick Sullivan argues that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations may get more robust protection by entering mainstream processes than by retaining their unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status” (2010:3). Examples from Mt Druitt certainly attest to the heightened surveillance of groups falling under *CATSI Act* regulations.

As noted above, in the early 2000s corporations overseen by ORAC had very low rates of success in meeting their reporting requirements. Below is a graph (Figure 11.1) provided in ORIC’s *Yearbook 2009-10* that illustrates the compliance rates of Indigenous corporations overseen by ORIC from 2001-2010.

ORIC reports that: “Higher compliance means that members, communities, creditors and government agencies have greater confidence in the public information maintained by the Registrar about corporations” (ORIC 2012a:24). Note that ORIC says nothing about the truthfulness or validity of this “public information”, for that is not a factor that NPM measures; their verification procedures are selective at best and completely absent at worst. Rather, compliance in reporting signals to taxpayers the trustworthiness of governmental monitoring processes and procedures and therefore, trust in the government itself (Power 1997:88). This is what led ORIC to institute surveillance practices more heavy-handed than any other funding body; practices that are in fact discriminatory.

³²⁶ Similar statements were repeated in ORIC’s *Yearbook* for the years 2007-08 (2008b:36) and 2008-09 (2010:40). The emphasis of ORIC’s *Yearbook* changed in 2009-10 to highlight its growing assistance to corporations to increase their corporate governance knowledge and skills (2011b). However statements regarding its “reputation as an active regulator” returned as a feature of the most recent *Yearbook* (2013b:v). Interestingly this coincides with a slight drop in compliance rates, which were 96.21 percent in 2011-12 (2012b:3), but 95.5 percent in 2012-13 (2013:1).

Figure 11.1 ORAC/ORIC Reporting Compliance, 2001-02 to 2009-10



(ORIC 2011b:25)

While the Registrar has substantially increased rates of compliance³²⁷ among Indigenous corporations, this does not mean that these corporations function in the way they were intended. Rather, it means that they have submitted reports, for which the validity of the information remains largely unchallenged. That is, the reports meet the criteria set for audit within the framework of NPM, such as the priority of on-time reporting. Once the quantitative reporting requirement has been met, there is little, if any, qualitative assessment of whether or not the report or the delivered outcomes have any on-the-ground validity. Thus, reporting and accountability under NPM are merely procedural rather than substantive (Box et al. 2001:609).

The perception that Indigenous organisations are prone to corrupt and inept management is what has led to the excessive policing of such organisations by ORIC and government funding bodies. Yet with the intense scrutiny being restricted to Indigenous corporations, and with government's shift toward awarding contracts to non-Indigenous organisations, it is fitting to ask whether or not such treatment is indicative of institutional racism.

³²⁷ ORIC began offering extensive governance training for members of Indigenous corporations in 2006 in anticipation of the introduction of the *CATSI Act 2006*. This training has proved effective in raising rates of compliance and has since been expanded. Governance training continues to be offered by ORIC in 2015.

Racialism and Racism

Discussing the fine line between sound government policy and racism in the United States, law professor Stephen L. Carter examines the difference between *racialism* and *racism*. Carter (1988:436) writes that racialism, or “the awareness of skin color [and other physical markers] and the belief that it can have other than aesthetic import”, is to some extent unavoidable: it is private individuals’ way of selecting what they believe to be the most salient features of their experience and using this to organise and sort what they observe. This involves stereotyping or the generalisation of observations, which allows the individual to “simplify their world” (Carter 1988:429). Carter argues that while racialism is unavoidable, it is the permeation of racialism into government policies that results in racism. So while the Australian public may view Aboriginal corporations to be a governance risk by virtue of their Aboriginality, this becomes racist as the belief crosses over into legislative practice, whereby *all* Indigenous corporations are formally constructed as a risk. Indeed, private racialism can manifest in singular instances of racism, but when it is systematised into government processes, it has the power to affect *all* people identified as belonging to that minority rather than only specific individuals.

In demonstrating the difference between racialism and racism, Carter uses the example of a white taxi driver robbed by a black male passenger. For this taxi driver, a logical approach to risk management may be to stop picking up black males. Yet this means that the taxi driver has alleviated his “own victimization by turning law-abiding black people into victims of fear”, making such an action racist. Carter astutely notes:

A society in which people make many small, individual racist choices is a society in which, over time, government will be pressed to adopt policies consistent with racialism. The policies adopted need not be racially specific to be consistent with the racist suppositions of the voters. If government policy is shaped by the unacknowledged racial categorization inculcated and acted on in daily life, the risk is substantial that government policy reflecting racist preferences will, in the end, prove racially oppressive. (1988:437)

He goes on to state that: “A society that recognizes its own racist character might try to avoid some of these harmful effects by adopting special decision rules that place certain subjects beyond the will of a majority of the popular representatives” (1988:437). Here, Carter is suggesting that the government create legislation that is racially based, in order to

enable certain minority citizens, e.g. Indigenous Australians, to exercise autonomy without interference from mainstream branches of government. This would facilitate such a minority group to create, as well as monitor, government policies affecting their people in order to counter further oppression.

It is noteworthy that this statement should so closely parallel the platform upon which ATSIC and the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* were built. However, as has been demonstrated in the scrutiny and distrust of ATSIC and organisations incorporated under the *ACA Act/CATSI Act*, it is not enough to merely create legislation unique to Indigenous Australians; rather, it is *essential* that their resourcing and administration lie “beyond the will” of White Australia. Anything short of this allows the racist perceptions of mainstream Australia to dictate the terms and conditions under which Indigenous autonomy will be tolerated.

Australia’s governments appear to waver between acknowledging that racist ideas circulate within society and proactively attempting to counter their effects on Indigenous Australians, such as through the creation of ATSIC, on the one hand; and complete denial of the existence of such ideas, as illustrated during the abolition of this body, on the other. Just as the Howard government refused to recognise the legacy of Australian racism when he refused to apologise to Indigenous Australians, so even today are Australian governments denying the prevalence of racist thinking and of racist policy-making. This is further evinced by the current preference for the distribution of Aboriginal-specific funding in accordance with NPM principles, which does not adequately safeguard against prevalent racist thinking.

Stigmatising Indigenous corporations as “risks” (Cunningham and Baeza 2005:466; Dillon and Westbury 2007:71; Sullivan 2011:60-62) that need to be managed, by virtue of their Indigeneity, is racist thinking that has racist repercussions; for it results in the further oppression of all those identified as Indigenous Australians. Such government policies promote the notion of the inferiority of such organisations, while at the same time silencing or drastically curtailing recognition of the unique qualities that make them so valuable: namely, that these organisations serve as the primary means through which Indigenous

people make their citizenship visible and express their priorities and needs to non-Aboriginal Australians (Sullivan 2011:56-57).

Many of these organisations are trusted by the communities they serve and are the first port of call when Indigenous Australians experience the need for resources, advocacy and support. Yet the recognition and trust they receive from their local communities is rarely, if ever, factored into government valuations of an organisation's funding worthiness. Government agencies might demand extensive reporting, but as we have seen, it does not take note of qualitative factors. Quantitative measures, such as numbers of people using an organisation or its services, are not monitored for accuracy. While accountability is demanded of Indigenous corporations by government, the government does not appear to feel the need to be accountable to its Indigenous constituents (Rowse 2000:1520; Cunningham 2005:466; Sullivan 2011:68-83). Thus, the accountability these organisations demonstrate to their local communities goes unacknowledged and the cultural legitimacy and culture match (Hunt 2006:18) of their governance practices are devalued.

The Politics of Accountability

In 1991 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) released its recommendations to prevent Indigenous marginalisation and deprivation in the justice system; some of which heightened awareness for the necessity of Aboriginal corporations:

They have the support of Aboriginal people and are accountable to them. On the other hand, governments do not, apparently, feel an obligation upon themselves to account to Aboriginal people for the processes whereby they or their public servants make decisions on policy or deal with applications for funding made by the organisations. (1991:27.4.11)

Under current government funding practices accountability is a prime feature; however it is clear that the government is the only body to which Aboriginal corporations need be accountable. Research suggests that, in Australia, NPM funding regimes provide human service recipients “no means whatsoever of holding government to account” (Box et al. 2001:612). Excluding the human service recipients and the communities from which they

come, the only accountability seen as important is that to the funding bodies and statutory bodies: ultimately, the government (Sullivan 2010:8).

Australian governments are ruled by ministers concerned first and foremost with re-election³²⁸, making them vulnerable to the dissatisfaction of multiple constituencies such as commercial and corporate interests, the voting public and the media. Patrick Sullivan writes that managing media is “pivotal in the development and implementation of Indigenous affairs policy. It is driven by, and results in, the production of policies aimed at the non-Aboriginal population” (2011:73). Therefore, an unacknowledged target of Indigenous services is the non-Indigenous voter. Sullivan asserts that:

The wishes of white Australia, the context in which those wishes are formed largely through mass media images and reporting, and the ability of government to convince white Australia of adequate funding, appropriate programs and commensurate performances are significantly more influential than the voices of Aboriginal citizens. One of the greatest inhibitors of Aboriginal development is that Aboriginal policy is formulated for the non-Aboriginal public. (2011:76)

According to Stephen Cornell, writing as a member of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Disadvantage, this is a tragic flaw in the design and delivery of many Australian policies regarding its Aboriginal population:

For generations, authority over Indigenous peoples not only in the U.S. but in Australia, New Zealand and Canada has rested with non-Indigenous governments, which have seldom been held accountable to the Indigenous peoples they have governed. This divorce between those with the authority to make decisions and those bearing the consequences of those decisions has resulted in an extraordinary and continuing record of central government policy failure in all four countries. (2006:17)

As the above quote from the RCIADIC suggests, many Aboriginal organisations feel a real need to be accountable to their constituents, as opposed to the non-Indigenous public and White government officials. Cornell notes that the devolution of accountability from the government to the Indigenous collective forces the decision-makers to “pay the price of bad decisions and reap the benefits of good ones” (2006:17).

³²⁸ While it is only the Minister, and not the bureaucrat, who is elected, ministerial staff influence the policies to be developed and implemented by the Australian Public Service bureaucracy. In turn, these bureaucrats must be responsive to ministerial priorities and expectations (Sullivan 2011:69).

Winanga-Li has on many occasions felt the need to report to members or justify to the community why and how the organisation makes decisions. For example, in the highly political issuance of Certificates of Aboriginality, Winanga-Li has had to justify to members of the community why certain individuals received a certificate. In fact, negative community feedback on the awarding of such Certificates has led the organisation to change its practice of allocation³²⁹. Furthermore, the constant solicitation of members for ideas or feedback illustrates to the community that it is they to whom Winanga-Li feels accountable, not governmental bodies.

Accountability to the community in which an organisation is based encourages responsiveness to local issues in a manner that is likely to be contextually based. Gary Robinson writes that “The intervention literature is clear that programs that are not culturally competent and adapted for context often fail to reach parents and families from diverse cultural backgrounds and with complex needs and multiple difficulties” (2011:12).

Even governmental bodies agree that this contextually-based approach to human service delivery is the most effective. For example, a 2013 Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (CtGC) publication states that “community involvement and engagement in both the development and delivery of programs” is a key principle underpinning successful Indigenous-specific programs (1). Furthermore, when discussing “things that work” in their biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* report, the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) repeatedly notes that one “successful factor” in the delivery of Indigenous-specific services is “community involvement in program design and decision-making – a ‘bottom up’ rather than ‘top down’ approach” (SCRGSP 2007:9-10; 2009:9; 2011:9). Accountability to the community

³²⁹ Prior to 2005 Winanga-Li would award Certificates of Aboriginality to persons whom the Executive Officer judged to demonstrate Indigenous descent (through her knowledge of the individual’s ancestors and archival records of descent). Grumbings within the local community regarding certain individuals to whom Winanga-Li had issued such Certificates gradually reached the Executive Officer via word of mouth, at which point she brought the issue to the Management Committee. Since 2005 Winanga-Li issues Certificates of Aboriginality only once the application has gone before, and been approved by, the organisation’s Management Committee. Additionally, persons without direct ties to the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community are encouraged to seek these Certificates from an Indigenous corporation serving the community from which they originated.

encourages their involvement in the decision making processes of Aboriginal human service organisations and is therefore likely to yield more effective service outcomes.

Yet despite government departments acknowledging that successful Aboriginal-specific services must to be tailored to the culture and context of the local Aboriginal community, this fact does not appear to be sufficiently incorporated into current NPM funding processes (Sullivan 2011:78; Dillon and Westbury 2007:60-61, 198). While the state has yet to make any sound attempt at formally incorporating ongoing community input and feedback, this is a core principle for the management of Winanga-Li.

The fact that Winanga-Li's governance is more heavily accountable to the community than to the government is one demonstration of Winanga-Li's resistance to the governmental structures that seek to define the way the organisation operates. Winanga-Li's resistance to NPM's prevailing forms of accountability constitutes this organisation as operating within what Emma Kowal calls a "postcolonial space"³³⁰. Winanga-Li challenges the status quo on a number of fronts, including the government's funding allocation, administration, and accountability processes. In doing so, they legitimate and make visible the concerns and criticisms voiced by a large number of their Indigenous constituents. Yet, at the same time, the organisation thereby jeopardises its own funding security, as advocacy such as this "tends to attract the displeasure of government, both its political and administrative wings, as it assumes that there is an alternate base of power with its own grassroots legitimacy" (Sullivan 2011:58). Thus, the organisation's mission puts it in conflict with its sustainability, so long as it remains dependent on government funding.

These two forms of accountability – that to government (its statutory and funding bodies) and that to the community – conflict with one another (Rowse 2000:1520; Ivanitz 1998:14-15; Ivanitz 1999b:1). This fact was first reported by Jim Fingleton, the head of a 1995 committee tasked with investigating whether or not the "culturally appropriate forms of incorporation" provided by the *ACA Act 1976* were effective. Tim Rowse notes that Fingleton's report highlighted the inherent tensions between "tolerance and autonomy" in

³³⁰ Kowal writes that "postcolonial space" is "a space where there is a concerted effort to invert colonial power relations" by "signalling a (partial) shift from the colonial while acknowledging the contested nature of the term [postcolonial]" and giving Indigeneity relative privilege (2008:341).

postcolonial liberalism (2000:1518). While the government tolerated attempts at Indigenous autonomy by means of the *ACA Act*, it did not permit true autonomy. For example, Fingleton found that there were certain “overriding Western legal concepts”, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2, that were not open to negotiation during discussions of ways to make the *ACA Act* culturally appropriate (Rowse 2000:1519). A clear example of this was ORAC’s insistence that “Model Rules” be maintained despite assertions from Indigenous corporations that “the procedural demands encoded in the Model Rules” were inappropriate (Rowse 2000:1519). These “Western legal concepts” form what Basil Bernstein calls “restricted code”. A restricted code “merely accepts the boundaries and ideological renderings established within the discourse of the most powerful and influential... and do[es] not allow for the production of new knowledges which have the potential to challenge the status quo” (McConaghy 2000:207). Thus the Australian government currently strives for tolerance in Indigenous Affairs, rather than autonomy and self-determination. Cathryn McConaghy argues that tolerance reflects “deep-seated notions of white superiority”. Quoting Phillip Adams (1997) McConaghy asserts that “the word we choose to describe a superior state of mind – tolerance – speaks to our arrogance if not our prejudice... *I will tolerate you*” (2000:189, emphasis added).

Fingleton concludes that the *ACA Act 1976* did not concern itself with the “representative appropriateness of [an incorporated] body’s objectives, the equity of its delivery of services, and the practical adequacy of its staffing” and that it had “narrow” approaches to assessment (Rowse 2000:1520). Furthermore, in accordance with the Act’s prescriptions “resources have been devoted to activities of doubtful utility” (Rowse 2000:1520).

Rowse, in his 2000 article, states that an important question in light of the 1995 report is whether or not ORAC’s notion of accountability “align[ed] with the perspectives of the indigenous constituency” (1518) and from my experience it clearly did not. Within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community accountability is realised through knowledge of participants’ outcomes, word and photographs of which spread throughout the community through extended social networks, and is qualitative. The collection and publication of quantitative data, essential to accountability to the government, carries little weight with regard to the

organisations' accountability to the community³³¹. Despite the fact that consecutive biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (OID) reports from 2007 to the present state that "Not everything that matters can be captured in indicators, and some information is better presented in words, rather than numbers"³³² (2007:9; 2009:7; 2011:9), this approach has not been incorporated into the reporting conditions of Indigenous-specific funding schemes. Fingleton, in the review of the *ACA Act 1976*, advocated the incorporation of multi-dimensional accountability, an approach to accountability I shall discuss in the final chapter of this thesis.

The fact that Winanga-Li does not prioritise accountability to funding bodies and other government departments has weakened its ability to win funding tenders. I therefore argue that although Australia is a postcolonial nation, it has sustained colonial power relations with respect to its Indigenous citizens, making it a neo-colonial nation. Citing Rowse, McConaghy notes that the "dualities between Indigenous and introduced political structures... should be recognised as a deep structural legacy of the colonial encounter" (2000:202).

Also characteristic of Winanga-Li's postcolonial spatiality, by which I mean their concerted effort to invert colonial power relationships, is the political orientation of the organisation's staff. With regard to seeking funding, Lewis and Betty have on numerous occasions stated "we're not going to play their game." While Lewis and Betty have sound understanding of the guidelines for obtaining funding, as both have decades of experience working within

³³¹ This is not unique to the Mt Druitt Indigenous community, as examples of such accountability are discussed in Ivanitz (1998:16; 1999b:5-6).

³³² Boyd Hunter has rightfully challenged some of the qualitative data presented in the OID reports, as qualitative data, being smaller in scale of collection, may not reflect broader outcomes (2013:8; see also CtGC 2013:10). He notes that the "What Works case studies" presents data that is anecdotal and partial, but could be improved upon by combining it with "more rigorous" publicly available information (such as that provided by the CtGC) and thereby taking a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach to reporting. However, Hunter also takes aim at the quantitative data presented in OID reports noting that "it is inappropriate to represent administrative data as if they are very precise" and the "potential conflict of interest for certain data or evaluations... [such as when data is] drawn solely from people providing or administering the services being assessed or evaluated, [makes it] difficult to discount the possible incentive to overstate the efficacy of programs" (2013:6).

health and government bureaucracies, they passively resist conforming to what is demanded by NPM³³³.

Since the staff of Winanga-Li realise that quantitative data is demanded in funding applications and project assessments, they make attempts to record this type of data to the degree that their heavy workloads permit. As Winanga-Li staff have little time to undertake quantitative reporting, but also because of the limited applicability of the items to be quantified and recorded, a majority of their positive outcomes and the wide extent of their provision of services are therefore unknown and unacknowledged by their funders. In addition to not wanting to “play their game”, both Betty and Lewis recognise that many of Winanga-Li’s accomplishments cannot be captured by the sorts of quantitative data required, both because of the difficulty quantifying social factors (such as self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and human capital), and because many positive outcomes only become visible long after a program has been completed. We have seen examples of this in Chapter 8; such as the woman who, as a result of her participation in Winanga-Li’s sewing course, found employment, returned to school, and then persuaded her daughters to continue their education until year 12.

While both Lewis and Betty state that should they have funding for additional employees, consistent quantitative data collection would be possible, I am not certain this would be the case. Rather, in line with my experiences and observations, I find it likely that more projects and services would be undertaken by additional staff, in order to provide even greater benefits to the community³³⁴.

At the heart of this matter is the organisation’s ethos: they are there to serve the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community first and foremost, with all other responsibilities being secondary. It is not that they believe they should be exempt from any kind of reporting to funding bodies

³³³ Betty and Lewis feel that the systems management and formal processes entailed within NPM procedure are inappropriate, unnecessary and arbitrary for their two-person operation. One example is funding bodies’ expectation that organisations regularly hold formal staff meetings, against which Betty argues: “What is the point of having a formal staff meeting when both staff members work and live together?”

³³⁴ One solution that would enable greater quantitative accountability to government bodies would be to include within all funding packages a financial provision, of say 15 percent of total funding, which would be restricted to expenditure on data management of outcomes, as well as the provision of quantitative data recording tools. However, this would still fail to capture data that resists quantification.

or the government, but rather that they are convinced that an approach which includes qualitative reporting on program outcomes – such as via photographic evidence and written case studies – is more appropriate for presenting the reality of Winanga-Li’s achievements than that dictated by NPM. Furthermore, their qualitative approach to reporting enables accountability to the community, while the quantitative approach does not. Therefore, should they fully adhere to the demands of government bodies as well as maintain accountability to the community, they must conduct two separate forms of reporting, doubling their accountability workload.

Effects of NPM on Small Aboriginal Corporations

When Winanga-Li was founded in 1993 the Aboriginal rights movement had not yet been silenced and self-determination, in some form, was still viewed as possible and desirable. The number of Aboriginal corporations that had emerged from the 1970s legislation was still growing and they were viewed by many as the most viable method for addressing Aboriginal disadvantage.

By opening the tendering process to mainstream organisations, including large national-level charities, the competition faced by small Aboriginal corporations when applying for funding has increased exponentially. Competing against professional grant writers employed by large mainstream charities (Sullivan 2010:9; O’Shea et al. 2007:52, 58-59), small Aboriginal organisations such as Winanga-Li try to convince application assessors that their proposed programs are the best fit for the needs of their community and that their organisation is trustworthy; yet often without reference to NPM objectives, making their tenders likely to lose.

Bias in Indigenous-specific Service Tendering Processes

Since government “experts” usually possess neither experience in social service delivery nor in the needs and values of urban Aboriginal communities (Baldry et al. 2006:370; Sullivan 2011:86, 88-89, 95, 111; Dillon and Westbury 2007:57, 60, 73, 179; O’Shea et al.

2007:53), those charged with tendering processes have a “knowledge-gap”³³⁵ (Parsons 2004:48). Without knowledge or understanding of either of these factors, they can neither propose legitimate criteria for particular funding tenders, nor accurately assess the efficiency and effectiveness of projects offered by applicants. This has resulted in programs lacking traction within many communities. In turn, specialists compensate by placing even greater weight on the ability of funding applicants to demonstrate the systems and processes of NPM in every instance of the proposed project (Box et al. 2001:612). With little interaction between funding application assessors and local Aboriginal communities, there exists a disconnect in approaches to achieving successful outcomes.

The fact that government funding administrators lack understanding of local Aboriginal communities in important respects also underlies the increased difficulty Aboriginal organisations experience when trying to access government funding. The incorporation of Aboriginal culture in its reified form into bureaucratic ideals of Aboriginal service delivery (Sullivan 2011:88), as discussed in Chapter 6, has excluded the crucial facet of producing and maintaining social relationships; thereby preventing the deserved recognition of productivity in Winanga-Li’s approach.

Funding application assessors hold a range of implicit assumptions about types of organisations and viable approaches to Indigenous service delivery, enacted within NPM tendering processes and reflected in the way they expect a funding application’s questions to be answered. Michael Power, drawing on Marilyn Strathern, asserts that:

studies suggest that anthropological sensibilities about culture are antithetical to the logic of audit. The former tends to expand the complexity of context, while the latter, in its current form at least, is essentially reductive. Thus efforts to render culture auditable, as an explicit object of management intervention, are very likely to interfere with collective patterns of operations and behaviour. (2007:177)

³³⁵ Wayne Parsons describes a “knowledge gap” as “the gap between policy-making and policy-relevant knowledge” (2004:48). This is a common feature of NPM’s one-size-fits-all approach to management, which results in decision-makers lacking knowledge and understanding of on-the-ground cause and effect (Hood 1991:10; Hood and Peters 2004:270, 274; Parson 2004:48; Power 1997:78, 120).

The black-boxing³³⁶ of Aboriginal culture, incorporated within Indigenous Affairs policy, is grounded in an inadequate understanding of the internal workings of diverse and heterogeneous Indigenous behaviour and ideology, and therefore fails to produce processes that ameliorate Indigenous marginalisation. While, as Power and Strathern suggest, it may never be possible to black-box culture for use within policy, the present manifestation of such attempts is clearly flawed, with resulting policy and processes frequently being foreign, even counter-intuitive, to employees of small Aboriginal organisations. One example of this is the lack of importance placed on sociality in Indigenous service delivery.

As noted previously, NPM leaves no room for the acknowledgement of social relationships within its machinery (Coleman 1988:97), operating under the assumption that each employee brings no personal relationships or interests to bear on the execution of their duties. Yet, the Aboriginal corporations I am familiar with are successful for precisely this feature: their approach to service delivery is woven into a dense sociality.

While the incorporation of sociality into Aboriginal service delivery is seen by Winanga-Li staff and clients to lead to more effective outcomes, its prime drawback is the time entailed in building and maintaining such relationships; which sometimes results in a lack of efficiency and economy as defined by NPM. Yet, as NPM often promotes economy and efficiency over effectiveness (as this is harder to quantitatively measure), the role of an Aboriginal organisation's social relationships is discredited and portrayed as wasteful and inefficient. Because NPM trumps all other ideological orientations to human service delivery in funding allocation processes, many Indigenous-specific services are now being delivered by mainstream organisations and are not finding a foothold in the community, and therefore, are not connecting with target clients.

³³⁶ My use of the term "black-boxing" denotes the process of reducing something complex and multifaceted to a bounded and simplistic object. The internal complexity of the "black box" is invisible to the outside observer and is thought to be irrelevant when it functions as intended (Latour in Harris 2005:167; Power 1997:87). In the case of the black-boxing of Indigenous culture, the black box's input are Indigenous practices, within the black box is Indigenous behaviour and ideology, and the output of the black box are the policies, processes and services intended to serve Indigenous people. Thus, the purpose of this black box is to produce bureaucratic technology consisting of the policies and processes that must be followed for Indigenous programs to be "culturally appropriate". However, as White policy makers have an inadequate understanding of the ways that diverse Indigenous practices operate to structure complex social worlds and behaviour, the resulting policy is flawed. Thus the current black-boxing of Indigenous culture within bureaucratic technology is specious and demands re-examination.

While the ideology of NPM carries little salience for many small Indigenous corporations, it finds great traction in large, national-level, non-Indigenous organisations. Organisations such as Mission Australia, mentioned in Chapter 9, have governance structures that are in direct alignment with NPM values (http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/annual-reports/2011?download_id=270:annual-report-2011, accessed July 13, 2012). Furthermore, these organisations have the resources to hire professional tender writers who are highly skilled in the logic and rhetoric of NPM (Sullivan 2010:9; O'Shea et al. 2007:52, 58-59). When a small Indigenous corporation competes against such large charities, there is little likelihood that application assessors will embrace an approach alternative to that dictated by NPM, and small Aboriginal corporations lose out. An example of this scenario played out during my fieldwork and the events will be detailed and analysed in the following chapter.

The great incongruity in the values which shape the operations of Aboriginal corporations and those of government departments can be seen throughout almost every dimension of Indigenous-specific service funding. The values of both are rooted in historical colonisation processes, with the power to define the parameters of funding processes being held by the non-Indigenous government. This leaves Aboriginal organisations little choice but to accept NPM's rules if they are intent on obtaining government funding, and self-determination remains impossible.

Government departments' almost blind faith in NPM, and the inability or unwillingness of Aboriginal workers to subscribe to its ideology, results in a clash of organisational governance cultures. The impact of this cultural clash is the elimination of the carapace provided by Aboriginal corporations; something that is evinced in the closing down of many of the area's Aboriginal organisations. This is symptomatic of the marginality of Aboriginal voices in the legislative processes regarding the delivery of Aboriginal-specific services.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the legislative frameworks within which Indigenous corporations must function have been established almost wholly by White Australia. This has allowed racialist perceptions of Indigenous characteristics to become enshrined in NPM's seemingly "rational" approach to the development and administration of Indigenous-specific service delivery; thus facilitating racist policy and practice. This approach persists despite repeated criticism by academics from numerous disciplines, as well as by government-sponsored reviews.

The development and delivery of Indigenous-specific service funding by White public servants and bureaucrats, who frequently have little or no experience interacting with Indigenous people or communities³³⁷, is set within the ideology of neoliberalism and NPM, which legitimises and naturalises private racialist assumptions and appeases non-Indigenous voters. Demonstrations of racist policy can be found throughout governmental approaches to Aboriginal policy and practice. This is exhibited in ORIC's heavy-handed surveillance of Indigenous corporations and public shaming of those that do not meet all reporting requirements, unparalleled in the regulation of non-Indigenous organisations. So too is the adherence to NPM frameworks in the tendering and delivery of such funding, as its assumed superiority permits the racialist assumptions of White public servants and bureaucrats to decide all matters pertaining to Indigenous-specific services, without regard to locationally-specific Aboriginal priorities and practices³³⁸.

This latter feature of the administration of Indigenous-specific service funding also evinces systemic racism. Racialist assumptions, such as that all "Aboriginal organisations have a tendency to go belly-up" systematically label such organisations as a funding risk, weakening their chances of receiving the funding necessary for their sustainability. This has already resulted in the racist practice of governments' increasingly awarding Indigenous-specific service funding to non-Indigenous, often religious, organisations. This form of paternalism parallels that of the "mission days", in which Indigenous Australians were

³³⁷ Amanda Keddie notes that the framework in which White Australians make decisions regarding what will best serve Indigenous Australians "positions the Indigenous subject without agency as the 'known' rather than the 'knower': defined, understood, explained and diagnosed at a 'level of determination' not 'accorded to the 'knower'" (Ellsworth 1992:112 in Keddie 2013:28).

³³⁸ For example, see Keddie 2013:27-28.

overwhelmingly confined to religious-based institutions and denied freedoms guaranteed to other Australians.

Having established the policy frameworks through which Indigenous organisations must manoeuvre, the following chapter will provide a case study of the repercussions of these frameworks. We shall see not only how a non-Indigenous organisation can be deemed better-able “to connect with Indigenous people and their families” than a community-controlled Aboriginal corporation, but also the powerlessness of that community to effectively challenge such a pronouncement. However, the most disheartening feature of the following chapter is that the execution of this policy framework resulted in a great deal of monetary waste, as the service provided by the mainstream organisation was ineffective, inferior and produced negligible outcomes.

12. Structural Violence: A case study

Aboriginal people have clearly voiced their preference for using Aboriginal organisations; not only as their negotiators, but as the agents for delivering services. The Aboriginal organisations, when given adequate funding and when placed in a position in which they are respected negotiators and service deliverers, have performed much more effectively than the majority of mainstream agencies have performed in relation to Aboriginal people. They are trusted, they know and respect Aboriginal society and culture and they enhance self-respect within the Aboriginal community as they fulfil their roles.

– Elliott Johnston, Commission of RCIADIC (1991:27.4.19)

The previous chapters have laid out the ideological orientation of government funding bodies: that of New Public Management (NPM). I have argued that current regimes for the distribution of Indigenous-specific service funding, and for Indigenous policy in general, are grounded upon the racist assumptions of White Australia regarding characteristics attributed to *all* Indigenous Australians. The incorporation of these racist assumptions within government policy and processes has resulted in institutional racism against Aboriginal people.

In earlier chapters I have provided several examples of how this regime bears upon Aboriginal organisations, drawn both from the scholarly literature and from my own fieldwork, in order to illustrate certain adverse features of NPM. This chapter furthers that discussion with a comprehensive exploration of one Indigenous-specific service tendering process that occurred during my 2009 fieldwork, in which the many paradoxical features of NPM came together, resulting in structural violence against Indigenous Australians.

As noted in Chapter 7, structural violence is the indirect harm inflicted upon members of a minority group via society's structures, such as the health, education, market and legal systems. This violence is normalised by the dominant culture by ascribing negative characteristics to the minority culture – known as cultural violence – which naturalises the latter group's inferiority and legitimates their oppressive treatment. As a result of this oppressive treatment, the minority group experiences indirect violence, as their ability to meet their fundamental human needs – such as health, identity, freedom and justice – is

restricted (Galtung 1990:292). The outcomes of structural violence manifest in Indigenous peoples' low life expectancy, socioeconomic status and rates of educational attainment; and high burden of disease and rates of incarceration; among other wellbeing indicators.

The lack of political voice is another feature of structural violence, for which “this unequal distribution of power systematically disadvantages – and therefore discriminates against – those who hold little or no power in society” (Parker 2012:167). This has proven to be the case in the matter of government funding for Indigenous-specific human services. As we shall see, perhaps the most egregious example of the absurdity of NPM rationales and the concomitant structural violence, emerges most clearly in a chain of events in which a non-Indigenous organisation, St Martin's Youth Care, was deemed better-able “to connect with Indigenous people and their families” than the community-controlled Aboriginal corporation Winanga-Li.

Community Support Service

In mid-April 2009 Winanga-Li learned through an advertisement in the Koori Mail³³⁹ of a new stream of Indigenous-specific funding, valued at \$150,000 per year for 3 years, known as the Community Support Service (CSS). This funding was being offered by the federal Department of Families, Housing, Children's Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The CSS program arose because the government had identified that Indigenous Australians were under-utilising almost all human services in comparison with their non-Indigenous counterparts, as noted in Chapter 7 with reference to health.

Previously, under the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, Indigenous Australians had informally used CDEP staff and offices³⁴⁰ as gateways to accessing other services. However, CDEP was discontinued in all but remote areas in July

³³⁹ The Koori Mail is a national fortnightly newspaper, which has been “Aboriginal owned and self-funded since 1991” (www.koorimail.com).

³⁴⁰ The CDEP scheme functioned as an alternative form of unemployment benefit payment distribution within Aboriginal communities. Rather than these benefits being paid directly to individuals, under the scheme Aboriginal communities received the approximate equivalent of community members' unemployment entitlements so that they could employ members on a part-time basis to undertake labour beneficial to the community (Sanders and Morphy 2001:1). Thus, the staff of CDEP were largely Indigenous Australians and its offices were hubs within Indigenous communities, forming an important arm of the “Indigenous sector” (Rowse 2001:39).

2009, and FaHCSIA created the CSS to fill the service void in non-remote areas. The CSS program was therefore designed to provide a point of access for Aboriginal people to obtain referrals to services such as housing, counselling, health and medical, and to support them as they manoeuvred through different service agencies.

Winanga-Li realised that this funding scheme fit well with their organisation's existing services and objectives: they were already providing many such referrals, despite not being funded to do so, and had a strong Aboriginal community base with connections to over 1,700 individuals³⁴¹. Although the funding application deadline closed only three weeks after Winanga-Li became aware of the funding package, all members and volunteers of the organisation (myself included) eagerly composed components of the tender.

CSS Funding Model

The funding model chosen for the CSS program was the purchase of service contracting, which in this case involved the competitive tender and contract. It is interesting that this funding model was selected for the program, rather than the collaborative funding approach, for the 2010 Productivity Commission report on Not-For-Profit organisations states that the competitive tender and contract model was most often used for “the delivery of relatively standardised services” (2010:325), yet at the same time identifies Indigenous disadvantage as an “intractable problem” (327) worthy of a collaborative funding approach. Here it is clear that the market-based approach of NPM trumped evidence of “things that work” in Indigenous-specific service delivery (SCRGSP 2007:9-10; 2009:9; 2011:9; CtGC 2013:1).

Community Consultation?

Two days before the application deadline Winanga-Li received a telephone call from the Christian non-profit organisation St Martin's Youth Care, which sought permission to cite Winanga-Li in *its* application for the CSS funding as the location through which the organisation would deliver services. In other words, St Martin's Youth Care believed it appropriate that it should receive the CSS funding, even though it would have to utilise

³⁴¹ According to amalgamated 2011 ABS Census data, this accounts for approximately 43.1 percent of Mt Druitt's Indigenous population.

Winanga-Li's community contacts and facilities to actually provide the requisite services. It would receive the bulk of the funding, while Winanga-Li would be subcontracted at a fraction of the monetary funds granted. By citing Winanga-Li as their site of service-delivery, St Martin's Youth Care could assure the funding committee that Aboriginal employees would be involved in service delivery and that the local Aboriginal community would be involved.

Counter to "things that work", St Martin's Youth Care clearly had not held any initial or ongoing local community consultation with regard to programs for Indigenous service delivery, or a last minute telephone call would not have been deemed necessary for their tender. Betty, Winanga-Li's Executive Officer, politely informed the caller that Winanga-Li was also applying for the CSS funding and that St Martin's Youth Care could not mention the Aboriginal corporation in their funding application. Sitting next to Betty during this phone call, I overheard the St Martin's employee tartly respond "well, good luck" before ending the call.

At the time, Betty and I discussed the patronising nature of this encounter. Indeed, it was offensive on many levels. A non-Indigenous organisation made its request a mere two days prior to the application deadline and it offered a successful Aboriginal organisation the opportunity to take on the actual work while St Martin's Youth Care received the bulk of funding, recognition and esteem. Winanga-Li's employees labelled as racist the fact that St Martin's Youth Care saw fit to collect money while utilising the resources and networks of the Aboriginal community, without even discussing partnership³⁴². In the end, Winanga-Li submitted its completed application by the May 7 deadline and nothing more was heard from St Martin's Youth Care for some time.

Tender Results

In anticipation of the results of the CSS funding being announced, Betty visited the FaHCSIA website on July 7th. Much to her dismay she discovered that the funding had

³⁴² In many cases, the partnering of small organisation with large ones permits only a marginal role for the smaller organisation. The smaller organisation is likely to experience difficulty exerting any influence over program design, implementation and administration, due to intrinsic power inequalities (O'Shea et al. 2007:59).

been awarded to St Martin's Youth Care and that the contracts had been signed. The news came shortly before NAIDOC week, and the awarding of the CSS funding to St Martin's was extensively discussed before and during numerous NAIDOC Aboriginal community events by quite a number of Aboriginal human service workers and Mt Druitt Aboriginal residents. Questions were raised as to how St Martin's Youth Care had demonstrated the required "ability to connect with Indigenous people and their families" (FaHCSIA 2009a:17), particularly in light of their aforementioned telephone call.

As previously noted, St Martin's Youth Care had taken over the local Aboriginal Youth Hostel in 2002 and was notorious among Indigenous Mt Druitt residents for its disregard of community objectives. Further, knowledge within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community regarding the practices of St Martin's Youth Care in relation to the Hostel led them to question an organisation that tended largely to have a staff ratio of only one Indigenous employee to four non-Indigenous employees within its Indigenous-specific programs. They were therefore sceptical of St Martin's ability to meet another CSS criterion: that of two Indigenous referees who would "verify support from the Indigenous community for [their] organisation" (FaHCSIA 2009a:5). As this CSS program specifically targeted an Aboriginal clientele, the Aboriginal community for whom it was intended could not understand what would justify awarding the funding for this service to a non-Indigenous organisation with which the community had previously experienced negative interactions.

These questions led Winanga-Li, with support from other local Indigenous organisations and their clients, to formally contest FaHCSIA's allocation of funding to St Martin's Youth Care by lodging an appeal via the CSS complaints procedure. This entailed both calling and writing to FaHCSIA. One week later FaHCSIA replied, stating that as the contracts had been signed, there was no way to challenge the award except by FaHCSIA undertaking an internal review.

Here again we see a component of NPM structures: the only recourse for appeal lay in internal review. Such internal monitoring procedures do not permit outsiders to evaluate decisions, thereby making a body immune to external scrutiny. FaHCSIA's reply also noted that should an internal review be undertaken, it would only evaluate whether St Martin's

Youth Care had made untruthful statements in their application. Perhaps to appear conciliatory, FaHCSIA also recommended that Winanga-Li formally request, in writing, an assessment of their application in order for them to learn how future applications could be strengthened. Winanga-Li pursued both options, remaining convinced that St Martin's Youth Care had misrepresented itself in the CSS application, and Winanga-Li and community members continued to agitate in an attempt to expose what they perceived to be an injustice.

Ministerial letters were written to the Minister of FaHCSIA, Jenny Macklin (who was also the federal minister for Aboriginal Affairs), and to local Members of Parliament, detailing the events surrounding the award decision. Subsequently meetings were held between Winanga-Li's Executive Officer and local state members of Parliament Roger Price MP and Richard Amery MP. Additionally, Winanga-Li prepared a petition that documented the community's lack of support for St Martin's Youth Care being awarded the CSS funding; a petition that obtained over 300 signatures.

The Internal Review

Over a month after Winanga-Li requested its assessment of their CSS application, it was finally delivered – three weeks later than promised – via email. It included an attachment stating that an “internal independent review” – rather a contradiction in terms – had been conducted of “the process used to select a service provider for the Community Support Service”. The “independent assessor found that the assessment and scores were justified based on the information *provided in the application*” (FaHCSIA 2009b, emphasis added).

The community was very sceptical about these statements³⁴³ and assumed that FaHCSIA was trying to prevent outside criticism, since not only had contracts been signed, but by this point the funding had been released. This internal review was interpreted as merely a quest to ensure that FaHCSIA could truthfully state that the tendering process was carried out in complete agreement with the guidelines established for the CSS funding scheme.

³⁴³ Several different community members commented that FaHCSIA's internal review was undertaken solely as an exercise in “covering their backs”.

Furthermore, by virtue of the review being internal, community members believed that FaHCSIA had had no intention, from the very first, of truly re-evaluating their decision.

In spite of FaHCSIA staff previously specifying that the internal review would investigate the veracity of the information St Martin's provided in their tender, the review failed to demonstrate any such investigation, making reference to the review solely being "based on the information provided". It appears that the only topic addressed in the review was verification that "the processes used to select a service provider" had been followed, and the question as to whether or not these technical processes were appropriate never arose³⁴⁴.

As mentioned in Chapter 10, internal reviews such as this are often ineffective because there is no incentive to report errors (Power 2007:165; see also Sullivan 2011:85-86; Hunter 2013:6). Furthermore, because the "technical routines" of FaHCSIA's internal independent review were only "loosely coupled to the purposes which they are intended to serve and rarely function according to the official blueprint", they were, in this instance, used to "frame decisions which have already been made" (Power 1997:8).

To Winanga-Li's knowledge at the time, FaHCSIA had made no effort to contact any known Aboriginal referees living in the local community. When FaHCSIA was challenged on this point, it claimed that it was only necessary to verify those references of tenders short-listed. As both cultural sensitivity and an ability to establish ties with the Indigenous community were criteria for rankings, it is surprising that contact with Aboriginal referees was deemed of so little importance in the funding allocation process. FaHCSIA steadfastly refused to reveal the identity of referees, despite the community's multiple requests to know who was speaking on their behalf³⁴⁵. This demonstrates the lack of accountability the

³⁴⁴ A foundational principle of policy management is that, in accordance with jurisdiction, "procedural and other questions have to be addressed as separate issues apart from the deployment of the particular process which may give rise to them" (Francesca Merlan, personal communication, December 14, 2013). Thus, it is impossible that an appeal of the funding decision via the CSS complaints procedure could directly lead to a reassessment of the pre-established tendering process. Such an additional measure could only be undertaken at the discretion of the government department, which would have little interest in revealing its own inadequacy (Power 2007:117; Sullivan 2011:72, 85, 95).

³⁴⁵ Two years after these events Betty was able to discover the identity of one of St Martin's Indigenous Referees. The person was indeed a respected elder in Mt Druiitt, yet when I tried to persuade Betty to talk to him about the situation she was hesitant. Knowing this elder for decades, Betty stated that "he didn't even

government exhibits towards Indigenous communities and the marginal nature of local consultation³⁴⁶ in decisions regarding Indigenous funding. This is in spite of the fact that COAG's steering committee repeatedly noted the importance of Indigenous "community involvement in program design and decision-making — a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach" and that the lack of this "can result in program failure" (SCRGSP 2007:9-10; 2009:9; 2011:9; see also CtGC 2013:1).

FaHCSIA Assessment of Winanga-Li's Application

The results of FaHCSIA's assessment of Winanga-Li's CSS application were also a large disappointment to both the organisation and the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. A number of criticisms made regarding the application were wholly inaccurate; for example, information supposedly lacking had indeed been supplied. For instance, FaHCSIA criticised Winanga-Li's response regarding "Capacity to deliver the required community services". The feedback detailed that "While the response addressed the Mt Druitt site well, the application did not address how clients in Blacktown will access services (including access to the internet)" (FaHCSIA 2009c:3). However, the organisation's application specifically stated in this section that the organisation "will aid the client in finding appropriate transportation to the site of both Winanga-Li and other service providers; if necessary, providing the client with transportation via an 8-seater van that will be leased by Winanga-Li, should this application be successful" (WAC 2009:15). This reflects NPM's selective approach to evidence (Hood and Peters 2004:278), and belies any claim of objective rationalism.

Other criticisms did not truly address criteria of the tender; for instance, the assessment stated that Winanga-Li had failed to provide numerical data of specific outcomes, when those outcomes had never been objectives of Winanga-Li's programs. Another important, and rather ludicrous, example comes from FaHCSIA finding that Winanga-Li should be granted only two points out of five on the selection criterion "Demonstrated ability to

know what he was signing. They're good at that; they just slip it in there." The "they" here refers to non-Indigenous organisations attempting to obtain Aboriginal-specific funding.

³⁴⁶ It has been noted that large organisations with no local connections to the community are frequently able to win funding tenders due to their ability to dedicate substantial resources to tendering and reporting, and because they have the centralised hierarchical structure preferred by government (O'Shea et al. 2007:58-59).

develop and deliver community services to Indigenous people”. In its review, FaHCSIA claimed that a “Weakness” was that “The response relating to the outcomes element stated the broad outcomes of the services provided, but lacked specific details relating to the outcomes from specific programs, for example, how many Indigenous clients have been placed into employment via Work for the Dole? How many clients are placed into training?” (FaHCSIA 2009c:2). Clearly FaHCSIA assessors were looking for comprehensive quantitative data on outcomes. But again, this reflects NPM’s selective approach to what constitutes “evidence”. For, as Winanga-Li had made clear in its tender, Work for the Dole was a joint program “in partnership with JobQuest” (WAC 2009:12), and it had had 25 participants. Placing Work for the Dole participants in further employment and training was not a duty with which Winanga-Li was tasked in this project partnership. Rather, this aspect was the responsibility of their partner JobQuest³⁴⁷; an agency that deals exclusively with employment and training. Winanga-Li’s role in this program was to recruit participants and oversee their activities on the Work for the Dole project, which involved administering expenses, providing a project instructor and overseeing attendance and supervision. Thus this criticism from FaHCSIA was unfounded.

Further, there was very little transparency in the scoring of sections, which were broken down into numerous components. Feedback was only given for each overall section, providing a sentence or two on the “Strengths” and “Weaknesses”, but without explaining how or why points had been lost on the components of the section. For example, the criterion discussed above, that of “Demonstrated Ability to develop and deliver community services to Indigenous people”, was broken down in four sub-sections:

- (a) Tell us what services you have developed and/or delivered and to which communities.
- (b) What were the outcomes, including how your service/s benefited Indigenous members of the Community?
- (c) Tell us how you ensured staff awareness of cultural sensitivities in delivering services.

³⁴⁷ It was JobQuest who had obtained the funding for this Work for the Dole program and was responsible for its overall reporting and acquittal. JobQuest approached Winanga-Li with the idea of launching a project to “beautify” the grounds of Winanga-Li under the Work for the Dole program. Winanga-Li was responsible for administering the project on their site and were to report their data to JobQuest. However, at no time did JobQuest provide Winanga-Li with any overall outcomes and the reporting was unidirectional: Winanga-Li to JobQuest and JobQuest to its funding body.

(d) How did you manage service delivery and monitor results? (FaHCSIA 2009:12)

Presumably, the feedback quoted above was in reference to section (b). The only positive feedback identified by FaHCSIA as a “Strength” for this criterion was: “The element about staff awareness of cultural sensitivities was addressed well in your response (through training and induction) and was assessed as Very Good Quality in this criterion” (FaHCSIA 2009:2). Yet this does not say why Winanga-Li earned only “Very Good”, rating four out of five, on subsection (c) and how this could have been improved.

Undeniably the most outrageous feature of the feedback was that Winanga-Li scored only three points out of five on the section “Ability to connect with Indigenous people and their families”, whereas St Martin’s Youth Care had scored a perfect five (FaHCSIA 2009c:2). One might wonder, as did the local Aboriginal community, how a non-Aboriginal organisation with few Aboriginal employees and little involvement in Indigenous affairs could score higher than one created and staffed by Aboriginal persons who had, and could demonstrate, extensive involvement with, and service-delivery to, their community for over 17 years. Yet when one understands the workings of NPM and the privilege it bestows on large non-Indigenous organisations which are considered unlikely to go “belly up”, it is all too clear how this happened.

Like all others, the criterion “Ability to connect with Indigenous people and their families” was also broken down into subcomponents. It was presumably in response to the subcomponent asking “Provide details of cultural sensitivities that could arise in providing the service and how you would deal with these”, that the feedback stated: “The response relating to providing details of cultural sensitivities that could arise in providing the service was general in nature and focused on process. The response would have benefited from specifically identifying... a general awareness of indigenous culture and issues likely to be experienced” (FaHCSIA 2009:3). Thus, while Winanga-Li was able to convince the assessors, with regard to the first criterion, that staff had “Very Good” “awareness of cultural sensitivities”, this did not translate over to another closely related criterion, where it appears that assessors believed the organisation to lack awareness of cultural sensitivities and Indigenous culture.

This stems from the fact that NPM takes a compartmentalised approach to management, which results in tenders not being viewed as a whole but rather as separate, non-interrelated parts. Power called this trend “decoupling” and described it as follows: “Through the creation of compartmentalized organizational units for dealing with external assessments, audit and evaluation can be rendered ceremonial in such a way as to deflect a rational questioning of organizational conduct” (1997:96). Perhaps different assessors ranked different sections and this is why rankings were inconsistent. Whatever the case, it shows the subjectivity of NPM’s approach to ranking tenders.

Not only did FaHCSIA provide a spurious justification for its funding decision, but they also insisted upon their own non-Indigenous, reified notion of Aboriginal culture. Feedback for the above criterion went on to state that: “The response would have benefited from specifically identifying issues such as sorry business³⁴⁸, men’s and women’s business, community elders, [and] communication styles” (FaHCSIA 2009c:3). Counter to this criticism, Winanga-Li’s application did indeed make reference to communication styles in this section, stating: “an essential difference of a culturally sensitive approach is a communication style that reflects the service provider’s awareness, understanding and openness to Aboriginal culture and its priorities” (WAC 2009:17).

It is also the case that other instances raised in the feedback indicate a lack of understanding for the cultural reality of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. While conversations regarding the terminal illness, loss of and grieving for a loved one were common at Winanga-Li, I have never heard of this referred to as “sorry business”. Winanga-Li’s staff and Management Committee members also believed that a provision of services based upon gender was restrictive³⁴⁹, and therefore did not offer programs specific to “men’s and women’s business”. It appears evident that in their criteria of “cultural sensitivity” FaHCSIA employed a rigid definition of Aboriginality that aligned with reified cultural presuppositions, collapsing Aboriginal authenticity into a handful of essentialist and

³⁴⁸ I later learned from an academic working with Indigenous communities in the central desert area of Utopia that this reference to “sorry business” pertained to issues related to death and dying (Chrischona Schmidt, personal communication, February 6, 2012). Indeed, this term is quite widely used (Francesca Melan, personal communication, December 14, 2013), although is not very common in Mt Druitt.

³⁴⁹ For example, they (successfully) encouraged men to participate in activities that are typically feminised, such as cooking and sewing.

tokenistic notions. This reified approach, based on the assumptions of White Australia (Sullivan 2011:76, 88-89), enables non-Indigenous individuals and organisations to be deemed better able to deliver “culturally sensitive” Aboriginal services than organisations with solely Aboriginal Management Committee members and employees (which had been noted in the tender).

As discussed in previous chapters, a number of characteristics commonly attributed to Indigenous Australians are frequently taken out of context or are antiquated. The inclusion of such generalised and reified depictions within Indigenous-specific funding administration is therefore ineffectual and even counter-productive (Hollinsworth 1992). Government bureaucrats and public servants, drawn from White Australia, often have only learned about Indigenous life and culture through statistical reviews, written reports, cultural “sensitivity” or “awareness” training workshops, and of course, media representations. These sources project an overly simplistic representation of culture that does not acknowledge its dynamism, variability and locational specificity (Couldry 2000). Rather than interacting with Indigenous Australians, the government officials charged with Indigenous program development and administration interact only with other members of White Australia; circulating the same hackneyed strategies to “close the gaps” that have proven ineffective in the past (Cornell 2006:17; Dillon and Westbury 2007:31-32; Sullivan 2011:86-89).

The approaches such officials promote as “best practice” for addressing Indigenous sensitivities during inter-cultural interactions are grounded in base and stereotypical constructions of “aborigines”, and infrequently reflect on-the-ground cultural complexity. One example of White Australia’s “best practice” for “culturally sensitive” behaviour when interacting with Indigenous persons is the widespread belief that it is inappropriate to make eye-contact with an Aboriginal elder, as this signals disrespect. However, Winanga-Li’s Community Project’s Officer frequently ridicules this notion as he perceives someone who refuses to make eye contact as deceptive. Another example is the common warning issued when pictures of deceased persons are displayed, as this is believed to be traumatic to their Aboriginal kin; yet anthropologist Francesca Merlan commented to me (September 5, 2010) that Aboriginal people in Katherine, Northern Territory, frequently place pictures of

the deceased on tombstones and have done so for several decades. It is apparent that “cultural awareness” and “sensitivity” can never be static, nor can interpretations of these concepts be freely applied outside of their given context (Hollinsworth 1992:146) and location. Therefore, by citing “sorry business” and “men’s and women’s business” as examples of the sort of specific sensitivity Winanga-Li should have shown in order to be “culturally aware”, the reviewers were indicating their own lack of cultural understanding.

The wholly Aboriginal staff of Winanga-Li perceived “cultural sensitivity” to entail treating all clientele with empathy, dignity and respect, regardless of their background, life situation and choices. As explained in previous chapters, Winanga-Li’s approach to service delivery privileges clients’ lived culture over reified perceptions of Aboriginality, even when this clashes with bureaucratic notions of “authentic” culture and efficiency.

It must be noted that Winanga-Li’s application regrettably did not make reference to the elders who serve on the Management Committee or who participate regularly in programs and activities. The role of elders within Winanga-Li is so central that at times it becomes taken for granted. Winanga-Li’s heavy engagement with elders would have been known, of course, had referees been contacted, but this was not done. Within NPM such a step was perhaps seen as too qualitative in nature as well as inefficient. However, organisations with weak relationships to community elders, but who mention their engagement under appropriate headings, are assumed to be involved with the Indigenous community, regardless of the extent of the engagement. Clearly the assessment did not extend beyond the written word, and privileged those familiar with the rhetoric of NPM and its tendering processes (O’Shea et al. 2007:52, 58).

Aboriginal Community Meeting

Discussing FaHCSIA’s feedback with me, Winanga-Li’s Executive Officer, Betty, broke down and tearfully stated “I feel so oppressed.” I responded by saying that the community should continue fighting for their right to be heard on this issue, as this was the only way to overcome the oppression. In my naïveté, I said that should the situation be made public, outside pressure would shame FaHCSIA into reassessing their decision.

The community continued to fight this battle by organising a public Aboriginal Community Meeting, inviting local MPs, the CEO of St Martin's Youth Care, Aboriginal community members, other Aboriginal organisations and the press. The meeting was held on Wednesday August 5, 2009, in the hall of another Aboriginal organisation and was attended by approximately 60 persons.

Early on the morning of the meeting, the CEO of St Martin's Youth Care emailed Winanga-Li to say that she would not be attending, giving no reason for her absence. Despite attempting to contact multiple media sources, only one photographer from a local newspaper arrived. Although Winanga-Li obtained verbal support from both local MPs, only one of them sent a representative to the meeting. In addition to eleven persons representing other Aboriginal organisations, also in attendance were a representative from FaHCSIA, one from the local Indigenous Coordination Centre³⁵⁰ (ICC), and approximately fifty members of the local Aboriginal community.

The opinions voiced during the community meeting revolved around the trend of government funding for Indigenous programs increasingly being awarded to non-Indigenous organisations. Indigenous speakers made comparisons between the paternalistic domination of Aboriginal people during the "mission days", in which many were confined within Christian-based institutions, and the present handling of Aboriginal services by government departments and funding bodies, which were overwhelmingly awarding funding to Christian-based organisations. It is worthy of note that these criticisms mirror those of the 1991 RCIADIC report cited in previous chapters. The tone of the audience's statements was one of anger and disgust, with all Aboriginal persons who spoke expressing their distress regarding the awarding of the CSS funding to St Martin's Youth Care.

³⁵⁰ ICCs are administered by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), a branch of FaHCSIA. According to FaHCSIA's website: "ICCs engage with Indigenous communities, other levels of government and service providers to support initiatives that help close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage." The locally based staff at each office serves "to provide a single government interface to focus and simplify community engagement with government representatives" (<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/indigenous-coordination-centres-and-regional-operations-centres>, accessed October 9, 2012).

A month after the Aboriginal Community Meeting little had come of it. Winanga-Li was informed by a representative of the ICC that the FaHCSIA representative had submitted a report stating that the opinions voiced during the meeting “[were] not representative of the community,” and could therefore be discounted (personal communication, August 27, 2009). Despite the presence of eleven representatives from Aboriginal organisations and about fifty Aboriginal persons, the ICC supported FaHCSIA’s assertion. However, the local ICC did inform Betty that when the CSS program came up for renewal after three years, the ICC would ensure that the Mt Druitt region was re-tendered, rather than simply renewing St Martin’s contract.

Over two months after it received the CSS funding, Winanga-Li learned that St Martin’s Youth Care was still seeking an Aboriginal organisation willing to run the CSS program. Apparently they had failed to secure a service-delivery site prior to the submission of their funding application, although this clearly did not hurt their chances of winning the funding package. This is somewhat surprising in light of the criticism received by Winanga-Li with regard to the sub-components of criterion two: “How and where would you provide internet access?” and “How does your organisation propose to commence delivery of this service *within 6-8 weeks of funding*” (FaHCSIA 2009a:14, emphasis added). Clearly St Martin’s responses to these subcomponents were either untruthful or misleading, as they clearly could not identify a specific site through which to offer internet services (other than at their mainstream Blacktown Office), nor could they truthfully say that they could commence delivery within six to eight weeks, as this did not happen.

While many local Aboriginal organisations took a consolidated stance by refusing to work with St Martin’s Youth Care, one organisation relented, under the accommodationist justification that if they did not allow St Martin’s to operate out of their facility, the whole community would lose out. Oddly enough, it was the Aboriginal drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, Bar Bug-gi, that finally agreed to deliver the CSS under St Martin’s auspices. Staff and elders involved with Winanga-Li commented that they found this inappropriate, as any person who wished to inquire about or receive CSS services would have to go to a facility associated with and populated by addicts and those in recovery.

Indeed, this no doubt presented a deterrent to, or at least an uncomfortable feature of, a site meant for persons wishing to access CSS services.

St Martin's CSS Service

It took St Martin's Youth Care over six months to establish its CSS program, rather than the six to eight weeks stipulated. After operating for approximately six months, it once again faltered when the Aboriginal coordinator resigned. The CSS services then ceased to be offered for another month. St Martin's Youth Care's CSS program now works with its fifth Aboriginal coordinator, as all other coordinators also quit; each time leaving the program inoperative for up to a month. In addition to the difficulty St Martin's experienced in attracting and maintaining an Aboriginal coordinator, it has also had difficulty retaining other Aboriginal workers.

In mid-2012 I had the opportunity to interview a young Indigenous man, Peter, who had worked for St Martin's Youth Care for approximately 18 months as a case manager to Indigenous persons and families (although not under their CSS program). Peter grew up in the western Sydney area and was deeply familiar with multiple branches of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. He recalled regularly clashing with non-Indigenous St Martin's supervisors who insisted on time restriction for all meetings with clients. Peter explained that certain cases were incredibly complex, with multiple and interrelated social problems, yet St Martin's staff repeatedly demanded "efficiency" and that he cut down time spent with clients.

Peter's account reflects a number of contradictions between the ideological orientation of NPM and Aboriginal organisations: St Martin's insisted upon rigidly following process and procedures, such as the aforementioned time allotted to each client meeting. They did not acknowledge the essential role of sociality in building relationships with Indigenous clients. And they treated employees who could not or would not ascribe to these values as needing further training. Indeed, Peter recalled recurrent training sessions aimed at aligning his service delivery with the processes of St Martin's Youth Care. Yet Peter felt that these training schemes did little to aid him in negotiating the multifaceted and intractable

problems experienced by members of the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. Without the flexibility and creativity necessary to address clients' diverse and complex needs, Peter felt that he could no longer continue the farce of "help[ing] my people", and quit his job.

St Martin's administration of the CSS contract not only failed periodically, but it showed few positive outcomes within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community. The service appears to have been poorly publicised, as no one within Winanga-Li's network seemed to know about it. Winanga-Li, in the meantime, continued to offer the same level of service referrals. At first, since St Martin's had won the contract for this, Winanga-Li staff referred clients to the CSS. Perhaps not surprisingly, during the first eight months of the CSS program, a number of Aboriginal persons called Winanga-Li back, explaining that when they called the drug and alcohol centre out of which the CSS services were supposedly being offered, they were told that there was no such program. While I am unsure of the extent to which prospective clients were turned away from the CSS, it is apparent that St Martin's Youth Care had not delivered the program in accordance with funding guidelines or with their stated responses within the tender. Without a grounded presence within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community, which would have facilitated access to clients as well as to potential Aboriginal employees, it is not surprising that St Martin's had such great difficulty in delivering CSS objectives.

Yet despite all of these faults and the assurances of the ICC, when St Martin's three-year contract concluded mid-2012, FaHCSIA opted to renew their funding without retendering (FaHCSIA 2013:705). At this time the CSS funding scheme was rebranded "Indigenous Community Links" and is now being delivered by 37 different service providers throughout NSW, only nine of which are Indigenous corporations (<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/indigenous-community-links-icl/indigenous-community-links-icl-provider-contact-details>, accessed October 4, 2012). In early 2014 the Mt Druitt branch of what was the CSS continues to be operated out of the drug and alcohol service and a new Aboriginal coordinator has been in her position for approximately ten months. FaHCSIA, now renamed the Department of Social Services (DSS), recently released a brochure advertising St Martin's service in Mt Druitt (despite the original CSS tender application specifying that publicity for the service

be provided by the funded organisation). Winanga-Li continues to receive requests for information and referrals and continues to fulfil all such requests.

A highly puzzling incident regarding FaHCSIA's/DSS's funding of St Martin's came to light in October 2013. Apparently the newly rebranded DSS had become concerned regarding the poor outcomes and the low incidence of Indigenous service delivery from St Martin's Youth Hostel. In response, they provided funding for St Martin's to undertake a review of how to make their Indigenous programs more attractive to their target clientele. It is unclear why the DSS elected to provide even greater funding to St Martin's in light of their past failures, although it is possible that St Martin's poor Indigenous service-delivery record only came to light after their CSS funding had been renewed. Why this would be the case is unknown, although there is likely to be some NPM policy which was impeccably followed to justify this decision.

Conclusion

This case study provides clear evidence of the inadequacies of NPM tendering processes, and of organisations operating on the principles of NPM, with reference to Indigenous-specific human services. There are specific and telling criticisms to be drawn from this case study.

- (1) A most selective approach to evidence is used in tendering processes, particularly in regard to the assessor's emphasis on quantitative head counts and the compartmentalised assessment of application criteria.
- (2) Application assessors were subjective and careless, as is highlighted by their erroneous feedback on Winanga-Li's tender, such as their criticism that the organisation neither explained how Blacktown residents could access CSS services nor discussed communication issues.
- (3) Processes were manipulated in order to justify decisions already made, as demonstrated by the results of FaHCSIA's "internal independent review".

(4) NPM processes were so rigid that assessors did not credit Winanga-Li for its responsive and adaptable approach to service delivery, nor did they contact referees beyond tender finalists. This is also an example of the inability of NPM evaluation to recognise the capabilities or lack thereof in candidates for funding, as became evident in the many failure of St Martin's CSS delivery.

(5) NPM is not apolitical, for it privileges certain ideological orientations over others in its tendering processes, particularly favouring organisations that adhere to NPM principles or that can afford to hire professional tender writers to frame an application in NPM terminology.

(6) The tendering process, designed to select the organisation best able to deliver programs with economy, efficiency and effectiveness, failed on all three accounts, in part because of decoupling in assessment.

(7) Internal monitoring processes are often unable to identify errors, as there is no incentive to do so. In this case study FaHCSIA would have had to publicly admit an error and spend time and money to correct it, since the contracts had been signed prior to the completion of the review.

(8) NPM has reinstated a top-down control of Indigenous human services, in spite of SCRGSP's repeated recommendations that they be developed and delivered through a bottom-up approach entailing community involvement in decision-making, here illustrated by the tenuous role of community (and referee) consultation in awarding the tender.

All of this has resulted in a non-Indigenous organisation being deemed more sensitive to, and knowledgeable about, Indigenous culture than an Indigenous organisation that had been managed and staffed solely by Indigenous people for 17 years. Essentially, in the cynically facetious (yet perhaps apt) words of Bill Fogarty (August 4, 2012) this case study "show[s] us that white fellas are better at being black than black fellas".

The ideology of NPM has permitted Australian bureaucrats to continue to act within a framework of White racialism, which results in racist governmental policies and practices. Thus, the method by which Indigenous-specific human service programs are tendered is a

causal factor in the maintenance of the “gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Dillon and Westbury 2007:2; Sullivan 2011:48-50). While I cannot speak for wider Aboriginal populations, I can state with certainty that this is the case in Mt Druitt.

This chapter has demonstrated the problematic nature of Australian governments’ current approach to funding badly needed Indigenous-specific human services. The following, concluding chapter will discuss and propose solutions to some of these shortcomings, as well as exploring the viability of these options in relation to the nation’s political orientation.

13. Recommendations and Conclusion

As public attention focuses on the ‘dysfunction’ of Aboriginal communities, and government programs are increasingly delivered by mainstream processes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil society institutions need support and encouragement as the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander modernisation. Instead they are in danger of increasing neglect.

– Patrick Sullivan (2010:5)

In 2014, Winanga-Li continues to operate and provide important services to Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal community, including those for which it receives no funding. Throughout my time at Winanga-Li both Betty and Lewis have discussed shutting down the organisation, stating with conviction that “this is going to be our last year”. Yet when I next check in with them, they carry on as if this had never been said or excuse it by saying “well, maybe one more year.”

After the intense scrutiny of their budget in 2012-13 by DoCS, discussed in Chapter 10, there was concern that Winanga-Li might lose its funding. However, in 2013 the organisation received positive media coverage on two separate occasions: one in which Betty was short-listed as a NSW state finalist for “Australian of the Year”³⁵¹ and another in which NITV³⁵² covered the organisation’s Christmas event³⁵³, promoting the work it did within Mt Druitt’s Aboriginal community. Both incidents of acclaim prompted congratulatory telephone calls and emails from government departments, including funding bodies. While the organisation’s funding was renewed 2014, DoCS reduced it from a triennial to biennial basis.

³⁵¹ “Australian of the Year” is awarded by the Australia Day Council and “celebrates the achievement and contribution of eminent Australians” (<http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/the-awards/>, accessed February 17, 2014). The awards take a two-tiered approach: nominations are drawn from each state for the award’s four categories and then the national winners are chosen from each state’s winners. There were several thousand nominees in NSW in 2013 and Betty was selected as one of the four finalists in one of the award’s categories.

³⁵² NITV stands for National Indigenous Television and is a broadcast network under the parent company of SBS – the Special Broadcasting Service – which is funded by both public and private sources. NITV draws its program content primarily from the sector of indigenous productions. The program that covered Winanga-Li’s event was aired on both NITV and SBS.

³⁵³ This event was not advertised in any way; yet more than two hundred people attended, having learned of it via word of mouth within the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community.

From an impartial perspective one can see that the excessive workload undertaken by Winanga-Li employees is not sustainable and is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. However, when this is juxtaposed with the needs of the community and the consistently positive outcomes achieved, one can understand the drive that motivates Betty and Lewis to struggle along with the organisation.

This thesis has built on several strands of theory, interwoven within my analysis. Its findings indicate that no matter the government policy espoused regarding Indigenous Affairs – whether Assimilation, Self-Determination, or Practical Reconciliation – in actual fact the pattern of colonialism continues on. This pattern has been exacerbated by neoliberal policies, which took hold in the 1980s, whereby governments increasingly committed to an indirect supervisory role in the delivery of State-sponsored human services. By promoting New Public Management (NPM) as *the* ideal means through which this supervision occurs, governments overlook NPM's inherent weaknesses in accounting for the complex dynamics of human behaviour; encouraging strict quantitative assessment and standardised program design.

I have demonstrated the multitude of ways that NPM's use within Indigenous-specific service funding privileges those groups that conform to White Australia's values and marginalise those which promote an alternative approach. Further, I have emphasised the important role of social relationships within human services, particularly those that are Aboriginal-specific, which NPM consistently discounts. The rationale and procedures inherent in NPM, developed within the realm of for-profit business, are not well-suited to the nature of the third sector, in which all matters are not reducible to quantitative analysis. NPM's use within the government funding of human services inevitably leads to inflexibility when innovation is essential; the centralised design of programs by bureaucrats with little on-the-ground experience with services' target populations; the undermining of stakeholder participation, which thereby erodes trust; the endless cycles of applying for and reporting on funding, thereby diverting resources from delivering the intended services; and the re-orientation of organisations' focus away from meeting local needs in contextually-grounded ways, towards the fickle whims of government.

This thesis has examined Winanga-Li as an ethnographic case study of an urban Aboriginal corporation. Its focus has been not only the organisation, but the Aboriginal community of Mt Druitt associated with it; illustrating the ways in which this type of organisation differs from others that provide Aboriginal-specific human services in meeting the needs of its heavily disadvantaged local community. The evidence indicates that such organisations foster a resilience and agency amidst oppressive circumstances; enabling its Aboriginal members and clients to transcend poor education, social exclusion, and racism on the part of White Australians, to achieve meaningful lives. This is accomplished through services delivered in ways that are salient to clients, its representation of local needs and Aboriginal perspectives to the White public, and its advocacy for community members who have few other places to turn. The interface between mainstream and Aboriginal domains created by such Aboriginal corporations has to some extent kept neo-colonial forces at bay; mediating between the two domains with the objective of facilitating Indigenous autonomy in service design and delivery, while maintaining accountability to both governments and local Indigenous constituents.

Despite the efficacy of Aboriginal organisations, I have shown the ways in which they have been continually belittled and demonised by White institutions such as the media and governments. Chapter 2 demonstrates that even during the primacy of Australian efforts to incorporate Indigenous self-determination into government policy, Indigenous efforts to realise a state-imposed model of self-governance were portrayed as incompetent, ineffective and inefficient at best, and corrupt at worst. No acknowledgement was given to the fact that Indigenous people were once again being expected to conform to the restricted codes embedded within structures of the colonial-settler society.

Chapter 3 details the ways that the modest progress made by the Australian nation towards diminishing Indigenous oppression was reversed in the early 1990s. The turning point away from this progress was marked by the election of the Liberal-National Coalition government and Prime Minister John Howard, followed by the abolition of ATSIC and institution of the Northern Territory Intervention. From that time until present, “practical reconciliation” and “closing the gaps” have dominated the Indigenous policy spectrum,

with Indigenous-specific resources increasingly being devoted to those who bowed to White Australia's imperial economic rationalism.

“Closing the gaps” policies recognise the overwhelming Indigenous disadvantage evident in Census statistics, such as those of Mt Druitt provided in Chapter 4. Having pledged to “close the gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, governments continue to earmark billions of dollars for Aboriginal-specific services; yet they do so within policies replete with colonialism. The “communities” to which this funding is devoted are defined largely by White government agents with little, if any, experience working with the Indigenous Other. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, Indigenous people have been denied the opportunity to determine guidelines regarding their cultural identity, behaviour and forms of association, both legal and social; with such guidelines continuing to be constructed by the non-Indigenous state. The “White Nation” dictates the conditions of Indigenous identity through policies employing reified stereotypes, criticising those persons and organisation that do not rely on such simplistic formulas. Not only is this oppressive, it presents a barrier to self-determination, as without Australia's First Peoples clarifying who and what is Indigenous, the “self” in self-governance cannot be resolved.

Further instances of Indigenous oppression were explored in Chapter 7, which demonstrated the overt and covert forms of violence inflicted on Indigenous Australians by the State. Despite widespread knowledge of the discriminatory treatment Aboriginal people receive during encounters with Australian institutions of education, health, justice and policing, there has been markedly little improvement in Indigenous outcomes in these areas. A causal factor for this is the short time-frames and discontinuous nature of programs funded to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal persons. Further, the efforts to educate White employees about Indigenous cultural difference in these State-sponsored arenas wholly excludes exploration of White privilege; instead focusing heavily on Indigenous stereotypes and their portrayal as a broken people deserving of paternalistic compassion.

Indigenous organisations provide a counter-narrative, one of internal strength and resilience in the face of these negative portrayals, as demonstrated in Chapter 8. Examining Winanga-Li's governance culture, grounded in organic community development, I have shown how

the organisation's flexible programs provide a culture match with the community it serves. The emphasis on justice, advocacy and deep social relationships cannot be understated when accounting for the efficacy of the organisation's approach, as it works to build clients' skill base, social connectedness, self-esteem and agency. Yet the elusive nature of these social and rehabilitative objectives makes the quantification of service outcomes difficult, if not objectively impossible. This is a primary reason why government funding bodies overlook the achievements of Aboriginal organisations such as Winanga-Li and instead dismiss their work as inadequate, inefficient or not culturally sensitive.

However, the culturally-matched services offered by organisations such as Winanga-Li – grounded in their embeddedness within, and continuous communication with, the social networks of their target clientele – are precisely the reason they are *the* preferred option when Indigenous people access human services. Chapter 9 documents experiences of Aboriginal Australians as they manoeuvre through the vast human-services landscape. The Chapter finds that unless a trusting relationship is established with a non-Indigenous service provider, Indigenous persons are hesitant to access human services – both mainstream and Indigenous-specific – should they not be delivered by an Indigenous person. The reason for this lies in the recurrent narratives of racist and demeaning treatment received by Aboriginal people when they access the services of non-Indigenous providers. I do not argue that *all* human services must be delivered to Indigenous persons by Indigenous organisations, as this would be untenable. What I promote is the essential role that Indigenous organisations play in ensuring that Aboriginal needs are met, particularly when the service is designated as Indigenous-specific.

Australian governments overlook the discriminatory treatment Aboriginal people experience from non-Indigenous organisations and are currently, to an overwhelming extent, awarding such organisations with funding for Indigenous-specific services. Justification for this practice is provided through the tenets of New Public Management (NPM), an apparatus of neoliberal governance. Chapters 10 and 11 discuss how NPM rose to dominance within Australian governments and how this manifested within funding regimes for Aboriginal-specific services. Chapter 10 explores the many paradoxes and contradictions inherent in NPM logic, particularly when applied to human services; while

Chapter 11 documents how White Australia's racist perceptions of Indigenous Australians prove fertile grounds for cultural violence against the latter and results in racist policy and processes. Chapter 11 brings to the forefront the lack of accountability governments demonstrate towards their Aboriginal citizens and highlights the ways in which Aboriginal organisations are doubly burdened with accountability measures – undertaking one form for government bodies and another for their local community – creating even greater demands on their limited resources. Yet it is this accountability to an organisation's Indigenous constituents, frequently via qualitative reporting, that is key in gaining clients' trust, and thereby facilitates their willingness to engage with the organisation's services.

Bringing together all aspects of this thesis, Chapter 12 illustrates how government policy and NPM tendering processes intersect with the reified stereotypes held by those enacting policy, which leads to profound oppression and wasted public spending for Indigenous wellbeing. Although in each instance the processes and procedures guiding the allocation of Community Support Service (CSS) funding can be argued to have been executed with objectivity, the resulting service provided by St Martin's proved incapable of fulfilling its brief of connecting Mt Druitt's Indigenous residents with further human services. Key to the multiple failures within the administration of CSS funding is the lack of social interactions between White administrators and service recipients. The low priority given to referees, coupled with the bureaucrats' lack of engagement with Mt Druitt's heterogeneous Indigenous residents, resulted in the White organisation St Martin's Youth Care being deemed best able to “connect” with Indigenous individuals and families.

I have demonstrated that Australia's present approach to “closing the gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes is not lessening Indigenous disadvantage, but rather is further entrenching Indigenous marginalisation. It discounts the achievements of Aboriginal organisations, demonises their character, impedes their advocacy abilities, and obliges them to conform to White ideology. Government-funded human services are the primary means by which outcome “gaps” are able to be “closed”, yet these services are now increasingly being delivered by large non-Indigenous charities with little on-the-ground engagement with the clients they intend to serve. While Indigenous organisations have both

the experience and level of community engagement essential to develop and implement successful Indigenous-specific human service programs, they are increasingly being starved of funding. This jeopardises the interface between Indigenous communities and Australian governments and, in turn, Indigenous autonomy over service delivery. Further, their excessive surveillance and micro-management is eroding these organisations' beneficial traits, such as their responsiveness and flexibility, advocacy role, trust from Indigenous constituents, and ability to culturally match their approach to their local clientele.

Recommendations

Leading scholars of indigenous peoples have proposed a number of steps that colonial-settler governments might take to alleviate the oppression and suffering of their indigenous populations. While these propositions are academically sound, their enactment will undoubtedly challenge the imperialist ideology of the powerful in neo-colonial nations. As such, I am not optimistic that such solutions to indigenous disadvantage will be realised within this lifetime.

In light of Australia's present Indigenous policy environment, which remains entrenched within paternalistic and assimilatory regimes, I therefore separate my recommendations to those which are long-term and those that can and should be acted upon immediately.

Long-term Recommendations

The research of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development consistently demonstrates that the indigenous peoples of the United States (US) have only achieved socioeconomic success within the structural condition of self-determination and self-governance. While the colonial encounters and ensuing political relationships between indigenous populations and the State in the US and Australia diverge, Australia should learn from the American Indian experience: that self-determination is a necessary ingredient to successfully alleviating indigenous poverty.

Australia had previously acknowledged its racist character and instituted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) so that Indigenous people could influence

decisions directly affecting them, yet the body remained constrained by its imposed structure and demands for accountability to the White government (Palmer 2004:8). ATSIC's power to legislate on behalf of, and direct resources to, Indigenous Australians was ever-weakened over the course of the body's existence, its resources being slashed. Although ATSIC only existed for fifteen years, the scrutiny it received resulted in a multitude of government-sponsored reviews and academic publications regarding the strengths and pitfalls of this Indigenous government body. A thorough review of these documents, which is beyond the scope of this research, does however provide an unfinished roadmap for the future establishment of a national system of Indigenous self-governance.

The path to self-determination will not be quick or easy to travel, yet I believe it is achievable through the establishment of local, regional, state and national levels of an Indigenous government, with representatives seated in Parliament³⁵⁴. Numerous hurdles stand before Australia's Indigenous populace on this front. There exist deep divisions and factionalism within and between Australia's Indigenous groups, with great uncertainty surrounding who has the right to identify as Aboriginal. Such "competing lines of articulation" frustrate Indigenous Australians from forming a "broad civic authority" (Levitus 2009:85). Decisions will have to be made on who the "self" in "self-determination" is; no small challenge due to the great heterogeneity amongst Indigenous peoples in relation to class, skin colour and plural identification – not to mention the urban/rural/remote divides. Robert Levitus asserts that nowhere in Australia, including remote regions, does untouched, pre-colonial Indigenous culture exist and that the "Aboriginal social universe... always draws to some extent on external sources of supply that are under non-Aboriginal control" (2009:77). While this may be the case, I would argue that American Indian nations have achieved self-rule under these same conditions (Herbert Jim, Seminole Tribe of Florida, personal communication, June 2, 2014) and that it therefore does not preclude the development of an Aboriginal Australian governance system nationally recognised by its constituents. The shape and form of such an Indigenous government is uncertain, as it must provide a culture-match with Indigenous Australians

³⁵⁴ Similarly, Patrick Sullivan has advocated for "an exclusively Indigenous committee, with democratically chosen representatives and all the powers of parliamentarians... It could evolve, effectively, into an Aboriginal chamber of Parliament, binding Indigenous peoples into the processes of Australian democracy while recognising their distinct needs" (2011:121).

and be seen as legitimate in their eyes. In establishing such a system of governance, Indigenous persons might build upon the wealth of material regarding ATSI³⁵⁵; and through extensive consultation with other indigenous persons throughout Australia and globally, gradually develop a governance model³⁵⁶.

Should Australia come to terms with the necessity of Indigenous self-determination, at the outset the federal government must establish funding for the project that is not susceptible to election cycles or the whims of the nation's White majority. The journey to Indigenous self-determination will likely take over a decade, perhaps even several decades, and involve trial and error. Australia's historical record has demonstrated that there is no quick-fix to Indigenous disempowerment and that the likelihood of getting an Indigenous governance structure right at the outset is negligible. Yet this does not mean it cannot be done.

Funding for the establishment of an Indigenous government could be drawn from taxation of the nation's mining industry, which reportedly earns over \$50 billion a year (Pilger 2013). Australia is a nation of great mineral wealth, and while the mining industry has repeatedly launched multi-million dollar campaigns to maintain its gross profit revenues, fighting any additional taxation³⁵⁷, there is a national consensus that the industry, which consists predominantly of foreign companies (Mansillo 2014), should be taxed at higher rates (Dorling 2014). The propaganda of the mining industry is not insurmountable, and should the national will support the establishment of an Indigenous government, funding for this venture could be found.

³⁵⁵ See, for example, Smith (1993a; 1993b), Ivanitz (1998; 1999a, 1999b), Ivantiz and McPhail 2003, Rowse 2000, Sanders et al 2000, Palmer 2004, Cunningham and Baeza 2005, Pratt 2003 and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissions's Annual Reports (www.austlii.edu.au and webarchive.nla.gov.au/).

³⁵⁶ The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples may already have initiated the process of establishing a culturally matched Indigenous governance system. This body was formed in 2010, resultant from the convening of an Independent Steering Committee to research "a preferred model for a national representative body" for Indigenous Australians at the request of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner in 2008 (<https://national.congress.com.au/about-us/>, accessed March 10, 2014). The body's development was grounded by a broad series of workshops and consultations with Indigenous people throughout the country. While too early to foresee the future of this body, or whether or not it will be accepted by Indigenous Australians as legitimate, it offers the potential in time to develop into a national democratic system of self-rule for Australia's First Peoples.

³⁵⁷ In 2010 the mining industry spent an estimated \$22 million to fight the implementation of the "Resource Super Profits Tax" (RSPT), in which it was successful. It has been estimated that, had this tax gone through, it would have brought \$60 million into the federal budget annually (Pilger 2013).

Intrinsic to the creation of a national Indigenous government is accountability to Indigenous citizens for policies and expenditure concerning them, particularly at regional and local levels. As was argued in Chapter 11, too much of today's Indigenous policy caters to White voters and it is only through the efforts of remarkable Indigenous organisations that any government expenditure is made accountable to Aboriginal people.

Jim Fingleton promoted a need for multi-dimensional accountability in his 1995 government-sponsored review of Indigenous-specific forms of incorporation (Rowse 2000:1522). He recommended that institutionalised forms of accountability be variable, so that locally determined accountability mechanisms are made socially, politically and financially relevant to the organisation's constituents. Indeed, a methodology for developing such a form of multi-dimensional accountability in the Australian Indigenous context has been proposed by Michele Ivanitz (1999b:7).

However, Fingleton's recommendations were put forth in a very different political environment, one in which Indigenous self-determination was still promoted as favourable. In light of the current Indigenous Affairs policy milieu, I find Fingleton's recommendations for culturally and locationally specific accountability unrealisable. However, should a time come when an Indigenous government is enacted, multi-dimensional accountability will be essential and Ivanitz' model can serve as a starting point.

As is the case with Winanga-Li's accountability to its local community, multi-dimensional accountability will not draw solely upon quantitative reporting, the statistical representation of which means little to some Indigenous Australians. Rather, in addition to quantitative accounting, multi-dimensional accountability can incorporate qualitative evidence: photographs, case-studies and the circulation of oral accounts. Indeed, Indigenous Australians will witness positive (or negative) outcomes of policies and programs through their own experience or that of members of their social network. Essential to effective multi-dimensional accountability will be the creation of forums in which Indigenous persons can voice their support or concern regarding current policies and initiatives to Indigenous government representatives. As established in Chapters 6, 8 and 9, the need for

the incorporation of social relationships and face-to-face interaction into governance processes is crucial.

In addition to more effective accountability, the formation of an Indigenous government is likely to reduce present problems with the disconnected, fractured and poorly coordinated Indigenous service spectrum. Currently Indigenous services are funded and administered by multiple departments within both state and federal governments, leaving ultimate responsibility for Indigenous outcomes in particular arenas indeterminate (such as health, housing, education, etc.) (Dillon and Westbury 2007:112; Sullivan 2011:80). By bringing accountability for these outcomes, as well as oversight of incorporated Indigenous organisations, under the one umbrella of an Indigenous government, the matter of which persons and policies are succeeding and which are not can be clarified. Effective actions will be clearly identifiable, and when they are not, the replacement or alteration of the approach can be undertaken.

Although the creation of an Indigenous government will be time and cost intensive, it is clear that a new approach to Indigenous disadvantage is needed. The billions of dollars currently expended annually in this vein are being wasted. My research has made it apparent that despite the significant investment necessary to establish a national Indigenous government, it is more costly to remain on this same road that so clearly leads to policy failure and wasted public expenditure.

Short-term Recommendations

As noted above, it is unlikely that Australian governments will undertake efforts to facilitate the formation of an Indigenous government in the near future (Levitus 2009:90). Therefore it is necessary that more immediate steps be taken to improve present approaches to decreasing Indigenous disadvantage and oppression.

In today's policy environment I believe a first step towards more effective Indigenous-specific human service delivery would be the recognition on the part of governments and bureaucrats that quantitative reporting in funding allocation and accountability measures is a fallible approach. Behind the guise of objectivity, ideological preferences privilege White

organisations when allocating Indigenous-specific human service funding. Many such organisations are not well positioned to engage local Aboriginal populations or provide services in ways that are salient to this target clientele.

In the allocation of funding, greater weight needs to be placed upon on-going engagement between organisations and their local Aboriginal residents. This should be demonstrated not solely through easily-fabricated quantitative head counts, but via qualitative evidence such as dated photographs and written accounts of consultation forums and face-to-face engagement with local Indigenous citizens; as well as the request for, and engagement with, multiple Indigenous referees. It should not only be short-listed applicants whose referees are contacted, but *all* referees given for a local area, so as to canvass insights on different organisations from multiple unrelated sources. Further, referees should not merely be asked if they endorse one specific organisation, but should be asked about other organisations that have applied for the particular pool of funding, including their perceptions and experience with each.

Investment in qualitative measures of funding allocation and accountability must also include the requirement that civil servants responsible for Indigenous programs and funding regularly interact with their Indigenous constituents. Currently bureaucrats (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) spend far too much time interacting with each other and very little, if any, interacting with their local Indigenous citizens. Forums for regular interactions between officials and Indigenous persons could be created, for instance, by hosting Indigenous-specific community events. To ensure broad participation, the events should provide free food and children's activities for attendees and their families, perhaps giving out gift certificates for local supermarkets to those with whom the bureaucrats directly interact³⁵⁸. At such events it is essential that bureaucrats engage attendees, both collectively and in one-on-one formats, in discussions about their needs, the services seen as necessary and the forms preferred for such services. Ideal venues for the establishment of such forums are local Aboriginal organisations, which can and should be included in the consultation. However, once established, events should branch out into more public places, such as local

³⁵⁸ Of course it will be necessary that records be kept of the allotment of such resources so that there is no favouritism in their allocation.

parks and malls. While the funding of such forums would include additional costs, the data yielded would ensure that services funded would be much more effective, saving governments money since they would not be funding programs that do little to reach target populations³⁵⁹.

Hosting such regular forums would not only provide qualitative evidence regarding local human service organisations, community needs, and services likely to be effective; it exposes bureaucrats to the reality of living Indigenous culture. Civil servants need to understand that the practices of Indigenous Australians are heterogeneous and vary greatly by (and within) location(s). The reification of Indigenous culture and its incorporation into policy does not make programs “culturally appropriate”, but rather deepens Indigenous oppression. In order for policies and programs to meet the needs of Indigenous persons, they must be grounded in legitimate on-going local consultation.

Social relationships between government officials and their Indigenous constituents need to be integrated into the administration of Indigenous-specific human services³⁶⁰. Although this will not necessarily result in a level playing field in the allocation of funding, as some people are more willing or able to participate in the aforementioned forums than others, it ensures that Indigenous citizens’ voices are heard when devising and assessing programs specific to them. Transparency in the reporting on forum outcomes is essential, as this is far more likely to produce results seen to be legitimate by Indigenous participants. Transparency could be accomplished by the timely delivery of reports to local Indigenous organisations, as well as publishing them via the relevant department’s internet. The websites of Aboriginal organisations could either provide overviews or links to these reports so that forum participants are aware of how they are being represented to policy decision-makers. Too many decisions regarding Indigenous Australians are made behind

³⁵⁹ Indeed, such multi-dimensional accountability is likely to yield positive results for all forms of human services, particularly those catering to other minority groups.

³⁶⁰ The embedding of such social relationships within Indigenous Affairs policy will contribute towards the de-centring of White privilege within this arena. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) asserts that de-centring enables one to view things from the perspective of marginalised groups because “beginning from the lives and interests of these groups identifies and makes visible the working of power and inequality” (Keddie 2013:23). As Indigenous policy currently stands, analysis begins, “and is limited to, the space of privileged communities [where] visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges (Keddie 2013:23).

closed doors (see, for example, Dillon and Westbury 2007:107), and many such decisions do not take Indigenous input seriously, as was demonstrated in the FaHCSIA report in the previous chapter in which the views of approximately fifty Indigenous persons were written off as “not representative of the community”.

Increasing transparency within the administration of Indigenous service funding promotes accountability to Aboriginal citizens. Should true ongoing consultation be incorporated into Aboriginal-specific service funding through transparent means, Indigenous agency will be fostered. Without Indigenous agency, it is unlikely the health and socioeconomic “gaps” between Indigenous and other Australians will ever be “closed”.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that an alarming trend has come to dominate the allocation of Indigenous-specific service funding over the past decade: the awarding of such funding to non-Indigenous organisations with poor track records of working *with* Aboriginal persons, preferring instead to work *on* them. The organisations currently receiving the bulk of Indigenous-specific funding do not consult with their local Aboriginal residents; instead they develop and deliver top-down services in paternalistic ways, and achieve negligible on-the-ground results.

This occurs in part because of the present governments’ preference for funding a small number of large mainstream organisations with demonstrable business models that align with NPM. As Aboriginal organisations do not fit within this category, they are increasingly being frozen out in competitive tendering. NPM’s quantitative approach to human service administration is ill-suited to the complex needs and behaviours inherent to humankind (Ivanitz 1999b:8). It overlooks social processes and power relationships in constructions of “development” and insists upon a centralised and paternalistic White worldview. History has proven that this does not encourage Indigenous self-sufficiency, but rather begets greater oppression and violence.

Michael Power writes that through NPM's administration of funding, "organizations are in effect colonized by an audit process which disseminates and implants the values which underlie and support its information demands" (1997:95). Unless steps are taken to dispose of, or temper, NPM within Indigenous-specific service funding, Indigenous organisations will lose their ability to respond to the needs of their constituents. Not only will this exacerbate oppression, it will destroy one of the very few institutional forms that has ever achieved positive results for Indigenous Australians. Should the nation truly wish to "close the gaps", the agency, representation, advocacy and essential services provided by Indigenous organisations cannot continue to be undervalued and demonised. Unless there is soon a change in the administration of Indigenous service funding, the one formal representative body permitted Aboriginal people by the White Nation will effectively become colonised.

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