

**TEACHING AN INDIGENOUS SOCIOLOGY: A RESPONSE  
TO CURRENT DEBATE WITHIN AUSTRALIAN SOCIOLOGY**

**KATHLEEN JULIE BUTLER  
B.SOC.SC, M.SOC.SC**

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ABC</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>ACER</b>	Australian Council for Educational Research
<b>ACSJC</b>	Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
<b>AECG</b>	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
<b>AEP</b>	Aboriginal Education Policy
<b>AIATSIS</b>	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
<b>AIM</b>	Aboriginal Inland Mission
<b>ANZAC</b>	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
<b>ASSPA</b>	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
<b>ATSIC</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
<b>DEST</b>	Department of Education, Science and Training
<b>DET</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>FCAATSI</b>	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
<b>HREOC</b>	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
<b>NATSICC</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council
<b>NESB</b>	Non-English Speaking Background
<b>NSWALC</b>	New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council
<b>RSL</b>	Returned and Services League
<b>SBS</b>	Special Broadcasting Service
<b>UAICC</b>	United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

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my great-Aunts Gertie, Esther and Evelyn Webb.

*In the Sweet By and By*

*We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Since the 1970's, there has been a growing impetus in Australian education to include Aboriginal issues across the full range of educational settings, from pre-school to tertiary levels. In practice, the provision of an Aboriginal perspective has often lead to socio-cultural constructions of Aboriginal people that tend to reflect, rather than contest, hegemonic understandings of Aboriginal people and culture. In doing this some fundamental misconceptions are continuing to have currency within mainstream Australia, becoming more entrenched due to the ascribed legitimacy of the educational institutions.

The discipline of sociology has recently self-identified an absence in its scholarship related to provision of comment on Aboriginal issues. The challenge for the future is to find meaningful alternatives that allow for the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and histories to be interpreted through a multiplicity of cultural subjectivities. Given the diversity of both Aboriginal cultures and the student cohorts examining them, an essentialising curriculum based on the inclusion of Aboriginal content is ultimately unhelpful. Rather, the development of critical pedagogies actively seeking a localised praxis is of far greater utility. This thesis considers the author's pedagogical approach to teaching Aboriginal perspectives within the mainstream discipline of sociology at a regional university in New South Wales, Australia.

Methodologically, the thesis is framed on a syncretic model between the Western mode of auto-ethnography and the Indigenous narrative tribalography. It includes a deeply reflexive component that aims to illustrate the way the Aboriginal lived experience can inform teaching, as well as a more standard textual engagement with academic literature and debate. Specific focus will be applied to consideration of The Dreaming as a foundational Aboriginal philosophy.



## Introduction

### Finding the Sociology of Indigenous Issues

In 2004, Walter and Pyett posed the question “Where is the sociology of Indigenous issues? Please explain” in *NEXUS*, the newsletter of the Australian Sociological Association (TASA). This question reflected the increasing concern over the Indigenous absence in both content and participation in the discipline that had also been noted in the allied disciplinary area of Health Sociology (Anderson, 2001; Saggars & Gray, 2001; D’Abbs, 2001). As an Indigenous person teaching in sociological courses, this was a question that was both professionally and personally engaging. This thesis provides one response to Pyett and Walter’s question by showing that while not generally acknowledged in sociological literature, tertiary pedagogy is one site where the sociology of Indigenous issues is located.

In seeking to answer their own question, Walter and Pyett co-edited the Special Indigenous Issue of the *Journal of Sociology* (Walter, Pyett, Tyler & Vanderwyk, 2006) that aimed to identify the areas of Indigenous sociology and to invigorate discussion on its development. In privileging the Indigenous voice as both contributors and referees the *Journal of Sociology* response differs markedly from the earlier responses by Anthropology and History to similar silences in their disciplines. In the Special edition of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, entitled “Power, Knowledge and Aborigines” (Attwood & Markus, 1992), eleven articles consider the ways in which European Australians represent Aborigines through a variety of disciplines, with a number discussing the possibility of including Indigenous voices. It is not without a certain irony that none of these “leading scholars... in the field of Aboriginal Studies” (Attwood & Markus, 1992) were Aboriginal. This should not preclude them from commenting, indeed, I have found all of the articles to be extremely valuable and used the majority of them in this thesis. By not including the Aboriginal voice however, the collection’s unproblematic usages of “Them”, “Us”, “Our” and “We”, which signified non-Aboriginal Australians, extended rather than challenged Aboriginal exclusion.

Similarly, the more recent History Wars demonstrated that academic debate surrounding Aboriginal history was constituted on debates about but generally not including Aboriginal peoples. As such, the Journal of Sociology's production of the 2006 Indigenous special issue with not only the stated desire but the resultant production of a compilation that did privilege the inclusion of Aboriginal authored critique is a significant innovation within the Australian humanities and social science sector. In attempting to discover *where* Indigenous sociology is located, the Journal of Sociology also revealed an interesting trend: those who were commenting on sociology were doing so from outside of the discipline (Walter, Pyett, Tyler & Vanderwyk, 2006, 342-3) or at best, like myself, from the peripheries (Butler-McIlwraith, 2006, 370). This is broadly indicative of the intellectual domain to be assessed for this thesis in that much of the best critique of a sociological nature on Indigenous issues is being done by those from allied disciplines: Colin Tatz's works on the varied areas of Indigenous sport, suicide and genocide (1987; 1996; 2005); Chris Cunneen's (1995) sustained interest in legal matters and their ramifications; and Gillian Cowlishaw's (1997; 1999; 2001; 2006) incisive comments on the complexities of Aboriginal community life are but a few examples.

Given the dearth of information on Australian Indigenous sociology itself, this thesis attempts to make a contribution to considering what constitutes sociology of Indigenous issues based upon the author's experience. This has led to my eventual tentative positioning teaching courses that are designated as sociology from which others have labeled me a "sociologist". I remain unsure whether this will be transient identity, but retain the right to change my position as a response to experience and my reflection on it (Pettman, 1996, 107). This is not the first time that my professional activities have seen me externally identified differently to my self-ascription. In 1998, I was the first Aboriginal academic to present a paper for the Philosophy of Education Society Australasia and to be published in their journal. I was somewhat amused to find myself described as an "Aboriginal philosopher" in the editorial comment (Marshall & Martin, 2000, 16).

Within my own institution, I am the only Indigenous staff member employed in a combined sociology and anthropology department<sup>1</sup> and remain the only permanent Indigenous academic in the broader School of Humanities and Social Science. As such, I have found myself in positions of relative theoretical and methodological isolation that causes me to think that perhaps the lack of a recognizable Indigenous Sociology lies in the isolation of those who are enacting it. This reminds me of Said's perspective that

[T]he pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives... Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one in your new home or situation (Said, 1994, 39).

As an academic who has struggled to find a disciplinary home, the intellectual framework provided by the "sociological imagination" (Willis, 1998) is the key lens through which I have come to view my professional world and my place as a teacher in it. In the early stages of my academic appointment, the lack of an Indigenous forum caused me to be uninterested in pursuing sociology more fully. Pyett and Walter's (2004) simple question "Where is the sociology of Indigenous issues", acted as a catalyst for me to critically articulate that I have been practicing a form of an Indigenous Sociology for a decade- even where occupying other disciplines. The new directions taken towards the development of an Indigenous sociology offer the exciting potential that I (and others) may be able to be positioned within a disciplinary community of scholars rather than as a perpetual "border-crosser" (Giroux, 1992) with incomplete solidarities to many. This is consistent with the earlier history of Australian sociology generally where

The sudden growth of sociology in the 1960's meant that there was no experienced group of academic sociologists from which to make

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<sup>1</sup> Even working for short periods within the university's School of Aboriginal Studies, I have not shared a disciplinary background with the other staff.

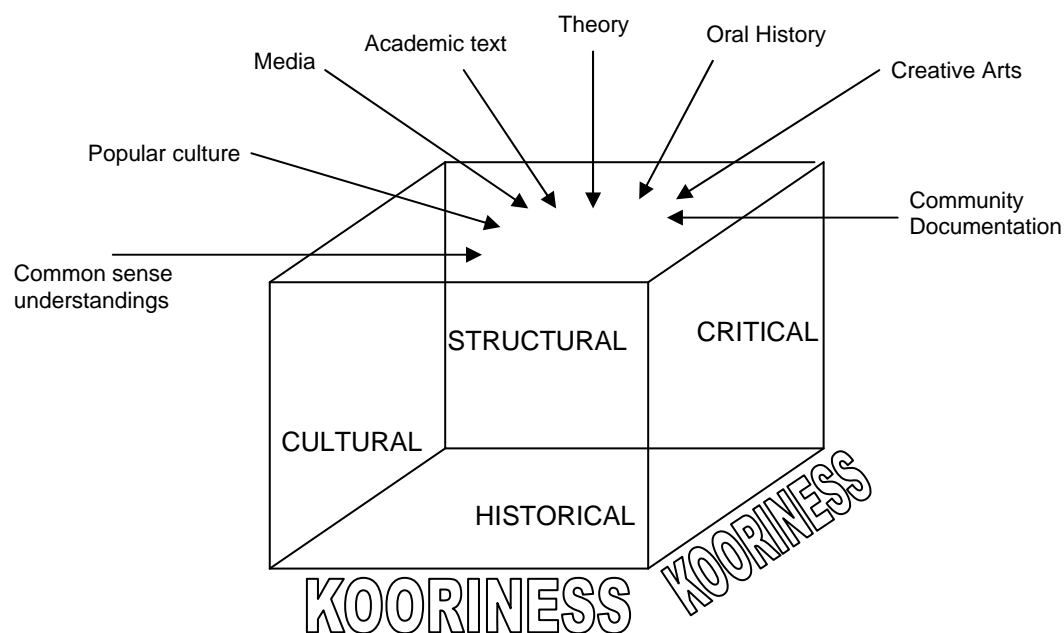
senior appointments. Appointments were made from other subjects' mainly political science, anthropology, and demography, but also history and psychology. Those appointed were able and committed people but they were forced to learn a new and complex subject while on the jobs of teaching it... It would be fair to say that as a consequence, Australian sociology lacks intellectual coherence (Waters & Crook, 1990, 18).

With Indigenous topics included in many Australian universities sociology departments, it is clear that in asking where Indigenous sociology is being practiced the university classroom must be considered a significant site. I have provided Indigenous perspectives in my own courses on Aboriginal policy and cultures, as well as including it in more broadly focused offerings that centre on Australian nationalist mythologies and the social analysis of inequality. I have also been responsible for the "Aboriginal guest lecture" for Introductory Sociology; Health Sociology; Societies and Cultures; Anthropology; Gender Studies; Religious Studies; Aboriginal Studies; History; Drama and English/ Australian literature.

One of the difficulties of considering my own place, as an educator including Indigenous perspectives in a sociological classroom in this thesis is that I have been unable to source other Aboriginal focussed sociological pedagogy from an Australian context. Indeed the teaching of sociology generally has not been widely considered in Australian literature. There is however a wide range of literature on critical pedagogy and I believe its aims are consistent with the broad goals of sociology to contribute to the development of a socially just society in general and education system specifically (Feagin, 2001). I consider one of the greatest insights from critical pedagogy is "that to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision" (Giroux, 1992, 239). In being consistent with this vision, I feel committed to adopt an overtly political stance in both my teaching and this thesis.

Ultimately, I (and as a consequence this thesis) inhabit a shifting field of enquiry, sometimes in the contact zone where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination"

(Pratt, nd). As an Indigenous person, trying negotiate within a university that is “Duggaibah, which means place of whiteness” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 240), I have a constant position in the contact zone through my lived experience as an urban Indigenous lecturer in the mainstream Humanities and Social Science section in the University of Newcastle. This contact zone is also relevant with regard to my reading of non-Indigenous authored literature on Indigenous subjects; the struggle to find methodologies that are culturally appropriate; the consideration of the place of an Indigenous lecturer within the mainstream; and the constraints and liberation that I experience operating within an Indigenous family and communities. In terms of pedagogy this relates closely to the ‘border’ position as discussed by Giroux (1992) and reflects the decolonising agenda that is central to many Indigenous academic perspectives (Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005).



**Figure 1. The author’s approach to teaching Indigenous Sociology**

This thesis deconstructs the author’s Indigenous praxis within a sociological domain, examining the processes through which individual biography and disciplinary (dis)engagement have synthesized in the classroom. In analyzing my own lecture material and critically reflecting on my experiences as an Indigenous educator I note the there are consistent themes that have evolved into the basis of this thesis. The first

of these is intimately connected to my own situatedness as an Aboriginal person (Merlan, 2000). It is consistent with Morgan's position that 'stresses to Kooris the essential ingredients for true justice and equality: pride and dignity based on a profound sense of Kooriness and an unseverable tie with our previous generations' (cited in Miller, 1985: xiii). Although not expanded upon in any depth in academic literature, this perspective of Kooriness was a foundational philosophy of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) of which Bob Morgan was the inaugural president. As I joined the AECG as a teenager, it has also made a great impression upon me in my construction of a community and professional identity. Moreover, Kooriness is a localized version of a more broadly relevant international Indigenous phenomenon where Indigenous identity is the explicit base for professional practice (Smith, 2003). As shown in Figure 1, 'Kooriness' is the foundational concept on which my sociological framework rests.

Further, in a professional sense, my 'Kooriness' directed me towards the privileging of certain literature and examples. Where possible, I deliberately choose examples from New South Wales, particularly those areas in which my family have lived. Further, I seek information, discourses and narratives that complement my own socialization in an extended Aboriginal family, particularly of perspectives developed from interaction with my Elders. With regard to its inclusion in my teaching practice, Kooriness relates to the Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) that pertains to the integration of Indigenous knowledge into programs involving Indigenous people" (Choy & Woodlock, 2006, 2). Where it differs from most of the documented cases is that IST is generally applied to engage Indigenous learners, rather than to embody the beliefs of the Indigenous lecturer in a predominantly non-Indigenous sphere. I can extrapolate from the Indigenous standpoint pedagogies that aim to increase Indigenous student participation and other work that considers mandatory Aboriginal Studies provision to teaching students (Parente, Craven, Munns & Marder, 2003). Further, I can draw on commonalities from other Indigenous academics and find the work of Nakata (1998, 2007), Kelly (2005), Behrendt (2005; 2006) and Morgan (Miller, 1998; DET, nd) extremely useful in this regard. Aileen Moreton-Robinson's interrogation of the feminist academy (1998, 2006) and Marcia Langton's (1993, 1997) consideration of constructions of Aboriginality are inspirations too.

The second theme that I have identified is that each lecture scaffolds the presentation on the four aspects of the sociological imagination, which are historical, cultural, structural and critical analysis. As an educator, I have found the concept of scaffolding particularly potent, because it provides the learner with a clear framework for developing the skills to critique the social world. Using the metaphor of the builder's scaffold, educational scaffolding aims to enable the student to understand the process through which knowledge is acquired, facilitating the eventual independence of the learner from the teacher (Verenikina, 2003). The sociological imagination, originally developed by C. Wright Mills is an outstanding example for the richness of the scaffolding metaphor for the way in which it provides students with the insight into a sociological gaze that does not only describe but also analyses.

It is not only information they need--in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it...What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves (Mills, 1959).

To the historical, cultural and structural features part of Mills' original model, Evan Willis (1998) has added the critical element to further extend the means through which the analytical aspect of sociology can be extended. These four elements metaphorically construct the parameters, which frame my analysis.

The final theme concerns the range of sources that inform the learning environment. I am fascinated by the developing academic synergies between Western and Indigenous knowledges and enjoy the exploration of these in my teaching. Realistically however, student's "common sense" understandings are not even drawn from ethnocentric academia, but from media, popular culture and stereotypes (Giroux, 2004). Moreover, the Aboriginal counter-discourses within media and popular culture achieve the widespread attention that few academic texts of any discipline can rival. As such, any critique must be prepared to engage with these "non-academic" forms as "social justice is promoted by questioning normative (taken-for-granted/ commonsense educational structures and practices, a counter-move that characterizes what Kumashiro calls "anti-oppressive" education" (cited in Sumara & Iftody, 2006, iii-iv).

Placing these resources within the parameters of my sociological imagination 'box' reflects the method through which they will be deconstructed.

I explicitly see my teaching as an extension of my politics although for Indigenous people this stance is often labeled as propaganda (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). While this label is part of the extension of a broad range of discourses of derision directed towards educational professionals (Blenkin, Edwards & Kelly, 1992, 10-11), I believe that it if this means that my work is interpreted as constituting Aboriginal propaganda that is a criticism worth accepting rather than compromising the intent of the work. In this matter, I concur with the late Oodgeroo Noonuccal who responded by saying

I agreed with them because it was propaganda... If you talk about a hole in the street up there that's politics. And this old clichéd business of saying we are non-political. If you're non-political, man, you're dead, you're not even thinking (Noonuccal, 1988, 19).

My own space as an educator is within a physical area of the Central Coast and Hunter Region of New South Wales. For the Newcastle campus, the Awabakal people maintain a presence on campus and within the broader community. In contrast, the neighboring Darkinjung whose lands have the Ourimbah campus occupy a particularly difficult position for Indigenous peoples in that their continued survival is in itself contested. Although not receiving national attention that similar debates within Tasmania have engendered (ABC, 2002), many of those who claim descent from the Darkinjung are dismissed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal commentators. Further, they are often displaced from any formal recognition by those claiming "custodial" status by virtue of an institutional affiliation to an organization such as Aboriginal Land Councils. The percentage of Aboriginal students within my courses is small. While I have been involved in various special entry schemes, Aboriginal TAFE programmes and other forms of Aboriginal education governance, this is not the field of the thesis. Instead, I wish to focus on the way in which I interact with non-Indigenous students, entering into a process that requires being both teacher and learner. Marcia Langton claims that Aboriginality is "a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination of representation and interpretation" (1993, 33). I argue that it is critical for this process to be actively engaged by urban Indigenous peoples across any number of 'fields'. In



terms of the academy generally, this means being active within the mainstream as well as Indigenous focussed centres. It must also be reflected in academic literature and in pedagogical practice so that Aboriginality can truly be recognised as a dynamic range of possibilities, rather than a static primordial curiosity. I also acknowledge that this process shapes my identification as an “Aboriginal lecturer” as well.

I am seeking to establish a position that best reflects my understandings of the Indigenous lived experience and its expression in sociology, simultaneously recognising and challenging the way in which these understandings are also shaped by discourses of Western hegemony and marginality. I have chosen an area that has been of particular concern to the Australian sociological community: identity formation and its role in contributing to marginality and institutional repression, through the experience of such things as citizenship; nationalism; engagement with popular culture and interaction with religion (Kellehear, 1997). Many Aboriginal people operate multiple subject positions with regard to their identities. This phenomena of differing positions according to race was described in sociological literature as early as 1903, by the first African-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois who coined the phrase ‘double-consciousness’, which he described as follows:

...The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by a tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois, 1973, 3).

Indigenous people's experiences can also be reflected in the development of a double consciousness. It is often necessary to manifest cultural forms that conform to externally defined criteria but other forms often baffle the outsider in their non-sanctioned difference that often acts as a trigger for the overt re-emergence of fear and hostility or rejection and denial. Du Bois’ metaphor of the veil is also useful for the veil serves to affect the vision of both the observer and the wearer. Therefore, the White Gaze in attempting to render everything visible and known is thwarted by the

veil, obscuring and sometimes totally negating observation (see Fanon, cited in Monhanram, 1999, 64). Similarly, to be behind the veil offers the individual a different perspective on the world outside, also referred to as the 'peculiar lens of the colonised' (Cliff, cited in Marinara, 2003, 151). Moreover, while the veil is sometimes worn through outside influence or coercion, it may also be voluntarily adopted for the specific purpose of facilitating distance and difference.<sup>2</sup> That the Veil is acknowledged and interrogated for its ability to act as both oppressive and emancipatory is revealing for the Indigenous pedagogies that struggle with the tension of this duality. While I am attempting to allow both my students and the readers of this thesis an insight into aspects of my vision from 'behind the veil', it should be noted that I am not attempting to justify my right to claim an Aboriginal identity, nor am I trying to rip aside the 'veil' to expose those who I term 'my people' to an external cultural legitimisation - this does not rest within the domains of power of either of these groups.

It is the position of this thesis that for any teaching professional to implement an Aboriginal perspective in their courses it is essential for them to engage in a reflection on their own positioning with regard to the Indigenous sphere (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). For the Indigenous academic this involves a consideration of one's own identity. It is an equally meaningful exercise for the non-Indigenous academic as well as the lived experience of all helps to shape one's outlook. Therefore, a lived experience where Aboriginal people are absent will shape a perspective as much as but differently to one where Aboriginal people are present. What is required is the will to confront the forces that have shaped our perceptions of Indigenous issues and to critically analyse whether these can stand up to rigorous scrutiny. My reflection on my teaching is one example of how this can be achieved.

In Chapter's One and Two I examine the disciplines and methodology that have informed the thesis. This concerns the development of sociological silences on Indigenous issues and the growth of anthropological hegemony in attributed 'expertise'. These two Western disciplines and associated methodologies are also

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<sup>2</sup> While I can see the relevance of the veil as a metaphor for the experience of racism I recognise that also has gendered and racialised specificity. I am not trying here to appropriate the experience of Islamic women or to indulge in "Orientalist clichés" (Degabriele, 1992).

interrogated for their applicability to an Indigenous framed analysis. It should also be noted that while the thesis considers the discipline of sociology, the candidature is based within Aboriginal Studies. At times, an Aboriginal perspective will be privileged over a dissertation consistent with orthodox sociological theory and method.

Chapter's Three, Four and Five discuss the resources that can be used in a classroom teaching the sociology of Indigenous issues. These include multimedia, which is interrogated for its potential to inspire student engagement in discussion. Other non-traditional resources including the Self are discussed. These chapters detail the auto-ethnographic aspect of the author's identity construction within an Aboriginal sociality and the ways this is interpreted by students. The ramifications of this discursive struggle are considered for the effect, which they can have on the student's receptiveness to content and on the student/lecturer dynamic itself.

I provide a range of different examples on the way in which an Aboriginal Dreaming can be applied within a sociological classroom in Chapters, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine. It is in these chapters, that I feel a significant disjuncture with sociology. At times the examples, which I am privileging, may be outside of the sociological norm. As the thesis represents what occurs specifically in my sociological classroom, these remain relevant to the overall thesis aims. The thesis concludes with a brief comment on the current "intervention" in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. It then summarises the thesis aims and outcomes concluding with the desire for an increased ongoing development of dialogue within sociology to critically comment on Indigenous issues.

## Chapter 1. Disciplinary and Methodological Adventures

**Readers beware: This is not orthodox!**

The nature of my work is multidisciplinary and this is shaped by an institutional imperative as well as my own commitment. In moving between and within disciplines adopting a single methodological position has proved impossible. This chapter details the changing disciplinary positions I have occupied as well as my considerable struggle to find a methodology that would adequately express the nature of my position. My movement from anthropology to sociology will be discussed, as will the methods of ethnography, autoethnography, tribalogy and story.

My greatest dilemma in articulating my research methodology has been one of disclosure, where I was tempted to conceal the fractured methodological journey that has characterised this thesis in contrast to the structural cleanliness that I note in other works. I have come to realise however that the varying research terrains in which I have ventured directly reflect the tensions of attempting to reconcile two macro-knowledge and research traditions, Indigenous and Western (Porsanger, 2004). As such my methodological chapter is far from orthodox, but it better reflects the realities of the thesis evolution than a standardised representation. There are many others who have shared this dilemma (Dyson, 2007, 36-7). Reynolds and Vince (2004, 19) comment that eventually they “tried hard to retain the untidiness in the discussion of our cases, painting a picture of partial, but limited successes, along with some outright failures”. While at first I was tempted to ask the reader's indulgence for this type of difference, I now enact it as a form of resistance, part of my professional and moral privileging of the Indigenous voice, and epistemologies. I will present my methodological “story” from a position of comfort that does not mean complacency or lack of rigor but rather a conscious political decision to engage in an Indigenous research method while attempting to provide transparency of the process for the reader. This is based on Irabinna-Rigney's (2002) three principles of Indigenist Research:

1. Resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research
2. Political integrity in Indigenist research

### 3. Privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenous research.

This is not orthodox sociology. It is a possible sociology of the future, my own Dreaming journey of what sociology may be. This is a journey that I share with other Indigenous academics such as Skerret White (2003, 2-3) who says:

The journey has been long. It started long before I was born and will continue long after I am gone necessarily making my journey a life-long one. It is one of cultural and linguistic survival. I am a product of colonisation. As such my story is one of struggle and resistance against the insidiousness of colonialism and all its guises - not necessarily for myself - but for those who traveled before me and those who come after me.

In discussing my evolving thesis with a colleague I was reassured by the comment “Don’t worry! It’s all about the journey not the destination”. In one context, my thesis began its journey within the discipline of anthropology, but it never gained any true momentum, it was all stops and starts, reverses and detours. This, I am told is not uncommon. During my undergraduate years and in pursuing a coursework masters I had read a considerable amount of both sociological and anthropological literature that was based on both theory and practice of both disciplines. As an Indigenous person who had been socialised into the “cultural traditions, values, beliefs systems and world views that, in any indigenous society are imparted to the younger generation by community elders” (Dei, 2002, 5), specifically the Indigenous traditions of the Bundjalung and Worimi peoples of New South Wales, I had always been keenly interested in any reading on Indigenous cultures. Finding work related to Indigenous people very limited in contemporary Australian sociological thought but plentiful in the anthropological arena it seemed a natural progression to move towards a career in anthropology. I did not see the discipline of anthropology as unproblematic, recognising it as steeped in a self-identified colonial past as a “quintessentially Western project” (Ranco, 2006, 61) that may have even extended to being the “handmaidens of colonialism” (Cowlshaw, 1992, 2006).

The ramifications of the momentous Mabo decision were still being felt and there was an optimism that for the first time there was national land rights legislation (Brennan,

1995). This seemed to herald a promising and rewarding future for me in anthropology that I could consider both intellectually stimulating and of value to my people. While some anthropological literature suggested that “Native” inclusion was a seriously developing strand of the discipline I was also motivated by the hope that transformative action from within might allow the detailed data that was held in the anthropological repositories of knowledge on Indigenous people to be repatriated to community control (Nakata, 2004). I didn’t expect to remain in university after my degree. Even when I attained a lecturing position, I didn’t categorise myself as a ‘lecturer’, I was an ‘anthropologist in training’. My gaze was turned firmly outwards from the university and I viewed lecturing as a means of allowing me the space to develop the skills that would take me ‘into the field’, to ‘do’ ethnography with the aim of contributing to the Land Rights process.

Initially I considered the methodology of my thesis would be fairly straightforward. Orthodox anthropology has, since its origins in the early twentieth century valued ethnography as a key research method, whether in the American or British traditions. Philosophically founded on the notion of alterity, ethnography placed the western anthropologist (Self) within the context of an exotic locale to study the Native (Other) (Hovland, 2003). Extending on this logic of alterity is the constant creation of binaries: Self/ Other, Black/ White, Savage/ Civilised and it is from this basis that ‘the West’ is accorded the positive signification and ‘the rest’ are negatively defined (White & Tengen, 2001). Moving particularly into the outposts of the European empires, anthropology provided one of the most overt displays of the colonising academy, often aimed at recording the cultures of peoples before their demise as predicted by Social Darwinism (Isaacson & Ford, 2005, 360).

Placed within anthropology, I assumed that my thesis would be based on a detailed ethnography, where I would situate myself for a period of months on the north coast of New South Wales in Bundjalung territory conducting participant observation within the context of Bundjalung communities. This assumption developed from a dual focus. Firstly, I had a desire to be immersed within an anthropological research culture that values the ethnography above any other form of research enquiry. I also had a commitment to be involved with the Indigenous communities to which I can claim membership. My mother and I attended a north coast funeral of an extended

family member during which my mother re/introduced me to many people I had not seen as an adult. Beyond the cultural normalcy of this practice she hoped to facilitate the development of networks to assist in my research and to provide me with greater insight into research questions that might benefit these communities. One of the first reality checks of this experience was that the Native Title land claims that were being made on the north coast were not universally supported and the anthropologist was widely regarded as “taking sides” in disputed claims, rather than being seen as objective. Rolls (2003) notes this problem and queries whether a researcher can receive ethical Indigenous community clearance when there are multiple “communities”. In a case where the New South Wales Aboriginal Lands Council (NSWALC) was calling for expressions of interest for anthropological work in the Bundjalung region, both of the rival claimant groups were my extended family. Being familiar with the extremely corrosive Hindmarsh Island case where split between Ngarrindjeri women on the issue of a heritage claim divided their community (Lucas, 1996) I considered it both personally and professionally prudent to remain distant from this arena. This was heavily based on an emotional response that in hindsight might have been negotiated as part of the ethnography, although emotions are still viewed warily by many anthropologists (Strestha, 2007). What the anthropological gaze did facilitate however was a critical realisation of the connectivity between urban and rural populations and the specificities of cultural practice.

I was particularly concerned that within the urban Aboriginal context there was a trend that conflated the identities of all Indigenous peoples under the subsuming colonial category of “Aborigine”. Whilst I did not deny the political utility of the term and its role in the construction of valid contemporary forms of Indigenous experience, it is a major part of discourses that construct the urban Indigenous population as experiencing less authentic forms of Aboriginality, disassociated from country, having “lost” culture. This has the potential not only for moral and philosophical disadvantage in claims to the self-determination of identity, but more broadly having the potential to disempower and marginalise urban Aboriginal people from contemporary political debates such as Native Title (Keen, 1999).

To challenge some of the underlying assumptions in these discourses I chose to modify the thesis aims and provide a case study of post World War II Bundjalung

migrants from the north coast of NSW people to inner city Sydney, encompassing suburbs which include Redfern, Waterloo and Alexandria. It was my initial belief based on my lived experience that many of these people and their families operate socially, culturally and politically within what we might term an Indigenous ‘double consciousness’ (DuBois, 1903), simultaneously recognising broad links to other Aborigines within the urban landscape, while at the level of the specific privileging and maintaining links to kin, to language forms which might be more correctly referred to as Bundjalung English, rather than Aboriginal English, and interpreting events, particularly the spiritual through syncretic Bundjalung Christian forms.

Finding that academic work on these issues was virtually non-existent was illuminating in itself. The autobiographical works of Ruby Langford Ginibi: *Don't Take Your Love To Town* (1988), *My Bundjalung People* (1994), *Real Deadly* (1992) and *Haunted By The Past* (1999) were easily accessible however. Having read these texts as they were released, I have been interested that critiques of these texts refer to their narrative structure as being representative of the quintessential Aussie battler, Aboriginal, urban Aboriginal and Aboriginal women's narratives. In general, scant regard was paid to the author's Bundjalung identity beyond its brief biographical relevance. My reading of the texts as an urban Bundjalung woman was markedly different. At the beginning of Ruby's first book *Don't Take Your Love To Town* (1988) she recalls how her mother left the family to begin a new marriage with Eddie Webb. Eventually, both Ruby's family and the Webbs' moved to inner city Sydney. These stories intersect with mine because Eddie Webb was my grandfather's brother and Evelyn Webb, Ruby's mother, was my much-loved great-Aunt. From a methodological perspective, I began to realise that I was not a participant observer in a normative anthropological sense. In reading these works I was evaluating the text primarily as a participant and as a putative researcher the community judged me this way as well.

*Don't Take Your Love To Town* and Ruby's subsequent books provide a rich source of data for the continuity of Bundjalung identity as a potent cultural feature of urban lives. In reading a cultural narrative that resonated with my own I was able to see the abstract theoretical paradigms of anthropology in a dynamic way. My position as ‘anthropologist’ was, in terms of status, secondary to say the least, eliciting a bemused



tolerance rather than cultural capital. I would add one caveat to this. Anthropology did gain a measured credibility as Barry Morris; whose long-term work with the Dhungutti (1989) contributed to the first mainland Native Title claim was my supervisor. I would note however that this also functioned through a lens of inter-personal connectedness of those Barry knew and was known to rather than professional standing alone. In the main however, anthropology and ethnography were regarded as negative and politically problematic at grass roots levels, conforming to Smith's much quoted concept that for Indigenous people **"Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary"** (1999, 1, my emphasis). Valuing my position as a partial insider in community I needed to re-examine the methodology to determine the ethical limitations of continuing this research.

My own misgivings of anthropological process were sharpened by a critical consideration of "ethnography" itself. Even today, ethnographies are rarely written with the "Native" as the audience, they still remain aimed at the West as travelogues for the armchair enthusiast; texts for the academy; data for the state. In Australia, even within what the discipline regards as its positive contribution to Native Title, the ethnography while it may service Indigenous communities still has judicial proceedings as the ultimate arbiters of cultural worth, proceedings where at least one party often actively seeks for the de-legitimation of Indigenous claims. Further, ethnographies retain a greater legitimacy than Indigenous testimony in Native Title claims, even where the ethnography predates the claim (Lucas, 1996). This reflects the way in which the mainstream academy has attempted to contain Indigenous cultures to such an extent that we remain the locus of enquiry, but information from our communities constantly moves outward to inform the West (Smith, 1999). The 'gain' to Indigenous people of the knowledge accrued by mainstream academics is not determined by those studied, and generally it returns only if it has been digested by the West whose institutions can determine for us what 'benefit' it may serve. This is premised on "the insulting idea that others know them [us] better than they understand themselves [ourselves]" (Prah, cited in Dei, 2002, 10).

Despite the claimed desire to be more inclusionary, the mainstream academy has, on the whole, reacted badly to those Indigenous peoples or organisations that have tried

to place controls on their communities as fodder for the academy. Jeremy Beckett's (2001) plenary address to the Australian Anthropological Association provides a case in point to exemplify the problematic nature of the academic expectation of access. Beckett acknowledges that it is "[s]mall wonder then that they [Indigenous people] may want to have a say in what research is done and also to ask what benefit the research might have for them" (Beckett, 2001, 9). However, he continues,

Some research contracts drawn up by land councils require that investigation be confined to a particular matter, such as a land claim, rather than building up a sense of context as anthropologists normally do. Fortunately, not all Aboriginal people take such a restrictive view. The Yolngu have accepted researchers over many years, to the point where the typical Yolngu family includes mother, father and anthropologist, much as the Hopi family used to according to the old joke (Beckett, 2001, 9).

This reveals the depths to which scrutinizing, surveilling and interfering into Indigenous lives has become a normalised practice in both the mainstream Australian psyche generally and the Academy specifically. Further, Beckett describes what he terms "a nationally oriented indigenous intelligentsia that feels entitled to police our [White/Anthropological] research" (Beckett, 2001, 9). His juxtaposition of the intelligentsia to the reified "community" is indicative of the tension that exists when Indigenous academics are perceived as 'interfering' in relations between White academics and 'their' Indigenous subjects. This type of resistance on the part of White academics continues the reproduction of the asymmetrical relations of power between the Academy and the Indigenous community. Moreover, Muecke's (1999) recollection that when he began fieldwork he was advised to stay away from Aboriginal women and politics places the political Aboriginal woman in a somewhat tenuous position with regard to the discipline. This is extended by Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2002, 92) who says

Anthropological discourse operates within academia where knowledge production is supported and valued. In this discourse, self-definition by Indigenous women is not accorded the same value.

While there were some anthropologists who were questioning both their role and that of ethnographic practice (see Rose, 2003; Baumann, 2001; Muecke, 1999; Cowlishaw, 1992) I still felt that this movement did not represent as great a shift as would be required for me to be situated comfortably as an ethnographer for the purposes of this thesis. Further, I think that implicit in many of the ethnographies studying the Other that I have read there is a sense of both the transience and empowerment of the anthropologist in their studied community. The binary of home/field recognises that the anthropologist can and probably will leave the field, their identification with those they 'observe' more a matter of choice than an essentially defining category (White & Tengen, 2001). It would be absurd to suggest that no anthropologists develop long term affiliations with their studied communities, but many of these are never-the-less not permanent residential arrangements (Muecke, 1999) and the anthropologist, by virtue of their outsider status, may also be positioned with the dominant mainstream. Given the preference among many anthropologists to conduct research among those peoples where identities are essentially defined by remoteness, language, and by the inscription of race on the body via appearance, it is not surprising that the anthropological corpus has difficulty grappling with the Indigenous intelligentsia.

The ability to move freely from remote to urban, from community to academy, and to speak with authority on Indigenous cultures has been the domain of the anthropologist. This leads me to suspect that in some ways the rejection of the Indigenous intelligentsia is a fearful reaction that [White] anthropologists may be displaced. This is not without foundation as Aboriginal Studies itself was defined in the 1960's as pertaining to anthropology with minor inclusions from archaeology and linguistics (Nakata, 2004). As such this highlights the naturalness of White anthropological inclusion within Indigenous community, moving from the popular imagery of urban Indigenous academics as 'caught between two worlds' to effect a discursive displacement and somewhat ironically placing the anthropological body as the self-proclaimed protector of Indigenous community from Indigenous academics. Simultaneously, there is also a rejection of the Indigenous intelligentsia from the academy where Anthropologists claim both a moral and professional authority for their enquiry, as well as a hallowed place as a 'sandstone' discipline.

While ethnography aimed to limit the presence of the author in the text and this is still seen as desirable by some, I believe this reflects a general false consciousness where the Western self is so ingrained as the normative model that it is the benchmark of 'neutrality' and 'truth' (Dei, 2002). I have noted with interest that many White students lament the fact that they have 'no culture', a belief that exemplifies this fictive neutrality (McMaster, 2002). The development of the Indigenous intelligentsia and the recent growth of Whiteness Studies have exploded that fiction with Whiteness Studies demanding the West systematically consider *Itself*, articulating the place of the self in the research process (Brewster, 2005).

I am not suggesting that the issues of power raised with regard to White academics are exclusive to them (Rolls, 2003). Indigenous academics, have also encountered the pitfalls of research and its dissemination. Eve Mumewa Fesl, the first Indigenous doctoral recipient in the discipline of Linguistics was involved in the development of a LOTE curriculum to be used in Victoria (McKay, 1996, 50-1). Fesl, a Gabi Gabi woman from Queensland used the language of the Bundjalung who were not her own people, but who did have long histories of meeting and ceremony with the Gabi Gabi (Fesl, 1993, 22). Despite negotiating with and having the support of some Bundjalung people (McKay, 1996, 150), Fesl's actions caused an outcry amongst sections of the Indigenous academic community generally and the Bundjalung community specifically. I clearly remember the disgust of my own Bundjalung elders over this incident. "Who is she [Fesl]?" my Great-Aunt said, "She's not even one of us!" I do think though that there is a major difference between the ramifications of supposed wrong doing for Indigenous academics. While judged ethical according to the academy those who are seen to transgress acceptable research behaviour face vociferous condemnation from within the Indigenous academic and community circles. Unlike White researchers they have less opportunity to retreat because these are likely to be a major part of their private social and cultural circles as well as professional lives.

It became obvious during the course of my literature search that other academics had similar difficulties in using standard ethnography as a method. With my workplace also placing greater emphasis on encouraging staff and students to engage with a multidisciplinary agenda, over time I came to pursue a far more multidisciplinary

approach, shaped less by an interest in pursuing ‘traditional’ anthropological fieldwork where the “ethnographer, then, stays at least a partial stranger to the worlds of the studied... [where s/he] retains commitment to the exogenous project of studying or understanding the lives of others - as opposed to the indigenous project of simply living a life one way or another ” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, 35-6).

While I was struggling to find a direction for my research I was involved in developing as a lecturer. My teaching of anthropology was all textually based, considering the fieldwork of others as at this stage I had yet to venture ‘into the field’ and I keenly felt this as a deficiency that I had not experienced one of anthropology’s “teaching rites of passage” (Oliver, 2003,1). A White, male colleague, had developed my first course and I reproduced the readings that had been part of his teaching. The readings focussed on moieties as identified by Spencer and Gillen (1889), Western desert art, ‘traditional’ spirituality and northern land rights. While there was some attempt to juxtapose the ‘traditional’ with the contemporary there was little on urban Indigenous life and the course literature only included one article by an Indigenous author. The lectures adhered to a conservative framework, where I was the talking head out the front. Tutorials too were uneventful, where we were all distanced from the material as the ‘Aborigines’ depicted in the text were as much the ‘Other’ to me as they were to White students. This was a curious position. I had always acknowledged my Aboriginal identity and the initial funding for my lectureship was from an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, yet in my early practice as a lecturer my approach conformed to a White textualism in which I had less authority than my White predecessors.

As Oliver (2003, 4) has noted in being a fledgling anthropology lecturer, “the system fosters an ethic of sink (if one fails) or swim (and nobody notices)” and I was finding teaching very heavy going. Perhaps this would have continued indefinitely had I not been teaching sociology tutorials at the same time. These were far livelier and the interplay between the literature and the student's lived experience (and mine too) was far more dynamic. In class and in their written submissions, many students were demonstrating that they could articulate the relevance of the course to their ‘real life’. Yet, in the Indigenous focussed anthropology there was little evidence that the material was applicable for students in the same way. In anthropology, student

presentations grated against my sensibilities of Indigenous culture based on my New South Wales coastal experiences, but I realised this arose in no small part from the recommended material I was presenting through the course.

I had also come to better understand the student motivations for taking the course. They were **not** taking the course to pursue a career in anthropology. They were predominantly White education students who were responding to the emphasis placed on their role to implement the Aboriginal Education Policy (1996), in particular the mandatory Aboriginal perspectives required from Kindergarten to 12. My courses were seen as having a potential twofold benefit. Firstly, they might provide them with some ideas to apply Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. Secondly, many considered a course whose title referred to Aboriginal culture would look good on their transcripts and enhance their possibilities of employment. In general, the courses I was teaching were not tailored in any way towards facilitating the student's desired outcomes. When I discussed this with senior colleagues I was presented with a range of suggestions that emphasised the need to remain true to a disciplinary focus. In one way, this intellectual integrity made a strong argument. In another, as the university system was part of the trend towards the global McDonaldisation of education (Hartley, 1995, 409), with an increasing emphasis on credentials and a desire for new flexible teaching methods (Phillips, 2005). In this context, it appeared to me that clinging to disciplinary purity in this context, coupled with an increased student autonomy choosing subjects could lead to greatly diminished numbers and a perceived lessening relevance. Student comment was leading me towards a greater consideration of **what** I was teaching. As Giroux argues,

If cultural critics were more attentive to what is taught in professions such as nursing, social work and education, they might become more aware of the effect of such teaching on the thousands of teachers, health workers, and community members who do battle on health care, social service and the public school fronts... What silences will have to endure in the debate on higher education before academic intellectuals are dismissed as irrelevant, even though much of the work that goes on in institutions of higher education directly impacts thousands of students whose work concerns public issues and the renewal of civil society (Giroux, 1997, 258-9).

Nursing, social work and education comprise the main areas of employment for the students I teach. It is relevant to note that each of these areas were relatively new additions to the university institutions in Australia, having previously been taught in more vocationally oriented colleges and TAFE. Having entered the University as a student in 1990, the year of amalgamation between the University of Newcastle and the Hunter College situated next to it, these areas were part of my 'taken-for-granted' experience of University life. For many of my colleagues however, their experience as lecturers predated the inclusion of these groups and they had developed their pedagogies in a university world that was almost as alien to me as it was to the new students. It was through the discovery of critical pedagogy that I was able to develop a new framework in which to teach and that was to ultimately effect my research too.

Reading a text that made reference to Paulo Freire, led me to his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). This work was really challenging, particularly to someone who had not previously thought in any depth on **how** one teaches, I had merely been replicating what I had experienced, without giving consideration to the race, class and gender dimensions of the learning environment. I recognise now that those I was copying were "inside" the academy, whereas the position of the Indigenous lecturer is often as Kaomea (2001, 67) notes "partially as insider and partially as outsider within both the academy and [the Indigenous] community". *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* served as an introduction to the area of critical pedagogy. This made me realise that as a novice teacher I was censoring myself and rigidly adhering to what I was wrongly interpreting as 'correct' methods of teaching, with neither the confidence nor experience to provide any of the flexibility that my mentors were able to achieve. As such, I was teaching in a manner that was reproducing Western patriarchal hegemony in what was in many instances an authoritarian classroom. In contrast, I could see that the sociology tutorials operated in a far more democratic and innovative manner. This was in part due to the fact that I was incorporating and valuing the student's lived experience in the sociology class, but there was little in the anthropology classes to allow students to make the same connections.

As a consequence of desiring to teach within a framework that is consistent with student needs and consistent with my understanding of Indigenous perspectives I have since engaged in a process that constantly reworks my teaching. This involves three key facets; being personally and professionally reflective; positioning myself within sociology but augmenting this discipline with a multi-disciplinary literature base from the areas of Educational philosophy, Aboriginal studies, cultural studies, history, anthropology, theology and linguistics that support my understanding of marginality generally and Indigeneity specifically; and re-evaluating the classroom dynamics of teaching. It is these facets that are also integral to this thesis.

One of the most empowering elements of critical pedagogy is the emphasis placed on teachers being reflective (Kanpol, 1998). When I chose to undertake a reflective exercise one of the first things I did was a series of mind maps with the weekly topics at the centre. My additions were based on the way in which I personally felt connected to the topic, a process I found liberating as well as instructive. For example, when I thought about missions<sup>3</sup>, I had actually been to missions to visit my family and heard mission stories as part of our oral history. On the topic of land rights, I had been on the committee of a land council, lived in the local area and witnessed the racism that was directed towards land council initiatives. I personally viewed certain sites as ‘sacred’; spoke Aboriginal English at home; had been to conferences that placed the Indigenous experience in an international context. I had first-hand knowledge of Aboriginal education in schools, as a student, and in professional and advisory capacities. I had worked for the Department of School Education in two contexts, as an Aboriginal resource person and as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, and held an executive position for several years on the Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). Yet, I had devalued myself because I hadn’t done any ‘fieldwork’ and immersed myself in a discreet ‘community’ recognised as authentic by the anthropological discipline! Critical pedagogy provided me with the tools to see this as patently absurd. Finding this new perspective that gave me the concepts and language to recognise and name some of the discomfort that I had experienced engaging with anthropology. I could see that I

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Missions’ is a generic term applied to both Christian missions and state reserves initiated under the various Aboriginal Protection legislations. In NSW, this was done under the Aborigines Protection Act 1909.



had been inculcated to believe that cultural study was only relevant if mediated through the institution, which in practice was another way of continuing to colonise. It was a powerful shift to see that while universities may adjudicate on my credentials as a scholar, it is family and community that determine my rights to speak (McMaster, 2005, 9) as an Aboriginal person. What I needed to reclaim was not only a sense of, but also respect for (Lyall, cited in Riecken, Conibear, Lyall & Tanaka, 2006, 11), the Aboriginal knowledge that I had learnt in non-academic settings. Although critical pedagogy has been critiqued as having limitations in the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, its benefits when melded with Indigenous aspirations have also been acknowledged (Lee, 2006, 6-7).

For me, critical pedagogy posed the challenge:

This is a great discovery, education is politics! After that, when a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favor of whom am I educating? By asking in favor of whom am I educating, the teacher must also ask against whom am I educating... After that moment the educator has to make his or her choice, to go farther into oppositional politics and pedagogy (Freire in Shor & Freire, 1987, 46).

I then had to consider: What ultimately is my role? Is it to provide students with a textually based, disciplinary pure means of analysing the 'Other'? Or, is it to use the discipline to equip students for their professional role, to give them the tools to critique the world of their lived experience? (McTaggart, 1991, 3). The way I was teaching was a 'transfer-of knowledge pedagogy' (Ibid, 122) that did not invite an anti-racist consciousness. In fact, it did not encourage students to recognise their consciousness as racialised at all. While Australian anthropology's pursuit of the 'Other' maintained the dichotomy Black/White, it also predominantly removed the urban situation from consideration as a legitimate issue, maintaining its domain on the remote and/or exotic. Racism through this lens is what occurs on "the Frontier", it is the province of rednecks and the Far Right and is recognisable by overt acts of such vehement mean-spiritedness that any 'rational' observer must reject them (Lattas, 2001, 108- 112). In contrast, the urban student, who knows no Aboriginal people, deplores overt racism and often employs an argument of "ambivalent" racism framed

in egalitarianism to explain how Indigenous peoples deserve no 'special treatment', assumes a position of moral superiority (Tuffin, 2008, 592). As such, many students continued to see racism as discrete from their lives, it is entirely performative not discursive. As such, if they are not performing racist acts they saw their classroom practice as needing to be race neutral, not anti-racist as a means of achieving a socially just society. This is problematic because race 'neutrality' in practice tends to unconsciously reinforce the normalisation of the white mainstream, acknowledging disadvantage but ignoring race privilege; erasing the complex dynamics that are part of both foundational nationalism and contemporary life (McMaster, 2002, 152).

The tension created by negotiating these issues does not seem to be able to be reconciled within an anthropological gaze. As such, while anthropology has assisted greatly to shape me as an intellectual, I recognise now that my disciplinary path leads elsewhere. In sociology, I can more easily pursue a research agenda consistent with my lived experience. As Rothman (2005, 10) states

More and more sociologists are doing just that: mining our own lives, our own experiences. Just as the anthropologists have moved closer to home, losing some of their fascination with exotica and exploring their own locales, sociologists have moved in closer as well. But for us, it was never about sailing off to some island somewhere -- we were always exploring close to home. Increasingly, though, we've come closer and closer, turning our sociological eyes on our own lives.

This was a dynamic field for me because it was engaged not as a discreet "trip" but as an everyday practice of "teaching the field" (Corsin-Jimenez, cited in Fechter, 2003, 1). In this, it is a form of "action research" and remains consistent with an Aboriginal worldview because as Hughes (2000, 1) notes the "indigenous (sic) community action cycle of aims, actions, observations and stories corresponds to the action research cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect". In many ways this process is still constituted on Otherness: between my students and me; Western and Indigenous knowledges; and representation and the lived experience, yet in contrast to what I perceived as the anthropological field I have far greater power to shape rather than describe its contours. The sociological commitment to enacting social change, revealing and addressing social inequality (McLaren & Mayo, 1999), finds a synthesis with the

Indigenous imperative for a socially just society. As an everyday practice, which can be reflected upon, teaching through a sociological lens can in itself be an ongoing lived research methodology.

Working through the sense of confusion associated with the dynamics of the field and finding an appropriate methodology has meant a refined sense of purpose and appreciation that the

purpose of research is not the production of new knowledge, per se.

Rather, the purposes are pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency, the production of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, a performative pedagogy that resists oppression (Christians, 2002, 409).

This recognition led me to a different research and teaching agenda that also uses a combination of story through auto-ethnography and tribalography as key methods.

### **Autoethnography, Tribalography and Story**

Auto-ethnography, generally defined refers to an “emergent ethnographic writing practice [that] involves highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (Holt, 2003, 2). Although regarded by some in the academy as “self-indulgent and narcissistic”, I would argue to the contrary that auto-ethnography represents an in depth reflexivity, where the author aims for a fuller critical comprehension of their own position within a particular milieu. It is helpful for articulating the interplay of many features of memory, performance and reflection (Akindes, 2001; Jewett, 2006). Auto-ethnography is particularly successful at articulating practices or knowledges that have been marginalised in the academy, deemed not worthy of academic contemplation at all or as the subject of alterity. Indeed, some of the auto-ethnographic work that I have found the most compelling challenges both of these aspects, as authors grapple with the position of being simultaneously insider/outside and of the fear of rejection that their unorthodox subjects and methods may provoke (White, 2002; Ricci, 2003).

Auto-ethnography extends on the notion of participant observer where the emphasis is placed upon the author's perception of their participatory role in “attempting to discover the culture of self, or of others through self” (Ricci, 2003, 593). Its application covers a broad range of areas from involvement in sport to teaching within a variety of pedagogic settings including adult education (Nichols, 2004; Townley, 2007; Dyson, 2007; Jewett, 2006). “The highly reflexive approach of auto-ethnography, making visible the development of my own thinking and practice in all its fluidity and ambiguity, allows me to look at the threads that make up the different stories that I tell to explain myself to start to unpick them, to see where they have come from and where they take me” (McCann, 2002, 25). What reoccurs consistently in the range of auto-ethnographic literature referenced in this section is a fear of having the work rejected. This is counterbalanced by a conviction that to speak in another homogenised narrative would damage the integrity of the text. In fact, many of the works based on critical pedagogy where the author considers their role both as teachers and as libratory thinkers are consistent with the auto-ethnographic genre (Autrey, 2003; Dyson, 2007).

In this way, auto-ethnography opens up a range of possibilities for me that did not seem available via an orthodox anthropological or sociological approach because there is no sustained tradition within either Australian anthropology or sociology that considers teaching practice. Instead, rather than formally venturing into the Indigenous community to return data on them to the academy I am examining the academy itself considering the institutional practices of representation a legitimate field of enquiry. Interacting with students, who are Othered from me in a variety of ways, and using auto-ethnographic methods to reflect on our interactions and modifying my teaching as a result has become an extremely sustaining part of my job.

There are many elements of auto-ethnography that I find useful. Yet, the discussion of self, framed within this terminology “auto”- failed to fully contextualise my position. I struggled to name the nature of the flaw. Perhaps, I thought, I am too prepared to feel discomfort. Moreover, while auto-ethnographic methodology has been used as a means through “ which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonisers’ own terms” (Pratt, cited in Ruckel, 2005, 4), there is also a need to represent ourselves in our own terms (Smith, 2003), which in this case

is through ‘story’. What I have often noted in the Indigenous literature is a deliberated means through which many Indigenous authors use a story narrative form that can be viewed as an extension of oral history in that it embraces rather than excludes the personal, moving the author and their family and community from the margins (Martin 2002).

As such, I think that this reveals a gulf of narrative between Indigenous and non-Indigenous styles. What stands against the inclusion of ‘story’ is the Western academic pejorative process that reduced the ‘story’ from its historical position as the bearer of culture and knowledge to fables, reduced to children’s bed time recitations, allegory, deemed as fanciful (Butler-McIlwraith, 2000). Moreover this transition reflects a critical shift in who speaks and how knowledge is passed on, movement away from the inclusive interactive performative aspects of the story, where song, dance and art illuminated the collective wisdom and history (Lyall, cited in Riecken, Conibear, Lyall & Tanaka, 2006, 11). The institutional capturing of this discourse by clergy and academy reflects their growth in power to control both the sacred and temporal, with clergy to be the only legitimate mediators with God and academics the mediators of worldly knowledge (Phillips, 2005, 3). This has remained as part of the “cognitive legacies of imperialism” (Slemon, cited in Turcotte, 2003, 1). The internalisation of this coupled with scientific racism feature prominently in the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledges and must be challenged.

Following Spivak, it is important to recognise that “the real demand is that when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism” (cited in Smith, 1999, 71). To do this I needed to evaluate and adopt a position that I believe to be consistent with an Aboriginal perspective. As such, I am consciously making a claim in this thesis for the recognition of the ‘story’ as a legitimate means of expression within the academy, employing the meaning consistent with Indigenous usages. This privileging of the story was partially motivated by reading a powerful piece by Choctaw author, LeAnne Howe (1997). It was based in part on her experience on a university-sponsored visit to Israel. At one point in the story, a Jewish-Israeli settler confides that she has a Cherokee ancestry. She invites Howe to dinner, negatively comparing the commitment of ‘Indian’ resistance to that of Jews. I want to quote Howe’s story at length, as I will do with

other authors because I want to give a fuller context of what these authors are saying not simply my interpretation of them.

" And then what happened?" she asks. "You promised to tell me your history."

[Howe replies] "After the war ended between the British and the French in 1763 Indians in the Southeast couldn't make the foreigners do anything. Soldiers went AWOL and married into our tribes. No one wanted to live in Paris or London anymore. That's why so many Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws and Cherokees have British and French last names.

In 1830, after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed, the Choctaw are the first to be removed from our ancient homelands. Many walked all the way with very little to eat or drink. The road to the Promised Land was terrible. Dead horses and their dead riders littered the way. Dead women lay in the road with babies dried to their breasts, tranquil as if napping. A sacred compost for scavengers."

She stokes the fire to keep it from dying, and I know the more revolting the details, the less she believes me. Finally she says. "You are exaggerating."

"Perhaps. But four thousand Choctaws died immigrating to Oklahoma."

"It is late," she says, ignoring my facts. "Time I returned you to your hotel. I'm sure your husband is waiting for you."

"But you said you wanted to know about my history?"

She gives me a fishy look but agrees. "Very well."

"It's no accident that there are sixty-six Indian Nations headquartered in Oklahoma. Oklahoma or Indian Territory was a forerunner of Israel.

Choctaws were the first to be removed there, other Indian tribes from around country soon followed. We were supposed live together in peace. Form relationships. It wasn't easy, but for the most part we did it because we do not idealize war. However throughout the nineteenth century more and more whites moved into Indian Territory. Followed by missionaries and lawyers who began converting us, or swindling us."

"Then on April 22, 1889 the American government opened the unassigned lands to the whites. When the trumpet sounded, the Run of 1889 began. It was estimated that twenty thousand immigrants were waiting at the border

to stake their claims. Today the Run of 1889 is an annual celebration in Oklahoma. Like a holiday."

"I thought you were going to tell me your story."

This was the point of my epiphany. Howe was telling *her* story. Through Indigenous oral traditions, She/I/We are conditioned to consider the history of our respective peoples as *our* story. The collective identity allows for events in which we were not physically present to be as, if not more, important in our construction of self. This contradicts the Western intellectual tendency towards valuing dehistoricised individualism. As such, while I could never feel completely fulfilled in a narrative of ethnography or auto-ethnography, what Howe terms tribalogy meets my needs when speaking from the position of an Aboriginal sociality.

Howe describes Tribalography as follows:

When I write fiction, poetry, or history (at least the kind of history I'm interested in writing), I pull the passages of my life, and the lives of my mothers, my mothers mothers, my uncles, the greater community of chafachúka ("family") and iksa ("clan"), together to form the basis for critique, interpretation; a moment in the raw world. My obligation in that critique is that I must learn more about my ancestors, understand them better than I imagined. Then I must be able to render all our collective experiences into a meaningful form. I call this process "tribalogy" (Howe, cited in Hollrah, 2004, 214-15).

When I engage in Western literature about Indigenous people I am so often discomfited, able to see ways in which there is relevance to my perspective but almost always requiring some form of change that develops from an insider's position. Tribalography creates more than a framework for my discussion; it also represents a space of safety and comfort as I find the work of Indigenous authors so often does. While Howe names the process tribalography it is a reflection of many other Indigenous works. The strong body of literature in this area by Maori academics is empowering (Smith, 2003), as is the literature from Hawaiian scholar Kaomea (1999). It will not lead to a discreet body of work, but is rather an ongoing part of a holistic

extended kinship network where both birth and association have placed me. I draw strength from other Indigenous academics that acknowledge similar thoughts:

The journey has been long. It started long before I was born and will continue long after I am gone necessarily making my journey a life-long one. It is one of cultural and linguistic survival. I am a product of colonisation. As such my story is one of struggle and resistance against the insidiousness of colonialism and all its guises - not necessarily for myself - but for those who travelled before me and those who come after me, particularly my five children (Skerret-White, 2003, 3-4).

I considered a similar theme in a paper written for the Indigenous Researchers Forum (2004) and also with my mother in our 2004 paper for the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies* where we discussed the dimensions of the loss experienced by Jane King, one of the Stolen Generations. In discussing our approach we wrote:

In critically considering the nature of Jane's loss, we realised that we held a highly subjective position stemming from our experience. We initially tried to apply notions of reflexivity and limit our presence in the text, but the result was a sterile analysis that captured neither the grief we felt for all the 'Janes', nor the joy we found in the remembrance of our grandmothers. Eventually we acknowledged that as the text is a 'cultural production' (Lee, 2000, 201), it is reasonable that texts by Aboriginal authors should reflect our culture rather than replicating white forms, a process that has already been initiated by many other Aboriginal women such as Sally Morgan, Jackie Huggins, Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Wendy Brady (Moreton-Robinson, 2002). Therefore we have chosen to embrace rather than reject our recollections of our grandmothers, placing them at the centre of the paper, rather than at the periphery. From this our task is to release our narrative in a form that respects and empowers the Aboriginal experience, while interrogating our life histories. We consider that it is only in this context that our comments on Jane's life are meaningful (Butler-McIlwraith & Butler, 2004, 5-6).



We continued through this paper to tell ‘stories’ about our grandmothers as means of revealing the depths of Jane’s denial. Some of our listeners and readers felt that we needed to provide more analysis of the nature of loss and denial. After considerable discussion we decided in the written work that we were not willing to do that. Our reasoning was complex, but our eventual conclusion was that because while at times the Indigenous usage of ‘story’ provides a similar explanatory feature as the orthodox Western narratives, at other times however, it is deliberately obtuse where the meaning is open to the interpretation of the listener/reader. This is an interpretive framework that has had its acceptability pushed to the margins, where this form is only acceptable in art or fiction both of which are constructed (wrongly) as being antithetical to ‘fact’ or ‘good scholarship’. Rothman claims that part of the benefit of auto-ethnography is that “in memoir, the driving force is the story, you want to tell your life. In auto-ethnography, your life is data” (2005, 2). I argue this change in emphasis is a semantic conceit that unconsciously privileges the terminology of scientific rationality, through the pursuit of “objective data”. Further, it is argued that “stories” can be rigorous and deserve to have the recognition as such (Nichols, 2004). Native American scholar, Thomas King (2003, 2) claims, “The truth about stories is that’s all we are”. I agree. The methodological component of this thesis concerns the way that I can tell my ‘story’ about the intersections of teaching and being an Indigenous person in a way that synthesises the narrative traditions of Indigenous and academic origins, demonstrating that these need not be competing. Beyond that desire is a deeper consideration of the processes of critical thinking where I am moving beyond just giving testimony to analysing and reconfiguring my understanding of events within an intellectual framework engaging in both a telling and retelling of stories that shape both auto-ethnography and tribalography.

If we were only to approach autoethnography from a retrospective, representational sensemaking narrative perspective, then we would be omitting what’s most important to us about living story. Living story recognizes the plurality of selves that constitute our identity (Boje & Tyler, 2007, 1).

What I am attempting to achieve in this thesis is recognition of the “plurality of selves” or the “patchwork” (Muncey, 2005) that I exhibit as an Indigenous

person and lecturer in all its messy, overlapping, ruptured inconsistency. This is not where I started in fact in many ways it inverts the research process I envisaged for myself at the beginning of the doctoral journey. I had significant difficulty in determining what narrative style I would apply in writing many sections of the thesis, but Howe's tribalogy has given me the confidence (I hesitate to say permission) to pursue a more personalised, family contextualised narrative. This does not reflect less rigour as I have spent more time considering this than in those sections constituted on a more orthodox academic style. I have tried, where possible, to link my position to a broader literature base and knowledge systems, but it is at times an experience so particular to myself that I am the only source and mine is the only voice.

That's how I *feel* about it all. Emotion doesn't just inform my narrative, it is integral to my narrative. That's what I do and it's what many of us do. In this I am careful to make a distinction that this form of narrative is not the exclusive province of Indigenous people. In 1903, following his groundbreaking work in urban racial studies<sup>4</sup>, DuBois (1970) provided an academic template in *Soul of Black Folk*, stunning in its ability to combine the personal and the academic. Further, while an increasing number of White authors use 'story' as a tool for explaining their perspective, I note that many Indigenous authors do this as a conscious political act, seeing this form of voice as an expression of collective responsibility (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; King, 2003) without fear or apology for labels of possessive individualism (McClaren & Leonardo, 1998) that sometimes concerns White authors.

Graveline, a Metis woman, writes:

As Metis woman, scholar, activist, teacher, healer  
I enact First Voice as pedagogy and methodology  
Observing my own lived experience as an Educator  
Sharing meanings with Others ... (cited in Denzin, 2003, 3).

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<sup>4</sup> The Philadelphia Negro, first published in 1897 (DuBois, 1995).

This thesis and its methodology are about finding and expressing my “First Voice” as an Indigenous educator. As this chapter has shown through its detail of my disciplinary and methodological shifts, I occupy multiple positions and as such I must speak with multiple voices too. Once again, the “contact zone” (Pratt, nd) is a useful metaphor where auto-ethnography, tribalography and story intersect, are layered and support and subvert each other in the overall narrative. It is my journey.

## Chapter 2. Sociological Literature: Reviewing the Silence

While Australian sociology is internationally recognized for its scholarship on class and gender (Skrbis and Germov, 2004), this has not been extended to race and human rights except for the study of ethnicity, led by the outstanding Jeanne Martin (Roach-Anleu, 1999). In Australia, early sociological interest in Indigenous peoples declined with the rise of anthropological dominance of Indigenous affairs. As particular silences have been noted with regard to Indigenous issues (Skrbis and Germov, 2004), to conduct a literature review is a somewhat strange task as it has ultimately become a study on how the silence developed. This is further problematised by the position adopted by Marie Batistte (2002, 2) who claims

In the context of Indigenous knowledge... a literature review is an oxymoron because Indigenous knowledge is typically embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library. The second point is that conducting a literature review on Indigenous knowledge implies that Eurocentric research can reveal an understanding of Indigenous knowledge. The problem with this approach is that Indigenous knowledge does not mirror classic Eurocentric orders of life. It is a knowledge system in its own right with its own internal consistency and ways of knowing, and there are limits to how far it can be comprehended from a Eurocentric point of view.

In responding to these difficulties, this chapter will be limited to providing a foundational understanding of why sociological silences exist. It also considers the limitations of Aboriginal inclusions in the discipline. The remainder of the thesis is partially predicated on discussing how other resources can be introduced to fill both the disciplinary void and attempt to be consistent with the experiential nature of Indigenous knowledges.

Given the interest of the Founding Fathers of Sociology, in using Aboriginal peoples and cultures as part of their scientifically comparative methodology, it has been somewhat perplexing that the Indigenous question should receive so little attention from sociology during the Twentieth Century. This is particularly acute given the

sociological fascination for considering inequality (Alexander, 2007, 23). It is my contention that the sociological disengagement from Australian Indigenous issues stems from the inception of the discipline. The discipline of “Sociology was created by crisis” (Flanagan, 2003, 105) because at the time when the founding theorists of sociology were writing they were responding to the enormous social flux caused as a result of the development of industrial capital (van Krieken, 1990).

Sociological analysis reveals various aspects of the collusion between the state, religion and vested financial interests to utilise various means of Othering as a means to acquire land, legitimised through the use of state resources and force, to create a class of labour where the state acted to mediate the populace as a tractable labour force for capital (Paolucci, 2001, 87). Among the social problems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the growth in suicide, infanticide, child abuse, domestic violence and alcoholism were identified by early sociologists as being direct consequences of this period of social flux. Spatial reorganisation in the private and public sphere, the growth of quantifiable population data, and a burgeoning bureaucracy characterised by specialist professional interventions to treat dysfunction were also noted by sociologists (Kellehear, 1997). Examining these historical developments reveals several salient points regarding the later Australian experience. Firstly, the systems instituted here to dispossess Aboriginal people were neither new nor accidental. They had already been carefully refined in both technique and intention on vulnerable European populations and also in other colonies such as North America. Secondly, the resulting alienation, poverty and marginalisation of Aboriginal people should not be seen as an unfortunate consequence of colonial expansion but a deliberate regime of terror and control where a range of known outcomes could be expected (Morris, 1992). In part, the physical and philosophical movement of Aboriginal people to the peripheries of urban space and public perception would seem to have created an intellectual climate where Aboriginality and sociology’s focus on urban modernity were virtually mutually exclusive. I am also struck by the depiction of social malaise that prompted the early sociologists to write that seems to have eerie similarities to the current “crisis” identified within Aboriginal communities. From this, I wonder whether the late interest in the sociology of Indigenous issues has found currency because the discipline has radically

altered or because the Aboriginal profile can now be seen to fit within the discipline's existing gaze.

Early sociological thinkers examined emerging anthropological data on Aboriginal Australians for its potential to shed light on the origins of man, a quest with undeniably Darwinian overtones (Hiatt, 1996). Contrasting the Indigenous primitive with the European civility extended across the intellectual terrain of the time. For instance, Jeremy Bentham, whose work was to be of great importance to Michel Foucault (Shapiro, 2003), championed the rights of European men because

We know what it is for men to live without government and, living without government to live without rights; ...We see it among many savage nations, or rather races of mankind; for instance among the savages of New South Wales... no habit of obedience, and thence no government; no government and thence no laws; no laws, and thence nor any such thing as rights, no security, no property” (Bentham 1973: 268-9).

Additionally, many early feminists, who were later lauded by sociologists, continued the trend to use Indigenous examples as a foil for promoting the superiority of European culture, while advocating the emancipation of the White working class, and gender equity for White women (Lake, 1994, 80-91). As such, while one could note the presence of the Aboriginal subject in early sociology there was not any development that could be considered sociology *of* Indigenous issues.

Although early sociologists had an interest in using data on Aboriginal people there was not a corresponding development of sociologists conducting their own research in the area. In contrast, anthropology with its focus on the non-Western became a key arbiter on all matters Aboriginal. Many anthropologists were motivated to record the rituals of a dying race, and then settled comfortably into a symbiotic relationship with the state, mediating information about Indigenous people in bureaucratic and juridical domains while maintaining a position of hegemonic dominance as ‘experts’ - ironically a position some anthropologists still cling to (Goodall, 1992, 106). As the

twentieth century progressed, anthropology maintained a stranglehold on its position of expertise crossing from observation to social engineering via influencing policy development and engaging in its practical application. This is comprehensively exemplified by the work of A. P. Elkin, who simultaneously influenced the direction of anthropological enterprise in Australia through his Professorship of Anthropology at Sydney University and his scholarly publications; his advice to the national politicians and bureaucrats entrusted with Aboriginal advancement; and his appointment as the Head of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales (Attwood and Markus, 1999, 15-6). Elkin and most of his professional colleagues saw the future of Indigenous people as the extinction of the full blood and the absorption of the lighter castes into the broader Australian community through a state targeted assimilation policy (Ibid). Following this, most writings lauded the ‘traditional cultures’ and presented urban or fringe dwelling Aboriginal people as having ‘lost’ culture.

The effect of this bifurcation of Indigenous peoples into ‘traditional and urban’ was to have far-reaching effects that continue until the present day (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 75-88). While anthropology maintained its fixation on the Indigenous subject, the Australian sociological enterprise did not pursue Indigenous issues as a field of inquiry. Both common-sense and academic wisdom generally held that Aborigines were a ‘dying race’, relevant to neither a future vision of the nation state nor contributing anything of significance to the myth making of its colonial expansionist past other than as a curiosity to show the evolution of humankind to civilisation. Consequently, the experience of Aborigines, the diversity of their cultures and the persistence of their very existence remained marginal to such an extent it constituted a “cult of disremembering”, where “[w]hat may have well begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale” (Stanner, 1969, 25). Even where contemporary anthropologists have tried to address the anthropological bias against south eastern Indigenous cultures, there has been considerable resistance as evidenced by the incredulous tone of Bain Attwood’s comment that “Cowlshaw, Creamer and Morris reveal the existence of communities in New South Wales who, despite European genetic admixture and an apparent absence of traditional practices, have for generations been regarded, and have regarded themselves as Aboriginal” (Beckett,

1994, 3). Vilification of Gillian Cowlishaw by her disciplinary peers has even descended to the taunt that she is in fact ‘a sociologist’ (Marcus, 1993, 6)!

Within the education system, Stanner’s “cult” reached its zenith wherein Aborigines figured as a “melancholy footnote” (Stanner, 1969, 25) of Australian history, with the majority of representations conforming to the implicit ethnocentrism of Terra Nullius, where Aborigines were present but inferior and subjects but not citizens. Thus curricula highlighted Aboriginal cultures as primitive curiosities of the Stone Age, while pedagogical practices encouraged the Aboriginal student to conform to the inherently ‘superior’ Anglo-Australian norms that constituted entry into civilisation. Following Stanner’s contention, in academic texts, the Indigenous ‘footnote’ was common. Brief mention was made of the prior existence of Aboriginal people and their contemporary poor socio-economic position, but little was offered by way of analysis of Aboriginal culture or positive images (Johnson, 1994, 142). Despite the absence of Indigenous scholarship in Australian sociology, the Indigenous chapter has been a consistent inclusion in introductory sociology texts (see for instance Bessant & Watts, 1999). In general, the chapter has introduced students to a formulaic representation of Aboriginal statistical disadvantage, defined and discussed through as a consequence of individual and institutional racism. Predominantly authored by non-Indigenous people these chapters have been constituted as methodologically and structurally orthodox, with the inclusion of Indigenous voice limited to the occasional supportive quote (Ibid.). One outstanding exception to this is “The Aboriginal Self” in which Julie Finlayson and Ian Anderson reproduce “a discussion between two academics whose histories derive from different sides of the colonial frontier” (1997, 46), meeting Anderson’s desire to make the Indigenous voice “active” rather than “passive” (Ibid). Rather than merging their divergent voices into a homogenized narrative this chapter explicitly employs their separate standpoints, allowing them to be celebrated in, rather than constrained by, the transference to a textual medium.

In the last thirty years of the Twentieth Century there were radical advancements in Aboriginal empowerment within Australian society. Mass media attention, inclusion in the tertiary education sector, legislative and juridical reform all contributed to the emergence of Indigenous issues to the forefront of the national consciousness. Historical debate exploded the previously entrenched colonial fiction of a bloodless



occupation to recognise an invasion with significant casualties in the Unknown War (Cowlshaw, 1992). At the same time, anthropology doggedly continued to maintain its privileged position as the key white experts on Indigenous matters and all Land Rights legislation reflected a bias towards 'traditional' culture and continuous occupation (Jacobs, 1994, 41). Urban Indigenous populations remained marginal to the anthropological field, and relevant to sociologists primarily as a briefly considered statistical quirk in the area of criminology (Cuneen, 1995). Overall, the White academic gaze has been turned rigidly to the Frontier, with urban Aboriginal people considered the aberration within the White Australian domain.

If a new sociological tradition in Australia is developed that encourages a dialogue with Indigenous people, a protocol that I believe should be given primacy is the need to alter the desire to use Aboriginal textuality as the raw data for an analysis that radically alters the meanings. The reasons that necessitate this are complex and speak as much to rectifying the ethnocentrism evidenced at the inception of the discipline, to creating an anti-colonial framework as central to the contemporary Australian sociological theoretical impetus.

One problematic element of the textual debate that is a feature of academic life is that many non-Indigenous academics have been able to utilise the autobiographical work of Indigenous people to provide the raw data for their analysis, without having to engage with Aboriginal people in the first person. This represents a small shift from the Founding Fathers using ethnographic data gathered by anthropologists. **It is not debate.** Most Indigenous autobiographies have not been written within the confines of the academy nor were the academy the target audience (Rowse, 2004). Indeed, many Indigenous autobiographies have come to be used as emotive examples, juxtaposed to the rational theoretical frameworks of the mainstream. The risk is that this perpetuates an ethnocentric division expressed by August Comte, another of the Founding Fathers of the discipline of sociology. In expressing this,

Comte posits the existence of three great human facilities, intelligence, action and feeling, and he declares that each of the three great 'races', white, yellow and black, has uncontested superiority in one of these faculties. Whites are most intelligent,

Yellows work hardest, blacks are the champions of feeling (Macey, 2000, 185).

Indigenous academics from Kevin Gilbert to Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2002, 113-4) have been criticised and dismissed for the vehemence of their response to a white academy that presumes to 'know' about Indigenous people. An antipodean theory based on an inclusionary model should reflect on the way in which Indigenous life histories have been appropriated to exemplify the very traditions of the academy that contributed to Indigenous marginality. Many of the authors of Indigenous autobiography remain peripheral to the academy other than in the position of the ubiquitous guest lecturer acting as the reserve army of labour for White academics to selectively include to handle the contentious obligatory Indigenous inclusion. These Aboriginal voices are drawn from the separate Indigenous unit or from Aboriginal community speakers, whose critique focuses on Western knowledge generally but not sociology specifically. The extent of this as an institutional practice has been identified in Morgan's "guest paradigm", "within which Aboriginal students and their community are merely "guests" in the non-Aboriginal, Eurocentric education domain" (DET, nd). This exists within the earlier schooling system as well.

Conforming to the directives of the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) in the apparent implementation of Aboriginal perspectives, yet also problematic, is the use of Aboriginal people as a resource. An illuminative example of this is the use of Aboriginal life histories. Life histories are introduced into the classroom in three main ways. Firstly, a number of Aboriginal autobiographies and also fictional accounts premised on actual events are included within syllabuses such as English. Audio-visual recordings, which present Aboriginal interviews and 'historic' footage accompanied by critical comment, often support these. These resources can be of great benefit if they are understood as subjective representations, which may be typical of some aspects of the Aboriginal experience, but certainly not all. Further, teachers need to be aware of the mechanisms for evaluating the utility and validity of materials that they are using. Accessing material approved by the peak consultative bodies such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group or the National Aboriginal Studies Project is one means of overcoming this problem (Craven, 1997,

110). Using material that is outdated or not approved can reinforce the very things that the teacher is seeking to overcome.

Secondly, the development of Aboriginal speakers in school programmes, and the utilisation of Aboriginal education professionals (O'Shane, Bickford 1991, 63-5) has allowed for face-to-face interactions. For many the recognition of alternate Aboriginal accounts so long suppressed or ignored is fundamental to educational reform. Further, research shows that this aspect of the Aboriginal perspective is one viewed most positively by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. For pedagogy the teacher sometimes promotes this approach because it forms part of their own re-education, or they believe that Aboriginal best imparts Aboriginal perspectives people themselves with the state fulfilling a supportive function rather than a prescriptive one.

Disturbingly however, some teachers fail to engage with the spirit of policy requirements, consigning some Aboriginal aspects of education as outside of their understanding or effort. Thus the Aboriginal community or more commonly the Aboriginal education professional is called on to fulfil the implementation of positive initiatives in the general field of Aboriginal education. This leads to the overtaxing of Aboriginal peoples within the system in an already under-staffed and poorly resourced area (O'Shane & Bickford, 1991, 63).

The third, and I argue most problematic way in which teachers are accessing Aboriginal life histories however is through Aboriginal students that can have both positive and negative ramifications (Groome, 1995, 111). Many Aboriginal students feel, and indeed are, marginal within the school system. This occurs for a variety of reasons that include non-engagement with western teaching styles, negative stereotyping and indifference by both non-Aboriginal students and teachers. Aboriginal students are often less likely to be called on by teachers and more likely to be labelled difficult (Munns, 1998). It is thus quite shocking for some students to be placed within the position of pseudo-expertise by teachers and other students simply by virtue of their Aboriginality (Groome, 1995, 112). Aboriginal students' non-engagement in conforming to this newly allocated role can also occur as a consequence of numerous other factors. For some being singled out for attention on this basis is unwelcome or shaming (Malcolm, 1998, 139), as evidenced by a Year 9 student who reported "[t]he worst thing about learning about Aboriginal people is...

I'm one of them and when something comes on embarrassing everyone looks at me" (The first of its kind, nd, 72). Other students complain that they are seen as representative of all Aboriginal people which place them in antagonistic relationships with their class who expect them to defend all actions (Anderson et al., 1998, 118).

In attempting to work with rather than appropriate Indigenous voices, some non-Indigenous academics have initiated collaborative research and found this to be as much, if not more problematic than their individual engagement. As a key area within Australian sociology, feminism can be seen to have made attempts to encourage an inclusionary dialogue with Indigenous women although these overtures have been generally unsuccessful (Moreton-Robinson, 2006). Indigenous women's primary textual response has been to critique the universalizing tendencies of feminist rhetoric, rejecting it as founded on an unacknowledged white-middle class privilege that has subordinated Aboriginal women and men. Some particularly rancorous exchanges in the Bell-Huggins debate have exemplified the separation between the White academy and the Indigenous commentators, who despite their position as academics were dismissed as "urban activists" (Pettman, 1992, 129) rather than as intellectual peers. The Bell-Huggins debate further exemplified that collaboration may be beset by two interconnected problems: the empowerment of some forms of Aboriginality at the expense of others and the differentials of power that the two or more people bring to the collaboration (Moreton-Robinson, 2002, 75-6). In critically considering the collaborative process, Schemers and Solomon (2000, 130) comment "We need to consider ways in which we can participate collaboratively and at the same time use research to extend understandings about the tensions and contestation around the construction of knowledge".

Like historians and anthropologists, sociologists, fond of seeing themselves as part of a positive transformative tradition, may find that they have been observed with far more rigour from the periphery than they have shown in gazing outwards towards us. It must be stressed that there are no simple answers to achieving an inclusive sociological body and the Indigenous desire to participate may well run the full gamut from a resounding "No" to an eager "Yes". Never-the-less, consideration must be given to what a dialogue between the centre and periphery will entail. I query whether the centre is willing to become more inclusive or are Indigenous knowledges to

remain the appendices to White thought? It is this question that is fundamental to Critical Whiteness Studies.

Critical Whiteness Studies stem from the work of American academic Ruth Frankenberg, while in Australia Aboriginal academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson has been a key advocate in its use for analysing Indigenous sphere (Nicol, 2004). The fundamental premise of Critical Whiteness is “its ability to name what is so invisible to contemporary ‘white’ majority societies: the racialised nature of power and privilege”(Haggis, 2004, 50). This acknowledgement is linked to a practice of reflection where the White individual is asked to consider “how did I become White”(Brewster, 2005,1)?

Of further import for this thesis is the perspective that the methodological form of autoethnography is considered a valuable means of expressing the culturally critical tertiary classroom (Schulz, 2007, 270). Aveling (2004), Nicol (2004) and Riggs (2004) all interrogate their own classroom practice of Critical Whiteness. Their use of student response demonstrates the destabilising effect that disrupting student perceptions of race can cause. While these are valuable additions to the considerations of an anti-racist classroom, they still do not fully reflect my experience because they rely on the lecturer being able to establish their race solidarity with the students. Nicol (2004) provides an example of how this occurred in her class:

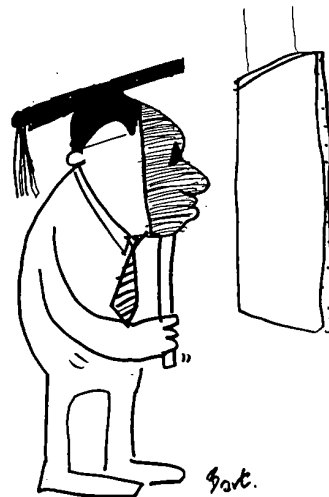
the student looked me in the eyes and asked aggressively: ‘Are you calling me racist’? I was taken aback... I gathered my thoughts to reply to the student: ‘I’m not implying that you are racist, any more or any less than I am. What I want you to consider is that you and I share a common ground as white Australian women and that the subject position ‘middle class white woman’ has not only shaped our heritage but continues to influence our everyday practices.’ Placing us together on the shared ground of whiteness not only defused this particular situation; it also worked against re-inscribing the subject position ‘middle-class white woman’.

Nicol’s solution is not one, which I can apply to my classroom. Much of the literature on teaching Whiteness needs to be seen as a further embedded in the practice of Whiteness itself. Thus, the challenge of Critical Whiteness to

ask – How did I become White is an absurdity for me. As such, in Chapter 4, I take the opposing position and consider – How did I become Black? In considering this question, I have embedded the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2002, 2004) throughout the thesis.

Extending on this I have questioned whether my work is simply an addition to existing sociology or if it integrates the Aboriginal perspective in a meaningful way. I considered this when, despite being pleased in many ways with the foundational inclusion of an Aboriginal perspective into the sociological imagination I still remained uneasy. A cartoon in Djon Mundine's (2005) article expressed my discomfort (see Figure 2.1). In providing an Indigenous foundation for the sociological imagination, was I simply placing a black façade over a body that was premised on Whiteness?

This seemed possible when one looks at many community attitudes and some of the more polemic Indigenous writers who deride the Indigenous academics, particularly those that work in the mainstream. Although Indigenous graduates tend to be lauded within the mainstream and supported by sections of their communities, dissenting, hostile voices from our own communities can also limit the range of options that Indigenous people perceive as being open to them.



**Figure 2.1 Black Mask, White Academy (Bart, in Mundine, 2005, 18)**

The following quotes from Parente, Craven, Munns and Marder's (2003, 15) work on Indigenous student aspirations exemplifies the nature of such restrictions:

I got bashed by me own mob 'cause I want to go to uni. They accuse me of thinking I'm too good for 'em.

If ya get good grades then ya get called an uptown nigger...

Me aunt told me that I shouldn't go to uni because they will only turn me into a coconut [Black on the outside and White on the inside] and no-one would want me to come back.

For Indigenous academics the challenges of reconciling our academic roles with our Indigenous identity are also often problematic. Our roles can be fraught with concerns around our engagement with scholarship and the consequent risk of the loss of the Indigenous cultural self. For example, Indigenous American activist, Russell Means vitriolically refers to those he deems traitors and sell-outs, a category which he includes Indigenous university students and academics. He tempers this assertion only slightly by acknowledging that there may be some who remain dedicated to their culture but who are 'confused on how to proceed' (Lynes, 2002, 1043-6). This prescriptive perspective of a commitment to scholarship being premised on confusion at best and a refutation of cultural identity at worst means we are constantly engaged in defending our position, not only to others but also to ourselves. In contrast, I engage with sociology not because I want to replicate its elements of whiteness, although to work in sociology has meant if not an adoption, at least an accommodation with 'dominant cultural values and practices' (Lynes, 2002, 1046). Yet, even as I attempt to temper these, I recognise that the act of critique itself means that Western knowledge is engaged.

I have needed to anticipate my work will be rejected by some Indigenous commentators as 'politically contaminated' (Monhanram, 1999, 186), by its inclusion of sociological knowledge. Yet I also draw inspiration from many Indigenous authors, who amaze me with the depth of their scholarship and their courage to challenge orthodoxies. I am not constructing a position here that negates the possibility of others developing Indigenous pedagogies or theories based on an exclusionary model, but I am saying these do not have the scope to adequately address all the issues I wish to discuss. My position aligns with Walker (1993) who states

I cannot put myself in the position of the voice of all Aboriginal people. My thoughts are individual and reflect my lifestyle, my learning, my culture and my opinions, and although many other Aboriginal people around the country may relate to my words, mine is only one of many voices.

When I approach sociology I am not strictly a Marxist and I do not slavishly repeat Foucault, but critically and cautiously approach their work. What I have developed through my engagement with these writers, and those who have developed their work, is a syncretic understanding that refuses to be contained within one cultural tradition. I understand that this is a process that can often rightly be criticised for being extrapolated beyond the theorists original intent and used to gain “moral authority” by a “fleeting citation” (Soyland & Kendall, 1997, 9-10) however some of the social sciences' most exciting and controversial work has resulted from such practices. In this, I am attracted by McGee's (2001) description of Jurgen Habermas:

He is a voracious reader of anything and everything connected to the enterprise of social inquiry. And he is quite unabashed in confessing to piracy—not the sort of thievery we condemn as plagiarism, of course, but the bold, imaginative appropriation of parts of theories that strike his fancy and suit his needs. If “taking things out of context” were the great crime scholars sometimes pretend, we would never cross the artificial barriers of the disciplines, we would not cross-pollinate our practices with fresh insights “from the outside,” and we would be the poorer for our condemnation of Habermas' ingenious pilfering.

In this way, I would like to think that my scholarship is modelled on the practice of intellectual marauding in that it provides an exploration across disciplines, incorporating those elements that are relevant to the aims of this work. There is no essentialised demarcation of an externally determined ‘appropriate’ literature based on the author's racial positioning, although this may be a factor in framing my analysis. I, therefore, do not make a claim for the universal inclusion of Western knowledge, but caution that rejecting a discipline, such as sociology, simply because it emerges from a Western tradition does not advance the cause of critical thinking.



Rather, it simply inverts the binary by privileging the marginal and dismissing the mainstream. Instead of working from binaries, I would prefer to use the Indigenous gaze as a way of bringing a different type of critical analysis to Western knowledge. This is consistent with Marie Battiste (2002, 5) who argues,

Indigenous scholars discovered that Indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. As a concept, Indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory -- its methodology, evidence, and conclusions -- reconceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes. Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship. By animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive “other” and integrating them into the educational process, it creates a new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyse Eurocentric education and its pedagogies.

As a result of considering the connection between Indigenous knowledge and sociology, I began to further refine the aim of my academic role. In some ways this seemed a semantic exercise that extended almost to the point of being overly pedantic. In making a commitment to synthesise sociology and Aboriginal perspectives, I felt a need to expand on how I was interpreting Kooriness as a foundation to the sociological imagination. The work of Marcelle Townsend-Cross (2004), a Biripi and Worimi woman was a confirmation of my own beliefs. In discussing a framework for Aboriginal early childhood education, Townsend-Cross uses the Waltja principles to explain the key concepts in Aboriginal knowledges and experiences. The Waltja principles are:

1. *Tjukurpa* - the Dreaming, the Law - prescribes all the rules for living, including rules for ‘bringing up little kids’.
2. *Waltja* - family, extended family, all family - includes all those with whom a significant relationship is shared, including people and animals.

3. *Ngura* - the home, the land, the country, this place - the relationships and connections between people and place.
4. *Kanyini* - holding everything, keeping everything together - the connection to land, relationships (Townsend-Cross, 2004, 4).

Although drawn from Central Australian Aboriginal groups, the Waltja principles are more broadly indicative of Indigenous worldviews across the continent. Certainly, I would argue, they are consistent with my understanding of Kooriness. The centrality of these concepts is further evidenced by a survey undertaken for the Australian Museum by Kelly and Sullivan (1996, 9-10) that aimed to determine the most effective and attractive features for an Indigenous exhibition. In asking Indigenous respondents to rate their preferences for inclusion in the exhibition, family, land and spirituality ranked as the most popular choices.

While initially I felt tempted to try to construct the four Waltja principles as a cross-cultural translation of the sociological imagination's existing concepts I realised that this was doing a disservice to both knowledge traditions. Rather, it is the contrasts in focus and meaning that generate some of the most pertinent comparisons. This is consistent with other academics such as Orion (cited in Baskin, 2002, 11) who believes that it is

Not a translation of one world view to another that is required, but access to the multidimensionality provided by two pairs of eyes.

For instance, Tjukurpa may superficially be comparable to the concept of structure. However, from a structural perspective, religion is but one of many institutions that influence the Western social order. Within many Indigenous frameworks, The Dreaming/Spirituality occupies an unassailed centrality. Further, while the Western concept of History forms a locus of intellectual tradition, this is integral to all Indigenous principles rather than being conceived as a separate theme. I have used the same concepts as shown in the Waltja principles in constructing my teaching.

The lack of identified sociological literature discussing Indigenous issues can be viewed as both a limitation and an opportunity. Should one wish to maintain a disciplinary focus the limitations are great, but if a multi-disciplinary approach is adopted the sociology of Indigenous issues has the potential to offer valuable critique

to other disciplines such as anthropology and to include Indigenous perspectives in a meaningful way. Further, while sociology is a Western discipline, it may still provide a forum for Indigenous academics to speak.

### **Chapter 3. (De)Constructing Aboriginal Perspectives**

Aboriginal identity is a highly contested site in (post)modern Australia. In this chapter, moving between literature review and classroom based auto-ethnography, I am particularly interested in the way stereotypes act to ascribe Aboriginal identity. I then examine the concepts of Aboriginalism, Aboriginality and Indigeneity, three different but interconnected means through which Aboriginal identity is constituted discursively and as a lived experience. The chapter then includes brief consideration of the Aboriginal Education Policy and some of the problematic areas I have identified with regard to its implementation. Finally, the chapter examines visual stereotyping of Aboriginal people in the media, the classroom and wider society.

#### **Which form of identity?**

Currently, in most mainstream Australian educational discourses from Kindergarten to the tertiary level, Aboriginal perspectives are premised on ‘Aboriginalism’ - the hegemonic conception of outsiders (Attwood, 1992) and ‘Aboriginality’ - the legal and bureaucratic legitimisation of the ‘Aborigine’ (Gardiner-Garden, 2003). Based on Said’s model of Orientalism, Bain Atwood (1992, ii) comments that

Aboriginalism in the Australian context disempowers Aborigines because they are made into an object of knowledge over which European Australians, as the dispensers of truth about their needs and requirements gain control. Aboriginalism can, moreover, be seen to have produced the reality it has imagined by influencing government policies and practices... racialising the aboriginal [sic] social body and so making ‘Aborigines’ of the indigenous [sic] population.

The ramifications of Aboriginalism are far-reaching. In teaching there is a danger that positive developments such as ‘Aboriginal Studies’ actually constitute “European

studies of Aborigines” (Groome, 1995, 111). Even amongst so-called enlightened academics, Aboriginalism provides a basis for their perception of Indigenous cultures.

Discourses utilising Aboriginalism operate through the application of dichotomies whereby the objectified Aboriginal subject is scrutinised in ways that attempt to maximise difference from the White Australian self. Skin colour, location, language, spirituality and the performance of these on demand to a White audience, be they tourist, judiciary or teacher, all act as markers of authenticity (Brady, 2000). If these discourses remain unchallenged in the university, then another generation of teachers may replicate them within their classes and welfare professionals may not provide culturally appropriate service.

In contrast to the ways in which Aboriginalism premises Otherness, Aboriginality is entrenched within legislation and institutional regulation. As a codified representation it is less fluid than Aboriginalism, but still changes across differing bureaucratic terrains. Peter Read provides an example:

In 1935 a fair skinned Australian of part-indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being Aboriginal. He returned home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because he was not Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During World War II he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal person. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act - and was told he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not an Aboriginal. He was denied permission to enter the Returned Servicemen's Club because he was. In the 1980's his daughter went to university on an Aboriginal study grant. On the first day a fellow student demanded to know, 'What gives you the right to call yourself Aboriginal'? (Read, 1998, 169).

Today, through the bureaucratic concept of Aboriginality, Aboriginal people are generally perceived as having greater self-deterministic possibilities. The legislative definition for Aboriginality is that an Aboriginal person:

- is of Aboriginal descent
- identifies as Aboriginal within their community
- is accepted by their community as an Aboriginal person (Gardiner-Garden, 2003).

While at face value the current definition appears to empower the right of Indigenous peoples to be self-determining, a closer inspection reveals it still contains an inherent prescriptiveness that has characterised state attempts to regulate Aboriginal identity since colonisation/invasion. To be legally authenticated as an 'Aborigine' one must still rely on recognition and acceptance from those who may be from unrelated Indigenous cultural heritages. The state definition of 'community' and the pedagogical privileging of both 'traditional communities' and 'Aboriginal community representatives' often evidence little resemblance to the varied lived experiences that constitute Indigenous communities today.

For 'proof of Aboriginality' the state empowers the judiciary and Incorporated Aboriginal Organisations to adjudicate on identity in a 'properly constituted meeting'. I have been party to 'proof of Aboriginality' as a claimant and as an adjudicator, neither of which I am comfortable with. In my area, those claiming Indigenous identity must attend a meeting of an Aboriginal organisation. They have to verbally defend their right to call themselves Aboriginal. The group may request them for more information and on many occasions I have seen people sent away to seek more information, more 'proof' before they are accepted. It is rather ironic that a person who has found their Aboriginality via archival searches but who has not been culturally socialised may find their Aboriginality challenged less than a person raised in an Aboriginal family but who cannot 'document' their Aboriginal lineage. Proving Aboriginality is sometimes the means through which an individual, by accessing an Aboriginal organisation gains formal recognition of their status. As some people remain disconnected from a kin-based sociality, membership of an Aboriginal organisation or workplace operates as a kind of fictive kinship.

While Indigeneity is unquestionably influenced by both Aboriginalism and Aboriginality, it includes a representation of context-based micro identity that extends

from the family to the extended family, nation or ‘tribal’ group to a pan-Indigenous identity. Indigeneity is often engaged in the private domain and is likely to contain knowledge and practices that are not made available for public scrutiny. This may include those aspects of life that can be described as secret or sacred or other beliefs and behaviours that while more mundane are still considered private. The notion of the Indigenous right to privacy needs to be juxtaposed to the West’s incessant badgering of the ‘right to know’. As previously discussed, this reveals the depths to which scrutinizing, surveilling and interfering into Indigenous lives has become a normalised practice in both the mainstream Australian psyche generally and the Academy specifically. Further, Indigeneity is generally premised on action to serve the needs of the collective rather than the individual.

The three models of identity, Aboriginalism, Aboriginality and Indigeneity that I have discussed are not experienced discreetly. Many Indigenous people operate multiple subject positions with regard to Indigenous identity. In contrast to the state definitions, Indigeneity or Aboriginal identity as a lived experience can be constructed according to kinship and affiliation to country. Moreover, many Indigenous communities have mechanisms to incorporate a non-Indigenous spouse (Huggins, Saunders & Tarrago, 2000, 44) or trusted ally into the group by virtue of their involvement in the life of that particular group (DePlevitz, Croft, 2003). This possibility is rendered illegitimate under the bureaucratic requirements of the current authenticating regime and smacks of the continued over-bureaucratisation of ‘Aboriginal’ lives that is deemed necessary through models premised on Aboriginalism and Aboriginality. Therefore, the state retains the right to incorporate into its citizenry individuals who may be from any race or ethnic group in the world. These people may all be *Australian*, yet, it denies the same possibility to bureaucratically unaffiliated Aboriginal people to determine who is *Aboriginal* despite the fact that our sovereign rights in this country have been proved within the White juridical domain to predate and co-exist with those of the modern Australian state (Bachelard, 1997).

This sense of entitlement that White Australia may judge on an individual’s Aboriginal identity seems endemic across mainstream Australia. In 1993, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs John Herron commented, “I speak as an average Australian, a

member of the community, who - like nearly everybody else - has had nothing to do with the Aboriginal community” (Dodson, 1996, 13). Despite this, Herron and indeed the majority of the mainstream have a plethora of discourses on the topic of Indigenous identity.

The penalty for those who fail to manifest an authentic appearance or performance according to these criteria are treated in mainstream education with varying levels of suspicion, scorn and dismissal. As Attwood (1992, ii) commented, in the context of Aboriginalism there is a trend to conflate the identities of all Indigenous peoples under the subsuming colonial category of “Aborigine”. While I do not deny the political utility of the term and its role in the construction of valid contemporary forms of Indigenous experience, it is also a major part of discursive practices that construct the urban Indigenous population as experiencing less authentic forms of Aboriginality, disassociated from country, having “lost” culture. Linked to a philosophy of economic rationalism, pedagogies premised on Aboriginalism become a means of demonising urban Indigenous peoples as illegitimate claimants of ‘Aboriginal special treatment’, diverting funds from ‘real Aborigines’ who are constructed as the deserving poor. By virtue of their physical location that supposedly necessitates a cessation of all facets of Indigenous cultural experience, urban Indigenous disadvantage is positioned firmly as arising from individual pathology. This has the potential not only for moral and philosophical disadvantage at the micro-level in claims to the processes of self-determination in the formation of identity. More broadly it has the potential to disempower and marginalise urban Aboriginal people from contemporary political debates such as Native Title; accurate context-based representations in education; and from equitable participation in Aboriginal consultative bodies. Therefore, the development of pedagogies that problematise the supposed disenfranchisement of urban Indigenous people from ‘culture’ has a clear benefit in empowering us across the many sectors where Indigenous inequity is experienced.

The increasing interest in the provision of “Aboriginal perspectives” in the tertiary courses I teach stems partly from the fact that many of our Teaching students will need to implement the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) when they are eventually school based. As a number of the sociology courses I teach are compulsory for



Teaching students the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives has been required by the School of Education. My knowledge of this policy comes from a combination of experiences as a student and Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer for the Department of School Education, member of the local and Regional AECG, as well as a much later textual engagement with literature regarding Aboriginal perspectives. I was in High School when the first Aboriginal Education Policy was put in place. The development of the A.E.C.G., ASSPA and Aboriginal Homework centres were all positive developments, as were the compulsory Aboriginal perspectives (K-12) that were being implemented. Some teachers taught this in desultory and tokenistic manner, some showed an early enthusiasm undermined by a lack of resources and a minority were both enthusiastic and knowledgeable. When we were doing a unit on Aboriginal history my teacher kept sliding sideways glances at me as if for approval. Further, she called on me to answer every question despite the fact that I had not raised my hand. Surprisingly (to her), I could not supply the required information on Aboriginal people in the sixteenth century, nor in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. While I found this both annoying and embarrassing things reached a head when she began quizzing me on my home life, something she did not do at any time to any other student. In response to the question had I ever eaten traditional food I carefully considered before answering because I had been asked this question before in primary school. On that occasion, in giving the answer “cobra worms” and a description of how they were gotten and how they were eaten I had set myself up for several terms of enquiries at lunch time along the lines of “Is that a worm sandwich”? Bearing this in mind I answered truthfully, “fish”. Her response was “No, I mean traditional *Aboriginal* food”. The class laughed. With all the considerable sarcasm that a fourteen year old has at their disposal I replied, “so you think the British bought fish with them”. This reply earned me a place in the hall to consider my rudeness.

As an adult I am still uncomfortable with this recollection although I am able to critically consider the incident. I now realise that there was a yawning chasm between the teacher and myself in terms of class, as well as race. Further, she constructed her understandings of Aboriginality on a homogenised and homogenising model that was predicated on emphasising Aboriginal difference. While my response was truthful, it did not fulfil her racial fantasy of New World primitivism. She was expecting, and indeed I think stage-managing for the class, an example of the exotic. Not only did I

fail to provide to conform to her racialised dramaturgy, but I also inverted her understandings of what constituted the separate domains of White and Black life. Like many people who are in the dominant group her teaching reflected an ethnocentrism based on the privilege of Whiteness, that Anglo-Australian culture was 'normal' and that it was others who required critical attention and academic curiosity (Brewster, 2003).

As for myself, I now realise that aside from humiliation, much of my underlying hurt stems from the fact I associate fish as integral to my Aboriginal heritage. My mother has told me many times of her Grandfather catching fish for her and her brother; the Aboriginal fish traps are still visible in the bay, as are middens where fish was eaten for generations; our young babies have fish and prawns rubbed on their lips to give them the taste for seafood; fish soup is considered an excellent remedy for the flu and there are other stories, many humorous, which demonstrate that fish in our families past and our continuing lifestyle plays a significant role. Thus, in rejecting fish as traditional, one of the signifying practices of my Aboriginality was publicly denied. This example should not be viewed as an isolated incident, either in my own experience or in the experience of other identified/identifying Aboriginal students.

While the Aboriginal Education Policies have explicitly acknowledged the need for Aboriginal participation in its implementation via the involvement of formal Indigenous bodies such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) or at the micro level with informal localised responses, and an increase in the number of Aboriginal educational professionals across all aspects of the education strata, the majority of grass roots implementation is still the province of non-Aboriginal teachers. Given the immense numerical disparity between 'White' and 'Black' Australians it is not feasible to suggest that the situation will change (Butler, 2000). In schools, Aboriginal perspectives are now, and will continue to be, mediated by those with little or no cultural experience of an Aboriginal sociality and there is a distinct danger that these teachers will either unwittingly or deliberately continue to privilege western constructions of Aboriginality and of ways of knowing and being (Corries & Maloney, 1998, 222-3). Many teachers are presently replicating their personal educational experience and "common sense" understandings of Aborigines, failing to

realise that that as Tickner asserted, “in many ways our [mainstream Australian] text books and our education taught us to be prejudiced” (1993, 13).

As shown in my fish anecdote, teacher expectations of the Aboriginal student response are often grounded in their ethnocentric conceptions of what constitutes acceptable and authentic Aboriginal identities. Thus, whilst some students may be able to provide information on aspects of Aboriginal culture, for others, the type of information sought particularly that relating to language or bush and artefact skills is unknown. This is particularly true for those living within an urban environment or struggling to reconnect with elements of their Aboriginal heritage as a consequence of the stolen generations, mission influences or recent discovery of Aboriginality (Groome, 1995). This can have the unfortunate consequence of publicly labelling the student's claims to Aboriginality as inauthentic, which is a damaging legacy to the student's sense of self that must then be overcome. It is from this personal motivation that I am particularly concerned that my teaching students recognise the discourses and stereotypes that can negatively impact on Aboriginal identity. It is my hope that their classrooms will be places of cultural safety for the next generations of Indigenous students.

### **“Visual Aboriginality” and the trauma of stereotypical judgement**

Although less than an hour drive from Metropolitan Sydney, the Central Coast of New South Wales does not reflect Sydney’s cultural diversity. Neither Non English Speaking Background (NESB) migrants nor Indigenous people have a visibly high profile within the community and students are often explicit that they have “never met an Aborigine” before. Despite this lack of lived experience, which is often coupled with a self-professed lack of textual knowledge, students are willing to pass judgement on whether they ‘believe’ someone is Aboriginal. As such, they often rely on simple visual stereotyping. Deconstructing these stereotypes is a significant aspect of my teaching.

There are a number of key forms that representations of Indigenous peoples take when based on Aboriginality or Aboriginalism. The first of these involves the depiction of Indigenous people that positions them as passive and dependent (Pearson, 2005, 8); the second as violent and uncontrolled (Cowlshaw, 2003, 103-25); the third,

assimilated (Moran, 2002); and the fourth, tribal (Walker, 1993). Yet, these are not accurate depictions of lived experience of Aboriginal people (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, 76). This begs the question “Why? What purpose can it serve to portray Aboriginal peoples in these ways?” I believe the answer lies in the socio-historical process of colonization, and a continuity of Indigenous disadvantage that is maintained through state mediated control over the public deconstruction and reconstruction of Indigenous identity. It is in the assuredness that mainstream Australia assumes a role in this process that reveals the fraudulent nature of a claim to ‘post-colonialism’- a fiction as pervasive as great initial fiction of Terra Nullius. If Australia were truly post-colonial then the state needed to relinquish its legal-bureaucratic control in defining Aboriginality and dismantle those features that are embedded in its structure that both monitor and police Indigenous identity.

Being denied the recourse to the most fundamental form of self-determination, which is the right of self-identification, is a major philosophical trauma. Instead, for Aboriginal people, as for millions of the world’s trans-national Indigenous communities, nation states still frame the terms under which Indigenous identities are publicly scrutinized, where legislative constructions become enmeshed in the domain of ‘public opinion’. While I would argue what has been written or said about Aboriginal people makes a major contribution to this process, visual representations of Indigenous people has been a major tool in the development of racist propaganda about Aboriginal people. Representation, as both Said and Bourdieu have argued are linked to the forms of symbolic violence that it entails (Hall, 2004), yet the media are so rarely called to account for the socially corrosive nature of their manipulations.

For urban Indigenous peoples, the issue of ‘looking Aboriginal’ as a marker of authenticity is a constant minefield to be negotiated. In providing an alternate understanding we are opposed by over a century of scientific rationality that held that Aboriginality could be ‘bred out’ and that physical appearance was the best way to determine this. This assimilationist trope also provided the justification for the removal of thousands of fairer skinned Indigenous children from their families (Haebich, 2004, 284). Such was and is the ethnocentrism of the mainstream ideologies that it is difficult for many to comprehend that an Indigenous person who

looks White would want to continue to claim an Aboriginal identity other than for 'special treatment'.

The cultural presentation of the self is for some an important consideration as it can also become a means through which one's authenticity and commitment to one's people will be judged. John Herron is a useful example again with his comment: "I have seen blue-eyed flaxen haired white Aboriginals in some communities that had been infiltrated once the Aboriginal community had been accepted by the local community... It is a very great problem" (cited in Dodson, 1996, 13). Deconstructing this statement reveal the currency and credibility that stereotyped representations still enjoy shown through the bifurcation between 'white Aboriginals' and the 'Aboriginal community'. Also of interest is the distinction between 'Aboriginal community' and the 'local community'. The language is telling, 'local communities' therefore, are not constructed as spatial but rather racial entities into which Aboriginal people must wait for acceptance. This is a position that receives consistent challenge from Aboriginal writers and speakers. Sandy O'Sullivan's wry comment on our audio CD *Indigenous Reflections* is a case in point:

"You don't look Aboriginal. Really, maybe you don't know what Aboriginal looks like" (O'Sullivan, 2004).

With the perception that Aboriginality should be manifested in a visual way, if not through physical racial typology, then there is an expectation that Aboriginal people will adopt a type of Aboriginal bricolage made up of signifiers of Aboriginality. Some of these are shown in the cartoon by Lindsay and discussed by James (1997) (See Figure 3.1). As with all depictions this can be read at a number of levels, however I believe that there is a suggestion of self-delusion by the figure of modernity seeing himself reflected as the 'traditional warrior'.



**Figure 3.1 Reflection of an Urban Activist (James, 1997, 61)**

Rhoda Roberts also comments on the concept of identity and community constituted on the visual but differs vastly from Herron. She states,

In the Aboriginal community, if someone's Aboriginal and you know their family and the particular community they come from, full stop, end of the road, they're black. Doesn't matter if they've got blonde hair and blue eyes. Now that's really hard for other Australians to accept, that's just the way we are because we've always been like that. But again, for people who were taken and have been raised as white people and then discovered that they have this heritage - that's a very hard thing for them referring to them as being black, and they've got red hair. So there are many issues as we go through that process as a community, but also as a broader community as well (Roberts, 1997).

The reality for many Indigenous people particularly from the South is that we present visually as a broad multicultural mix based on histories of marriage and sexual relationships across the “colour line” (Grieves, 2004). In commenting on the staging of the play *Black Mary*, Rhoda Roberts provides an example of this from a New South Wales context.

It is an Australian story - a love story between an Aboriginal woman and one of our heroes, Captain Thunderbolt... Anyway, they go on to have children, and doing a lot of these interviews and articles, we actually had two groups of family contact us, who said they were related to them. One group's family was related to Captain Thunderbolt and the other was related to Maryanne Ward. Really? We know they both had the same children, so there was one group that identified as white and another group of the family who identified as black...No matter how much we might dismiss it, Aboriginal people and convicts, English settlers who are invaders, whatever you want to call them - forged links. And we never get away from that (Roberts, 1997).

I find Rhoda Roberts' analysis very compelling, as is her sense of self-presentation as a public “Aboriginal” figure. In this I am at odds with Mudrooroo whose critique of Roberts in *Us Mob* (1995, 146-7) is quite scathing. In some ways this speaks to the difference between those whose Indigenous identity is grounded in being part of a nation specific collective as opposed to a pan-Aboriginal one. Mudrooroo comments of Roberts:

One of the presenters of ‘Vox Populi’ is Rhoda Roberts, a Koori actor from Sydney, who after enduring many career changes as Indigenous persons often do, has found a niche in TV on SBS. Along with other ethnics, she has acquired the correct accent - high British - and as she is light skinned and has an English name, it is doubtful many viewers identify her as a Koori, though she is definitely ‘ethnic’. She is one aspect of the acceptable face of Indigenality... which is non-threatening and non-confrontational (Mudrooroo, 1995, 146).

For me, Rhoda Roberts' 'authenticity' is unquestioned. She looks to me like many East coast Aboriginal people. As a Bundjalung woman I immediately recognize her surname Roberts as belonging to a well-known Bundjalung family. My knowledge of Bundjalung connectivity situates her father Pastor Frank Roberts within important rights movements as evidenced in his letter to the short lived *Abo* [sic] *Call*, the newspaper of the Aborigines Progressive Association formed as part of the historic Day of Mourning protest in 1938. I would consider her style of dress and speech appropriate for her professional role as a spokesperson and role model for the Koori community here.

Unlike what Mudrooroo infers, I do not believe that there should be prescription on how Indigenous peoples should dress or speak connected to their Aboriginal identity. Many early activists in New South Wales such as Patten, Ferguson and Groves were extremely articulate men, who dressed in suits and hats in public. Mudrooroo's comment is situated within an Indigenous formulated discourse of derision that demonises those Indigenous people who would seek to be border crossers. This 'correct' way to engage with mainstream can be a source of constant tension within the Indigenous sphere that may extend beyond verbal or textual criticism. For instance, when Rhoda Roberts organised the Indigenous segment for the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics she recalls:

I was getting abusive phone calls and death threats. I would wake up in the morning to find human faeces on my doorstep and notes like, 'I know where your daughter goes to school.' This was from people within the Aboriginal community who were upset that we were going to welcome people to this country for the Olympics. The threats only spurred her on. "I wasn't about to have some Johnny-come-lately tell me I was a sell-out" (SMH, 2003).

A sociological classroom that is considering Indigenous issues needs to recognise the stereotypes that constrain Indigenous people regarding how we look and what it is appropriate for us to do. Primary source materials can also act as a catalyst to make students reconsider the stereotypes that Aboriginal people were inarticulate and politically passive. Photographs are a key way that students can be re-socialised to examine visually encoded signifiers of Aboriginality. One excellent example that



highlights to students the ways in which they have been socialized to deconstruct images of Aboriginal people can be seen in the following newspaper article (Figure 3.2).

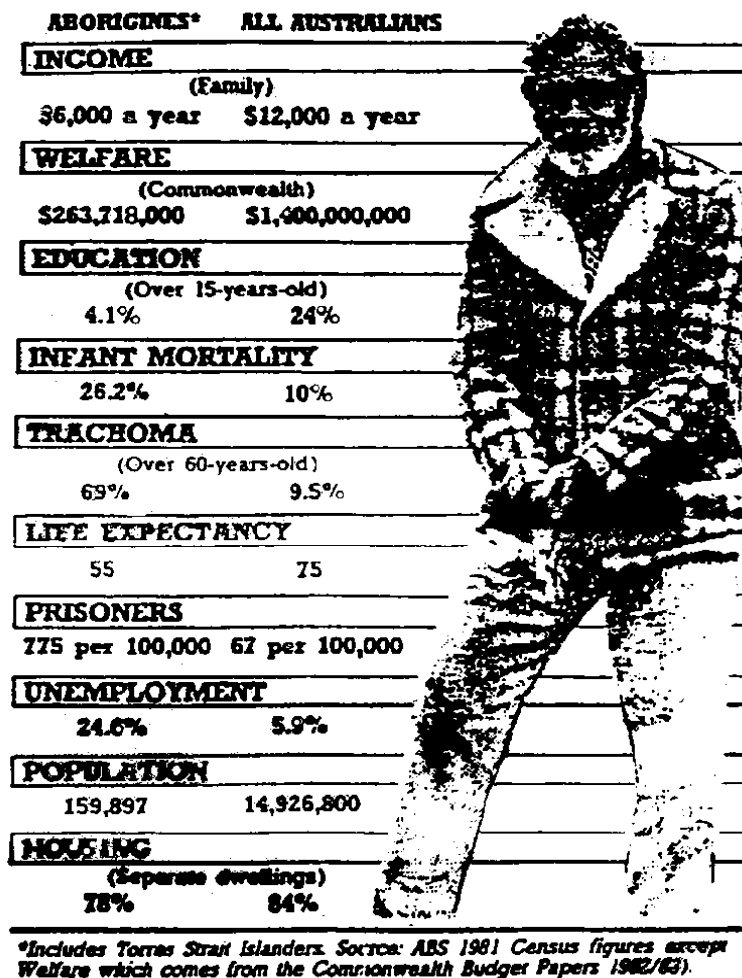


Figure 3.2 Article showing Aboriginal disadvantage

The photograph has been positioned in a way consistent with the Australian media formula that makes statistical comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians with the conclusion that Indigenous Australians present the worst socio-economic indicators of any Australian cohort. The prevalence of this type of reporting has meant that many mainstream Australians are at least familiar with the huge disparity in life expectancies, infant mortality and disease experienced by Indigenous people. The subtext of this message is often focused more on the need for state intervention to

assist a people obviously incapable of dealing with the demands of modernity. Such representation therefore negates Indigenous claims to lessen state interventions and surveillance, and reinforces the status of Aboriginal people as ‘wards’ of the state, a position they were legally emancipated from with the removal of Protection legislations.



**Figure 3.3 Aboriginal Tent Embassy Protesters**

Morris analyses this example, from the Sydney Morning Herald, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1985 of the way in which the Aboriginal subject is manipulated to maximize themes of Aboriginal hopelessness in everyday media practice, drawing on the statistically comparative theme. As Morris argues the photograph is analysed as a “visual metaphor already in place is already coded for public consumption as readily knowable” (Morris, nd, 21). While Morris is not

concerned here with the way in which the figure has been cropped from a fuller image this does interest me, as it is indicative of the generalist means of representing Aboriginal subjects. In this way, Indigenous peoples are consistently presented out of the context of their lived experience. When showing the article to students and asking what the picture signifies the responses always focus on Aboriginal poverty, ill health, dysfunction and possible alcoholism. In the full context of the picture it is revealed the man was part of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a groundbreaking event that changed the nature of protest in the struggle for Aboriginal rights and the recognition of sovereignty. His outstretched hands interpreted by students as “begging” are in fact being warmed over a fire (Figure 3.3).

Like the magician who focuses audience attention on one place while acting to transform elsewhere, the cropping of this image acts to depoliticise the subject in terms of Indigenous relevance and reconstitute it in the image of mainstream interventionist political fodder. As such the void is always readily filled from an accessible stable of stereotypes and the racist logics underlying this process are masked. While this occurs in the ‘everyday’ constantly, it is also visible in the institutional practices. Thus, it was bureaucratically acceptable for Aboriginal children from New South Wales to be removed in the early to mid twentieth century “for being Aboriginal” (McConnochie, 1988). Moreover, it provides an underlying logic to the abandonment of Aboriginal cultures on the following premise: if they accrue nothing of value and lead only to misery why maintain them?

This fill in the blanks approach also extends to override existing frameworks that are meant to guarantee the unbiased consideration of ‘evidence’ within the Australian legal system as highlighted in Morris’ continuing work on the Brewarrina Riot Trial. The prosecution of three local Indigenous men was ‘supported’ by film footage that DID NOT show the alleged crimes being committed. The men’s absence from the film was meant to validate the testimony a prosecution witness. It was argued that as they were headed in the direction of the incident they must be the perpetrators. Despite the obvious flaws in adhering to judicial process, this was accepted as evidence by the magistrate and contributed to the guilty verdict initially levelled at the defendants (Morris, 2001).

This negative prejudging of Aboriginal masculinity is rife within stereotyped perceptions of Aboriginal peoples. In their “natural” state, the Aboriginal man is statesman like, however where forced into settlement he remains an object of pathos. While through one lens, this may be viewed as a sympathetic portrayal it ultimately reinforces colonial tropes that are the foundations for contemporary stereotypes of urban Aboriginality, Aboriginal people are seen to have departed from “a particular Western conception of the purity of tribal life, its unity in space and time, and its “natural” authority rooted in the Dreamtime” (Kapferer, 1988, 142). As a consequence, whether as a fledgling colonial town or a contemporary inner city, Sydney figures primarily as an example of urban pathology, with high rates of criminality, appalling health standards and low educational and employment outcomes arising from the combination of poverty and racism. Until recently, while the outback Aborigines were presented as having similar poor social and economic indicators, they were still lauded for their authenticity, and seen as being in touch with their connectedness to ‘Dreaming’. This has altered vastly with the release of the *Little Children Are Sacred Report* (Wilde & Anderson, 2007) and the Northern Territory “Interventions”. As such, Aboriginal people from both the remote communities and the cityscape are often depicted as the urban wilderness, where the spirituality bereft and dispossessed fail entirely to negotiate the demands of modernity, Black apparitions whose presence ironically signifies danger to the White Australian Self.

While alcohol is recognised as a factor in these community problems it has become a convenient explanation for many students to ‘explain’ Aboriginal behaviours. It can be argued that since early colonial incursions on Aboriginal land, the ‘Aboriginal drunk as spectacle’ has fuelled the development of grotesque images of Aborigines as an uncontrolled public menace necessitating the policing of public space. Many students who enter through the University’s adult entry programme read Kate Grenville’s *Secret River* (2005) and discuss the character of Scabby Bill in this context.

“Scabby Bill was good for business, because for the promise of rum he could be got to dance... Men came from all the streets around, cheered to watch this black insect of a man capering before them, a

person lower in the order of things even than they were” (Grenville, 2005, 92).

The spectacle of Scabby Bill makes sense within the paradigm articulated in Marcia Langton’s (1997) powerfully argued article “Rum, seduction and death”, in which she considers how

the image of the ‘drunken Aborigine’ is a colonial construction [where] alcohol was used to engage Aboriginal people in discourse, to attract them into settlement, in barter for sexual favours from Aboriginal women, as payment for Aboriginal labour and to incite Aboriginal people to fight as street entertainment (72).

While any threat posed by Scabby Bill is apparently neutralised by the provision of rations, the *public* consumption of alcohol by Aboriginal people continues to operate as a signifier in White discourse of Aboriginal inferiority, characterised by a lack of control that comes ultimately to need state intervention. As was argued in the findings of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, laws against public drunkenness have been a major causative factor in the over-representation of Aboriginal people within the criminal justice system (Cunneen, 1995). This began with the criminalisation of both the supply of liquor to Aborigines and of the Aboriginal consumption of alcohol. The former law that was rarely enforced, and indeed did not figure prominently on the national consciousness as evidenced by the Prime Minister offering Kath Walker alcohol in Canberra during one of her tours raising awareness for FACATSI in the 1960’s (Fryer Library, 2007).

The figure of Scabby Bill would be less tragic if it didn’t still exist. Given the student cohorts that I teach, it is important that students confront a range of stereotypical perceptions that Indigeneity entails a visual essentialism through which social phenomena may be prescribed. This was evidenced in a discussion that I facilitated in the subject Aborigines and the Welfare State. The course involves one week’s discussion on the topic of Aborigines and alcohol. This is a particularly valuable opportunity to address the damaging stereotyped portrayal of Indigenous people. These myths include the genetic inability of Aborigines ‘to handle’ alcohol and the belief that, in general, Indigenous people are alcoholics (Kidd, 1998).

In one tutorial where this material was presented, a mature-aged female student took issue with the material arguing instead that Aboriginal male public drunkenness must be viewed as a safety issue for “women”. Her example concerned a recent shopping expedition she made with her teenage daughter to a local malled shopping centre. As she recounted, an Aboriginal man was ‘passed out drunk’ in the centre of the paved malled area [which would be at least 20 metres across]. Concerned, she moved her daughter to the other side of the mall to avoid a ‘confrontation’. Other students were quick to question elements of this story.

“If he was asleep,” asked one student “why were you frightened”?

“Well, he might have woken up and who knows what he might have done.”

“How do you know he was drunk?” asked another student.

“You just know. That’s where they [Aborigines] go to drink even though it’s an alcohol free zone. He was snoring.”

After allowing discussion to continue for several minutes I thanked the student for raising such a thought-provoking example. Without overtly disagreeing with her perspective I began talking about Gillian Cowlishaw’s (2004) contention that acts of public drunkenness, verbal and physical violence may also be actively employed by some Aboriginal people as defiant statements against White hegemony. Significantly though this is a tactic employed not only by Aboriginal people but also by other marginalised groups, whose peripheral status is not racially predicated (d’Abbs, 2001). I also present though, that there are many examples where Aboriginal people had been suffering from acute health problems such as stroke and diabetic coma highlighting the dangers of assumption, citing examples where Aboriginal people have been subject to poor health care, or indeed complete denial of care, due to the belief that they were drunk. The 2006 incident where an Aboriginal Elder in Residence at Griffith University lay in the gutter for five hours after a stroke before being assisted by foreign students highlights the racialised nature of this occurrence. It is difficult to imagine that an elderly non-Indigenous woman would not have attracted both attention and aid in the same situation (Boyle, 2006).

In considering these cases I am reminded of my Grandmother’s experiences in inner city Sydney where she sought treatment for jaundice. She returned home untreated

having been dismissed by the doctor with the words “Go home and lay off the grog Mrs Webb”- advice that did not remedy the situation as my Grandmother was a rare social drinker. I remember hearing this story as a young adult and questioning why my Grandmother didn’t challenge the doctor. To me, in our domestic sphere, and within the Aboriginal community that I saw her engage with she was strong and respected. I couldn’t conceive of her as disempowered. Working through these issues within a classroom has led me to a different understanding of my own family’s history as well.

A case study that I have included in a number of subjects relevant to this area concerns the life story of Warren Braedon (also known as Louis St. John). Removed from his Aboriginal mother in Alice Springs and made available for adoption despite her protests, Warren Braedon was adopted by an English couple in Western Australia. Raised within the middle class white society of his adoptive parents, Warren’s ‘Aboriginality’ appears to have rested entirely upon the externally imposed criteria of state and mainstream community rather than a lived cultural experience. Racism experienced within the classroom and within the general public sphere arose from prescriptive assumptions, such as the teacher’s belief in an inherent deficit in Warren’s intelligence and behaviour. While this had ramifications in terms of Warren’s school performance and certainly had psychological effects, visual Aboriginality was to eventually have fatal consequences. After a teen party that included underage drinking, Warren lay down at the edge of a road. A group of White youth, some of whom had neo-Nazi affiliations, ran over him with their vehicle, choosing him as their victim because of his perceived Aboriginality. Ambulance officers, delivered Warren to his home, on the taken for granted assumption that his condition arose only from the effects of intoxication. Warren lapsed into a coma and died the following day as the result of his injuries (Haebich, 2000).

In the spirit of maintaining the classroom as a zone of safety and encouraging students to articulate their beliefs and potentially address stereotypes it is important that students do not feel that they will be under attack for speaking. Alternatively, with regard to knowledges themselves Chatterjee (2000) makes an excellent point:

If I am to make what I teach critical and meaningful then my task is to jostle assumptions about what constitutes our perceptions of

otherness by not locking them into the distance of the picturesque.  
The task is not to create a zone of safety within which knowledges  
of difference can be easily apprehended.

These anecdotes have built to a repertoire of examples that over time I have been able to introduce to lectures. This has appeared to be beneficial as it introduces beliefs that students may have, and deconstructs them, while depersonalising them. These discussions have greatly influenced my approach to teaching about racism generally, but interactions with the health system in particular.

This chapter has been concerned with the way that “Aboriginal” perspectives are deeply affected by how one defines what it means to be Aboriginal. It has argued that there are major difficulties in trying to negotiate the bureaucratic and stereotyped definitions as opposed to the lived experience of the Aboriginal Self. In particular visual stereotyping has been shown as a potent force in negatively prejudging people who claim Aboriginal identity but do not conform to an expected ‘look’ and those who ‘look’ Aboriginal and therefore judged as deviant. I am also interested in reflecting on how ideas of visual prescription impact when this colonised gaze is turned on my own body as well, which will be a focus of Chapter 4.



## **Chapter 4. Why my family don't "dress like Aborigines"**

While Chapter 3 discussed the general principles behind the varying discourses that circulate in the public domain on Indigenous identity, Chapter 4 extends on that conceptual framework through the use of tribalogy.

While the relevance of this to pedagogy may not be immediately obvious, as my 'Kooriness' is a foundation of my sociology teaching it is imperative that I demonstrate how my identity is constituted. Of further critical import is explaining how students have interpreted my Aboriginal identity and in turn how this has influenced my self-presentation as an educator.

Methodologically, the chapter uses a synthesis of auto-ethnography and tribalogy. As such it is highly experiential. This is significant because as Moreton-Robinson (2004, 76) argues

Knowledge can be acquired outside experience but knowing is also connected to experience and understood in relation to situated acts of interpretation and representation.

I remember a high level Indigenous academic in the 1990s, who used to be invited to give the guest lectures on Aboriginal issues into mainstream first year classes. She would be well dressed in the Koori centre and as it neared time to leave for the lecture she would go and change into casual gear sometimes even stained and stretched out of shape, a 'dressed Aboriginality' if you like. She would remove her expensive leather shoes for tatty slip-ons or no shoes at all. Her speech would change in structure, pronunciation, and the f-word would make a sudden appearance. Off she would go to 'show the Gub's what Blackfulla's think'. Some people found her work confronting and walked out, others loved it. I know of a man who had worked for the betterment of Aboriginal people for 30 years who felt insulted and demeaned. As Goffman might argue, it's all about the dramaturgy of self-presentation (Crabbe, 2006).

When I look at my family, my elders, they seem to have managed to have lived lives full of a quiet cultural integrity without the politicised dramaturgy. My Nan disliked the combination of red, black and yellow for aesthetic reasons, saying they didn't go together. Moreover she rejected the pan-Aboriginal slant that the colours symbolized

the colour of the earth. As a coastal dweller that grew up on the shores of Port Stephens, Nan couldn't equate the red dirt and harsh yellow sun with her country. In thinking of how she passed this attitude on to her family, I chuckle when thinking of my mother attending an international Indigenous conference overseas. Emerging from her room dressed neatly in blue clothes, when the party was ready to go, the other Australian delegates all dressed in red, black and yellow asked if she needed to time to change into "the colours". "No", she replied, "I know who I am".

As a result of this socialisation, I don't present a visually stereotypical Aboriginality at work that is particularly overt. I might on occasion wear a small pin with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on it. Even more rarely, if dressed casually for a particular reason, I might wear an Indigenous t-shirt, generally with slogan. My favourite is as an AECG shirt from the 1990's that proclaims, along with a stylised logo including the Aboriginal flag "Involvement in education means determining our future". It is far more likely that I'll be dressed in smart casual, a flared pair of long pants, plain shirt and leather shoes. Given that I was neither presenting visually as 'Aboriginal' nor teaching in a designated 'Aboriginal' course, I failed to realise that this in itself signified to many students that I WASN'T Aboriginal. This was brought home to me in a series of first-year lectures in societies and cultures.

This was a first-year sociology lecture to 160 students, predominantly white teaching students who will one day implement the mandatory Aboriginal perspectives in schools. Although I did do an acknowledgement of country I didn't specify my heritage in the first lecture at all because it didn't occur to me. I'd never had any Indigenous lecturers as a student and none of my lecturers had identified themselves racially in the first lecture. I talked about the 'sociological imagination', the Founding Fathers of Sociology. It's supposed to be an easy lecture, accessible to students nervous on their first week in the subject. Critical thought reduced to the metaphor of Mars Bar, yes that's right, a Mars Bar. I had a student who told this story in a tutorial presentation and I've adopted and adapted it. It goes like this...

A woman walks into a cafe and sits down at the counter. She orders a cappuccino and a Mars Bar. She relaxes as she sips her coffee then reaches out opens the chocolate and takes a bite. There's a man sitting next to her and he glares at her, snatches the chocolate and takes a bite. She gives him the death stare, snatches it back and takes

another bite [I know, that's a bit gross], he grabs it back... and so on until the Mars Bar is finished. She hurls her money on the counter and storms out, scrabbles in her bag for the car keys and her hand closes around *her* Mars Bar. The Mars Bar she had been eating belonged to the man, not her.

My point, well, being at university is like that. We all have our pet beliefs, our common sense truths that we will defend to death. But sometimes we discover a new perspective that completely challenges those 'truths'. That's when we have what I like to call 'Mars Bar moments', the realization that perhaps the world, as we understood it is built on a false premise. When students approach university, attending the lecture, doing the readings, hearing others in the tutorial they should be exposed to new ways of thinking and living and that give them a Mars Bar moment and may make them change position. That's a good thing: that's the purpose of the University, as W.E.B. Du Bois (1970, 68) says on an overhead I put up to conclude the first lecture:

The function of the university is not simply to teach bread winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be a centre of polite society; it is above all to be organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life.

The second lecture was on the concept of race with the example of Indigenous Australians. I still didn't make what I've come to know some might expect as the normal declaration, publicly proclaiming an Indigenous identity. I used the two images of the Tent Embassy protester discussed earlier, to make the point that representations of Indigenous people are manipulated and if 'we' apply the sociological imagination 'we' are attempting to see the full picture, the hidden meanings. It's a nice word, 'we'. It makes students a little more comfortable that they are on the sociological journey with me and with each other.

From the front of the room you have great vision of the students so you see their physical reactions to what you are saying quite clearly. So when I was talking about Indigenous perspectives and culture and I used 'we' in a different context, that signifies I am 'Aboriginal', it was clearly visible that this impacted on some people. Some heads that were bent jerked up. Some people who listen and jot notes rather than trying to get everything down verbatim stirred in their chair. It wasn't meant to

be deliberately destabilizing, although I have done it to be so since. They'd already formed their opinions about me. I often get the comment in the first week 'but you're so young', that's the hurdle to be overcome in their perception of what a lecturer is. But in content they'd seen me talk about Marx and globalisation and set up the fundamentals of our relationship, what I would require from them and what they could expect from me. And most had already accepted 'me' as part of their new 'we'. Suddenly, I shifted the ground in a completely unexpected way. It was a 'Mars Bar moment' a lot of students didn't forget. There were those who couldn't help but comment on this at a later date.

In our School, most academic staff sat at the campus café for informal meetings and breaks. This might have been because we were fabulously egalitarian or it might be because we didn't have a coffee room in our building. Students passed through the centre of the tables to get to tutorial rooms so there was plenty of surveillance occurring from both sides. It's common for students to see a lecturer and approach, sometimes sitting down. After that first lecture, I couldn't count the number of times that students steered the conversation around to a discussion of my 'Aboriginality'.  
"We never would have guessed because you don't look it".  
"I knew you were something but I wouldn't have thought Aboriginal".  
"My boyfriend's Grandmother was Aboriginal so my kids have got a little bit too".  
"But you're so smart"!  
"You're the closest thing to an Aborigine I've ever met".  
And my favourite: "But you don't dress like an Aborigine".

This is on par with an Indigenous colleague's experience where a University Centre in the US used its Australian contact to verify her Indigenous identity because in the repeated words of the Australian academic commenting on her CV, 'she's too good to be true'! Or the university contact that my high school careers advisor spoke to that said 'but Aboriginal students can't do Three Unit English'. These comments are like paper cuts, quick and annoying and they can sting for a little while but they offer the opportunity for a response that allows people to gain a real insight into the fact that they can't always 'pick' an Aboriginal person. In a university, because of the institutional setting and the power difference they see between us they generally seem to accept it in a way they may not at a pub or party.

I once experienced the power of ‘dressed Aboriginality’ in a very memorable way. I was 18, attending a Meeting of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council in a western New South Wales town. My mate for the conference was an Indigenous man in his late 30’s, now long dead who I’ll call ‘Mick’, genius when it came to languages, speaker of five Indigenous dialects, Russian, Japanese and any number of European languages. We clicked because I was doing first year Japanese at University and had done four years of German at High School. We had fascinating conversations incomprehensible to most of those around us. He was attending the conference out of interest and because it spared him the Saturday night beating of his violent boyfriend. I was there because I was in my moderately militant land rights phase at this time. We decided to grab a hamburger after the conference and then walk to the ‘Black’s pub’ to meet others in our party. The directions to the pub seemed straightforward; it’s the one near the railway. We were both dark haired and olive skinned but not stereotypically ‘Aboriginal’ in looks, but our dress betrayed/displayed/placed<sup>5</sup> us. We were both dressed in jeans and identifiable Indigenous slogan T-shirts, his land rights, mine Koori Football Knock-out. My watch had an Aboriginal flag as the face; he wore a bracelet of red, black and yellow beads. We walked to the pub, pushed open the doors and walked in. It was like a classic comedy moment in the movies, conversation dwindled, and beers paused half way to mouths. It was the ‘wrong’ pub. This pub was the place for elderly White men, wearing knee high socks and old men hats. Without even a glance at each other, we walked to the bar and ordered a drink. Conversation did not resume and in fact did not for the entire time we were there. We were straight-faced as we sipped our drinks slowly and then began a clearly audible conversation – in German.

We could do this and get away with it because we were obviously outsiders, obviously urban and obviously not afraid. We had not internalised the segregated notions of place that were part of the spatial reality of this and many country towns<sup>6</sup>. We evidenced neither hostility nor fear as ‘Others’ in this context, he a gay Black man and me a young Black woman. We had the power to leave unmolested, to chuckle

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<sup>5</sup> I have included three terms to demonstrate the subjectivity of what our dress might have signified to different observers.

<sup>6</sup> The notion of this segregation is described in superb detail and clarity by Gillian Cowlishaw (2004).

quietly as we walked to the ‘right’ pub, to get in our cars and cross the ‘border’ back into urban space, which we did. But underlying this was the disquiet of those who do not have the ability to move as we do, the people we spoke with later that night who averted their eyes as a police car cruised by slowly, while we said goodbye on the footpath; the people whose presence in that White pub would have attracted symbolic and real violence. That’s the power and the privilege of the city that we had inscribed on our body through dress and manner.

I guess that’s why I can’t ‘dress Aboriginal’ anymore. Because I’m wary it would make a mockery of those who don’t have the power, whose options are limited by their lived reality, where the ‘fight’ isn’t a metaphor. If that means attracting censure from some other Aboriginal people then I guess that’s OK. Looking at an Indigenous American example was illuminative. Thomas King (2003, 67-8) writes

I had become a caricature of protest. So I toned down my indignation, did some historical research so I could throw out the occasional date, turned in my ribbon shirt, my four strand bone choker, and my beaded belt buckle for a cheap but serviceable suit and a rather nice tie...

At the end of that presentation... a young Native man about my age, dressed in a ribbon shirt, bone choker, and a beaded belt buckle, the very markers of race I had so casually abandoned, stood up and asked me what the hell an “apple” was doing speaking for real Indians...

But worse, there was that rhetorical question again. As long as I dressed like an Indian and complained like an Indian, I was entertainment. But if I dressed like a non-Indian and reasoned like a non-Indian, then not only was I not entertainment, I wasn’t an Indian...

Somewhere along the way we ceased being people and somehow became performers in an Aboriginal minstrel show for White North America.

The notion of the “Aboriginal minstrel show” is as apt for the representation of Aboriginal people by the academy as well as in it. When I first began studying

anthropology and sociology in the early 1990's, sections in first year and upper level theory were compulsory. While I often cringed at the ethnocentrism that was inherent in the methodologies, ethnographies and theories, I am grateful that this afforded me a greater understanding of the colonised and colonising aspects that continue to haunt the social science disciplines. What I noted was that in our failure to replicate the academic norms of authenticity, Indigenous people in academic literature, particularly from New South Wales, were often presented as impoverished in some way- not simply materially but spiritually and culturally too. Henry Giroux argues

Academics need to do more than provide tools for those who may be willing to struggle against power as a constitutive element of subjugation; they must also hold up to students and others those "forgotten visions, lost utopia, unfulfilled dreams - badly needed in this age of cynicism"(Giroux, 1997, 154).

When I look at the misrepresentation of urban Indigenous people I am struck by the counter-image that I have of the people I saw as a child. I am fearful that the lives of people like my grandparents are in danger of being 'forgotten' and 'unfulfilled'. They knew oppression. They knew racism and poverty. But they also knew dignity and fun and love of family and strength of community. We need to critically consider what was life like in the working Aboriginal community? Where are the representations of the dozens of inner city Aboriginal men like my grandfather, a street sweeper, who never went 'up town' on a Saturday without his pressed dark trousers, collared shirt, polished leather shoes and freshly barbered hair slicked back with Brylcreem or California Poppy; and the Aboriginal women who worked in factories and transformed space and place through their presence and humour? These are the stories which may not be as interesting to a white public conditioned on revelling in discourses of the exotic or victim (Muecke, 1992, 29-32), but they *are* the stories of Black struggle and triumph which have contributed to the opportunities of my generation. Indigenous academics have a responsibility to make sure that we imagine our past in a full way that while acknowledging the triumphs and the tragedies of our histories still gives thought to the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. This is one way to reinvigorate the 'forgotten visions' (Giroux, 1997, 154), through a process of deliberate 'remembering' that rejects the cynical, racialised identities imposed by state and public indifference.

African-American scholar Kelley has argued

We have to step into the complicated maze of experience that renders “ordinary” folks so extraordinarily multifaceted, diverse, and complicated. Most importantly we need to break away from traditional notions of politics. We must not only redefine what is “political” but question a lot of common ideas about what are “authentic” movements and strategies of resistance. By “authentic” I mean the assumption that only certain organizations and ideologies can truly represent particular group interests... Such an approach not only disregards diversity and conflict within groups, but it presumes that the only struggles that count take place through institutions (Kelley, 1994, 4).

Examining the Aboriginal family and identity is one way to do this.

### **My Tribalography: An Alternative Conception of Urban Indigenous Identity**

Even of the stereotyped views of Aboriginal cultures, most include an understanding that the family is central to identity. For many Aboriginal people I have known and in the resources I have accessed, family *is* identity. In this discourse, those who cannot claim a lineage are positioned in the margins regardless of whether they occupy bureaucratic or community organisation roles that externally label them as ‘Aboriginal’ leaders. As I have noted previously, in the complex politics of identity that is negotiated by Aboriginal people, I term identity constructed on the cultural experience of the Indigenous self and family as Indigeneity<sup>7</sup>.

This centrality of family is shown in other works as well. In the first of ten Indigenous profiles written by non-Aboriginal author Helen Chryssides (1993, 6), a first meeting with artist Ian Abdulla is described as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> See also Deacon’s concept of being *Blak*: ‘Blak and Blakness denote specifically Indigenous Bla(c)kness...you could say that Blakness is contextual- to do with being Black in Australia-Aboriginality plus history (Rea, cited in Brady & Carey, 2000, 280).



We're sitting inside a small coffee shop on the main street of Barmara, a town in South Australia's Riverland.

'My mother was a hunter,' says Ian Abdulla. He volunteers the information shyly.

'What did she hunt?' I ask eagerly, pen and notebook at the ready.

A confused expression crosses his face, and then he bursts out laughing. 'No, no, no, not *that* kind of hunter! She came from the Hunter family.'

It's a small vignette in a much larger work, but reveals the differences in conversational protocols between Black and White conventions. Chryssides, in seeking the authentic Aboriginal voice is looking for mainstream signifiers of the Aboriginal experience. Hunting, and by extension the consumption of exotic bush tucker seems to fit into this framework perfectly. For those familiar with an Aboriginal sociality this functions as a joke, whose punch line they recognise before it occurs because one of the most common means of initiating dialogue used by Aboriginal people is to position oneself as a member of a family - it is obvious therefore that Abdulla's mother was a "Hunter". In an expanded rendition of this protocol, Ruby Langford Ginibi recounts:

When that mission [at Coraki] kicked off, there were only three Koori families there. There were the Yukes, the Wilsons and the Andersons. My grandfather was Sam Anderson. He came from across the Queensland border, from a place called Boona, near Beaudesert. He was from the Waka Waka clan of the Bundjalung tribes, and he married my Gummy Mabel Yuke. My grandparents had seven children - four boys and three girls. My father, Henry was the eldest, then there was Bob, young Sam, and Gordon, who died young, aged thirteen by drowning in the river at Kyogle on the Stoney Gully Mission.

Aunt Kate Anderson married Uncle Christie Bolt of Cabbage Tree Island. They had nine children. Aunt Eileen Anderson married Uncle James Morgan who became the first full-blood member appointed to that

infamous 1964 Aboriginal Protection Board. He also spoke twelve dialects of the Bundjalung nation. He died on National Aborigines Day celebration in Casino in 1968, aged 65. They had seven children, four of them now deceased. Aunt Phyllis, the youngest, had only one child, Julie, who was born in 1955, the same year as Nobby. As the family grew up they all branched out in search of work. They went from one mission to another. Some went to Cabbage Tree Island, some to Stony Gully Mission in Kyogle, some to Tabulam.

This represents many of the oral narrative features of establishing a distinct identity as an Aboriginal person generally that values the multi-generational, it connects each person to place, it details those living and dead and relates anecdotal incidents that link individuals to incidents, public events and institutions (Tripcony, 1996). It is these features that allow for many Aboriginal people to connect and reconnect in meaningful ways both within the urban context and ultimately in their country as well. This was my experience too. In my foray into ethnography any interaction with Bundjalung peoples or Aboriginal people generally was fore-grounded in the recitation of kinship, where my place as daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, niece and cousin was of far more import than academic credentials. This is not simply my academic experience but is consistent with the broader Indigenist paradigm that places one's Aboriginal identity first and research position second (Martin, 2002).

The majority of our extended family lived on the eastern side of Redfern, Waterloo and Surrey Hills, not the much maligned "Block", and this in itself raises questions on how media and government have successfully inculcated the public imagination to focus on the Block as the extent of inner city Aboriginal community. The racial fantasy constructed of "the Block" serves to allow the state to justify the denial of rights to Aboriginal people generally, via its policing apparatus with little negative feedback from the mainstream.

As a student, I remember being perplexed at the representation of Indigenous family lives, the complex diagrams charting kinship and the generally sterile analysis of

familial social relations. These bore no resemblance to my lived experience as an Aboriginal person, nor to my family and communities. Many academic works represent urban identity as undifferentiated, homogenized under the subsuming category of 'Aborigine'. In my grandparent's lives nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, my grandparents can be seen to have a highly developed multilayered consciousness in terms of their place in their Indigenous community. These layers began with family or kin-based sociality and expanded to specific place of origin (Casino for my grandfather and Karuah/Soldiers Point for my grandmother); membership of the same 'tribe' or nation; peoples from coastal New South Wales and then moving out to eventually encompass a national Aboriginality.

Photographic analysis of the 'Other' has been a long-term tool of the discipline of anthropology. This has tended to focus on

- 1) The images taken by anthropologists of their subjects to support their text;
- 2) Analysis of historical images, predominantly taken by mainstream photographers which generally have one of two aims, to make the subject appear more different/exotic, or to record the success of the colonial 'civilising' imperative (Lidchi, 1997).

Neither academic tradition tends to reflect the agendas of 'ordinary' Indigenous people, or the photographic images to which they attach meaning, nor is there an analysis of what these meanings are. A work that goes against this trend is that of non-Indigenous anthropologist Gaynor MacDonald. In her article, 'Photos in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins: Negotiating Relatedness and Validating Colonial Histories' (2003), MacDonald introduces a number of relevant issues in the consideration of the importance of family photographs to Aboriginal families claiming

[t]ins, cardboard boxes and albums hold one of the most prized and jealously guarded of all Wiradjuri Aboriginal 'material' possessions, the family photos. They are used to tell and recall stories, introduce people to kin, as items of exchange and as important statements of identity and belonging in the spatial and temporal politics of kinship (2003, 225).

Prior to reading MacDonald's analysis I had already commenced my own study of the family photographs my mother inherited from her parents. It is not a coincidence that these were stored in a cardboard box!<sup>8</sup> Indeed each feature, which MacDonald identifies as salient to her analysis of the Wiradjuri photographs, was applicable to my study as well. It is interesting to note that this analysis has a pan-Indigenous relevance as well as representing a specific Aboriginal cohort. Beyond this, however is a cross-cultural similarity, where women's function as family archivists has in many cases been expanded to the ritualised guardianship of the family photographs and other 'domestic' artefacts. These are however often dismissed as trivial, but are in fact are a rich source of ethnographic data particularly if they remain linked to an oral tradition. The power contained within these artefacts is noted by the granddaughter of Manning and Dymphna Clark. In a public lecture dedicated to her grandmother, Anna Clark (2001) likens ways of valuing national narratives to Dymphna's family box and notes

The box makes me think of series of lives: ... Partly these women's lives were lived in the background, but they left traces visible enough if you look for them. This isn't a relic from the past. It is the past — just as it will go on and take bits and pieces from me and then from my descendents.

I make the claim therefore that the artefact of the family photograph should be recognized as a legitimate site of intellectual consideration. In particular, I believe photographs are useful to illuminate my kinship sociality, support claims of cultural continuity and evidence the pan-Aboriginal networks that had emerged. It is an approach that is also useful in deconstructing the major source of literature on inner city life in Sydney, the work of Ruby Langford Ginibi. An example of this can be seen in the following short analysis of *Don't Take Your Love To Town* (1988). After Ruby's father moved the family to Sydney, Ruby began work as a machinist in a clothing factory. With her growing economic independence came the ability to participate in Aboriginal social functions and Ruby recounts incidents of Aboriginal Balls, picnics to the national park, dances, night meetings at the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) and others. It is at one of these functions that she sees her mother

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<sup>8</sup> I wish to thank my mother Julianne (Webb) Butler and my Uncle Peter Russell Webb for permission to use and discuss these photographs.

again “looking dressed up and very beautiful as she was then” (48). Several months later, she sees her mother on the street

[s]he was on her own, and loaded up with shopping in string bags. I stopped and watched her. She was a solid built tall woman, and she had waist length black hair tied back in a ribbon. Every thing matched, she was stylishly dressed (52).

This reminds me of a photograph of Ruby’s mother, Evelyn Webb, with her sister in law, my Grandmother, Beryl Webb. It is contemporaneous to the period of which Ruby is writing and challenges many of the dominant understandings of the urban Aboriginal situation. Yet, this sense of fashion and style is missing from the majority of the dominant representations of urban Aborigines. Images such as this do not depict Aboriginal women as the impoverished, in need of welfare intervention. Nor should they be read as sanitized assimilationist representations trumpeting the success of welfare intervention. The photographs provide evidence that many Aboriginal women were influenced by and modified the fashion trends of their day. Although not developed in Australian academic literature there is strong tradition in the United States that addresses the issue of African American fashion. This includes strong fashion traditions in places such as Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance and also the wearing of extravagant costumes for attending church (Lippard, 2000). Contemporaneously, there is still a strong sense of fashion evident in the inner city Aboriginal community. This includes the youth fashion drawn from the United States, which is sports label conscious and the sharply dressed members of Aboriginal broadcasting and arts communities (Mudrooroo, 1995, 146-7). To ignore these forms of identity expression in favour of ‘culture of poverty depictions’ denies a rich and vibrant tradition.

Many of the photos taken vary in quality from small somewhat blurred images taken in private, to professional photographs from weddings and studio stills of Aboriginal sportsmen. All of these are important to record, not simply because of the value attached to them by the individual who collected them but because they form artefacts in the recitation of her oral history (see MacDonald, 2003; McKenzie, 1994, 865-6). As I am writing this I can picture my Grandmother and her sisters-in-law as they looked at these photographs. It is not possible for words to capture all of the nuances

of this process for an outsider but it is necessary to try because they are an integral part of how these stories were told to me and of how I will tell them to my children. As Fleming (2005, 16) suggests “the evocation of memory is a performative act.” Am I objective in the telling, absolutely not, nor do I wish to be. The emotion, the connectedness, and the ownership of the author add richness and a texture the narrative. To choose to omit these aspects would amount to a self-regulation of the colonised. Instead, what we need to do is

to write our stories in our own voices and to create our own images of ourselves. When we do not, others write our stories for us, and we are in danger of accepting the images others have painted of us (Chiu, 2004, 43).

Of these types of photographs, one that stands out most in my memory is a small photograph of my grandmother herself at Soldiers Point, around this time she met my grandfather. Dressed in a long white gown, her black hair reaches to her waist and she has a flower tucked behind one ear. Long after Nan had died, my grandfather came to live with us. In going through the photos he was moved to discover this image of so long ago and began carrying it in his wallet. As he slowly descended to dementia he confided to my future husband, showing this photo, that he had ‘a little girl from Karuah waiting for him’. When he died several years later, recalling his reaction to that photo, I mentioned it in his eulogy. In this way movement from the private appreciation of the family photograph to the public affirmation of the lives of our Old People is illustrated, as is the link between the temporal and the sacred<sup>9</sup>.

Further, it would be a mistake to consider that Indigenous people are not embracing new multimedia forms to preserve and show family photographs. Indeed, it is now common to go to an Indigenous funeral in New South Wales that includes an order sheet with a photograph of the deceased and a fairly detailed kinship history. Many of these sheets are kept and added to contemporary family archives (MacDonald, 2003). At the recent funeral of my grandfather’s cousin ‘Bullocky’, the funeral service included a whole power point presentation of photos from Uncle Bullocky’s life to

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<sup>9</sup> Both my grandparents and their families were Christians, however they syncretised their Indigenous spirituality with the Christian tradition. This is evidenced in the belief that deceased family members would have been with my grandfather at the time of his death and accompanied him ‘home’; that is, to heaven.

accompany the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. These examples also serve to display the diversity of Aboriginal cultures in Australia, as some people mistakenly believe that all Aboriginal people practice avoidance rituals of the name and image of deceased persons. To the contrary, while prohibitions after death are still practiced in some areas, even with those groups this ceases after several years at most (Thomas, 2006, 6).

Just as the photographs of well-dressed Aboriginal women challenge the stereotyped perceptions of Indigenous femininity, others form the rare positive depiction of Indigenous masculinity. For the working class men of my Grandfather's generation, the ability to fight was one of the most significant aspects in the construction of Aboriginal/masculinity. My grandfather had done some boxing in the army and was considered with his brothers to be a good fighter. The three Webb brothers (Rube, Eddie and Peter) drank at the pub called the 'leven' (Eleven). On one occasion when there was a brawl, my mother remembers her father running home to tape his hands then running back to join the fight. On another occasion, the Webb brothers were cornered in a pub when a group of men locked the doors to challenge them to a fight. Coming home victorious, but confident that their fight would be undiscovered by the women, my Grandfather was caught out by two things: he couldn't stop giggling and there was a button missing from his shirt.

In contrast to the stereotype of unrestrained violence, the 'fight' within many Aboriginal societies is an integral aspect of the performance of Indigeneity, drawing on kinship networks, often marginally related to specific incidents but rather an amalgamation of long-standing tensions (MacDonald, 1988). In another incident recounted, one Bundjalung man called "All in, All in" as an exhortation to other Bundjalung men to participate in what was seen as a righteous dispute between two different 'tribal' groups. As noted by a number of authors (Cowlshaw, 2004; Langton, 1988; MacDonald, 1988) the fight is only legitimate if it occurs in public, preferably with an audience. As noted by Langton (1988, 212), the public nature of the fight often places it within a different gaze, that of the predominantly non-Indigenous police who rupture the ritualised nature of the fight "at various stages in the process of conflict resolution between two individual or between two groups, treating a legal process of one society as an illegal process in their own society". As

such, the police gaze recognises the Aboriginal fight as a site to which they must restore order, rather than a structured response to conflict where police intervention is perceived as a wrong by Aboriginal participants and spectators. That police may use excessive force when arresting Aboriginal people or swear themselves while charging Indigenous people for the same is seen as a further justification of the perception that the police lack moral authority (Cowlshaw, 2004, 67). One means of circumventing police interference is through the formalisation of the fight in boxing.

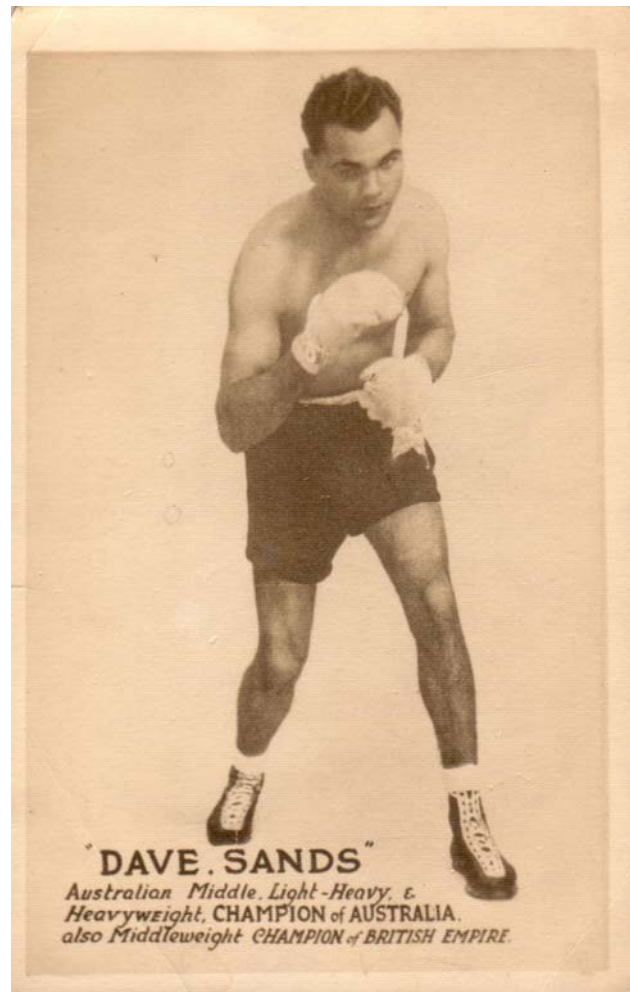
As with many marginalised peoples, although endowed with many of the same attributes of the community-based fight, boxing was also perceived as a means through which poverty could be transcended (Broome & Jackomos, 1998, 171). In the academy however, white writing often derides boxing using terms laden with racist undertones such as ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’. Fanon comments that in this way Black men elicit the following: “biology, penis, strong athletic, potent, boxer... savage, animal, devil, sin” (cited in Mohanram, 1999, 54).

Like many Aboriginal people of their generation, my grandparents avidly followed the boxing, ranging from tent boxing to amateur and professional bouts. While they generally supported all Aboriginal boxers, those to whom they had a connection, through either kin or country<sup>10</sup>, were regarded with particular favour. Two of these were Dave Sands and Tony Mundine (see Tatz and Tatz, 1996). I find using studio stills such as these an important tool for asking students to think about representations of Aboriginal masculinity. Dave Sands was a member of the Ritchie family (Broome & Jackomos, 1998) and cousin to my grandmother’s family the Russells. My grandmother’s brothers and my grandfather were mates of Dave too. One of the studio stills in Nan’s box shows Dave Sands in boxing pose (see Figure 4.1). On the back is written, “Admit one, Saturday 10am”. This was used for free entry to the boxing and then was filed away at home.

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<sup>10</sup> My grandparents, and I through them, claimed the Bundjalung and Worimi land as their ‘country’. They both had extended family members however, who were affiliated with other coastal peoples including the Biripi, Dhungatti, Gumbainggir (spellings may vary) whose lands were between the Bundjalung and Worimi.





**Figure 4.1 Dave Sands Boxing Still**

Not all memories evoked were happy. With this picture, my Grandmother had saved a page of an old *Dawn* magazine<sup>11</sup> that showed a picture of the memorial to Dave at Stockton under the heading “They did not forget”. When she would smooth out the folds of this page, her hands would tremble a little and she would always tell the story of his death in an accident the same way, how one of her brothers and two other men walked away from the truck unscathed while Dave was killed instantly. A breath, a sigh and then the comment “It must have been meant to be”. The paper would then be refolded and placed gently away. As an adult I read the repetition of actions, voice and emotion in the way she did this as ‘ritual’ and it is in part because of its consistency and rhythm that I can clearly remember the story. The image and its connected narrative show that “the structure of knowledge is part of the message, and indeed may be a significant and enduring aspect of the knowledge system” (Bird

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<sup>11</sup> Dawn Magazine was the publication of the Aborigines Welfare Board.

Rose, 2001, 96). For non-Indigenous academics these narrative forms and as such the knowledge that they contain are more often dismissed as ‘trivial or superficial’ (Muecke, 1992, 42).

I would extrapolate on this example to make a more general point on the difference between research constituted on the archival and that of the researcher who has a lived experience within the community on which they write. I have two copies of the same article written on the Dave Sands Memorial. One is copied from an electronic archive held by AIATSIS. It is clearly legible and could be used to evidence the continued remembrance of a popular man in the period shortly after his death. The second document is not in pristine condition, yet it physically embodies over 50 years of viewing. It is a testament to remembrance of a family's Dreaming in which the dead are structurally reconstituted as part of the present and of how oral history enfranchises itself across generations. In this way, while I applaud the efforts of institutions such as AIATSIS to digitally encode the material, making it more accessible, there should be a consideration that the electronic medium of knowledge storage can in itself erase part of the ethnographic data inherent in the artefacts of Aboriginal families.

My grandmother also kept a studio still of Tony Mundine, a Bundjalung man like my grandfather, that was also used for admission to the boxing. With regard to our family history, it is interesting to note that the support of the Mundines is multi-generational and can also be more abstract, with the rise to prominence of Anthony Mundine, Tony's son, in football and boxing. My Grandfather's sisters Gertie and Esther Webb were spending a weekend at home in Casino watching the television when there was a knock at the door. Aunty Esther answered the door to reveal a fire-fighter who apologised for the need to evacuate my Aunts because the house next door was on fire and was threatening their home. Aunty Esther refused saying “We are not leaving our home!” The fireman tried to coax her but she would not be swayed. Drawing herself up to her full height of slightly over five foot, and brandishing her arthritic index finger she told the fireman “Anthony Mundine is playing his last game for St. George and we not leaving this house until that game is finished!” In the retelling of this anecdote by her family, public events and individuals are ‘owned’. It is likely that as my own children grow older, Anthony Mundine will continue to be a public figure

and this story will add to their store of knowledge as part of what my grandparents would term their 'tribe'.



**Figure 4.2. Stan Roach, with l-r Dotty Gomes, Peter Russell Webb and Julianne Webb c.1950**

It should be noted that the term 'tribe' which is generally not used today was in common usage with my grandparents' generation. I still have a boomerang given to me as a child that is inscribed on the back "To Kathy with Best Wishes from Uncle Stan Roach of the Bundjalung Tribe". While Uncle Stan was not related to our family biologically, he referred to himself as our family's "Tribal Uncle" in reference to our shared heritage as Bundjalung peoples. To my grandparents 'tribal' bonds were important. When my grandparents, mother and uncle first moved to Surrey Hills, they shared a terrace with other members of the Bundjalung 'tribe'. This included Uncle Stan and his wife; my grandfather's sister and brother; and his cousin, Aunty and family. A photo of Uncle Stan with three of the children from this house was in my grandmother's box (see Figure 4.2). Later, when they settled into their own home in Waterloo, my grandfather's other brother and his family lived next door and his sisters lived 300 metres away. My grandmother's family, an extended network of female cousins from the Worimi 'tribe' lived within several blocks.

Uncle Stan's boomerang also signifies a range of meanings dependant upon the discursive position of the analyst. On the front burnt into the wood are two Aboriginal hunters. The object of their attention is a kangaroo. Either side of the kangaroo is the word Matilda, because this boomerang was made to target the global tourist market for the Commonwealth Games held in Brisbane that year. Matilda, the kangaroo was the Games Mascot<sup>12</sup>. There are many ways in which this object can be read. While it is a symbol of 'traditional' Aboriginality, it is simultaneously commodification of Indigenous culture servicing an economic niche, where sales were generated not only through the appeal of the object as Australian iconography but through Uncle Stan's visual appeal as an 'authentic' Aboriginal subject. Thus, as with certain types of Aboriginal art the artist's body and biography as racialised subjects are part of the touristic experience (see Jones, 1992). This conforms to what Muecke suggests is "the context of the general promotion of Australian culture, [where] the Aboriginal performances are wheeled on as that-heritage-lost-in-the-depths-of-time-for-which-we-as-a-nation-can-be proud" (Muecke, 1992, 39).

Yet, the words written in blue ink on the back "To Kathy, with Best wishes from Uncle Stan Roach of the Bundjalung Tribe" provide a completely different perspective on the artefact. It is an object given to cement communal bonds of Indigeneity, not individualism because I only saw Uncle Stan rarely through my childhood. Further, there was no intention of conformity to mainstream expectations of the context in which it operates as a signifier of Aboriginality. I would argue that there was a similar underlying message in the presentation to my Grandfather on his retirement of a pewter beer mug and a boomerang. The beer mug presented by his non-Indigenous best friend, represented working class masculinity premised on drinking and mateship. The boomerang presented by his son, who had followed him into employment at the council, signified his other axis of identity, his Indigeneity, further refined through family.

In both of these examples, the boomerangs are not meant to be functional as weaponry, they are symbolic of the desire to maintain and privilege distinct group affiliations while entering into Western society and its concerns in innovative ways.

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<sup>12</sup> Indigenous-art for tourists predates this. For instance, Aboriginal shell workers from La Perouse made shell covered replicas of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the 1930's (Nugent, 2005, 82).

What should be taken from these examples is the understanding that there are a myriad of ways in which Indigenous people ascribe different meanings and values that are not visible generally to the White gaze. In contrast, this White gaze is conditioned to notice only those socio-cultural features conditioned by Aboriginality and Aboriginalism that urban Indigenous people do not generally present.

One final image to be discussed here from my Grandmother's photo box is the studio still of a young Doug Nicholls, sent to the Russell family. Shown with a swag of athletic trophies, he was to become well known through playing first grade AFL where despite racist taunts he won the respect of many non-Indigenous peoples. What is fascinating about the way my Nan used the still of Doug Nicholls, is that it allows a segue across race politics of the entire twentieth century. A life history such as this shows the early protection and assimilation to self-determination. Nicholls early experiences of racism in sport, followed by his ministerial role and governor of South Australia mirror the changing political climates in which they were manifested. I also find fascinating the juxtaposition contained in Pastor Doug's dress on Day of Mourning celebrations in 1970. In the photos of this he waits to lay a wreath dressed in a dark suit with flowing headband. I try to explain to students why I find this form of bricolage so appealing. I think this arises from the conscious way that Nicholls presents himself simultaneously as a contemporary subject without conceding his Indigeneity. There is no conceit here he simply is Doug Nicholls.

In raising the sometimes insensitive and intrusive judgements made by students this chapter raised important considerations about how the construction of the lecturer's identity can influence both self-presentation and student perception of the lecturer. Aboriginal poet Maureen Watson (cited in Webb, 2005,1) asserts

We live in our land. We are, we have all around us people who are not of us. We have in our land - there are people all over our land - who are not of our land. Aboriginal people might as well be in a foreign country, you know?... Everywhere around us are the reflections of a foreign race, a foreign people, and they are making us foreigners in our own country (Watson, cited in Webb, 2005, 1).

The prescriptions of how Indigenous identity, which construct us as foreign are also present within universities. As an Aboriginal academic, I see reflecting on my

identity, both self-constructed and ascribed, as a means of resisting the designation of 'foreignness'. This chapter has shown that being raised in an "Aboriginal family" has greatly impacted on the way that I define being an Aboriginal person, in both professional and personal domains. It has argued that this is a central facet of my teaching, with the eventual aim that all Aboriginal people will be able to express themselves as they wish without fear of negative sanction or the incessant questioning of authenticity that many experience today. Moreover, I would like non-Indigenous students to reflect on the inappropriateness of their assumed right to arbitrate on the identity of Others.

## **Chapter 5. From Film to Blogs: Other resources for a Sociology of Indigenous Issues.**

One my key goals in the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives should be familiarising students with different types of signifiers in which Aboriginal issues are represented. This acknowledgement of different forms of expression is both a means of challenging the hegemony of the “traditional” and awakening student consciousness to the value of innovative expression. While I may use personal anecdotes, I also like to find an equivalent experience in the representations of other Indigenous lived experiences expressed in text or various audiovisual and multimedia forms. This chapter aims to discuss the use of these alternative forms in the classroom. In doing so, it will provide the basis for later chapters, which will further develop examples using audio-visual materials and media.

Some of the innovative expressions of Aboriginal issues have arisen from the generational shift that has seen the structural foundations laid in the 1960’s and 1970’s translate to a range of new opportunities in representation of “a generation that feels comfortable in talking about Aboriginal society whether it be through film or writing or art” (Moffat, 1988, 152). While this is an important growing field of resources some academics scoff at the inclusion of popular culture, often challenging it as being inappropriate within the academy -“unscientific or atheoretical... subjective and ... of no professional relevance” (Carr, 2004, 8). Others temper this slightly but still provide a clear delineation of where these usages ‘belong’. Indeed, Patton (cited in Ricci, 2003, 594) experienced this when told “those who want to write creative non-fiction or poetry should find their way to the English Department of the university and leave sociology to the sociologists”.

Despite criticisms such as these, popular culture can occupy a significant place in meeting the needs of including an Aboriginal perspective, using all manner of resources including, media, popular culture, poetry and stories of the Self (Lehman, 2004). Thus, there has been enough of a shift within the academy that these forms can be introduced within some settings even if they not universally accepted. For

instance, I often use poetry in the classroom. Ricci (2003, 4) argues that poetry, as “a composition designed to convey a vivid and imaginative sense of experience” should be recognised as meeting the aims of auto-ethnography and auto phenomenology. I agree, and I find that poems are invaluable for imparting information to students. Firstly, it can be extremely evocative, and students seem to feel less confronted in this form, because of their expectation that poetry ventures into emotion. This should not be construed that poetry cannot be as reflective of ‘reality’ as other narrative forms (Conroy, 2005, 5). I have also used a number of poems in this thesis in recognition of their value in imparting information on Aboriginal issues. Film is also useful.

I have commented earlier that in the provision of Aboriginal perspectives one of the most common “quick and easy fix” that I have seen people apply is to show a film or documentary to implement their Aboriginal perspective. This observation holds as true for university as for high schools. Audio-visual material can be used without the lecturer’s own critical research-driven input, distancing politically charged material from the class and acting as a discrete object which may be discussed from a distance (Staddon et. al., 2002, 271-75). It further ‘solves’ the problem of non-Indigenous reticence to speak on behalf of Aboriginal people because of a feared political backlash. This is a seductive solution that technically meets the requirements of Aboriginal inclusion while minimising the contentious nature of discussion.

Film can be useful for

Offering empirical material supplementary to the lecturer’s own knowledge, introducing an alternative perspective on subject matter, [and] sensitizing students to material that may be new, controversial or complex (Staddon et.al. 2002, 171).

However, one of the major concerns that I have with this uncritical use of audiovisual material is that it maintains rather than challenges the hegemonic gaze. Unless a spirit of critical cultural reflection is embedded to create an *analysis* of the material, it is vulnerable to reinforcing rather than challenging stereotypes. Moreover, it is another example of Aboriginal content rather than perspective and what generally remains unacknowledged is that much of the popular media representations are by non-Indigenous directors and production teams. This is not say that they have no place in filmic representations encompassing the broad area of Aboriginal experience, but



rather to make explicit that their positions may well be tempered more by White notions of Aboriginality and Aboriginalism than Black notions of Indigeneity.

That current regimes offering ‘protection’ to Indigenous communities have instigated mechanisms of cultural protocols in dealing with Aboriginal communities and subject matter provides the two-edged sword of any form of intercultural dialogue. This is considered by Frances Peters-Little (2002) who questions both the nature of defining community and the possibility that the creative process and political vision of the filmmaker may be stifled by the constraints imposed to enforce a positive representation of Aboriginality. These constraints she argues may hinder the ability of filmmakers to genuinely engage with the difficult issues of social dysfunction that are crippling Aboriginal societies today or discourage both Black and White filmmakers from entering into such a fraught process.

My own approach to using audiovisual material varies with the topic. For instance, in teaching a course on “Traditional” Aboriginal culture I found the films *Ten Canoes* and *Yolngu Boy* to be invaluable resources, presenting students with a far greater conceptual and practical range of Aboriginal traditions than I could possibly hope to impart in a lecture period of the same duration. With both plots focussing on the Yolngu culture they provide a fascinating juxtaposition of Aboriginal specificity rather than the pan-Aboriginal. *Ten Canoes* further refines this with its all Yolngu cast and script input.

In asking the students to watch these films I have had clearly defined tasks to help to shape their viewing of the film. Study Guides, available on line, are also useful for their explanatory power in scaffolding the understanding of the plot and its broader implications in both social and political terms. The *Ten Canoes* Study Guide shows the photographic work of anthropologist Donald Thompson lending a greater “authenticity” to the movie’s depictions of Yolngu social life (Tudball & Lewis, 2006). That students still require this external approval is in itself reflective of the continued need for Aboriginal cultures to be externally authenticated, a point that can be discussed at length.

This Study Guide also provides a table of concepts for students to fill in listing key thematic areas of culture that are represented in the film. I had hoped that this would

provide the means of generating discussion on the film, but I was surprised at the complete engagement that students had with the task. After breaking them into groups and giving them twenty minutes to compare notes and be prepared to contribute their answers to a full class discussion, all groups requested more time to work through the material. As we eventually discussed the film, I typed their answers into a Word document on the screen and this was immediately saved and pasted into the class blackboard site so that there was a record of the class discussion. I have found this useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allows me to stay facing the class, rather than have my back turned to them if I am writing on the White board. This is helpful both in terms of general communication and specifically for hearing impaired students who find my audibility enhanced front on or who can lip-read if I talk while typing. Secondly, it means that the class moves at a pace that I can regulate more easily, rather than if the students are writing the work down as we go as there are often slower students who ask for more time to write or for information to be repeated that can break the rhythm of discussion. Finally, work can be edited as discussion progresses, because points can be cut and pasted or added at will. Coupled with a greater demand for electronically accessed lecture materials such as PowerPoint presentations, the availability of a comprehensive record of the class seems to do much to allay student fears that they have missed crucial points for their assignment tasks. They are also useful for students with any form of learning disability; taking out much of the subjectivity of whether student note-taking has adequately addressed the lecturer intentions. While a common refrain from lecturers who do not wish to provide students with notes or multimedia support mechanisms is that it will lessen student attendance I have found to the contrary that it encourages a more engaged and enthusiastic student cohort.

What emerged strongly in the discussion of *Ten Canoes* was student empathy with the situation, attachment to the characters and identification with the commonality of their social experiences of marital life and group solidarity. In enjoying the humour and feeling the pathos of the film, students' emotional engagement facilitated a greater attachment to the cultural traditions than was apparent through purely textual material. Their previous comments on many readings about Aboriginal cultures are that they are overly jargonistic and written so densely as to be virtually incomprehensible or very dry and boring. Using *Ten Canoes* gave them a point of reference to approach

the material from and I believe enhanced their appreciation of the textual. Even in presentations, they often added to their discussion... “As we saw in *Ten Canoes* when...”

What is also useful in the contemporary films with Aboriginal content is the additional material provided by the directors that attempt to give a far greater transparency to the work and its implications for the Indigenous actors and their communities. The comments by Rolf de Heer, director of *Ten Canoes* are but one example of this extremely useful development. For instance, De Heer's article in the *Griffith Review* (2007), provides an insight into the changed nature of engagement by the Ramining actors involved in the project as opposed to the established Yolngu actor David Gulpilil whose mentoring into the film world in the 1970's involved lessons on being able to drink copious quantities of alcohol while still maintaining a professional demeanour when filming. While ‘fame’ has certainly extracted a personal toll on the *Ten Canoes* actors they remain far more connected to their communities than Gulpilil who emerges a rather tragic figure.

Just as *Ten Canoes* was shown internationally, Phillip Noyce's *Rabbit Proof Fence* was also part of the global film industry and while much of De Heer's comments were based on the microanalysis of an individual community, Noyce's comments have spoken to the broader issue of the Stolen Generations. Unapologetically attempting to rouse the audience's emotions, Noyce comments 'So much rhetoric doesn't go any deeper than candy. But by emotionally affecting people, I hope this film helps them to understand' (cited in Barkham, 2002). The film's success bears out the potency of the film's ability to effect, that is similarly useful in a teaching situation. For a lecture on Aboriginal families I have used a small segment of *Rabbit Proof Fence* to show the camp life experienced by the Aboriginal girls and the devastation of their removal. Offset with Kenneth Branagh's portrayal of Western Australian Chief Protector of the Aborigines who gives a slideshow to demonstrate the “breeding out” of Aboriginality, the use of Neville's documentation in the lecture undercuts the claim that the film misrepresents the persona of the times. Many students are visibly affected by the footage and this I would argue is desirable, *as long as there is an opportunity for them to debrief*. Deliberately introducing the so-called negative emotions such as despair

or 'anger' into a classroom requires a very careful development and also a careful deconstruction so that it is not abusive, as I discuss later.

I rarely have a class that is totally comprised of video footage but in keeping with the idea of trying to include Indigenous voices I try to use small snippets of video to allow students to hear Indigenous people talking about themselves, about their realities. On one occasion, running late, I charged into the library to borrow a video I had chosen for that day's class. It was booked out. A quick perusal of the call numbers either side and there was a video that seemed to fit similar criteria to the video I had wanted. I raced to the class and after giving a small introduction, started the video and then excused myself to go back to the office and photocopy the handouts for a student's tutorial presentation. Coming back in about ten minutes later I was faced with a class who wanted to know what the purpose was of showing that tape. Not wanting to admit I hadn't actually seen the footage I asked them to discuss with me why they found it difficult. It transpired that the video was spoken in Aboriginal English, thick accents making it impossible for the students to understand. Some terms weren't in English at all. So what did you pick up about what they were doing I asked. We don't know came the reply. It was obviously something to do with *their* culture. A lightening bolt to the brain - I grabbed a marker and began writing on the white board. I listed the following:

Problem

Difficulty comprehending an unfamiliar dialect of English

Unfamiliar cultural actions

Response

Anger,

Frustration

Withdrawal

Boredom

Talking to friends who share one's culture instead of concentrating on the set task.

From this the lecture changed from what I had planned to a discussion of how difficult it was to engage in another culture. The students were highly receptive to earnestly sharing with me what it felt like to be unable to understand. Once they had a sense of ownership of the emotion and their responses I was able to ask them to

extrapolate. Most identified the unfamiliar language as the problem however it is not language alone that forms the barrier as is evidenced by many “high” culture performances. Opera, which is often performed in a language different from that of the audience, or ballet where the interplay of dance and music is used to tell stories, are examples of this.

Similarly, in pop culture, we discussed how they understand these performances. They gained an understanding that when a class is taught on the basis of unfamiliar cultural norms, when the language excludes, student response is seldom positive. In this way, I argued, many Indigenous students learn early in their education to disconnect from the classroom and evidence the same behaviours and feelings that my students had done after only ten minutes discomfort. In the act of their own lived experience, students gained a great insight into the difficulties faced with being a cross-cultural learner (Malin, 1997). This connects to Prime Minister Paul Keating 1992 *Redfern Address* where after acknowledging many of the injustices that Indigenous people have experienced stated “We forgot to ask how would I feel if this happened to me?” It is this question that I constantly pose to students and which draws them to the deepest consideration of their own position. It is however, a novel means of consideration for many students and they require prompting to examine issues in this way.

For instance, in discussing frontier relations between Aboriginal people and colonists I have asked students “What kind of things might Aboriginal people have been thinking as British settlers moved into their territories?” Answers vary:

a) I read they thought they were spirits or Gods

My response to this is while some Indigenous people did indeed believe that the colonists were dead, this is because for some groups white is the colour of death. As to whether they were Gods, this seems to be based more upon a colonial fantasy about British superiority rather than reality. In contrast, contemporaneous reports show that parties of Indigenous men challenging their presence, sometimes necessitating a hasty retreat by British sailors, often met landings.

b) Maybe they were curious

c) They didn’t have a sense of ownership so they would have accepted it

d) I don’t know any Aboriginal people so I’m not sure how they’d think (!).

By allowing students to present the items for discussion, gives an opportunity for me and other students to respond directly to their position rather than present material in the hope that this occurring. I have found that particularly early in a course, when many students have such deeply held convictions on the difference of Aboriginal people as compared to themselves that as shown in comment d), they feel unable to have any empathy or to imagine themselves within an Aboriginal position. It is here that I find trying to present them with a hypothetical situation that mirrors many of the same features quite helpful. For instance, relating to the previous question I pose the following situation.

Imagine you are at The Entrance [a popular local waterfront suburb] with your family. On one corner of the park is the ANZAC memorial. You are just going about your business when some people from overseas come to the park. They decide that the ANZAC memorial is the place where they want to have their picnic, so they start tearing it down and laying their blankets out. What do you think would happen? Some of the responses I have received include:

- Some old men would start 'having a go' and preaching to them about how they fought in the War.
- Some people, especially those with kids, would pack up and leave.
- Some young 'Aussie' guys would fight them [shades of Cronulla]
- Someone would call the police.

Once students have articulated a range of responses it is then possible to make the link back to the Indigenous question, with the aim of creating conceptual links between their common sense understandings of the world and an empathetic mindset. In this way students can start to develop a sense of their own competency as cultural translators. Fostering this confidence is crucial as many articulate a fear of presenting material on Indigenous issues in their workplace for fear of giving offence or giving the wrong information.

This method of generating classroom discussion will not always be successful. In the classroom, using this form of teaching has led to occasions of overt hostility from students who claim a moral rather than simply

academic authority to challenge my perspective. The process of challenge is not in itself a problem, however the vehemence of an intractable rejection is. There is only one instance where I was unable to negotiate this myself when an older White male student determined to turn the class into his own private History Wars. I refer to him in this section as *that student*, because even now in conversations with other staff on difficult students they recognize whom the phrase refers to (I suspect many other teaching professionals have a *that student* too).

The class was designed to allow students a means of critiquing Australian society, teasing out the exclusions based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. Within the broad field of cultural studies these criticisms are fairly standard but for *that student*, this was heresy! More, he rejected my authority to teach on the basis of age and gender as well, referring to me as “girly” and “the lass up the front”. Things reached a head when discussing Aboriginal frontier history, when *that student* accused me of being part of the “coven of young feminists on the campus” attempting to protect one of the campuses historians from the “truthful” assertions of Windschuttle. No amount of negotiation on my part limited his corrosive comments on topics ranging from single mothers (“bludgers”); to Aborigines (“the worst thing that happened was that we gave them equal wages”); to the use of film as a teaching method (“are you actually going to lecture”). His presence in class was disturbing to all students who took to going to library in the breaks to avoid his hectoring sermons in the café area. Student responses eventually made it clear that the situation was intolerable as verbal slanging matches ensued, something that hasn’t happened in any other class no matter how passionate the debate.

After a process of negotiation including a senior member of the School he dropped the course. In a follow up discussion with me I was assured by the senior academic that when I had “more experience” I would be able to deal with students myself. Having taught during the period when Hansonism was at its height on a campus where pro-Hanson propaganda and racial slurs were posted on walls, I took considerable pride that I was able to negotiate teaching race. In a guest lecture on Aboriginal politics at

the main campus the course coordinator told me that it was the “first time no-one had walked out of the Aboriginal lecture”. I was therefore rather surprised and hurt at this suggestion, but was encouraged by the former Head of School who defended me saying that having had this student in his own class he believed *that student* would have had a vociferous rejection of any young Black woman that no amount of experience could have contained. What I continue to feel is that in general the University administration remains oblivious to the difficulties of teaching politically charged material and of the deeply personal attack that many Aboriginal lecturers are confronted with. I should add as a postscript when some students from the nationalism class graduated a number of staff were invited to a dinner at the local restaurant to celebrate. They presented humorous thank you gifts and mine was a plastic fly swat and can of fly spray as a memento of *that student*. Despite that experience, I remain committed to innovation in my teaching practice. I also remain convinced that using “story” is an effective teaching aid too.

When I began to look at teaching in the university as means of truly fulfilling a political vision, I sought to find literature by other Indigenous people for guidance. I was able to find information that was auto/biographical, the best of which was the work of Jackie Huggins. One aspect of Huggins’ work that I have always admired is her generosity of spirit in her role as a facilitator, both for her own family and for non-Indigenous inclusion through joint participation, consciously seeking to build on the convergence of experience.

For instance, the late Rita Huggins and her daughter Jackie detail an emotive journey to Kooramindanjie the birthplace that Rita was removed from as a child and that Jackie had never seen (Huggins, Huggins, Jacobs, 1999). Included in this journey was non-Indigenous academic Jane Jacobs. Her collaborative approach shows a carefully constructed multi-layered lens through which this journey was experienced as three distinct approaches to the same moments. Moreover, what emerges stylistically is the narrative dignity of all participants. Rita’s story although observed by Jackie and Jane is not digested and refigured according to academic mores, but given the respected for having its own integrity. Jackie’s position rather than constructing separation between daughter, cultural actor and academic, shows the synthesis of all facets and Jane while an outsider in some respects is not excluded from the experience.



Using distinctly personal narratives of their mothers to show the intersections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, as means of engaging with a reconciliatory consciousness personally and sharing is publicly to engender the same spirit. I attempt to model much of my own role as an academic on Huggins in being true to my mother (and beyond her to our extended family); retaining the integrity of our family's stories while contextualising them within a disciplinary framework; seeking complimentary forms of both experiential knowledge and textual consideration. I put this into practice in a number of ways. For example, in doing the student introductions in Foundations in Societies and Cultures I like to ask students to tell their names and something that they feel gives them a sense of identity. This could be something as simple as football team, relationships or their age. The range of responses is rich data for us all. Loyalty to football teams and sporting participation can be teased out to reveal elements of class, gender and race and also exemplifies collaborative possibilities; religious affiliation speaks to deep cultural and intellectual passions intertwined with significant structural aspects of our society; marital status and children show the focus of family and relationships in our conceptions of self. Students begin to be alerted to their place in social and cultural milieu, as actors who are both shaped and who shape their perceived possibilities. The sociological imagination template receives the least resistance when linked into students' own stories, when their sense of the mundane is able to provide a space of comfort.

Further, stories need to be explicitly acknowledged as an integral part of all people's lives. In preparing for a tutorial presentation on oral history in a specific Indigenous subject, two students approached me to ask if they could ask an Indigenous lecturer to come and share their oral history with the class to show how story was significant to Indigenous people. Instead of allowing that I suggested that they might like to give the class a task of thinking of an oral story that they could recall from their own families, friends or communities. This, I reasoned, would give people a much deeper insight into the importance of the oral tradition and a sense of what its absence might mean.

This tutorial was electric as people began to engage with the concept 'oral history', rather than a distanced recognition of 'Indigenous oral history'. One student recalled a

story about her grandfather who had been prisoner of war in Thailand, where friends spoke of his heroism. In contrast, he told a story of finding a nugget of gold that he was eventually forced to abandon as it made his pack too heavy. Even after many decades he lamented the loss of the gold. It is stories like this I argued that are erased from official histories of the war. Even now as we see a proliferation of audio-visual recordings documenting these types of oral histories, we need also to be aware of the vast material of this type that has been lost by not being valued. Other students responded with some discomfort that their “grandad had stories like that but I didn’t listen”. One student spoke of being the only one in her generation who had taken the time to listen and who was now in demand at family gatherings to recount the family history. Another student allowed us the insight into a “community” based on shared passion for and commitment to the environment. The sharing of protest stories that both reconnected individuals who had participated and encouraged those new to the movement reinforced her group’s solidarity.

I caution here that students also need to be given the option not to share a story, but to understand that being the audience for others in the class is in itself a participatory feature. Moreover, it also needs to be understood that some stories are “unspeakable” because of the pain and trauma with which they are associated (Gregoriou, 2005). Once this is accepted there is a strong foundation for students to then engage cross-culturally. They are more prepared to consider what happens to oral history when you remove children? What happens if elders pass away or choose not to transmit their knowledge to the next generation? Why do oral histories differ from official narratives? What are the messages that teach safety, morality, culture and love of family that are contained within our stories?

What I believe that stories do is to provide scaffolding on which knowledge can be constructed. Ignoring the stories means that what we build is inherently unstable. Externally, it may be impressive but ultimately it’s a façade, whose fragility may be revealed if tested. Above all I embrace the story, not simply my own, but the stories that my students bring to the class as well and the stories of the university too. I believe that this is a valid intellectual enterprise and should be recognised as such. In this it is my hope that students will become champions of the ‘story’, because to me that is a major victory in my agenda to have Indigenous ways of knowing valued and

recognised within the academy. However these stories are told- orally, in film or poetry they have a place in my classroom. In the following section I detail one topic that showed the intersection of many different stories to create a much broader discussion than could have been achieved with a standard academic literature base.

### **Voting, Aboriginality and Media in the classroom**

In 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, the power of the ‘vote’ is seen as a pervasive aspect of modern life and remains powerfully entrenched as a signifier of civil society. In providing a lecture and tutorial on Aboriginal Rights I had chosen to focus on formal voting, highlighting the inconsistencies in lauding the comparatively early suffrage of women while Aboriginal people remained excluded. The denial and later enfranchisement of Indigenous peoples voting rights in the Twentieth Century and the “Aboriginal problem” as a contemporary election issue remain significant aspects in the struggle for Aboriginal social justice in a variety of formal domains. While this was the focus of orthodox academic literature and my lectures, student-driven discussion introduced a range of alternative topics from the success of Aboriginal peoples in reality television to non-Indigenous mistrust of Aboriginal organisation voting in polls such as the ATSIC elections. Once again, I was faced with an intrinsic dilemma on how to negotiate the gulf between academic and popular understandings. What I offer here is a truncated explanation of a passionate, amusing and stimulating time in which my students and I debated the complexities of “Aboriginal voting”. This section demonstrates that tertiary classroom practice can be a fluid process, where student reactions to material may alter the prepared structure of the lesson. This is by nature a less coherent experience. As noted in the methodology I determined that at times it would be necessary to maintain the ‘untidiness’ in the textual representation of my practice.

While there are many socially aware programmes on the non-commercial television stations SBS and ABC and journal articles and books of similar critical rigour, most students engage to a far greater extent with the populist media. They are more likely to see segments of an SBS documentary on You Tube than they are to watch it in entirety its television presentation. This poses a pedagogical dilemma as to how one

engages with issues of what constitutes a “legitimate” resource. This debate encompasses both the notion of sociologists contributing to media (Gans, 2002) and being prepared to analyse it (Stein, 1983). Those who would dismiss these popular media forms of expression as trivial and exclude them from classroom discussion fail to appreciate that this is a means through which people are personally connecting with their wider social milieu. They can be the data through which valuable analysis on the constitution of modern racism can occur. While it is tempting to reject these forums as ‘unacademic’, this maintains the perception of the university as the ‘ivory tower’ divorced from reality (Baumann, 1998; Doig, 1994). As such, showing students a different way to analyse the everyday is at the heart of an increasing number of lecturers in diverse fields (Madhuri & Broussard, 2008; Bevan, 2007). While I still place limitations on these being used as sources in undergraduate written work I consider them an essential part of tutorial discussion, as a means of allowing students to relate the more abstract theoretical perspectives to their everyday lived experience. I believe that this exemplifies the role of public sociology to provide a means of critically commenting on all that is present in the social world, rejecting an elitism based on the primacy of the academic text.

In 2007, the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 Referendum has raised the issue of Aboriginal franchise in voting privilege to national attention. This is not without a certain irony as the Referendum did not as popularly supposed give Aboriginal people the vote (Attwood & Markus, 1998). Yet such is the pervasiveness of this as a national mythology that it remains a historical “fact” to many students. In earlier years I had been somewhat dismayed that after a lecture and tutorial on the Referendum, coupled with discussion of commemorative events that student exams still maintained the fiction of the “vote”. In contrast, I highlight that the Referendum included in the Australian federal election rested on the alteration of the Australian Constitution’s following clauses:

Section 51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to :... (xxxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.... [and]

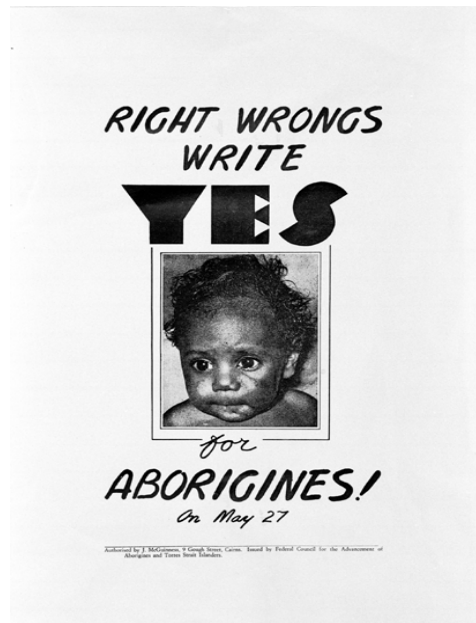
Section 127: In reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or any other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted (Attwood & Markus, 1998, 120).

Just as the Referendum is subject to many misconceptions, the general understanding of Aboriginal voting before and after is similarly flawed. While Aboriginal people had been variously enfranchised across the Australian states with voting privileges (Goot, 2006), pervasive racialised practices and lack of understanding of civil rights limited Aboriginal participation within the ballot box both as voters (Davidson, 1997; Lake, 2002) or candidates.

The difficulty to displace these misconceptions within the student consciousness is integrally linked to the way in which the “giving Aborigines the vote” was promoted in the media as a marker of the national conscience, possibly more about the “representation” of the national will to Aboriginal inclusiveness than the specific constitutional reform. Indeed, the real effects of the constitutional change were at the time quite minimal, but the show of popular will for social change was immensely significant (Attwood & Markus, 1998, 120).

To more fully comprehend the Referendum and its symbolism, it must also be contextualised in the development of a nationally focussed media campaign. This was not without precedent and owed much to the mobilisation of southeast Black resistance in 1938 as a counter-narrative to the sesqui-centenary celebrations of British settlement/invasion. Shrewdly using the media, the 1938-Day of Mourning Protest gained mainstream media coverage, as well as spawning the *Abo Call*, a newspaper that was published by the Aborigines Progressive Association. The Protest had as one of its main themes the achievement of citizenship rights, with voting seen as a key formal indicator of this achievement (Patten & Ferguson, 1938). However, limited by the externalised focus of World War II and assimilationist imposed silences, Aboriginal rights slipped from media attention in the 1940's and reconstructionist 1950's, re-emerging with the advent of television and media-driven rights agendas. In the 1960's however, increased technological capabilities in the media industry and television reportage had greatly changed the nature of public protest both in Australia and abroad. Appealing to the public consciousness through

media and recognising the importance of mobilising mainstream public support became a key focus of a number of organisations for the achievement of Aboriginal rights. Chief amongst these was the national body FACATSI, but a renewed Aborigines Progressive Association and Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales were also significant (Goot, 2006). In promoting the Yes Vote on the Referendum, posters such as those shown below (see Figure 2.4), used the formulaic representations often of children to arouse public sympathy.



**Figure 5.1 Yes Vote Poster (Clark 2006)**

Even after the Referendum, when the vote was popularly supposed to have been achieved, many Aboriginal people did not exercise their right to vote or even to enrol (Goot, 2006). Aboriginal activist Bert Groves saw making Aboriginal people aware of both the possibilities and responsibilities of voting as crucial. In an interview published in *New Dawn* (1970, 13) Groves stated:

Many of us have worked very hard for a long time to achieve citizen's rights for Aborigines. Now that we've got it, Aborigines are not interested. Do you know that a recent survey showed that only 1 per cent of Aborigines are on the electoral roll?

Many students find it perplexing that not all Aboriginal people would want to vote. Further, they see the lack of elected Aboriginal politicians as curious. It is possible to invert that gaze and ask: If White women have been enfranchised for so long, why do

men still dominate in positions of elected political power? This provides for a more broadly contextualized discussion on how legal opportunity does not necessarily translate to equitable outcomes. Indeed, Colin Tatz has controversially labeled the belief that enfranchisement equated with Aborigines being political equal as “moronic” (Goot, 2006). In contrast to some other countries with either designated seats for Indigenous candidates or separate parliaments (Sanders, 2003), the Australian state has neither encouraged nor mandated Aboriginal parliamentary participation. There have been several high profile Aboriginal candidates for political office but until the referendum only Neville Bonner had been elected to federal parliament. Despite official civic equality, it is interesting to consider that since Bonner, Aiden Ridgeway is the only other ‘identifying’ Indigenous politician in federal parliament (ABC, 1999). State politics in the twenty-first century have included historic elections of Aboriginal state members of Parliament with Linda Burney being the first Aboriginal MP in New South Wales and who now holds a series of portfolios within government (Browning, 2007). It should also be noted that in grassroots discussion, it has been suggested that a number of “mainstream” politicians are of Indigenous “descent”. The latest of these is Mal Brough, architect of the interventionist tactics in the Northern Territory who was satirised at the televised 2007 *Deadly Awards*:

ACTOR 1: We also wrote a letter to that lovely Malcolm Bro ...

Brough yeah. I believe he really is a bro.

ACTOR 2: Yes.

(Sound of laughter from the audience)

ACTOR 1: No, haven't you heard? He's got a touch of the tar

apparently, and no wonder he's so caring about you lot

(<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s2045875.htm>).

There is a current media frenzy that in concert with state rhetoric often clearly delineates Aboriginal people as separate from the mainstream populace. While there is not the same quantifiable data on the popularly mediated public ‘vote’ on this issue, a qualitative study of other multimedia forums such as letters to the editor and online chat strongly suggests that even with those sympathetic to Indigenous people it is still an ‘us and them’ issue. Moreover, in 2007, Aboriginal issues were once again significant election issue within the Federal arena, influencing the public expression

of the ‘vote’ to provide or deny mandate of controversial Indigenous policy. Many commentators saw the ousting of Mal Brough from his seat as a response to Northern Territory interventions (SBS, 2007). In each of its successful election campaigns, the Howard led Coalition used the race card to generate public support through the Children Overboard scandal and the undermining of Wik (Tuffin, 2008).

In the current political climate, the Liberals cannot sustain government without their coalition with the National party. This alliance has been most severely tested by the reaction to the issue of Aboriginal Land Rights. Indeed the Commonwealth itself has been threatened with division over the recognition of Native Title in its various forms. Former Prime Minister Howard’s consistent failure to negotiate with Aboriginal claims to issues that include sovereignty, self-determination and the “Stolen Generations” should be considered for its appeal to the electorate. In a radio interview, he listed what he obviously supposed were the laudable aspects of his intransigence on Indigenous issues:

I mean just remember that I’m the Prime Minister who took money out of the ATSIC budget... I’m the bloke that’s been under constant attack from Aboriginal leaders for being insensitive to their situation... I’m also the Prime Minister who belonged to the party that voted against the Native Title Act in 1993 (Bachelard, 1997, 97).

The savagery of Hansonism, where the anti-Aboriginal rhetoric was explicitly couched as a foundation of the political platform is another example (Lattas, 2001). While the Liberal/ National coalition attempted to appeal across the broad cross-section from the “Family farmer” to the multi-national investor, Hanson’s politics was specifically designated as grass roots. The inversion of notions of dispossession where Aboriginal people were cast as the fraudulent claimants to a special treatment that disadvantaged “Australians” clearly resonated with a significant cohort of voters (Newman, 1998; Hill, 1998). In discussing these examples on formal voting, students began to articulate parallels to the voting on reality television and awards and this generated really spirited debate. I found that while I would not have introduced shows like Australian Idol as relevant to the discussion, student’s felt far more personally engaged in bringing the formal concepts to something with which they had much greater familiarity.



Since the development of reality television dependent on viewer votes, as an Indigenous person on various mailing lists I am often exhorted to ‘get behind’ Aboriginal people participating in these programmes. From *Australian Idol* and *It Takes Two*, to *Big Brother* and the *Footy Show*, Aboriginal contestants have been successfully progressing through on the ‘public vote’. Other areas such as the Australian of the Year and AFL medals recognising player achievement are other prominent areas of more limited polling in which Indigenous peoples have been recognised. These arenas are being constructed within Indigenous forums as being part of the achievement of the pan-Indigenous collective. While not denying the significance of the Indigenous vote in continuing the inclusion of an Indigenous contestant, the huge numerical disparity between the mainstream and Indigenous people suggests that the Indigenous contestant must also be appealing to a broader cross-section of the voter/audience. For some students this is evidence of a more tolerant and accepting Australia, where talent and/or personality transcend racial boundaries. I am unwilling to simply dismiss this explanation because I do feel there is an element within the structured choice of candidates to include diversity, although I cynically consider it possible that this may be to promote tension and controversy as a means of generating viewer interest.

That race and ethnicity remains a factor was sharply drawn in the 2006 *Australian Idol* final. ‘Irishman’ Damien Leith’s victory over ‘Indigenous’ teenager Jessica Mauboy was constituted in some urban myths as being partly due to the Irish media coverage and support from a moneyed Irish Diaspora. For instance, one Blog had the following:

“Damien winning has totally destroyed idol’s reputation, and who’s to say Ireland wasn’t involved in this?”

“I am sure they can’t vote from overseas, but it is possible some very rich person in Ireland came out to Australia so they could vote a million times...” ([www.lattimore.id.au](http://www.lattimore.id.au))

In another Blog space the comment was posted:

“It would be great if Australians could just learn to vote for the best person and not for the underdog. Only here could a guy 2 years out of Ireland win Australian Idol over an Indigenous girl. Pathetic.”

[In another Blog space one post read] “I confess to a slight disappointment - I jumped over here expecting a repeat of last year's accusation that we were all racist because the Australian Idol happened to be Caucasian”  
([http://blogs.smh.com.au/newsblog/archives/dom\\_knight/014042.htm](http://blogs.smh.com.au/newsblog/archives/dom_knight/014042.htm)).

Clearly, the ‘vote’ is not regarded as the ultimate measure of fairly acquired victory but is constituted in a fiercely contested nationalistic socio-political context. Many blogs act as accessible generally anonymous soapbox forum that air the tensions that are generated in terms of the intersections of nationalism, ethnicity and race (Lattas, 2001). Yet, as ‘entertainment’, the vote and debate surrounding it are seen as accessible to those who may feel marginalised from commenting on a traditional political agenda. In particular the demographic cohorts of the teenager and early adulthood are seen as key arbiters of “public opinion”, while the aging mainstream population is presumed to be watching elsewhere. This seems to be played out within classes as well. Younger students, who often feel intimidated in commenting on what one termed “boring politics”, exhibit a confidence in their expertise as popular media voters. Encouraging this enthusiasm while directing it to critical outcomes is challenging but rewarding.

I question whether the support of Aboriginal individuals actually assists stereotypes to retain their potency. This occurs as a disavowal of racism if an individual can be valorised as the exception. Tutorial comment suggests Aboriginal success in media voting is seen as proof of the Australian egalitarian mythology that there are no barriers to achievement external to the individual’s own will and perseverance. The allied extension of this leads to a “blame the victim” mentality, where Aboriginal disadvantage is decontextualised from its broader socio-economic implications.

I also wonder if the designation of ‘success’ is still functioning as a means of reinvigorating the negative stereotypes of Indigenous identity within media representations. It is argued this was the case for many Indigenous sportspeople, conferring honorary White status (Balling Radmer, 2000) where there was a semantic shift in mainstream media reportage from referring to the individual as ‘one of them’ [Aboriginal] to ‘one of us’ [non-Aboriginal]. “Our Cathy” [Freeman] would be a

contemporary example, where the visual imagery of the victory celebrated with both the Australian and Aboriginal Flag is still potent (Elder, Pratt & Ellis, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2004, 79). Any deviation from success and there is a shift back where Indigeneity provides an essentialised explanatory framework. As an example, Evonne Goolagong Cawley was “Australia’s darling” until she appeared to lose concentration which was described as going ‘walkabout’ mentally<sup>13</sup>. Goolagong Cawley responded, “all tennis players lose concentration, but since I’m an Aborigine it’s brought up constantly - except when I’m winning!” (cited in Tatz, 1987, 64).

The positive spin placed on some Aboriginal successes can be contrasted to other sportspeople such as Anthony Mundine who are seen as too oppositional to be examples of ‘Australian’ nationalism and remain firmly positioned as ‘Aboriginal’ champions. Even when achieving World Champion status, Mundine remained the “Aboriginal” rather than “Australian” boxer. His outspokenness, conversion to and vocal support of Islam contribute to this. Unlike the Aboriginal “darlings” of Australian sport he unapologetically invokes his Blackness as a feature of empowerment. While Mundine could be popularly recognised as Aboriginal person of the Year in NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) celebrations and has consistently been a winner at *The Deadlys*, it is unlikely that he would be recognised as such in broader community awards. Even within a “successful” football career, Mundine considered it likely that he missed representative opportunities based on subjective opinions of his “complicated persona” (Hughson, 2007, 76) rather than consideration of his ability (Ritchie & Pramberg, 2007). Hughson (2007, 76) argues that

Mundine has undoubtedly been an inspiration to young Aborigines and has done more to fight racism in Australian rugby league than any other professional player in the history of the sport. On the other hand, he evinces a swagger and boastfulness...

It is personality traits that places him outside of the typified “sports hero”.

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<sup>13</sup> As late as 2003, an online discussion board for the World Tennis Association (<http://www.wtaworld.com/showthread.php?t=83977>) was still debating Goolagong-Cawley and rehashing the older stereotypes about a lack of Aboriginal focus [going mentally walkabout] or work ethic and attributing her success to being raised “white”.

Another Aboriginal figure denigrated in the media has been Geoff Clark, former Chairperson of ATSIC. While I will not debate the validity of claims made against him here, I am interested in the way that Aboriginal voting in ATSIC elections was widely derided by media and mainstream public alike. The personal attacks on Clark are only one part of the anti-ATSIC campaign promoted in the media that drew on long-existing tropes on Aboriginal savagery, community dysfunction and ill-deserved and mismanaged “special” funding (Scott, 2006). Such was the success of this campaign that the eventual demise of ATSIC generated little mainstream criticism of the government (Behrendt, 2000).

Also of interest in regard to ATSIC voting is that elected officials were seen as garnering widespread popular support though their democratic election despite figures indicating that in 1999 less than a quarter of eligible Aboriginal people voted. This lack of engagement has been variously explained as a ‘good’ response for a voluntary election (Sanders, 2003) and alternatively by the lack of cultural fit between democratic principles and Indigenous governance. For instance in a review of ATSIC (2003, 28) one submission considered:

The selection process itself is modeled on the Westminster system and does not take into account traditional methods of selecting leadership or spokespeople from within the community. In addition, the people elected through the ATSIC system are not necessarily the same people from within a community who have the traditional authority to represent the area. This imposed and artificial structuring of a leadership model creates a conflict with the traditional authority mechanisms within a geographic region. In this way, the authority of the ATSIC representative arm is often questioned.

*Submission from South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, WA*

These arguments are often subsumed under a discursive hegemony in which democracy is the unquestioned (and unquestionable) hallmark of civilization, where “civilization” remains a “means of marking the Self from the Other” (Duara, 2001, 1). Much of the current military and humanitarian involvement in global conflicts is partially predicated on the stated desire to bring democracy to oppressed peoples

(Dryzek, 2003). By extension, to deny the validity of democracy is therefore seen as indicative of one's failure to be civilized.

It is undeniable that in considering Indigenous Australians, voting has an added resonance. Further, whether constituencies are mainstream or Indigenous yields manifestly different understandings on both the formal voting processes and more populist engagements. There is constant political polling, where populist media openly attempts not simply to report, but to influence the public opinion and voting. The potential for the media to serve or harm the perception of Aboriginal people is high. The wide access to telecommunication, audio-visual and multimedia has led to a growth of a technologically driven polling exemplified by interactive television shows in which 'the viewer decides' and news shows in which the audience response is polled on stories.

In politicised content, students do not expect to learn "correct answers" rather they are bringing information to the classroom and are prepared to challenge. From my perspective, engaging with that challenge rather than excluding them makes for a richer educational experience. After undertaking a course at Queensland University of Technology that used web-based study, including a chat room to teach Indigenous Education, one student commented (Winslett & Phillips, 2005, 732):

the thing for me is that the popular press have such an effect on me (and society) that it surprises me when I discover (yet again) how my views and opinions have been informed. Just knowing that a group has been mis represented doesn.t (sic) automatically turn one into an informed and well acting person (unfortunately).

While there is considerable insight shown here, I would still argue that to know one has been misinformed inherently destabilizes the foundations of racism and disrupts the comforts of complacency. As has been shown for over a century in the sociological classroom without that destabilization, change cannot occur whether addressing marginality of any form (Roberts & Smith, 2002, 291-301). Using a wide range of materials to generate discussion contributes to this destabilization.

It has been the aim of this chapter to show that whether from standard academic texts, popular media or newer forms of textual expression such as blogs, debate about Aboriginal issues is present and as such sociological analysis must be too. The

examples that I have used from my own classroom experience demonstrate that expanding the parameters of resources can lead to complex but rewarding discussions in tutorials. The chapter has also warned however that this approach will not be highly regarded by all students and will by nature be far less formal than some academics would deem appropriate. My formal and informal feedback from students overwhelmingly demonstrates that it is in the main a successful teaching strategy.

## **Chapter 6. The Dreaming**

The Dreaming is widely acknowledged as the fundamental concept that underpins Aboriginal societies (Berndt, 1998, 39; Burgess et al, 2005, 118). It is therefore essential that any education claiming to be representative of Aboriginal perspectives include spirituality (Baskin, 2002, 6). For sociology this is particularly important, as academic knowledge of the Dreaming has been long considered the province of anthropology. Yet even where aspects of The Dreaming are not apparent, sociological thought can be given to the structural changes that have affected its apparent displacement and whether this is seen by Aboriginal participants to constitute a deficit. Also, a more open-minded appraisal often reveals the continuity of The Dreaming in contemporary practices, that is masked by a stubborn refusal by many academics to render the binary between traditional and contemporary thereby continuing the process through which “Indigenous rights to country have been transformed into something called something called Aboriginal heritage - a past oriented discourse” (Hemming, 2005, 5). In showing the continued relevance of the Dreaming as an explanatory mechanism in Aboriginal cultures this chapter discusses the ways the term has been defined and identifies examples that reveal it to be both a current and future feature that students can interact with at University and in their professional practice.

### **Anthropological and Sociological engagements with the Dreaming**

From the outset it is important to acknowledge that the term, “Dreaming”, is not of Aboriginal derivation per se, but an attempt by W.E.H. Stanner to describe Aboriginal cosmologies. For some Aboriginal peoples this is problematic and they prefer to use the specific localised terms (Tripcony, 1996). Although I do use the localised terms where possible, the huge diversity among Aboriginal cultures necessitates recognition of this plurality (Phillips, 2005). I am not opposed to using the Dreaming as a concept in my work, particularly where I am referring to general trends rather than specific examples.

Like many of the World’s religions, Indigenous spiritual expressions in The Dreaming provide an understanding of the creation of the world. Within all Indigenous Australian cultures, there is some form of conscious creative action, by an entity

which may be in the form of spirit, animal or human-like figure or interplay of a number of these (Rose, 1999). The Dreaming explains the formation of the landscape; the inter-connected creation of animals and humans (Leonard, 2003, 3); the initial reasoning behind Indigenous law and the ramifications for transgressors; the complexities of the kinship system including the regulation of marriage; and affiliation to country and totem (Townsend-Cross, 2004, 2-3). Broadly, it is now commonly acknowledged within the education system that Aboriginal people have significant links to land and alternative understandings of creation and beliefs in tabooed behaviours which if compromised can lead to physical and spiritual peril (Groome, 1994, 90, 96-7). Consistently absent from discussion however is the development of discourses, which recognise the subtleties, and specificity of Aboriginal beliefs (Partington, 1998a, 2; Partington, 1998b, 28). In presenting a homogenised pan-Aboriginal position, stories such as the Rainbow Serpent (a favourite resource of the infants and primary school system) are often presented as being the beliefs of the Aboriginal population as a whole (Leonard, 2003,4). This does not reflect the diversity of Aboriginal positions and tends to replicate models of Western monotheism, rather than Indigenous complexity (Butler, 2000).

The Dreaming is a concept constructed as fluid in a temporal sense that is manifestly different to the hegemonic Judeo-Christian linear time (Janca & Bullen, 2003) that students are familiar with. In contrast, the Dreaming refers to past, present and future. W.E.H. Stanner's work is illuminative:

The Dreaming, as an activity, is represented as a continuing highway between ancestral superman and living man, between life-givers and the life, the countries, the totems and totem-places they gave to living men, between subliminal reality and immediate reality, and between the There-and-Then of the beginnings of all things and relevances and the Here-and-Now of their continuations (Stanner, 1998,6).

This is a very important distinction as common sense wisdoms and many academic discourses confine Aboriginal spiritualities to static and primordial status as “the archetype of a closed society” (Partington, 2003). The many effects of this paradigm include a consistent judicial rejection of contemporary expressions of Aboriginal



spirituality, particularly where “traditions” have been modified due to contact with other cultures. The resultant denial of a number of Land Rights and Native Title claims has ensued from this (Partington, 2003). Yet, from within an Aboriginal cosmology, additions and contestations over the telling and interpretation of the Dreaming are entirely consistent. The judicial error relies on yet another limiting binary that for the mainstream change is inevitable and desirable, while for Aboriginal people it reflects a diminished cultural authority (Hemming, 2005). Additionally, the Aboriginal perspective that actions and events rather than time inform knowledge (Haynes, 2000, 54,56) needs to be understood with regard to a number of highly publicised Aboriginal struggles and helps to address the difficulties for students to understand the ways in which the Dreaming has contemporary relevance.

Within Australian sociology, the Dreaming has been severely under-considered, indeed only one work, dating from the very inception of sociology is well-known for dealing with the subject. Emil Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is regarded internationally as a sociological classic. This text was developed in the time when early sociological thinkers avidly examined emerging anthropological data for its potential to shed light on the origins of man, a quest with undeniably Darwinian overtones (Hiatt, 1996). Of this period, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1911) represents a most useful example of this trend because of its influence at the time of publication and its continued currency in modern sociology internationally. Based on the fieldwork of Spencer and Gillen, Durkheim posited that Aboriginal beliefs, specifically those of the Aranda people could be used to illuminate a hierarchy of human religious development, from the “primitive” culminating in the sophistication of modern European thought and institutional practice (Kucklick, 2005).

In considering the utility of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Connell (2005) recently commented ‘Durkheim sets up his analysis like a chemist choosing the ideal laboratory conditions for a crucial experiment’ (p. 6). At the same time, acknowledging Durkheim’s prejudice, Connell tempers this criticism by asserting that it takes a ‘very sophisticated form’. My position could not differ more! When I look at Durkheim’s work, two things strike me that might be considered more emotive than academic. The first is a deeply held revulsion for the discourses that considered the

creation of hierarchies of culture a valid intellectual enterprise. Second, I remain distressed when I see an international cohort of contemporary sociologists discussing Durkheim's work and using terms such as 'primitive' and 'less advanced' (Jones, 1986) with regard to Aboriginal people without deconstructing the implicit racism of the enterprise and the jargon. While, for Connell (2005), the sophistication of Durkheim's writing allows it to 'transcend the crude racism of others', as a member of the colonized I do not accept the ameliorating effects of 'scholarship' on racist conclusions. In fact, I deplore them all the more because it emerges from the academy and as such retain a legitimacy now denied to the 'common' public expression of racism.

Durkheim's work has also been revealed as flawed due to its more orthodox academic weaknesses as well. Of Durkheim's methodological approach, others have argued 'the Australian data were introduced simply to illustrate Durkheim's theories, rather than the theories being constructed or adopted to account for the data' (Jones, 1986). Further, while early anthropologists such as A.R. Radcliffe Brown were heavily influenced by Durkheim, Durkheim's work has since been regarded as 'misguided', particularly after the 'devastating critique' provided by the influential W.E.H. Stanner (Charlesworth, 1998: xv). Stanner's critique in particular is difficult to dismiss, whose work also has the distinction among early twentieth century anthropologists to be one of the few bodies of work motivated by a genuine desire to know not tainted by an inherent belief in the superiority of White culture (Manne, 2007). As the anthropologist who popularised the term Dreaming (Hume, 238-40), and through the remarkable consciousness-raising Boyer lecture *After The Dreaming* (1969), Stanner's contribution to an appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality should not be under-represented. With regard to the specific critique of Durkheim,

Stanner's powerful essay on Durkheim's reductionist account of religion in general, and Aboriginal religions in particular, is one of the best studies ever written about this subject and it has been an effective antidote against sociological reductivism in the study of Aboriginal religions (Charlesworth, 1987).

In my opinion, it is imperative that a developing sociological consideration of Aboriginal spirituality addresses the criticisms levelled at Durkheim by

anthropologists in particular. This can be coupled in return with a sociological critique of anthropology too. As Connell (2005) rightly identifies, the sociological norm is to focus on the Founding Fathers from the European Metropole. The development of what Connell terms a “southern theory” will need to overcome the continued hegemony of texts such as Durkheim’s for Aboriginal voices to be fully enfranchised in the discipline.

Connell’s (2005) call for the development of a twenty-first century southern theory is not limited to the Australian situation, but expands to other areas outside of the Metropole including Africa and South America. This is relevant to the sociological consideration of Indigenous spirituality because although the study of religion was an integral part of the budding sociological project, sociological interest has focussed on Western religion, while ignoring the varied religious landscapes globally other than as a comparative foil. What is starkly drawn in the literature emanating from the margins is recognition that sociology has, as a discipline, been lamentably ethnocentric in its consideration of religion. Further, the silences within sociology have contributed to a global deferment in this area to other disciplines. The resultant empowerment of anthropology, and more lately history, in Australia can therefore be viewed as part of a larger disciplinary landscape in which this country is not the aberration, but rather is consistent with international trends.

Thus the North Atlantic sociologist of religion derives confidence from the fact that the phenomena under investigation are continuous with that investigator’s native social experience, and have greatly inspired his discipline from its inception... [In contrast] the Africanist [or Indigenous] sociologist of religion is on relatively unfamiliar grounds, facing a plurality of highly fragmented and historically heterogeneous forms of ritual practice which ... have been largely studied by other social sciences than the sociology of religion (notably anthropology and history) (Hovland, 2003, 4).

The sociological silence on Aboriginal spirituality has been matched by a trend where until recently the recognition and expression of Aboriginal forms of spirituality were strongly repressed within the Australian education system. This was particularly overt where missionaries were involved in the provision of education but covertly Christian norms were implicit within teaching practice generally. Representations of Aboriginal

spirituality were often explicitly racist, ranging from constructions as quaint cultural relics, to symbols of pagan savagery, both of which necessitated “civilising” intervention (Craven, 1999). Within the contemporary education system there has been some attempt to redress these fallacies; however the entry of the state as a purveyor of information of Aboriginal belief systems may also be fraught with difficulty, particularly where the inclusion of the Dreaming is deemed necessary but the provision of culturally sensitive and accurate material is not.

### **Teaching the Dreaming**

The Dreaming is, as Wallaga Lake Elder Merv Penrith (1996) asserts,

our identity as people. The cultural teaching and everything, that's part of our lives here... it's the understanding of what we have around us.

Hughes claims (2000, 3):

To understand the Dreaming you must live it. It is not possible to explain The Dreaming in a conference paper. But Indigenous people insist that The Dreaming is the centre and wellspring of their culture and social organisation.

Herein lies a pedagogical dilemma. How does one teach about a concept that relates to everything but needs to be lived to be understood? From my experience, this can only be achieved if students are challenged to become *involved* in The Dreaming, to attempt to position themselves as actors, audience and interpreters as part of its continuity. As such, the understanding of Dreaming stories, related to physical manifestations of landscape and implications for Indigenous socio-cultural factors are crucial.

It is worth encouraging students to familiarise themselves with the Dreaming of their own areas and to prioritise this as an initial means of understanding the Indigenous cosmology of the areas in which they work. It may therefore be more relevant for an early childhood teacher to know the creation story behind a river, mountain or plant that their students can physically interact with, as this is an integral part of the oral transmission (Leonard, 2003). I am not suggesting that it is invalid for the stories of other areas to be told, nor that one must be physically located in country to participate

in an oral culture. Professionals should be aware that the Aboriginal peoples with whom they interact could be from other areas, relating their spiritualities to those places not their immediate residential country. In contrast, peoples from other areas may adopt local custom or take on the role of “custodial” participant in their place of residence (Vanderwyk, 2004, 61). Welfare and health students, should also be aware that disassociation from country or perceived damage to country can act as indicators of depression and ill health (Vicary & Westerman, 2004).

Beyond this however is the understanding that as non-Indigenous people engage with Aboriginal people they are also part of the ongoing Dreaming where their place may be construed as cultural participants or cultural impediments. This means listening to Dreaming stories and considering their historical, cultural and structural implications. In their performative aspect, Dreaming stories may take the form of what the West regards as the creative arts such as story, art, dance and song. There may also be a complex interplay between these, for example, a painting may be the result of group action under the direction of a senior lore person attempting to pass on a story where there is then a requirement to “dance it into life” (Crumlin, 1998, 97). As such creative artistic representations of The Dreaming occupy a central place in many representations.

For many Primary teaching students, connecting the Dreaming to the creative arts has unfortunately meant that they have been regarded as fiction, rather than acknowledged as history. To highlight the error of this perspective I tell an anecdote when as an Aboriginal speaker, I was invited to address Year 3 class at a private Christian school on the broad subject of “the Aborigines”. In discussion with the class and teacher it was revealed that in preparation for my visit Dreamtime stories had been read with the subsequent task for students to “write their own Dreamtime story”. Using the same narrative style of the text the class had thus developed their own stories on the origins of plants and animals. Whilst I do not question the teacher’s good intention I find this practice culturally inappropriate at a number of levels. It is indicative of an ethnocentric mindset in that it exemplifies the continued perception which denies Aboriginal spirituality its rightful recognition as a legitimate religious practice and illustrates how pervasive the hegemonic influence of Judeo-Christian beliefs remain within the Australian education system. The inherent ethnocentrism of practices such

as these is further revealed by absence of similar tasks on Judeo-Christian themes. I ask my students to imagine the parental response if primary school children were asked to create their own Jesus story or provide an alternative to creation following the reading of Genesis. As teaching practice is supposed to be moving towards greater recognition and respect for religious diversity a concerted effort must be made to avoid the conversion of Aboriginal cosmology to mere story telling narratives, on par with fairy-tales (Sheridan, 1988, 81). Student teachers need to recognise their important role to play in disseminating information of a spiritual nature and make their best attempt to determine that this material is correct and culturally appropriate (Butler, 2000).

This is not to say, that the Dreaming cannot provide a narrative for the introduction of new material, but this is based on actual events not fantasy. Dreaming stories are still being created (Knudsen, 2004). While Dreaming stories were once primarily localised cultural histories their multi-level functionality may now encompass a pan-Indigenous relevance as well. Stories of ancestors, of political struggle, sporting triumph, natural disaster, moving from past to present may all be part of the

“Dreaming Narrative... employing the tenets, structure, and style of the ancient Dreamtime stories, [where] authors narrate personal experience, inverting and undermining the dominant, Anglo Australian discourse while simultaneously rescuing a threatened Aboriginal heritage and constructing a modern definition of Aboriginal culture (Crocker, 2003, 101).

Consider as an example, a short piece written by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. There is a story of a woman who wanted to find the stories of her people. Biame told her to gather the burnt sticks from the campfires and the bark from the paperbark. With these she would make markings that would return the stories to the people.

And when next the paperbark-trees filled the air with the scent of their sweet, honey smelling flowers, they took her into their tribe as one of their own, so that she would never again be without the paperbark she needed for her work. They called her Oodgeroo. And this is the story of how Oodgeroo found her way back into the old Dreamtime. Now she is happy, because she can always talk with the

trees whenever she wants to. Time has lost his power over her because Biimi has made it so (Noonuccal, 1988, 32).

As Oodgeroo herself commented many people assumed this was a recording of an ancient Dreaming story, but in fact it was an autobiographical vignette, describing the process by which Oodgeroo took on her name and identity as storyteller for her people, those of Stradbroke Island and beyond. It is her Dreaming, that she terms “the new Dreamtime” (Noonuccal, 1988, 31). Students are often surprised to discover this is ‘modern’. This alerts them to the potential that they unconsciously categorise narrative according to designations of past/present and truth/fiction, where Aboriginal narrative is automatically assigned the place of past and fiction.

If I were going to tell the story in a way more consistent with a Western narrative I would say this:

Kath Walker was an Aboriginal woman of the Noonuccal people of what is now called Stradbroke Island. She became a national advocate of Aboriginal rights in the 1960’s, travelling Australia raising awareness on behalf of organisations such as FACATSI and OPAL (One People of Australia League) (Fryer Library, 2007). Her key means of communicating was through her writing in which she used poetry as a particularly effective tool for making the mainstream aware of Indigenous issues and the racism that continued to impede the achievement of equity for Indigenous people. In 1988, Kath Walker, along with author Colin Johnson decided to adopt Indigenous names as part of their protest against the celebration of the Bicentennial of the landing of the First Fleet. At the suggestion of Pastor Don Brady that she call herself Paperbark as a designation of her position as an author, Kath Walker chose to become Oodgeroo Noonuccal -literally Paperbark of the Noonuccal people (Noonuccal, 1988, 20).

It might seem that the second way Oodgeroo’s story was recounted is the ‘rational’ way, giving the facts. But in practice, Dreaming stories aren’t told as discreet entities: they are contextualised and debated (Crocker, 2003). Telling Oodgeroo’s story in a culturally appropriate manner means that this one story acts as a linkage in the transmission of a fuller oral tradition as her lifecycle intersects with the lifecycle of others. While many people only think of Indigenous artefacts as being things like

boomerangs or didgeridoos, they may also be things such as texts; photographs (see Figure 6.1); ephemera such as tickets, posters or programmes; petitions; legislation; court proceedings and judgements; transcripts of speeches. In this way, there is much that can be used as an artefact of Oodgeroo's lifecycle to support the integrity of her position as a spokesperson for Aboriginal rights and as a cultural mediator between oral, written and visual traditions that form a new Dreaming. For example, Oodgeroo Noonuccal "felt poetry would be the breakthrough for Aboriginal people because they were story-tellers and song-makers, and [she] felt poetry would appeal to them more than anything else" (1988, 22). This synthesis was also discussed by Sally Morgan, who when asked "Do you see a relationship between your art and your writing", replied, "There's a connection in both of them... I'm also interested not just in writing oral histories, but painting oral histories, doing the same thing in a different form" (Morgan, 1988, 105). It is worth noting that there are a myriad of ways in which the oral histories that form our Dreamings may be conveyed visually that include dance, art and sculpture.



**Figure 6.1. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Pastor Don Brady and ors. King George Square, Brisbane circa 1970 (UQ E Space, 2007)**



For me personally, the understanding and experience of the Dreaming is something that challenges individuals to be totally engaged in their surroundings. Being aware of spirit messengers, responding to feelings and using all senses to judge what is occurring are all ways in which the Indigenous cultural lens is brought to bear on the mundane. The Ngarrindjeri refer to this as the 'miwi' (Bell, 2002). Some of my most vivid childhood memories concern death and attendance at funerals. In hindsight, this is hardly surprising as these were significant events in my development of a publicly experienced Indigenous identity. These operate not only from my experience, but also from the repetition of family oral history. With each death, someone within the extended network has always received a sign that a death is about to occur. In the case of Ruby Langford-Ginibi, the significance of this features in the early part of her first book *Don't Take Your Love To Town*. Langford-Ginibi's Uncle Ernie Ord told her as a young girl to watch for the Willie Wagtail, her spirit bird. As Ruby recounts "Many years later I was living in Waterloo. One day I saw a Willie Wagtail. That afternoon I heard my brother George had died" (1988, 2). This story has an extra resonance for me, as Ruby's brother George was my mother's much-loved first cousin and my Uncle. I remember his death and my mother still has his funeral card in her possessions.

Although the Willie Wagtail is particularly significant to Ruby, birds are generally regarded as messengers. A bird flying into your home or unusually calling within your hearing is a sign to be aware that news, most often of a death, is approaching. To further illustrate this I like to use the best-known Indigenous autobiography, Sally Morgan's *My Place*. At the conclusion of the book, Sally's grandmother passes away and it is Sally's sister Jill who hears the death call of the bird heralding her passing. At first perplexed that she didn't hear the bird, Sally eventually reconciles it by claiming that she heard it in her heart (Probyn-Rapsey, 2007). While I am unfamiliar with the specificities of Morgan's culture, this is not a claim that would be made in my cultures. Indeed, there is considerable prestige attributed to individuals because they were the ones who received the omen. I remember having a conversation about this with a family member who said rather indignantly of Morgan's reinterpretation, "You can't do that. That message was for her sister. She shouldn't try to put herself in it".

Another omen is called the 'death stones' also referred to by Langford Ginibi (1988). For my mother's family this occurred after there was a wedding in their neighbourhood. That night, there was pounding of stones on the roof, but when everyone rushed outside there were no stones visible. My Grandmother said "We'll hear bad news in the morning". The next day word came that the newlyweds had been killed in a car accident on the way to their honeymoon. The newly deceased may also reveal themselves in dreams, by leaving doors open or moving objects that indicate that they have visited at the time of death or by three knocks (Tripcony, 1996). It is not uncommon for the deceased to come and speak or play with young family members who identify their 'companions' from photographs. In a similar way, Baines (2001, 80) writes of "testimonies to the post-death appearance of grandmothers and grandfathers coming to the doors and entering the homes of their successors".

Not long before Uncle George's death, my Great-grandmother, Granny Webb passed away. She was grandmother to both my mother and Uncle George. I have come to know of the circumstances surrounding her death from my mother. Word had been passed by telephone from Casino to Sydney that Granny was dying. Both my parents sat up waiting. Late into the night, the lights momentarily went out. My father asked my mother "Was that her"? Mum said, "Yes", checked the time and went to bed. In the morning it was confirmed that the time the lights dimmed was the time that Granny had passed away. After her funeral, my parent's car refused to start at the graveside. Some of Mum's family stayed to provide assistance. When it was noticed and verbalised that only Granny's grandchildren remained at the graveside, the car started. This was interpreted that Granny had refused to let the car start to manipulate a final private farewell with her grandchildren. Sometimes an event will persist until the deceased is acknowledged. Cessation of the event signifies that the message has been interpreted correctly. These should not be read as isolated incidents as I have not known an Indigenous family that does not have stories similar to this.

Dodson, Elston and McElroy (2006, 258) argue that funerals express important cultural beliefs and practice around kinship, loss, grief and death. They continue to be rituals shaped by people's desire to perform them in appropriate ways, but also adjust to contemporary and changing social situations.

I attended the funeral of an elder from another NSW coastal group. As is common, her male relations carried her coffin to the graveside. Although she was a very frail woman the six men carrying her coffin began to struggle with the weight of the casket. As they came close to dropping the coffin, other men, realising there was a problem ran to help bear the weight and yet still struggled with it. As the coffin was lowered there was a steady murmuring of mourners saying things like “Oh no, Aunt’s wild [angry], she made that coffin heavy you know”. It was the group consensus that the Elder had made the coffin heavy to reprimand her children (who were in their sixties) for fighting on the way to her funeral, causing the service to start late. In taking action so that all mourners were aware of her displeasure, Aunt shamed her daughters for not meeting their responsibilities as chief mourners to act ‘properly’ and to see her buried with decorum and respect. My mother, husband and I often drive past the Church and cemetery where this occurred and we cannot help but mention “poor Aunt”, thus the landscape for us is imbued with her continued presence through shared story.

Using all senses to determine one’s spiritual safety in place is paramount within my Indigenous cultures. For instance, I was taught to be wary if I smell decay as this is often signifies the presence of an evil spirit. The key story used as an example here is of my great-grandfather, who when left to sleep on the veranda of a house as a baby, was stolen by a Hairy Man and taken into the bush. He was found in an old tree stump by a clever man. Returned home, he had to endure multiple washings to remove “the smell of the dead”. Apart from alerting listeners to the presence of the “dead”, this story also functions as a warning to watch ones children lest they be stolen too. It is suggested that when children play, especially near the bush, that you keep counting them to make sure that they are not one too many, as this may be a Hairy Man, taken form as a child to try and lure the children away.

It is a perspective that can be used to interpret popular culture as well. I remember my Uncle informing me that the iconic Australian film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was based on a true story about Mt Lindsay, known in Bundjalung as Jabuthergoom, the Home of the Hairy Men. I have also heard other east coast groups claim it is their mountain where events take place. Carr (2005, 124-5) writes

Those attempting to solve the mystery have often deflected the charge of culpability onto Aboriginal 'land spirits' which guard sacred sites against unwelcome intrusion... note it can be inferred that Hanging Rock exacts a brooding **revenge** on the College girls as a gesture of retribution for European invasion, it is nonetheless an interesting conjecture on their fate.

Through my families Bundjalung analysis it is obvious that the girls in this story have been spirited away by the Hairy Men to deep with the Mountain, hence the searchers inability to find them. The rejection of Edith, the fat girl, makes perfect sense within this cultural logic, as we are told the Hairy Men only want beautiful young girls, although whether this is a long standing belief or reflection of modern misogyny I am unsure. The return of one girl serves as a warning not to go the mountain unguarded. Even for those who belong to the country this requires care. In travelling over the Mount Lindsay Highway to Queensland, my mother locks the car door to keep out the Hairy Men.

To many outside of an Indigenous sociality this might seem to be a rather fanciful cultural fairy tale, a functioning allegory to warn of the dangers of the bush and the need to keep watch over children. It is a readily accessible stereotype that has found its way into the mainstream imaginary through "the bushy-eyebrowed, spindly-legged and nulla nulla-clutching Big Bad Banksia Man" (McDermott, 2006) of the May Gibb's Snuggle Pot and Cuddle Pie books. But the Hairy Man in contemporary Aboriginal communities exists both as allegory and as actor within the particularly distressing and destructive issue of Aboriginal suicide. Relating to deaths in and out of custody, the Hairy Man is sometimes used to explain the reason behind the torment that leads individuals to self-harm. An outstanding study on Aboriginal youth suicide in Queensland by Reser, Hunter, Reser and Baird (2002) makes clear that the normalisation of suicide as a part of Aboriginal society is pervasive and may also be linked to fundamental experiences of this Aboriginal spiritual belief. As reported in the media:

The Hairy Man comes, unannounced, in the dead of night. He is a black, sinewy figure who stands before his sleeping victims like an ancestral hunter. One hand holds the spear by his side; the other

holds a rope. There is a possum pelt around his waist and his eyes burn like the embers of a camp fire. Wordlessly, he hands over the rope... [Peter Gray] had experienced the dream many times. Always, he awoke from it sweating and terrified, not knowing where he was, fighting hard to control the compulsion to injure himself, sometimes, unsuccessfully.

He was found at dawn, hanging from his mother's gum tree; his friends cut him down, but [Peter], who had celebrated his 21st birthday the month before, was dead.

Later, in the playground at St Michael's Catholic school, where [Peter] and [Craig] had once shared a desk, the children were talking about [Peter] and playing the hanging game. As they grabbed the chains of the climbing frame and put them over each other's heads, they said: "The Hairy Man's coming, take the rope, put it on your head and then you're dead." (Scott-Clark & Levy, [names changed from original], cited in Hunter, Reser, Baird & Reser, 1999, 30).

Apart from the tragic present consequences, what this demonstrates is that the spectre of the Hairy Man has already been passed on to the next generation of Aboriginal children and as such will in all likelihood retain its currency as an explanatory force for social behaviours. As Reser et al further explain, torment from past suicides and malevolent spiritual forces affected Aboriginal inmates in some detention facilities to such an extent that cleansing through ritual smoking ceremony was permitted (Ibid.)<sup>14</sup>.

In exposing students to these types of stories I am not asking them to 'believe' the Indigenous interpretation. What they should draw from them though is an appreciation that Aboriginal people's everyday lives and ceremonial performance are informed by continuing spiritual beliefs. One of my students, who worked as a nurse in the NSW prisons system found information of this type very illuminating. He

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<sup>14</sup> The need to "smoke" sites where deaths have occurred also has ramifications for culturally appropriate medical treatment (Maddocks & Rayner, 2003).

commented that this “made sense” of some Aboriginal inmate’s behaviours, but he questioned whether the New South Wales prisons system would embrace these understandings. Worryingly, he thought it more likely that reportage by inmates of spiritual unrest would more likely result in diagnoses of mental illness or delusion than as “real”. This area can be linked into the re-evaluation being undertaken by Health Sociology who have been querying their area’s silence on Indigenous issues during the same period as the broader Sociology discipline (Tsey & Hunter, 2001).

Among the platitudes that non-Aboriginal students are able to recite with regard to Aboriginal culture, the position that “Aboriginal people do not own the land it owns them” and “the land is their mother” are commonly expressed. The full import of this does not seem to be comprehended and extends to a positioning of connection to country as a static tradition. As such Aboriginal people who move away from country become objects of pity or derision, as through either lens they become defined as having “lost” their culture (Walker, 1993). My position differs markedly from this. As Indigenous peoples have moved away from country through state coercion, economic deprivation and choice, they share with many diasporic populations the ability to conceive of a “homeland” that exists in both temporal and sacred domains.

Contextualised within the field of diaspora studies, Aboriginal continued beliefs despite physical dispersal should be recognised as a trait of cultural continuity not lessened authenticity. Just as it would not be correct to suggest to those of Semitic or Islamic faiths that their global dispersal negates their spirituality (Levitt, 2001), the argument cannot be sustained against Indigenous peoples either. While the work by Indigenous academics encompassing diasporic spiritualities is growing it is still relatively small (Tripcony, 1996), however there is a larger body of resources in auto/biography (Langford Ginibi, 1988, Huggins, Huggins & Jacobs, 1997), surveys for National Parks and Wildlife (Kijas, 2005), children’s books (Stone, 1995, 332) and multimedia (Dust Echoes/ABC, 2007) that can be used.

Jackie Huggins, Rita Huggins and Jane Jacobs’ (1997) earlier discussed work that details a trip to Carnarvon Gorge shows an example. For Rita, it is a pilgrimage, a return to the country from which her family originates, which is as she poetically puts it, her “born place”. The removal of her people, the Bidjara- Pitjara, during the hated

Protection period placed her in decades long physical separation from her country. It did not sever her connectedness to the country. Rita says:

I was a small child when we were taken from my born country. I only remember little of those times there but my memories are very precious to me. Most of my life has been spent away from my country... but I remember about the land I come from. It will always be home, the place I belong to (Rita Huggins, cited in Huggins, Huggins & Jacobs, 1997, 232).

For Rita's daughter Jackie, the visit to Carnarvon Gorge is a first opportunity to walk her land, sharing the experience with her mother. It shows connectivity not gained by being born there, but by a multi-generational matrilineal belonging.

This was our place, my sense of becoming. The land of my mother and my maternal grandmother is my land too. It will be passed down to my children and successive generations, spiritually, in the manner that has been carried out for thousands of years (Jackie Huggins, cited in Huggins, Huggins & Jacobs, 1997, 243-4).

As another example, in *My Bundjalung People* (1999) Ruby Langford Ginibi provides a story that combines belonging to country, creation Dreaming, diasporic transmission via orality and reconnection through kinship. The ability to retain a Bundjalung Dreaming within a distanced urban context is striking, with Ruby's descriptions of her son Nobby and her affirmation "[Bundjalung land] was his country but he'd never been here before" (Langford, 1999, 106). Nobby's sense of belonging and that of Ruby's other children comes from their exposure to oral history whilst growing up predominantly in Sydney. In making journeys back to Bundjalung country Ruby realigns herself with kin, not only at an individualistic level, but also as daughter, granddaughter and niece of others.

For Nobby, his initial acceptance at Box Ridge relies almost exclusively on his position as Ruby's son. Ruby introduces him to her elders and her contemporaries as Nunyars jarjum, or my child. She uses the same form of address in the out of country urban context, amongst a predominantly non-Bundjalung audience when opening his first art exhibition when she says "Then I called out in my lingo, 'Balugan nunyars

jarjum! [Handsome young man my child] Welcome back to your Dreaming' (1992, 160). The term Balugan or handsome young man is not purely descriptive. It is originally the name of a Bundjalung ancestor figure. Balugan's mother-in-law Dirrangun, was a clever woman, who because of her jealousy of Balugan suppressed the local water with her body. Eventually the force of the water caused a flow from both legs. In this way the Clarence and Richmond rivers, that are central to many Bundjalung Dreaming tracks, were formed (1992, 7-8).

Significantly, Dreaming Tracks do not only relate to the movement of ancestor figures from what the West would term antiquity. They may also be roads along which repetitive journeys or one journey of great significance, were made (Baines, 2001). Ruby also follows a Dreaming track along the Richmond, beginning in Casino, passing the "Webbs' house" and culminating at Evans Head. This journey is replicated by my own family who have had a multi-generational occupation of the "Webbs' house"<sup>15</sup>. For Ruby, the Webb's house symbolises the abandonment of her mother through the marriage dissolution of her parents' marriage and subsequent marriage to my Great Uncle Eddie. For me it is our family home, as Baines notes, a "fallback point" (2001, 79) and the place where we begin our Dreaming track to Evans Head. In 2000, we spent Christmas in Casino, at this home, then owned by my grandfather's sisters. On Boxing Day, four generations of our family, including our elder Auntie Gertie travelled to Evans Head and the Bundjalung National Park on the coast. As Auntie Gertie would recount, our family has been making that journey for generations, first walking, then by sulky, hired truck and today in our own cars. I have vague memories as a young girl of Granny Dorothy making one of her final journeys there with us. In 2000, we began the process of introducing our next generation to our family 'place' in both land and sea. To outsiders it no doubt appeared a fairly typical family gathering, when my mother bathed her first granddaughter, Phoebe, in the water at Evans Head. However, at this place, where the river meets the sea she was acting in her role as grandmother to enfranchise her granddaughter in a tradition whose length of performance we can't even estimate<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> This is multi-generational from my Great-great-grandmother Louisa Collins; to my great-grandparents Bob and Dot Webb, grandfather Peter Webb and his siblings Gertie, Rube, Eddie and Esther; grandfather's cousins Jimmy and John (Bullocky) Collins; mother's cousin George Webb; my cousins Michelle and Stewart Webb and their children (cousins to my children).

<sup>16</sup> Note to scientists (archaeologists, biologists) - we're not interested in trying to quantify it either!



This physical expression of the connectedness of family history also acts as a means through which the dynamics of racial oppression are expressed to later generations. In a small photograph stored by Aunts in a tin, a truck with its back filled with Bundjalung people from Casino people is shown. Men in suits and hats, women in their best dresses and broad floral hats are heading to Evans Head along the same roads we still travel. Stories from other Aboriginal groups from the other side of the continent tell similar tales of Aboriginal movements contextualised within broader social interaction with non-Aboriginal people (Baines, 2001). Matter-of-factly, my Aunts tell me that this was the sanitation truck, the only vehicle that local Aboriginal people could hire. They would remove the sanitation bins and scrub out the truck. Then, in their best clothes they would travel as group to fulfil both social and spiritual engagements. A trace of wistfulness in her beautiful blue eyes, my Aunt looked down: “you wouldn’t do that now,” she said. What can be difficult to express to outsiders is lack of anger displayed by many of these elders in what we, the younger generations, regard with anger at the denial of rights. In commenting on this, Jackie Huggins says

The people of my mother's generation display a profound lack of bitterness about their lot, something, which I find both frustrating and amazing. This trait has often polarised old and young Aboriginal people (Jackie Huggins, cited in Huggins, Huggins & Jacobs, 1997, 235).

Of the three examples discussed on children making their first visit to their country, a consistent feature is that they are “welcomed to country” by family members. It doesn’t matter if, as with Nobby or Jackie, this occurs as an adult, they are entitled to welcome, to the public acknowledgement of his or her belonging; the introduction to country and kinship network in body and spirit and enfranchisement in kinship history. While today, these often occur without the stringent formality of ritual that many anthropologists would recognise, there is no doubt that they meet the core requirements of cultural continuity for Aboriginal people.

In a broader sense, the notion of ‘Welcome to Country’, expressed in a variety of ways, has formed an integral part of many Indigenous ceremonies for thousands of years. All areas of the continent have had large gatherings of different Indigenous

groups. These gatherings served a number of purposes: Firstly, they allowed for participation in ceremony for the purposes of required ritual, spiritual renewal, storytelling, and teaching of law (Rose, 1996). Secondly, they were often related to abundant natural resources, particularly those that were seasonal. This meant that the local area could support large numbers of people without damaging the ecosystem. Thirdly, although rarely acknowledged by the academy, they acted as a site for trade. Fourthly, they allowed for the arrangement of intermarriage between groups and for the complexities of the kinship system to be continued (Dingle, 1988, 17-21). A common feature of ceremony was the welcome and acknowledgement of participating groups. The spirits were also recognised, with the dual purpose of respect, but also to ask for protection to the participants from any malevolent spiritual forces.

In mainstream Australian institutional practice, the adoption of ‘Welcome to Country’ or ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ shows the dynamism of Indigenous cultures. An elder from the local country generally performs a “Welcome to Country”.

Alternatively, a custodial elder, someone accepted by the local community as an elder whose country is elsewhere or designated person may be the speaker. As part of both these processes, the audience is given welcome to the area on behalf of the Aboriginal people, past and present. In an acknowledgement of country, respect is paid to the “traditional owners” of the local area. Again, this acknowledges the past and present. The potential tokenism of this practice is discussed by Jane Haggis who recognises the practice of Welcome to Country being performed within the Academy but questions her own commitment to its deeper meaning.

Having enacted such acknowledgements of Indigenous ownership on numerous occasions, I now experience a growing sense of ambivalence about my iteration of the protocol. I wonder what my words actually do? It seems to me that as I speak, I both reveal and disguise my complicity in a continuing colonising moment in the production of knowledge. Apart from paying respect to the prior and continuing presence of First Nations, I do not engage with the ways of knowing and being embedded in that Indigenous presence (Haggis, 2004, 48-49).

Haggis' preoccupation here resonates with what I have noted where Welcome to Country occurs in universities, at formal gatherings or in lectures. It is often used as an opportunity to teach about local history, but not to explicitly acknowledge that non-Indigenous people have just been included in an Indigenous cosmology. In not clearly giving voice to the import of this practice its power as both a spiritual experience and as a reconciliatory mechanism are undermined. As such, I am at pains to explain to my students the significance of Welcome to Country.

Education students often articulate that they have little knowledge about Aboriginal culture and no direct experience of it. Getting them to understand their place as participants in Indigenous culture through the continuity of Dreaming practice can give them both a personal connection to Indigenous spirituality and the understanding of why Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country are performed in schools. I have also provided a web address for the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups document on the protocols associated with Welcome to Country (NSW AECG, 2002) so that students have a formalised resource on the practice.

Spirituality embodied in the Dreaming is an integral element of Aboriginal cultures with Lyons arguing that for Indigenous people “Spirituality is the highest form of politics” (cited in Stewart-Harawira, 2005, 155). This chapter has shown that the Dreaming is indeed politicised in many arenas. These include the academy, the struggle over representation and within Aboriginal socialities themselves. As I have commented I do not request that students share my Aboriginal beliefs but they must understand the significance that the Dreaming continues to play as a structural feature of Aboriginal lives. Moreover students may themselves become incorporated in performative elements that continue to make the Dreaming potent in Australia today.

## **Chapter 7. Teaching about the Aboriginal concepts of the lifecycle.**

Although there are some variations, all Aboriginal groups possess a notion of the lifecycle that is the manifestation of the Dreaming. The lifecycle retains legitimacy as an explanatory mechanism for many Aboriginal people today. In the following chapter I detail an explanation of the different periods of the lifecycle, while providing a commentary on the ways in which audio-visual material can assist in illuminating the cycle and generating further sociological discussion within a classroom situation. As a further developed theme I have used audiovisual materials that have been developed by and about the Yolngu peoples of Arnhem Land (see Figure 7.1). Although I am often wary of using such materials as students often then wrongly identify it as “authentic”, contributing to the “northern bias” (ABC, 1999), the volume of information available and the amount that has been developed either under local Indigenous control or with local feedback makes it attractive<sup>17</sup>. The section concludes with a consideration of the repatriation of Aboriginal remains as a means of repairing a ruptured lifecycle for many Indigenous Australian peoples. The specific focus on the return of remains from Tasmania evidences the breadth of the Dreaming and lifecycle as continued responsibility spreads from the north-most parts of Australia to its most southern. Moreover it shows the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal people in having our beliefs and knowledge traditions recognised over the hegemony of science. Because of the hegemony of anthropology in this topic area and the dearth of sociological literature, this chapter may not seem appropriate for a sociological discussion. However, this is what occurs within my sociological classroom and as such it is consistent with the thesis aims.

### **The Yolngu Lifecycle as an example in the classroom**

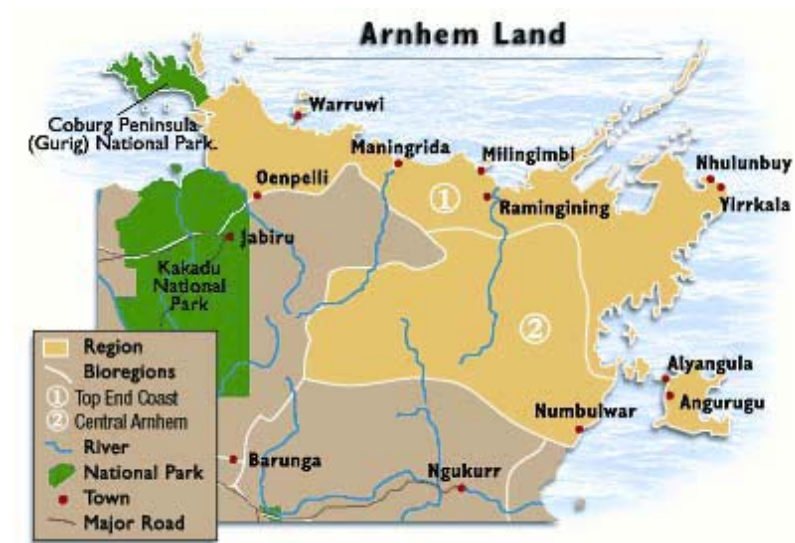
The body of work available on the Yolngu is one of the largest on any Aboriginal people, due to a number of factors. Firstly, there has been consistent anthropological attention during the Twentieth Century that is interesting comparatively. For instance, Mountford and Thomson provide different perspectives from the 1930’s (Starrs,

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<sup>17</sup> Other academics have similarly tried to develop localised representations. Leonard (2003) has developed a fascinating IT based representation of Nyungar Dreaming that is also notable for its reflective consideration of Leonard’s position as a non-Aboriginal mediator of this knowledge.

2007). Secondly, the relative isolation of the area from Western influences has led to the culturally comparative aspects are more easily teased out. Thirdly, the success of some of the later structural features of the community have assisted in creating opportunities for mainstream creative exposure in politics: The Barunga Statement; music [Yothu Yindi] (Yothu Yindi, 2006); film [*Yolngu Boy* and *Ten Canoes*] (Hartogh, 2007) and art installations [*The Aboriginal Memorial*] (Mundine, 2000).

**Figure 7.1: Arnhem Land (Tudball & Lewis, 2006)**

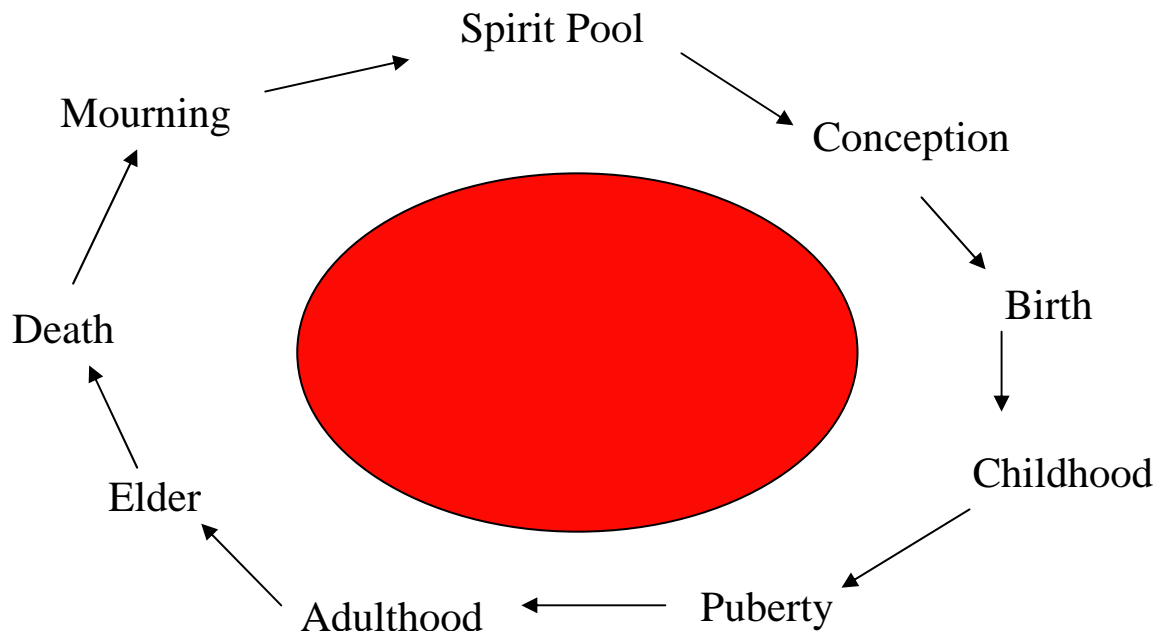


For many Yolngu individuals, the life cycle is integral to The Dreaming and for many Aboriginal groups both begin and end with a “Spirit Pool” (See Figure 7.2). As individuals progress through stages of birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age to death, mourning and a return to the Spirit Pool, each stage is accompanied by an increased spiritual knowledge and responsibility that relates to country, kin and community.

Conception involves the movement of a spirit from the spirit pool into a mother (Grimshaw, 1994). This notion of the “pool” may be entirely metaphysical or tied to a specific landscape feature such as a lake. Dreams, premonitions or other signs may be present to herald conception. For instance, Galaruwuy Yunupingu states

My land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land and so did my ancestors of the same land. We may have come in dreams to

the living member of the family, to notify them that the spirit has come from that part of our land and that he will be conceiving in this particular mother” (Yunupingu, cited in Rose, 1996, 40).



**Figure 7.2. Aboriginal Lifecycle**

Birth processes were gendered, with men and younger children not allowed. Female relatives, who “lived through” the birth, generally attended birthing mothers. They not only provided physical care but also gave spiritual support to the mother and child. Although most twentieth century literature on this practice focuses on remote Aboriginal peoples, First Fleet Lieutenant David Collins noted it in the Sydney region in 1791 (Grimshaw, 1994, 8). In recording the details from European women who had been present at birth by an Eora woman named Warraweer, Collins also noted the ceremonial smoking of the mother and baby to promote spiritual protection and good health (Ibid, 8-9).

In discussing current incidences, Bartlett recounts the words of an Aboriginal woman explaining the continued significance of the practice:

We dig that hole, put that medicine leaf, put fire, put that leaf, that smell, then we put baby there, with baby lying down and smoke coming up through the baby—baby can’t get sick. After baby we

put mother, lying down. First she head, her back, then her tummy and her leg. She can't bleed much now. Smoke stops that bleeding and makes strong. Law way we doing it (Bartlett, 2004, 349).

Bartlett continues to provide examples from a wide geographical range of the Kimberleys in Western Australia to Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory that detail the reticence of Aboriginal women to access pre and post-natal clinics, preferring instead to seek advice from within their female kin network. One successful program in East Arnhem has synthesised the Yolngu beliefs and practices of bush tucker, ritual smoking and female educative traditions with clinic visits. This has created a dual cultural environment in which Aboriginal women are more likely to participate and healthier outcomes are likely to accrue (Bartlett, 2004, 349). Similar practices of ceremonial smoking continue in the southeast for birth mothers and also form a part of the inclusion of Aboriginal practice into mainstream performance (Bird Rose, 1996, 64). It should be noted that there are different levels of public performance, from those that can be performed in front of anyone, to those that are highly restricted such as initiation.

It is my position that any discussion on initiation in the public domain should remain of a general nature. I believe that the textual and visual recording of sacred material should be left to the decision of elders to disseminate in a site based gendered way, not necessarily as the fodder for intellectual dissection by outsiders. To date, despite avowals of culturally appropriate and sensitive treatment, there are no failsafe methods through which secret/sacred knowledges have been honoured in the mainstream. I would hold up the Hindmarsh Island controversy as a case in point here.

In teaching, I make the following points about initiation. An individual's first initiation generally occurred around the onset of puberty and involved aspects of separation from children; gendered ritual; enfranchisement into new knowledge and a change in proscribed responsibility for oneself and the group. The change here was often manifested in a tangible way, from scarification to dress (Grimshaw, 1994, 22). As societies constructed on models of lifelong learning, Indigenous societies had

other levels of knowledge that required further initiations, culminating in categories of eldership.

In contrast to Western bureaucratic models where chronological age plays a significant role in determining the transition between stages, age plays a far diminished role in Aboriginal cultures. Judgements regarding readiness are critical here. As a consequence, one may be old without being an elder or adult in terms of age without having been regarded structurally as such by one's family and community. This is strikingly evident in the Film *Yolngu Boy* that shows three age mates whose commitment to live by the law and lore of their particular communities varies greatly. Although the characters are broadly drawn, the film is never the less an excellent resource for presenting the diversity of Aboriginal experience. Villella (2001), a film critic comments on her first viewing of *Yolngu Boy*:

In a public screening for the film that was followed by a Q&A with the director, scriptwriter and producer that I attended, it became quite obvious in the tenor and content of the audience's questions that they not only enjoyed the film but were indeed moved by what they had just seen. It was apparent that the main reason for such a reaction was because the audience was given a rare opportunity to relish in the sounds and images of Aboriginal characters, their communities and their stories, portrayed in a naturalistic, detailed and genuine light.

My students have reacted in a similar way to the film, being emotionally affected but also inspired to engage with the material. This has not always been the case. In tutoring for another subject, the film/documentary "Who Killed Malcolm Smith" was shown to represent Aboriginal youth alienation and the issue of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The film's heartrending conclusion where Malcolm dies after attempting to gouge out his eye with a paint brush, as a means of living up to the Christian saying "If your eye offends you pluck it out" (Lay, 1990, 236) greatly distressed many students. As the film took up the entire tutorial period there was no opportunity for students to be debriefed on the material, or for it to be contextualised. Student feedback made clear that while the film had impacted upon them, it was ultimately detrimental as it caused them to withdraw from the subject rather than engage with it.



This was a valuable lesson for me. I do believe that material should destabilise student complacency. Having this extend to the point of trauma however without factoring in the need to ameliorate its effects can damage the implicit trust in the relationship between the lecturer and the students. This can lead to a later wariness in student approach to presented material (Berman, 2001). Yolngu Boy, while upsetting, provides an ending that while tragic is not hopeless.

Yolngu Boy provides an insight into the continued process of initiation and its potential to more fully integrate the individual within their sociality. While the boys share an affiliation to a Crocodile Dreaming through ritual undergone in childhood (see Figure 7.3 where young Botj has been painted with the Crocodile design), their divergent paths in adolescence lead to strikingly different opportunities in “adulthood”.



**Figure 7.3 Young Botj (Lewis & Tudball, 2006)**

For Lorrpu and Millika, the judgement of elder men leads to further initiation and a fuller enfranchisement within the Yolngu social structure. Interestingly, the character of Millika seems to find similar purpose through his immersion in football, a comparison made in other contexts nationally. Rigney and Hemming's discussion of the Adelaide Oval as a pre and postcolonial site of ceremony with football a contemporary mediator (Hemming & Rigney, 2003) is one such example. For Botj however, juvenile crime and incarceration, substance abuse and a general

disassociation from country and community combine to leave him in a precarious position, failing to find meaning or belonging in either Yolngu or western society. The small vignette where Botj finds but is unrecognised by his father, an addict living in the “long-grass” itinerant community outside Darwin (Tudball & Lewis, 2006,6) offers a glimpse into Botj’s future that seems bereft of hope<sup>18</sup>.

As a consequence of this disturbing interaction Botj turns to petrol sniffing. His hallucinations lead to death, mirroring the real statistical disparities in young Indigenous male mortality rates. The cause of Botj's death as either misadventure or suicide are not clear, yet in either case the suicide risk factors of “life crises, substance abuse and personality traits of aggressive impulsivity” (Kirmeyer, 2007, xvi) are all present. Within some paradigms, even an accidental death when viewed as a part of a series of self-destructive behaviours may be classified as a “slow suicide” (Kirmeyer, 2007, 4). Botj’s situation provides a strong segue into discussions on the cultural difficulties experienced by many colonised Indigenous youth, where early death by misadventure, violence or suicide while lamented, do not attract stigma, but rather are regraded as ‘typical’. The disintegration of social structure as a consequence of colonisation is also highlighted as a feature of Indigenous youth disaffection internationally (Hirini & Collings, 2005, 4).

The work of Durkheim in the seminal text *Suicide* is an obvious sociological consideration here, yet in attempting to relate this text to more current sociological literature, opinions vary. For instance, Colin Tatz (1999, 65), while acknowledging Durkheim’s significance in the study of suicide, finds that the concept of anomie has only limited usefulness in an Aboriginal context. International literature on Indigenous suicide almost uniformly acknowledge Durkheim's significance to the consideration of the topic, but like Tatz, although they see some resonance with anomie they are sceptical of Durkheim's utility in addressing some features of the specific aspects of Indigenous suicide patterns (Kirmayer et al, 2007, 30).

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<sup>18</sup> This resonates with the real experiences of Malcolm Smith who after a four-year period in Kinchela Boys Home in NSW had his life chances assessed by the manager: taking into account Malcolm's lack of academic qualifications, being a persistent liar and his habits of perversion, it is difficult to be able to recommend anything for the future for him (Cunneen, 1989).

A later work that showcases Yolngu peoples and culture is the stunning *Ten Canoes*. Part of its strength lays in the actors being exclusively drawn from the Yolngu people themselves and from their integral relation to the development of the script in which their attention to detail is fascinating<sup>19</sup>. Of further interest is the trend where Indigenous people have used anthropological recordings to reaffirm or reconstruct cultural activities, such as ceremony and language and story (Thomas, 2006). In *Ten Canoes*, the work of White anthropologist Donald Thomson (see Figure 7.4) was used to provide a model for some aspects of the story, particularly those relating to the canoes and the platforms used in the swamps. Even the director of photography used Thomson's photographs as a model to recreate in the black and white sections of the film (Byrnes, 2006).



**Figure 7.4. Yolngu Canoes mid 1930's Donald Thomson Collection, Museum of Victoria, (Tudball & Lewis, 2006, 5)**

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<sup>19</sup> The character of Birrinbirrin for instance is played by an actor who is overweight. This would not pose a problem within a Western narrative nor be seen as 'inauthentic' by a Western audience, but the cast recognised that obesity was not a feature of pre-contact life- a startling revelation to students given that obesity and its attendant health problems are prevalent in Aboriginal communities today (O'Dea, Rowley & Brown, 2007, 494-5). In order to maintain the integrity of the story, the character is portrayed as a glutton for honey, a device that is also humorous.

All aspects of the lifecycle are evidenced in the captivating film *Ten Canoes* (2006) that deals with representations of Yolngu Dreaming in ways that I have observed are engaging to both domestic and international students. From the narrator's initial assertion of birth and death being related to a metaphysical and physical spirit pool, *Ten Canoes* presents a comprehensive range of aspects of Yolngu culture, relating to the life cycle. Marriage plays a particularly significant role in this regard. Set within a history of polygamy (Keen 2006), the hierarchy of wives; segregation of unmarried males from camp life; and responsibilities to protect wives from abduction or avenge it are included in the story. These issues of sexual politics too are of extreme relevance to the contemporary Aboriginal situation as the recent interventions into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory demonstrate.

In mistakenly believing that *The Stranger* has kidnapped one of his wives, Ridjimiril's anger allows the entry of malevolent spirit into his body that causes him to murderous violence against an innocent man. In order to allow their dead kinsman to rest, *The Strangers* party seek acknowledgement and payback from Ridjimiril. As shown in *Ten Canoes*, a kinsman may stand with or in place of a guilty party to discharge the responsibility of payback. Once payback has been achieved the matter is resolved<sup>20</sup>.

The repetition of the Stranger's people in moving in to claim injury and then stepping back to allow acknowledgement is an apt metaphor for contemporary processes such as Reconciliation which is "initiated by the perpetrator's acknowledgement of the wrongfulness of his act, followed by remorse and reparation, which opens the way for forgiveness and, ultimately, the restoration of community" (Schaap, 2003, 1).

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<sup>20</sup> The continued currency of payback is of further use in discussions as spearing and beatings continue to be practiced as forms of punishment in various areas of Australia. Even in the so-called "settled south", acts of assault may be part of settling disputes, although this is rarely recognised within the courts.

While payback settles matters between peoples it has a further dimension that is related to the intervention of spirits. Ridjimiraril, who was possessed by a spirit that made him spear a Stranger, eventually dies not because of the spearing as such, but the entry of a spirit into his body that cannot be expelled by the sorcerer (Hartogh, 2007). The Death Dance, which he begins, but his kinsmen complete is part of a culturally appropriate means to allow the spirit to move on (see Figure 7.5).



**Figure 7.5. Death Dance-Ten Canoes (Tudball & Lewis, 2006, 13)**

All Indigenous cultures had, and have, responsibilities to treat the remains in culturally appropriate ways, that allow for the deceased to continue on their Dreaming cycle. Stanner concluded, death and burial

“were consciously concerned with two tasks: to enable the ghost of a dying or dead clansman to be quit of earthly ties, and to shepherd his immortal soul towards and into the place within his clan-country where his bones could lie at peace and whence (the doctrine varied a great deal) his or an equivalent spirit might animate a human host (Stanner, 1998, 13).

Variation between groups ranged from burial to cremation and internment of skeletal remains in burial poles (Sunoo, 2001). *Dust Echoes* (ABC, 2007), an animated series produced by the ABC provides some excellent examples of the Dreaming of the Rembarrnga people of Arnhem Land. Although animated, the representations are strikingly different artistically and musically to the Western animation that students

are familiar with (Figure 7.6). With a website including study guides providing a synopsis of the story and questions to direct critical thinking, *Dust Echoes* is powerful addition to tutorial discussion.

One segment entitled *Morning Star* (ABC, 2007) explains the first death that occurred amongst the Rembarrnga people and the development of appropriate ritual to deal with the remains of the deceased and to cleanse the group. Areas shown include the preparation of the body; placement in the tree by men of ceremony, for the flesh to be cleaned by birds; the placement of the bones in a Lorrkun or burial pole; the cleansing of mourners through fire and water; and the renewal of the cycle with the birth of a new child.



**Figure 7.6 Still from *Dust Echoes* (ABC, 2007)**

What is fascinating about the perception of northern Aboriginal culture is that it remains potent within student imagination that it has been unchanged in a linear sense. Changing that view is not only possible but also desirable and the practice of constructing burial poles are a good example of this. While the assumption on watching *Dust Echoes* is that construction of the Lorrkun is an unbroken tradition, this is only partially true. A conference paper by Thomas (2006) details his journey to Arnhem Land to show the film recordings made as a part of the work of ethnologist Charles Mountford's 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition. In seeing this film, some elderly men recalled seeing the ceremonies and activities as children but had lamented their passing. They were excited to discover the film footage as a means of reinvigorating these cultural practices. Thomas Yulidji wanted

that Wubarr [material] and anything on the Lorrkun ceremony...  
We want to show it to young men to introduce it to them (Thomas, 2006, 23-4).

Jacob Nayinggul, who also remembered various ceremonies shown in the historic footage, was moved by the memories it evoked and greatly desired for it to be retained appropriately within the community. He commented:

Today that ceremony is gone... Who can we find today who knows about that ceremony? I would like to hold on to it. Myself and the other senior men here... [Indicative of the way that film can be integrated as a major component of the future he continues] If we don't see this film again we won't be able to remember (Thomas, 2006, 24-25).

Further, the continued relevance of the Lorrkun and its expansion into contemporary political representation can be evidenced by the striking National Gallery of Australia exhibition entitled the *Aboriginal Memorial* (Smith, 2001 see Figure 7.7), 200 burial poles were constructed to represent

a forest where each tree symbolically contains the spirit or soul of a deceased person. In essence the forest forms a large cemetery of dead Aboriginal people - a war cemetery - a war memorial to all those Aboriginal people who have died defending their lands, their country since 1788. Two hundred years of white contact and black agony (Mundine, 2000).



**Figure 7.7. *Aboriginal Memorial* National Gallery of Australia**

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Aboriginal\\_hollow\\_log\\_tombs02.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Aboriginal_hollow_log_tombs02.jpg))

The *Aboriginal Memorial* is one example of how elements of the lifecycle have been modified to reflect a pan Aboriginal national agenda. The lifecycle extends to being part of the international rights agenda for Indigenous peoples as is evidenced by the attempts to reclaim Aboriginal remains from the many collections that exist globally. Justifying this return relies heavily on value-laden debate regarding the benefits of science as opposed to those of spirituality.

### **Repatriation of Remains and Repairing a Ruptured Dreaming**

One of the damaging legacies of colonisation has been the removal of Aboriginal remains for the purpose of display and scientific study, which ruptures the Dreaming cycle. The media coverage in 2007 on the Tasmanian Aboriginal challenge to repatriate the remains of their ancestors from the London Museum represents the latest but certainly not the first attempt made by Indigenous Australians to honour the unfinished spiritual journey of our peoples. The responsibility of Mourning will not be discharged until this occurs.

Museums, archaeologists and anthropologists often discourage the return of remains, with one of the key justifications in the refusal to repatriate remains a concern on the “loss to science” of such valuable sources of data. This seems a flawed argument in a number of ways. Part of the difficulty in challenging this mindset is that despite “a crisis of faith ...in the inevitability and ultimate success of Western progress, imperialism, science and technology” (Creed, 1994,158) there remains a pervasive inculcation that ‘science’ and its attendant forms of rationality constitute the most desirable and ultimately most useful form of knowledge endeavour.

One of the most pervasive theories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Social Darwinism, often featuring as a foundation part of understanding racism in Australia in sociological texts (Waters & Crook, 1990). Yet, the majority of texts or speakers focus on the development of Darwinism as it pertained to the animal kingdom, which was extrapolated by others in the antipodes. This ignores the fact that Darwin, in the words of Bernard Smith, “cannot be exonerated entirely from the charge of vulgarising his own theory” (1980, 20). In his visit to Australia and on later



reflection, Darwin explicitly linked his theory to the decline of Indigenous peoples. Further, classification of Indigenous peoples according to their Stone-Age implements, juxtaposed to the technological superiority of the invaders contributed to the inference of moral neutrality in judging frontier violence (Ibid.). In doing so, biological 'fact' became linked to social reality. Coupled with the understanding that the initial movements beyond the "limits of location" contravened colonial jurisdiction, it is hardly surprising then that violence against Indigenous peoples barely rated as an act worthy of consideration. Indeed, in the Legislative Council, William Charles Wentworth, scion of the squattocracy exclaimed that he...

Could not see if the whites in the colony were to go out and possess the land that the Government had anything to do with them...The civilised people had come in and the savage must go back... It was not the policy of a wise Government to attempt the perpetuation of the aboriginal [sic] race of New South Wales by any protective means" (Woolmington, 1973, p145).

It cannot be forgotten either that the decimation of Indigenous peoples on the Frontier was not decried by many men of science with some eagerly awaiting the scientific spoils of Indigenous deaths for 'specimens' (Turnbull, 1997; Murray, 1998). Supporting the conceptual validity of Indigenous demise, but challenging that this needed be achieved via violence or neglect, philanthropists sought to 'smooth the dying pillow' of Indigenous people through a lens of Christian charity. Never-the-less there are similarities in the dogmatic commitment to the superiority of European 'civility' as opposed to Indigenous 'savagery'. In this, European rationality was to transform the Native. Indigenous perceived irrationality was such that Darwin, in comparing it to the self-reflection of a dog, questioned 'how little can the hard-worked wife of a degraded Australian savage, who uses very few abstract words, and cannot count above four, exert her self-consciousness, or reflect on the nature of her very existence" (Smith 1980, 20). While acknowledging these attitudes were undeniably products of their time and that information gathered may be of interest to the development of a statistical profile on the studied population, this does not mitigate the often macabre acquisition of remains nor the attendant philosophies that saw millions of Indigenous peoples worldwide fearful of the gross mistreatment of

their remains and of the spiritual ramifications that would ensue from this (Watson, 2003; Hitchcock, 2002).

This is another example that the desire for so-called ‘objectivity’ is a Western intellectual conceit that is rarely valued by Indigenous researchers or their communities. In stark contrast, the subjectivity that is encompassed seeks instead to reconstruct the emotional as well as intellectual terrain of the time. The conclusions of these reconstructions may be as flawed as the scientific findings, but they crucially place Indigenous peoples, past, present and future, as having a vested interest in the outcomes of dehumanising debates. From this, while the continued survey of Aboriginal remains may provide additions to scientific knowledge, it should be questioned what benefit it will provide to Indigenous peoples. The demand by archaeologists to *their* right of access and the importance of *their* knowledge (Pardoe, 1992) provides an irony not lost on me.

Western science has evidenced a particular fascination for cataloguing the “last of...” In Australia, Aboriginal people who could be labelled the “last of his/her tribe” proliferate in colonial literature. The image of Truganini, widely regarded as the “last of the Tasmanian Aborigines” was included in many histories. Having seen remains removed for study, Truganini died in fear that this was to be her fate as well. It was. Which then is more important, the measurements of Truganini’s skull which ultimately tell us nothing because science is no longer attempting to prove that Aborigines form the link to apes, or the knowledge that Truganini begged in vain for her remains to be kept intact after her death? What of William Lanne, the “last” Tasmanian man, whose corpse was divided by squabbling “scientific” societies and where the distasteful nature of the practice was even noted by the Hobart Mercury:

Don’t go to seek me in my grave  
Or think that there I be;  
They have not left one atom there  
Of my ANATOMY (cited in Murray, 1998, 225).

While the Western hegemony of linear progression often presents the passing of time as a mechanism in itself for closure, for many cultures unfinished legacies increase rather than decrease distress. Where Mourning is configured not as a time period, but

as a structurally constrained series of objectives, these objectives must either be fulfilled or the struggle must continue<sup>21</sup>. Oodgeroo Noonuccal's powerful piece *Oh Trugganner* shows this.

Oh Trugganner  
Oh Trugganner,  
I weep for you, For Lanney and all your race,  
As I read Ryan's damning thesis<sup>22</sup>  
After one hundred years.  
Your desperate guerrilla warfare  
Failed to oust the white foe,  
And spilt blood and tears  
Freely flowed  
Over your much loved land.  
Your race  
Was the trophy sought  
By the 'Christian, civilised' man  
Who carried his depravities  
Even beyond the grave.  
Oh Trugganner,  
I feel deep pain and sorrow  
For the life he has made for you.  
What did you feel  
When the foreign Doctor of Science  
Stole like a thief in the night to the morgue  
To cut from his body  
Lanney's not yet cold head and hands  
In the name of 'Christian' science?  
Oh Trugganner,  
What did your dreamtime spirit feel  
As it watched them take you after death  
As a rare museum piece,

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<sup>21</sup> This would also be relevant in the continued agitation by Indigenous families and communities over the deaths related to alleged police brutality (see TJ Hickey and Doomadgee)

<sup>22</sup> This refers to Lyndall Ryan's revolutionary text *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* that was a later a major target of Keith Windschuttle in the History Wars (Ryan, 2003).

To stay forever  
Under the rude stares  
Of vulgar public gaze?  
Oh Trugganner,  
Destined to be  
Not just the last of your race,  
But a prized specimen for science too.  
Oh Trugganner,  
Let your restless spirit bring comfort to us all.  
Give us wisdom and strength,  
For we have not yet found ourselves  
In this now alien land.  
The land we thought was ours forever  
Now peopled with racists,  
Murderers, manipulators,  
Who know too well the art  
Of conquest, enslave, kill and destroy.  
Oh Trugganner,  
Let your spirit rise from the foreign museum  
And walk with us in our grief,  
In our once loved Native Land,  
The love that sustains us,  
In what our race was  
Before the invaders came.  
Oh Trugganner,  
As you cried in the past,  
So too now do your people cry  
And have cried for the last two hundred years.  
Oh Trugganner,  
Will the dreamtime spirits of our race  
One day rise with us  
As they did with you,  
To the whispering sounds of stalking feet  
With our guns in our hands

And an ambush plan  
The nullas, the spears, the stones?  
Or will we in servitude,  
Die like you?  
And will 'modern' science rave and drool  
Over our bones  
As they 'religiously' did  
With Lanney and you  
Oh Trugganner!  
(Noonuccal, cited in Craven, 1999, 87)

Therefore, the collection of data and its usage must be balanced against the value that would accrue from Indigenous communities being able to seek some semblance of "closure" (Calma, cited in HREOC, 2006) in their ability to discharge their responsibilities in Mourning in allowing ancestors their right to the culturally appropriate treatment of their remains and a continuity of their spirit or soul. It is important to acknowledge too that some European institutions have agreed to return remains to Indigenous communities. For instance, in 1991, the University of Edinburgh returns 300 'specimens'. I would note here that one of the skeletal remains specifically requested was that of William Lanne, but such was the 'rigour' of the scientific documentation that it could not be determined which was his (Murray, 1998, 225). However, after thanking the University for its "great spiritual gift" to Aboriginal people, elder David Mowaljarlai "spoke of the Ngarinjin/Worora continuum of ancestral creation, life in the land, death and return to the realm of the spirit" (Turnbull, 1997). While this was apparently a moving display that gave observers an insight into why the remains continued to be of importance (Ibid), it unfortunately set no precedent across the British institutional landscape as 2007 challenges in London's High Court demonstrate. In responding to this, Michael Mansell claimed:

The museum's position was they are still unconvinced about why Tasmanian Aborigines should have the remains of our ancestors back.

They don't understand anything about the cultural and spiritual and religious obligations we have to our dead (cited in O'Sullivan, 2007).

In being made aware of this issue, students can become aware of a contemporary example of Dreaming that has by virtue of colonising ideology and practice needed to adapt to a global struggle for recognition and validity. As most students are at best marginally aware of the practice of the past and continued study of Aboriginal remains this is a valuable opportunity to give them an insight into colonial and academic philosophy and the ways they continue to disadvantage Indigenous interests. Moreover, I believe in encouraging students to see the conflation of scientific rationality with ‘truth’ as a mechanism through which the Eurocentric dominance of the academy is maintained to the detriment of the Humanities generally. This is in itself a belief worth challenging as is evidenced in Bent Flyvberg’s (2001) influential text *Making social science matter, why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of phronesis, Flyvberg makes a compelling argument for the reinvigoration of the social sciences from a perspective which differs from the desire to replicate scientific method and draws instead on its ability to impart a “reflective analysis and discussion of values and interest, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic, and cultural development in any society” (Tsey & Hunter, 2002). In asking “Who gains, and who loses, and by what mechanisms of power” (Ibid), Flyvberg’s model reflects the underlying challenge of Indigenous claimants to both the tangible and abstract conceptions regarding the value of remains. It is timely then, that science is not reified as a regime of ‘truth’ but as discourse whose hegemony has been so powerful that it has been able to both stifle critique of its fallibility and police its own ethical limitations. Ironically, some scientists now identify the failure of science to develop a reflective pedagogy and to engage in humanist discourse as a contributory factor in the widespread decline of voluntary student participation in the sciences (Fensham, 2006, 70-73). In discussing ways to reinvigorate interest in the sciences, these perspectives stress the need for science to be repositioned discursively within a social context. Fensham (ACER, 2006) proposes that this could be achieved through applying

International research [that] suggests that student interest in science could be heightened if curricula and assessment requirements made it possible for students to learn science as a story involving people, situations and actions, real world situations that students can engage with... This requires clearly presented science related to issues of

personal and social significance, with personally engaging open problems for investigation.

This approach resonates with my methodological position, but further, it is my belief that historical consideration of the Indigenous positioning within scientific enquiry illuminates centuries of Eurocentrism, justifications for dispossession and genocidal practice. It is of critical importance that the neutrality of science is challenged so that students (and the wider Public) become aware of the subjectivity of all forms of inquiry. Further, science rather than only being perceived as emancipatory from 'natural' ills or as a panacea from man made environmental disaster is also interrogated for its ability to oppress. It is this 'story' that continues to impact on Indigenous communities more so than the positive effects. Considering the Dreaming's potential as an explanatory mechanism is one way to introduce this.

The Lifecycle is key aspect to the inclusion of an Aboriginal perspective in my teaching of the sociology of Indigenous issues. This chapter began with an exploration of resources about the Yolngu that that I have used in explaining the concept of the lifecycle to students. The Yolngu examples have also been discussed as the hub for examples from the wider national Aboriginal cultures. In further recognising the national significance of the Aboriginal lifecycle the chapter concluded with a discussion on the repatriation of remains, with a particular historical focus on Tasmania.

## **Chapter 8. Social Justice, Catholicism and Aboriginal people**

I consciously try to create a sociological classroom that encourages student's to relate their concepts to their private and professional experiences. Their responses reveal that race may not be the only are in which we are separated. This Chapter explores the area of religion, where a group of students practicing the Roman Catholic faith asked me to engage in dialogue with them on what part their Church contribute to the achievement of Aboriginal equity. Their initial reticence highlights the dangers of creating discourse that stifle non-Indigenous people's confidence to ask how they can participate in change. My response, while sometimes digressing into polemic, does form part of the holistic understanding of the professional persona I am enacting as an Indigenous academic. It further demonstrates that the sociological classroom can extend beyond the physical constraints of the two-hour timeslot allotted to formal class time.

### **Why talk about Christianity?**

One of the most damaging fallacies about Indigenous cultures concerns the belief that the adoption of other cultural practices and beliefs necessitates the cessation of the original Indigenous culture (Parides, 2006, 363). This arises from the general failure of self-reflection undertaken by the mainstream whereby the forms of Anglo-Roman Christianity that have dominated in the Australian experience are seen as the norm. As such they are rarely interrogated for their cultural specificities, even within the context of other orthodox Christian traditions. One means of challenging student perception is to consider visual depictions of Jesus Christ. Most are familiar with Christ as fair skinned, blond and blue eyed, however this sharply contrasts to the Eastern traditions showing more swarthy complexions and the claim by some African denominations that Christ was black.

As I have previously discussed, I have made it a common practice to have students introduce themselves to other members of their tutorial in the initial class. Rather than simply providing a name and the program they are studying I often ask students to share something that they feel gives them a sense of identity. Responses to this vary



from where they live; marital status; football team affiliation; employment; sports participation; ethnicity and gender. I pay careful attention to the areas that they nominate, sometimes jotting notes after class, as I can then use examples that speak directly to their interests. I find this is not only contributes to a more engaged class, but it encourages student interaction. Moreover, it is a simple yet effective means of demonstrating the class is a site in which they are personally valued. Student feedback tells me this is appreciated in a society where they often feel depersonalised, reduced to number in an uncaring bureaucracy.

One of student self-classifications that promoted the most stimulating dialogue is Christianity. In my teaching on the Central Coast, I have had many students who identify their religious beliefs as integral to their sense of self. Although some students speak of coming from Christian schools there is also identification among the mature aged women seeking qualifications in Social Science. A significant proportion of these mature women are already employed within the welfare sector so they bring a wealth of anecdotal data to the classroom that I believe is of benefit in scaffolding the often tricky gulf between theory and practice that constitutes applied sociology (Perlstadt, 2005). Of this cohort, there has been a consistent identification with Christianity, particularly Catholicism, as a profound influence in their lives in terms of a variety of ethical positions and their choice of employment.

As existing professionals within the welfare sector, many of these students are seeking an understanding of the needs of Indigenous clients in terms of culturally appropriate service provision. This includes protocols for individual and community engagement, gender appropriateness and barriers to effective communication. Some speak of previous negative experiences with Aboriginal clients and an almost crippling fear that they will be regarded as continuing the negative assimilationist practices of the past (Manning, 2004). Where they have participated in child removals and other Aboriginal family interventions they are at pains to point out the ‘necessity’ of their actions. This generally involves quite detailed descriptions of the family deviance that are generally not employed as justifications in discussing their work with non-Aboriginal clients.

One of the most valuable lessons that I have learned from students is that the binary that constructs the Indigenous sphere as holistic and the West as rampantly individualistic (O'Hara, 1997) is hollow in many ways. Most students want to make their learning experience an integral part of their lives. Rather than being unwilling to embrace holistic frames of reference, they are often conditioned towards the separation of the intellectual and the spiritual from the mundane (Moerman, 2006, 7-8). When given the opportunity to see their academic lives merge with their everyday concerns, many are eager and optimistic. In one assignment, students were asked to nominate a welfare organisation and to analyse its functions within the context of the various rights discourses that had been discussed during the course. In being given the opportunity to choose the organisation, there was a definite trend towards turning this assignment into, what for some verged on, a manifesto for change within their own milieu. This led to a far more committed student population, spirited discussion in class and ultimately improved results.

As another example, on one occasion having discussed this topic several students approached me in the campus café wanting to have a 'chat'. Topics meandered around conventional conversation on family, weather and other mundane topics. Finally, one woman, having received obvious non-verbal promptings from the others, queried if they could ask a question about Christianity and Aboriginal people. They were all active Catholics, including one lady who also worked for a Catholic welfare organisation. The course, various dialogues within their own Churches and discussion with one another had prompted them to question the role that Catholics could play in 'helping' Aboriginal people. They were nervous to ask because they felt that based on media representation, most if not all Aboriginal people held anti-Christian sentiments, but they believed that questioning their role was consistent with Catholic teaching on issues of social relevance (Storck, 1997). They didn't want to offend me, but I was the only person they knew to question. Was there a place for their Church at all in the "Aboriginal struggle"- or was it a gross insensitivity to even presume to ask?

This was a confronting question in many ways that required a delicate response. While it is flattering to have student trust it is also a position of considerable responsibility. I do not treat this lightly and as such I am comfortable saying to students- "Let me think about it" or "Send me an email and I'll send you some links

to readings". Above all, at times I need to be prepared to say "I don't know" and then go away and think, read and discuss a possible response. The question from students on the place of Catholicism in Aboriginal affairs posed a series of interesting intersections in terms of faith, spirituality and intellectual pursuit, because "history has demonstrated that there is always a political, sociological and ideological aspect to the making of theology" (Moerman, 2006, 7). There were significant historical tensions with the perception of a continued structural dominance of the Christian Churches in interfering with rather than enhancing Indigenous self-determination. Further with Christianity as incompatible with Aboriginal cultures, students expressed concern that culturally Church involvement represented at best an ethnocentric paternalism and at worst cultural genocide. In considering their question I have been able to develop an argument that is of wider benefit to me as a lecturer and that has also evolved into a journal article (Butler-McIlwraith, 2008).

Beyond this, I have been able to grow as an educator in my ability to speak with, and not simply to, my students concerns in ways that are compatible rather than abrasive. For instance, I have learned that race shapes conceptual and institutional affiliation. While this is hardly groundbreaking, its application within my specific milieu has been illuminating. For instance, as an Indigenous thinker I have been engaged by the concept of social justice, which from my perspective is primarily linked to the work of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners, Aboriginal men of great courage in articulating the position of Aboriginal people in Australia. As an academic I have been interested in the self-identified trend of sociology to be concerned with Social Justice as a key motivation its enquiry (Feagin, 2001, 1-20). I was surprised however to hear my Catholic students speak of Social Justice as a key concept of their Faith. This is in some ways quite absurd, as I have long understood the link between religious concepts and political discourse such as with Social Justice and Reconciliation. Indeed, social justice is a common theme across Judeo-Christian and Islamic groups (Bielefeldt & Bahmanpour, 2002), but it reveals that being primarily involved in a particular group can create a form of intellectual insularity, where the "known" is related only to the central theme of one's own identity. This led to a reconsideration of my own understandings by examining the centrality of Social

Justice to Catholic social teaching and to its role in advocacy through a designated Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC, 2007).

In later interaction with my students the achievement of a socially just society has been at the heart of our discussions. Social Justice is one of the significant concepts in the struggle to address Indigenous disadvantage in contemporary Australian society and offers both a practical and philosophical commitment that should ideally speak to the key principles of Christian faith. To act in a way that is socially just, does not merely mean the alleviation of material poverty, but rather a consideration of how to address the marginality that pervades across all sectors of society (Feagin, 2001, 5). Having constructed a position as a key institutional advocate for both of these, the Catholic Church in Australia has the potential for leadership in converting the abstract imperatives into tangible outcomes that create a socially just praxis motivated by the desire for culturally inclusive Christianity and a role of advocacy and partnership in overcoming inequity. I believe that my task in this context is a delicate one: to be respectful of the students' strongly held beliefs, while encouraging them to interrogate the institutional aspects of Roman Catholicism. At the same time I am required to examine my own beliefs and to expand my consciousness.

I was disturbed from my complacency that Social Justice is an "Indigenous concept", to a greater understanding of its foundations within Western/Christian philosophy. Further, this made me broaden my range in terms of the type of literature that I was searching, a cumulative effect that has seen me "discover" other perspectives. For instance, despite reading copious amounts on the Mabo decision and waxing over its ramifications for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal spirituality an extra dimension is added when considering the religious affiliation of the non-Indigenous judges, not only the Indigenous plaintiffs. In the Mabo decision this is relevant as the success of the case was directly impacted upon by the composition of the High Court Bench, who were influenced by the principles of Catholic teaching on the concept of natural law stemming from Thomas Aquinas. This is seen to be the case with Justice Brennan in particular (Windschuttle, 2003; Franklin, 2007). Other judges, while acknowledging the trend, argued that it extended as part of a general Christianity:

Sir William Deane, one of the judges in the case, was happy to mention (later) his commitment to natural law principles. “The basis of natural law”, he says, “is the belief that some things are innately right and some innately wrong, flowing from the nature of things, including our nature as human beings. That approach provides a philosophical basis for seeing such things as human rights as going deeper than any particular act of Parliament or what have you. That is not exclusively Catholic. It runs through Christian belief.” (Franklin, 2005, 5).

Thus, although there is often a sense of presenting Australia as operating on a strict separation between Church and state, the reality is that a Christian ethos pervades across the Australian institutional landscape. As such, the linkage between religious concepts and their application within Australian society should not be underplayed, nor should student attempts to conflate the two be summarily dismissed.

### **My Indigenous Reflection**

As an academic, I have taken the lived experience of my family and our people as a foundation to a broader textual engagement with what a culturally inclusive Christianity might entail. It is often questioned why Indigenous people would want to maintain Christianity, give the many negative aspects of its application in Australia such as the civilising imperative of the heathen; the removal of Aboriginal children; the abuse inflicted by members of the clergy and ignored by others; and the role of Christian churches in deliberately attempting to displace Indigenous cultures. This is a valid question that speaks to a multi-generational suffering that cannot be separated from the striking conditions of inequity that Indigenous Australians experience today (Pattel-Gray, 1995). Further, it is complex to answer and is hampered if discussed only in a generalised way; from an Indigenous perspective it must be rooted in the specific before it can be extrapolated. Considering the self-identification of two-thirds of the Indigenous population in the 1996 Census as Christian (ABS, 1998), this is an area of significance to the majority of Indigenous people. From my own perspective, I act as a spokesperson for my family who desire an inclusive Christianity.

I remember clearly being excited to read the 1918 notice of my Great-Grandparents marriage published in their Aboriginal Mission magazine. “It was beautiful day when Archie married Mary. Every thing that Aborigines and people could do...” At first I was non-comprehending, ‘Aborigines and people’, what does that mean? It is difficult to articulate the sickening plummet in the stomach as one realises the import of what is contained statements like that and how seductive it is to convert that depth of emotion into hate. For many Aboriginal people, the hate is where it remains, because it is so hard to move past the ultimate insult, the denial of humanity itself and the hypocrisy as related in Kevin Gilbert’s *The Flowering* (1998, 22) as he says

When your psalmist sang  
Of a suffering Christ  
While you practiced genocide  
Did you expect his hate would fade  
Out of sight with the ebbing tide?

Yet my great-grandparents chose not to hate. Indeed, the family had its own pew in the local church with a brass plaque proclaiming it for their family.

As a child I spent a great deal of time with my maternal grandmother. Nanny Beryl was a strong Worimi woman, too proud to accept the position that was structurally thrust upon her. I remember lying in bed and as I was cuddled up to her back she would tell me stories of our family and country. Nanny’s parents had been placed on Karuah mission and although Nan never lived on the mission the spectre of it loomed large in her psyche. What she feared most was being returned to Karuah and buried there in the black box that served as coffins for mission Blacks. I remember our family’s conscious decision to bury her in a gleaming rosewood casket, with sweet peas, her favourite flower cascading fragrantly over it, a final touch of love to show that she had indeed transcended that feared reality for good.

On the north coast in my Grandfather’s Bundjalung country, Churches occupied the panoptic position of rural communities, central both in terms of their moral hegemony and physical ability for surveillance. Some Indigenous people lived on missions positioned in areas with apt names like ‘Swamp Street’ that even some clergy noted with horror were ‘living cemeteries’, while other Aboriginal people moved to avoid

the interlinked gaze of church and state. Church residences, highly visible were mansions in comparison. Yet my great-grandparents placed Catholic Holy Pictures in the bedrooms of their home. White skinned, blond, blue-eyed Mary and Jesus, heart adorned with the Crown of Thorns, to watch over the occupants. These were so highly regarded as essential for spiritual protection that they were not even removed when the room was repainted and they now have a thick multi-coloured rim of textured paint attesting their position held for decades.

In part I link my family's acceptance of the contradictions inherent in their Christian experience to the hymns that form an integral part of the experience of South-east Coastal Indigenous Christianity and that are similar to the African American Sorrow Songs born of slavery. As DuBois commented on the Sorrow Songs:

Through all of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope - a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is a faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins (DuBois, 1970, 215).

So it was, for my grandparents in their belief of Christianity. Life on earth was hard, a struggle reflected in the trials of the Israelites and the sufferings of Christ himself who through biblical narrative was shown to experience the hallmarks of oppression familiar to Indigenous people. The violence, vilification and derision evidenced in this narrative spoke to the key experiences of Indigenous marginality and dispossession (Mundine, 2006). They nurtured an eternal hope that those who espoused Christian virtues yet perpetuated oppression would see the error of their ways and recognise the rights of the Aboriginal person. As Ruby Langford (1992, 12), the daughter of my great-Aunt Evelyn Webb, has written

GIN! BOONG! ABO! COON!

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!

GIN! BOONG! ABO! COON!

Christ said, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do.'

But they do know!

When I was young, we would attend the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM) services in Redfern. I remember these as happy times, bonding of family and community where the Christian belief was linked explicitly to the Indigenous reality. There was a quiet call to an anti-racist world in the teaching to children of ‘Jesus loves the little children... Red and Yellow, Black and White...’. I remember Sunday school with a young Indigenous man, where my Christmas present was a little orange plastic purse with White Children and the words ‘Jesus Loves the Little Children. And I remember the many funerals; the shining lacquered wood of the tiny Church our family built at Karuah, the cloying incense that slowly dissipated in the big Catholic Churches; the bleakness on the faces of older men carrying young men to early graves; Aboriginal ministers pausing at the graveside to offer a benediction in the lingo, where even those who did not understand the language were moved by its power; wailing that called down the spirits of the Old People who swelled our ranks for a moment and then were gone. And I remember the hymns, our Sorrow Songs... Abide With Me, What a Friend we have in Jesus, Sweet By and By, Shall We Gather at the River, the extra resonance to the lyrics “and our spirits shall sorrow no more, not a sigh for the blessing of rest”. As people of the Karuah, Clarence and Richmond Rivers, there was a deeper meaning that was ascribed to the belief they would “gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God” linked to the significance of the rivers in our Indigenous cosmology. My Old People, those who I saw growing up, and those who come to me though story, saw death as ultimately redemptive, where all would be welcomed as equals in the House of God. I think that it is in the belief of salvation that Christianity, for all of its institutional history of domination and subjugation, remained attractive for them and perhaps for others who seek emancipation (Myers, 2005, 19; Bierman, 2006).



## **A Culturally Inclusive Catholicism**

While the concept of culturally inclusive Catholicism is sometimes debated as part of a post-colonial agenda, it was a fundamental position of the Church mission in the initial colonial expansionary period (Ross, 2006). As Charlesworth notes:

In 1659 the Catholic Church's Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith instructed missionaries... Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear upon people, to change their manners, customs and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals (Charlesworth, 1998, xv-xvi).

In this statement the Sacred Congregation further recognised the inappropriateness of attempting to replicate European cultures in colonised contexts, encouraging instead the preservation of Indigenous cultures (Ibid). This example is not unique, but it was not until the various speeches of Pope John Paul II, who personified the globalised Faith that this message has been widely acknowledged (Hefferan, 2005).

What I find important to emphasise is that Christianity becomes enmeshed with its host cultures to form new syncretic expressions, a process that is relevant to old as well as new forms of Christianity. I believe it is difficult to expect students to understand this process for Indigenous Australians unless they can contextualise it as part of broader phenomena. To examine the Indigenous Australian experience as discreet, masks the broader relevance of interrogating the pervasiveness of Christian hegemony as both a lived experience and an institutional foundation worldwide and allows for the Indigenous forms of Christianity to be positioned as an aberration.

While this is more overtly articulated today, with the attempts at inclusionary practice formally recognised by many major Christian denominations, it has been a covert part of Indigenous Christian practice for generations. Despite evidence presented on these issues, students feel most comfortable when they can see endorsement from the orthodox power structures. In this case, the critical analysis of socio-cultural contexts of Christianity becomes accessible and acceptable given that Pope John Paul II encouraged it.

John Paul II made a series of speeches in the 1980's to various Indigenous peoples during his travels, promoting the Catholic acceptance of the inherent right of Indigenous people to retain cultural specificity within their adherence to their Catholic faith (Hefferan, 2005). In the Australian context, his Alice Springs Address in 1986 remains a significant statement in this regard. While walking the Yipirinya Dreaming track, the Pope broke with protocol to don a beanie and scarf in the Aboriginal colours for part of his journey. The photograph of him wearing these while holding an Indigenous baby has since been considered internationally as one of the iconic images of his papacy (Brennan, 2006, 2-3; see Figure 8.1).

Speaking directly to Aboriginal people, John Paul II recognised Indigenous dispossession; celebrated the Dreaming and its associated ceremonies; sought the commonalities of Aboriginal and Catholic traditions; and encouraged forgiveness and reconciliation. Towards the closing of this remarkable speech he expressed the following:

The old ways can draw new life and strength from the Gospel. The message of Jesus Christ can lift up your lives to new heights, reinforce all your positive values and add many others, which only the Gospel in its originality proposes. Take this Gospel into your own language and way of speaking; let its spirit penetrate your communities and determine your behaviour towards each other, let it bring new strength to your stories and your ceremonies (John Paul II, 1986).

The Pope's actions and speech at Alice Springs contributed to an existing movement within Australian Catholicism evidenced to include Indigenous culture (Ross, 2006). Within all Indigenous Australian cultures, there is some form of conscious creative action, by an entity which may be in the form of spirit, animal or human like figure or interplay of a number of these. For some Indigenous people, these narratives are still incorporated into their practice as Christians, consistent with John Paul II's position. For example:

The Great Creator Spirit of the Bible has always been very active in this country... through the Creator Spirit's wisdom our ancestors

were given stories about our relationships to Great Spirit, to our world, our environment, our families, our people and our personal connection to the Great Spirit Being (Yavu-Kama-Harathunian, 2006).



**Figure 8.1. Pope John Paul II, Alice Springs, 1986 (Hefferan, 2005)**

For others, the Bible and Dreaming stories are synthesised through art and dance (Crumlin, 1998; Myers, 2005). Disturbingly however, The Dreaming is too often portrayed in the past tense, a quaint relic of the Stone-Age or an intellectual curiosity. Even where acknowledged as a present day experience, models of culture privileging the ‘traditional’ and dismissing syncretism or innovative expressions effect the development of a New Dreaming (Oodgeroo, 1988). All of these aspects to me resonate with the concept of the Church as a “community of believers” (Dodson, Elston, & McCoy, 2006, 253). A syncretic Indigenous Catholicism has the potential to make a New Dreaming based on these shared principles of acceptance and a commitment to live in way that is respectful of the laws given to us through Spirit.

Another example of this is the introduction of ‘Aboriginal smoking ceremonies’ in mainstream performances. This again received greater legitimacy through the papacy when a smoking was enacted at the Pope’s ceremony to beatify Mary McKillop. It is important to note that not all Catholics are in favour of these inclusionary practices. In a diatribe against a weakened Catholic faith, Margaret Joughin writes in the October 1998 edition of *Christian Order*:

The polluting of our churches continues apace with the increasingly common trend to include Aboriginal pagan rituals in what is supposed to be Catholic worship. An example of this occurred at the televised funeral of the late Dr. H. C. Coombes at St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, obviously with the permission of the Church hierarchy. This, of course, follows the precedent set by the pagan "smoking ceremony" performed by Aborigines that began the Mass said by John Paul II for the beatification of Blessed Mary MacKillop at Randwick Racecourse, Sydney, in 1995.

An inclusive New Dreaming must also be founded on dialogue and willingness to engage with the political realities of the Indigenous experience. One of the concepts that feature in improving cross-cultural relationships is 'dialogue' - the interchange of views between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to enable a fuller understanding of a divisive past for the purpose of facilitating an equitable shared future. As with many buzz-words however, 'dialogue' often seems to be frustratingly vague in terms of how it is constructed. Unfortunately, what is lauded, as dialogue sometimes is simply a place for the articulation of competing rhetoric, where each discourse is only strengthened in its opposition to the other. Dialogue is not constituted on merely allowing a place to speak, but a willingness to listen; it cannot be successful unless all parties are prepared to have their positions destabilised and to consider outcomes that are innovative rather than pre-ordained (Rose, 2003, 54). Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Indigenous people is hampered initially by a difficult past.

Although there were many occasions during colonisation when the Catholic Church attempted to advocate for Aboriginal rights, there was also an engagement in an active collusion with the State in the management of what was considered the "Aboriginal problem". As the functionaries of the Protection and Assimilation policies the Catholic Church has directly contributed to the current disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. Further, through the extension of their role beyond spreading the Gospel to a far darker imposition of cultural hegemony to 'civilise', Catholicism has also participated in the repression of Indigenous cultural expression (see Rintoul, 1993). I will not consider this history in detail here as it has been acknowledged in

various forums and specific statements of regret (see HREOC, 1999, 49-50). It is relevant to note however that any attempts at dialogue must be based on an understanding of the tensions that are and will be inherent in current and future relations. For many Indigenous people the perception of Churches as an ally remains difficult.

The federal Liberal coalition under the leadership of John Howard was widely criticised for its policies regarding Indigenous people and in its consistent small-minded rejection of Aboriginal claims to material or emotional reparations for past injustice. Moreover, the Howard Federal government often issued ultimatums demanding conformity, a process antithetical to dialogue, where “the outcome is not known in advance” (Rose, 2003, 54). The support of the Catholic Church in criticising the government has been viewed with surprise by some, but provides examples that it is possible for alliances to be altered, whether at the level of the individual or the institution.

Any Indigenous /Catholic partnership needs to also be founded on honest criticism. Even as the Church must be prepared to receive such criticism, it must also be enabled to provide it. It is uncontested that Indigenous people figure as the most disadvantaged cohort of the Australian population on every socio-economic indicator. There is no disagreement that many Indigenous communities are experiencing crisis. As a group disproportionately dependent on welfare, Indigenous peoples may find a valuable ally in Catholicism individually and institutionally. Given the inability of current efforts to substantially close the gaps in Indigenous disparity, indeed some have worsened, a new spirit of engagement between Indigenous people and institutions such as the Church is needed. As emerging reports show the parlous condition of Indigenous communities with regard to previously silenced critical issues such as sexual abuse and domestic violence, established Catholic service providers may make a valuable contribution to future initiatives with and for Indigenous communities. Yet, service provision alone will not provide a solution to Indigenous disadvantage. Ideally, holistic systems need to be constructed to empower Indigenous self-determination, supporting individual agency and the reassertion of communal responsibility (Pearson, 2003). It will be important however those initiatives are not a form of “new paternalism” (Just Comment, 2006).

Encouraging ‘partnership’ rather than prescribing ‘correctness’ is a practical expression of reconciliation that moves beyond the symbolic to re-establish a “moral universe” (Berndt, 1998, 29). While this needs to be Indigenous led and focussed, it also needs to enfranchise the state and mainstream Australia generally as active participants in the journey towards a socially just society that strives to achieve peace (Blackman, 2005). There has already been some criticism both internally and externally directed at the Catholic Church for participating in current political debates. While some people feel that the Church has not taken a strong enough stand, others feel that the Church should be less concerned with an overt political agenda (Dodson, Elston and McCoy, 2006, 260-1). From an Indigenous perspective where the spiritual was integral to all aspects of society (Berndt, 1998, 28) a political praxis is a necessary stance for reinvigorating Catholic faith and Indigenous autonomy. It is consistent with the Indigenous understanding of Christ’s role to befriend and liberate the marginalised. The Statement of Beliefs by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress expresses this:

He is the One who builds his new community at the fringes to which the people held by the society to be of no account in this world were pushed - the homeless, the dispossessed, the unemployed, those with poor health and little schooling, the despised mixed raced Samaritans, and the original inhabitants of the land (UAICC, 2001).

A church that is unwilling to be politically proactive is not establishing a role for itself in ethical leadership and is ultimately of little utility. It then runs the risk of being perceived, particularly by young people, as increasingly irrelevant, deepening the ‘secularisation’ (Maddox, 1999) of Australian society.

It is not in the spirit of dialogue however for the Catholic Church to uncritically support marginalised agendas. By this, I refer to the trend in which it is expected that the Church will be inclusionary of all alternative perspectives even those that explicitly contravene its doctrines. In contrast, I would argue that religion constituted on populism runs the risk of ultimately weakening its integrity.

The irony, however, is that the strategy pursued by others of making Catholicism more attractive by dumbing-down its profoundly rich albeit intellectually demanding content and producing pale imitations of whatever happens to be the latest secular academic fashion has not produced any discernible renaissance in Catholic intellectual life or the Church in Australia (Gregg, 2006).

One example of how this danger has been negotiated is evidenced in the position of Jesuit Father Frank Brennan, a noted non-Indigenous contributor to the Aboriginal Rights debate. In speaking on the process he undertakes when considering his position as both an advocate and Church advisor, Brennan begins with approaching key participants to express the varying Aboriginal positions within the debate. For him, it follows that:

Having made some assessment of Aboriginal aspirations, I would then ask which of those aspirations were morally justified. I knew this question could be problematic with some Aboriginal leaders and their supporters. What right did I have as a whitefella to be saying which aspirations were justified? But the church contribution on difficult social issues must always be made within the confines of what is morally justified both in terms of process and outcomes (Brennan, 2004).

The balance is therefore, to discourage a blind adherence to dogma, and to encourage a measured innovation and consideration that does not compromise the core values of the Faith - a challenging path indeed, but one that some students are keen to embark on.

If a sociological classroom is constructed to be responsive to student aspirations, areas such as religion need to be considered. As this chapter has discussed, students are questioning the relevance of the Indigenous issues that they learn in the classroom. As a lecturer, I have tried through both self-reflection and textual engagement to create a position respectful of their beliefs and my own. While I expect student's to be destabilised by the information I am providing to them, in turn, I am prepared to be destabilised by the questions they bring to me.

## **Chapter 9. Nation Dreaming:**

### **Aboriginal Spirituality and Australian Values**

The current attempt to define Australian values is generating passionate debate within both the academy and the public sphere. Within these debates there is an inherent tension on the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives might be included. Given that Indigenous critique is perceived as rupturing the homogenising Anglo-Australian nationalistic norms, Indigenous peoples often experience a somewhat ironic marginality from discourses on what constitutes Australian values. This chapter discusses the means through which Aboriginal Spirituality might be recognised for the unique contribution it could make to establish national values that celebrate the Indigenous as a potent feature of a reconciled future, rather than a nostalgic curiosity of a primordial past. Although this is relevant across many areas of the Indigenous experience, this chapter will focus on four examples discussed in my classes: processes of Aboriginal Mourning on Australia Day; ANZAC Day; the appropriation of Albert Namatjira as an “Australian” icon and the Gurindji struggle known as the Wave Hill Walkout.

#### **History Wars**

It begins, I think, with the act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion- Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia: 1992 (Keating, 1992).

“I profoundly reject ...the black armband view of Australian history. I believe the balance sheet of Australian history is a very generous and benign one”- John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia: 1996 (Howard, cited in Dodson, 1996, 12).



The two very different approaches to Australian history embodied in these quotes from Paul Keating and John Howard exemplify the rancorous debate that has existed in contemporary Australian thought. Keating's historicism was revisionist in many ways and sought to ignite a new direction for Australian nationalism (Clark, 2002). In contrast, Howard has rejected the revisionist discourses as "trendy post modernism and post colonialism" (Moses, cited in Gunstone, 2004, 6). My decade of teaching has been done entirely under a Howard Federal government where Aboriginal rights have been significantly eroded and a philosophical climate has been nurtured by the former Prime Minister that has systematically denigrated Aboriginal claims to reparation, sovereignty, cultural and economic autonomy.

As a consequence of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission created a new portfolio for a Commissioner of Aboriginal Social Justice. This Commissioner, with a task force of researchers, is responsible for the compilation of an annual Social Justice Report that considers the position of Aboriginal people and also targets a specific topic of inquiry (Dodson, 1996). Under different Commissioners and with over a decade of reportage for comparison, several themes have consistently reappeared and are indicative of the divisive Indigenous politics that have characterised the Howard federal government. The first of these is the clear evidence that historical factors are central to current Aboriginal inequality. The second is that the former Prime Minister dogmatically upheld the colonial histories of a glorious (White) nationalism and wilfully disregarded evidence to the contrary. His early self-assessment of this was that he had been the victor in the "Battle of History" (Brawley, 1997), while in later terms, Howard introduced a return to the teaching of "Australian Values" (Halafoff, 2006); promoted a preamble to the Constitution that was jingoistic and exclusionary (Bird & Kelly, 2000); actively participated in a scathing critique of the reappraisal of Frontier contact in the History Wars (Gunstone, 2004, 5-6); supported the rejection of the stories of thousands of Aboriginal children removed from their families (Buti, 2000); and finally suggested an intervention strategy for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory that has been likened to the repressive interventions of the past (WILPF, 2007).

For current tertiary students in education, the outcome of these debates are far from abstract, as they will have the responsibility of implementing Australian history and values in their classroom practice. The “Australian Values” identified by DEST (DEST cited in Halaloff, 2006) are “Care and Compassion; Doing Your Best; Fair Go; Freedom; Honesty and Trustworthiness; Integrity; Respect; Responsibility; Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion”. Consistent with this the New South Wales Board of Studies, in the Human Society and its Environment Syllabus (Board of Studies, 2007) has a stated emphasis on acknowledging a “Shared History”. This speaks to the different views that groups or individuals, including Indigenous Australians, may hold on the past in Australia. These issues have been debated with as much vigour in the public sphere as the academy and indeed the often artificial distinction between the two areas has been somewhat blurred in the History Wars.

The History Wars can also be contextualised as part of the International struggle between the left and right spheres of the academy, overtly linked with complementary political ideologies. This can be seen in a wide range of international settings, from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; the Historikerstreit (Historians Quarrel) in Germany (Brawley, 1997; Bonnell, 2004); the Dutch colonial repression of Indonesia (Ang, 2001) and the Culture Wars in the United States of America. In each of these, there is a tension between the right of disclosure for the less glorious aspects of the national experience and the attempted erasure of alternative voices, often of the persecuted, and those deemed their supporters (Brawley, 1997). Working off the binary of the Black-Armband or Historical Whitewash, the Australian experience differs slightly in that generally neither the ‘deniers’ nor ‘supporters’ are of the persecuted group. Despite this, they have maintained a stranglehold on the recognition of ‘expertise’ in Aboriginal history, excluding Indigenous participation. For Larissa Behrendt (cited in Burney 2007, 17)

‘... those debates are not about Aboriginal history. They are about white identity. These debates are about the story that non-Aboriginal Australians want to tell themselves about their country, and more specifically, they are about the stories that white people want to tell themselves about this country’.

This is not to say that White scholars should not engage in the study of Indigenous history, but they should not claim a greater right to be its arbiters by virtue of their “objectivity” (Keenan, 2002), nor should they displace Indigenous voices to do so. Indeed a shared history, if it is to embody the DEST Australian Values of respect, tolerance, understanding and inclusion must allow for “multivocality” (McMaster, 2005, 6) and as such this should be introduced to the tertiary classroom too.

Contemporary denials by White authority [government, media and academics] serve to confirm to Indigenous people that our war for recognition and inclusion is far from over. That our claims can only be legitimated if supported by White ‘objective’ primary source material and expertise highlights the continued marginality of oral histories and the denial of the reliability of Aboriginal testimony resonates across many arenas such as Native Title (Choo & Hollbach, 1999). This contemporary reality can be linked to the famous Myall Creek Massacre trial, where seven White men were executed for killing Aborigines. They were only convicted because there was White testimony of the massacre (Markham, 2000), Aboriginal testimony being considered legally invalid (Patton, 2006). Juxtaposing the past and present can assist in revealing to students the continuity of colonised patterns. One of my students grew up in the rural community where the Myall Creek Massacre occurred and was unaware of its specificities until university. Examples such as this disabuse students of the idea that simply because one is physically situated in an area that one knows its history.

The desire to haggle over the minutiae of ‘precise’ figures of frontier conflict speaks (Macintyre, 2005) more to the protection of methodological orthodoxies in law, research and teaching than it does to Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge construction and transference. Indigenous communities who continue to mourn massacres do not need a specified ‘death toll’ to legitimate their claims. For instance, one does not find Indigenous academics attempting a computer-modelled matrix to determine the population of Aboriginal societies pre-1788. From an Indigenous perspective, the recurring themes include the recognition that the continent was occupied by force; that the doctrine of Terra Nullius was invalid; that violence on the Frontier did occur; that sexual abuse of Aboriginal women was part of colonial experience; that sovereignty was never ceded; that Aboriginal people survive

(Moreton-Robinson, 2002). These represent a fundamentally different gaze than is bought to bear on an extremely complex terrain.

Eve Fesl (1993) provides a compelling account of the massacre of her mother's people in Queensland, (without once mentioning prospective numbers). She also includes the story of a White woman who on hearing the account is shocked to realise that her family history of which she has been told "dreadful things had happened" intersects with Fesl's story from the Other side. That Fesl labels this woman as a victim too shows the multi-faceted nature of the effects of colonisation (Fesl, 1993, 109-10). This demonstrates that Frontier relations need not be polarised, one can benefit from colonisation and simultaneously be a victim of it too. This is a far more sophisticated evaluation than the current homogenising national tropes. Students are very responsive to this perspective, where White empowerment is not seen as totalising. I am cautious here however because I have observed that the focus and sympathy shifts from the Aboriginal deaths to that of a sad White post-modernity. While Goldstein (2001, 9-10) notes the need to create "positive rather than guilty, angry or sad White identities", I consider it necessary to also include those works that will confront them in much more destabilising ways. The combination of the following poem and artwork are one means through which I have done this.

In her chapter, *Beyond Male and Female - Gender Identity*, Helen McCann (2002, 58-60) includes the poem 'Aboriginal Exclusion' from a female Aboriginal artist. This poem documents the artists struggle within a Bachelor of Arts degree programme constrained by the triple constraints of race, gender and urbanism.

Aboriginal Exclusion  
Excited, emboldened by achievement,  
By the heady adventure of  
Art,  
The university called me in -  
a Bachelor of Arts.  
I was not prepared for the  
closed world I found myself in.  
The women students – the majority –  
Dismissed.

Only destined for  
amateur status, playing around.  
The real artists, the males,  
the lecturer's favourites,  
worth their time.  
'Male chauvinist pigs!' the women muttered, while  
- as women do -  
we made our own world, made our own art,  
shared our muted, angry excitement.

I was doubly dismissed,  
Not male, and not  
'real' Aboriginal.  
They knew about real Aboriginal art.  
They had been on a trip to Arnhem Land once.  
They had met  
The bark-painters, so now they understood.  
What did I know?  
A child of the settled, white, coast  
(wasn't that once Aboriginal land? Are memories so short?  
Their's might be, mine isn't)  
living in suburbia  
(wasn't that once Aboriginal land? I saw the Eora scratching out a living  
on the edges)  
wearing clothes, speaking English  
- I'd learned the coloniser's lessons  
well enough.  
Well enough to know that I had to get their own tools  
to beat them with.  
At home, raging.  
Mum's answer,  
'You can't fight them with boomerangs and spears, you've got to get an  
education!'

Three years  
I worked very hard, never missed a lecture or prac,  
carefully  
researched assignments.  
They won't have an excuse to fail me.  
Took what was useful from their sterile art,  
dead weight of a history that sneered at mine.  
I hung on grimly.  
This was my one shot at tertiary education,  
my key out of a life that was  
just an existence, out of working in a factory.

I made other spaces of existence in  
a hostile city.  
The other dismissed ones,  
Also worming their way in through  
the cracks  
of an opportunity barely there.  
Angry, frustrated, we became tough.  
'We'll show them  
Aboriginal art! We'll do it ourselves.'  
Our own Artists Cooperative,  
The flag on the steps of the Art Gallery.  
You can't forget about us, can't leave us out  
Of your history.  
Not exotic enough?  
Not black enough?  
Not traditional enough?  
This, too, is our land.

A row of black figures hanging.  
This my final year  
Assessment piece –

‘Annihilation of the Blacks’.  
This is my history,  
my story,  
my art.  
The lecturers coolly gaze.  
Then the judgement, the voice  
rational, condescending  
and, (I can say later) afraid,  
uncomprehending:  
Your art doesn’t make  
a statement. It’s going nowhere. It’s just a  
full-stop!’

Tears spring to my eyes,  
stomach knots with disbelief,  
tongue stiffens  
in my dry mouth.  
I am destroyed by their verdict.  
They are my teachers. They know  
what is good art!  
Or at least, they have the power  
of judgement,  
of saying who is a real artist and who is going  
nowhere.

I search for words, find only  
dryness, ashes, devastation.

So far inside  
I couldn’t hear it myself or  
speak it,  
a small, voice  
hard  
like

stone,  
whispers,  
hoarse with pain,  
sharp with anger-  
'One day I'll show them they're wrong.'  
Many years later, the stone voice is heard.  
I present guest lectures to their classes;  
their students  
study  
me!

Of the subject and form of the poem, I feel that it is, and should be considered a rigorous consideration of author's position, no less than an orthodox academic work. While comprising only 525 words, it is densely packed with concepts to be deconstructed - the urban and traditional dichotomy; educative possibilities both for and by Indigenous peoples; criticism of the patriarchal academy; genocidal critique; and process of institutional change and inclusionary practices.

The artist is not identified by name in the body of the text, indeed, it appears that in the reproduction from her catalogue her name has been removed and in McCann's analysis the author is referred to as "the then student", "she". While the work of non-Indigenous academic Bronwyn Davies is also quoted at length, McCann names Davies in the body (McCann, 2002). When I first presented this to students I asked, "What can we make of this"? The answers came: Perhaps the Indigenous author passed away and McCann employed a name avoidance protocol related to the work; perhaps the author refused permission to be named; perhaps there is an unconscious racial erasure here; perhaps an editorial oversight? I didn't know and nor did the students, but much of my teaching of Aboriginal perspectives ultimately relies on a post-modern orientation, that searches not so much for a definitive "truth", but opens a space to consider varying alternatives. It continued to niggle though that the Indigenous author was unnamed so I reapproached the piece. By process of elimination in the references list I deduced the author was Fiona Foley, a name I recognised from the Boomali Artists Co-Operative in Sydney (Cregan, Cuthbert, Lowish, Muldoon & Spark, 2002). The title of Foley's work 'The Annihilation of the



Blacks' seemed to also have a haunting familiarity so undertaking some rudimentary cyber-tracking, I entered the title into the search engine and discovered the work was a highly controversial piece (see Figure 6.1) that after Foley's graduation has also been used in the National Museum of Australia to symbolise "Conflicting Frontiers" (Verancini, Muckle, 2003).



**Figure 9.1: The Annihilation of the Blacks- *FIONA FOLEY!!!* (My emphasis)**

Criticised as an example of the Black-armband history, 'The Annihilation of the Blacks' is one the few Indigenous counter responses to the national historical 'whitewash' (Jamrozik, 2002) that has received national consideration. Like Foley's poem, the installation piece can be read at a number of levels if analysed through the critical lens of Indigeneity. Annihilation of the Blacks is firstly a comment on Foley's own socialisation within a Batjala family and broader community in whose oral history she been enfranchised (Quaill, 2000). It has been my experience that with most Indigenous families, certain stories on the experience of racism form lasting impressions on the continuing Indigenous family psyche. It is often these points of past familial oppression coupled with individual experiences that are salient factors in the development of a politicised consciousness and expression (van Toorn, 2005).

For Foley, the knowledge of the massacres committed against her people, has led to a work of great power that can then also be seen as more widely relevant for the Pan-Aboriginal occurrences of frontier violence and also in the contemporary shameful national legacy of deaths in custody and appalling Aboriginal suicide rates (Hunter,

Reser, Baird, Reser, 2001, 36). As O'Connor (1988, 247-8) argues "Koories may see their poetry as primarily about defining themselves as a people, about expressing their sense of injustice, and about sinking tribal difference in the vision of a common Aboriginal nation". It is of interest then that there is the possibility that an Indigenous sociology would envision a deep and meaningful interconnectedness between C. Wright Mills linkage between "public issues" and "private troubles" (Haralick, 1990).

In maintaining openness to reflexive consideration of my teaching I have been able to continually provide additions to my consideration of Foley's poem. Student interest and interaction, the melding of the visual and print media (Morgan, 1988, 105), contextualisation at both the localised family level and the macro national mythology make this a rich contribution to a more rounded historical perspective. I believe that it also meets the requirements of Tuhawai Smith's argument that "multiply formed oppressions need to be responded to [by] multiply formed resistance strategies" (2003: 12). Therefore, if White academics continue to maintain their dominance as the 'experts' in textual representation of Australian Frontier history, this can and should be challenged in many ways, not only by Indigenous historians, but by Indigenous artists and through other forms of Indigenous voice and protest. One of these is the Day of Mourning Protest in 1938.

As I have shown previously, the concept of mourning has been a key tool in the political strategy of representing Indigenous history and in making moral claims on the nation state for reparation. The first Aboriginal Day of Mourning was called in 1938 in opposition to the celebration of the sesqui-centenary of the landing of the First Fleet (See Figure 9.2). Specifically targeting "Aborigines and part-Aborigines", the one day conference provided a public counterpoint to the celebratory paradigm of the state, where Aboriginal men from western New South Wales were coerced to participate in a First Fleet re-enactment at Sydney Cove. Leading to the development of the Aborigines Progressive Association and the publication of the newspaper the *Abo (sic) Call*, the Day of Mourning remains one of the best examples of the discursive ruptures to state hegemony in twentieth century Australia. The 1938 protest set a precedent that was modified in 1970 with the commemoration of Cook's landing at Botany Bay; in the 1972 construction of the Aboriginal tent Embassy; in

the “Bicentenary”/ 1988 as the premier focal day of a National Year of Mourning; and in the recognised tradition of Survival Day celebrations (Castlejohn, 2002).



**Figure 9.2 Aboriginal Day of Mourning Sydney 26<sup>th</sup> January 1938 (Barani, 2007).**

Even Indigenous academics sometimes fall into the trap of presenting us as victims of the narrative of mourning. For example, James (James, 1997, 74) argues:

The National Year of Mourning [which during the Bicentennial drew on the 1938 tradition] is an essentialising discourse. It marks out an emotional space, which is categorically Aboriginal. By doing so it specifies pain and loss as defining characteristics of Aboriginality. It implies psychological vulnerability. This implication affirms the authenticity of stereotypes of Aboriginality based on the notion of the noble savage or Aboriginal pre-civility, by directing attention towards an overwhelmingly colonial heritage and acknowledging its capacity to constrain contemporary Aboriginal initiatives... There is an ironic ambiguity in the capacity of a theme which privileges passivity and insularity to focus national mobilisation of Aboriginal networks in the organisation of a National Day of Mourning.

The irony for me in this passage lies not with Aboriginal intent, but with James' analysis. Whilst trying to articulate the traps of a colonised mindset, she reveals the same in assuming that everything which Aboriginal people do has as its primary point of reference, White abilities to 'constrain'. I would argue instead that the oppositional nature of the Aboriginal Days of Mourning to Australia Day renders the very solidarity that the public holiday is meant to celebrate. Depicting this as "passive" or "insular" fails to recognise the varied cultural implications of mourning for Indigenous peoples and the way that this has been used as a successful socio-political strategy across a multi-generational platform (Dodson, 2000). What this, and similar works are framed by is "discourses of vulnerability" rather than "discourses of resilience" (Furedi, 2007).

What I have noted, both in my own experience and that of others, is that the state of being 'in mourning' is not in fact a passive act, but one which is intended to be empowering to both the individual and the wider network. It can act as a powerful site for the expression, critical discussion and socialisation of cultural norms. To be 'in mourning' mobilises networks according to clearly understood responsibilities to attend, to provide both Care and Compassion to all those who are bereaved and Respect to the deceased and their kin network. It celebrates the connectivity of past and present, of those in body and those in spirit and further often symbolises emancipation from a discriminatory world. It allows many people to be involved in ritual that includes perspectives that are specifically related to Indigenous cultural practice, even if mediated through a Christian service.

If death has occurred as a consequence of the actions of another, mourning is also configured as one of the most culturally significant responsibilities to seek acknowledgement and reparation so that the spirit may continue on its Dreaming cycle. As such, Mourning will remain central to key Aboriginal issues: the repatriation of remains; the Frontier deaths; the Stolen Generations; Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; forced separation of people from Country; Indigenous suicide; and mortality rates. While a feature of the Howard Government's refusal to say "Sorry" was premised on the current generations lack of culpability for the past (Clark, 2002; Buti, 2001), Aboriginal law does hold the succeeding generations as equally obligated

to acknowledge and resolve the disputed actions. 'Mourning' is also about collective remembrance, acknowledgement and healing and responsibilities to give testimony. As Gregoriou argues in considering Holocaust victims

How could a society of friends but also imaginative communities  
hearken to the past and dream of the future if subjectivity and the  
social bond of collective remembering were not mediated through  
the testimonial debt of individuals as survivors (Gregoriou, 2005, 7).

In part then the struggle over the 26<sup>th</sup> of January is founded on the dichotomy between "testimonial debt" accepted by Aboriginal survivors around the axis of mourning and survival and the state constituted on commemoration of the glorious that erases the fact that the majority of the First Fleet was convicts, slaves to empire and capitalism. The state's official day of "testimonial debt" is ANZAC Day, where the nation celebrates histories of displacement, death, sacrifice and redemption. This is ultimately related to Taussig's argument that

"Death becomes a positive force for the state not simply in the form  
of foundation myths - the violence that gives life - but also the force  
that haunts even the most abstracted definitions of modern  
bureaucratic rationality" (cited in Hawkins, 2003, 46).

As such, the nation state becomes the ultimate arbiter of how death is to be perceived-as a positive feature of nation strengthening or as a negative consequence that must be expelled from the national consciousness. If these rituals of commemoration and mourning form such an integral part of the fabric of national consciousness, it is unjust to deny the autochthonous peoples of the country the same recognition of our histories. Yet the deaths of Aboriginal people, through frontier violence, state constituted neglects and even the current gross disparity in life expectancies are managed by the bureaucracy to avoid blame. The founding of Australia is whitewashed as peaceful settlement where only low resistance to disease is accepted as reason for decimation. Past and present mortality is likewise a consequence of biological and social inferiority where the State cites the fiscal disadvantage experienced by mainstream Australia in attempting to rectify "the Aboriginal problem" (Moran, 2002, 67). Historical figures such as Albert Namatjira and icons

such as the Anzacs are then appropriated to stand for the benevolent inclusivity of the nation state.

### **Nationalism and Imagined Communities**

When I first began teaching about nationalism, I was less discriminating in my criticism than I am now. In my socialisation as a child I was exposed to a counter-tradition to the mainstream nationalist tropes that firmly positioned the Indigenous at the forefront of my identity. I can be a rather passionate presenter and I was often vehement in my criticism of political figures and national mythologies. This was the period that included the rise of Pauline Hanson and the One Nation philosophy, which savagely demonised Indigenous people and attempted to reinscribe the moral right of dispossession that had only been overturned in the historic Mabo and Ors vs. The State of Queensland (Lattas, 2001). The Howard government's failure to adequately counter Hansonite rhetoric and the widespread reassertion of racist ideology meant there was much to be passionate about. I was teaching a course called Australian Culture, Myths and Nationalism, that deconstructs the Foundational Myths of Australian nationalism, the Bush tradition; Ned Kelly, Eureka Stockade and ANZAC. In academic literature and to my intellectual sensibilities the criticisms of these are obvious as they are focussed exclusively on White males. Issues such as gender, race and ethnicity are absent other than occasionally figuring as supporting or motivational features and I eagerly shared my knowledge of this absence. To say that in the face of my enthusiasm many students were left somewhat dumbstruck would be an understatement- many were gutted. I had taken their sense of safety by incautiously assuming that others felt as I did. For instance, many had family members who had been soldiers and they cherished their connectivity to that tradition.

"Why should women be involved?" they asked? "It was the birth of the nation!" Their essays, rather than deconstructing the development of the myth and its continued currency, could have been entered into an RSL contest on why ANZAC is important. My style of teaching here had acted in a sense of boundary maintenance. They were gathered together, against me, to preserve the "truth" of the national order. It was the opposite of the effect I had hoped for, but it was a valuable lesson that I have taken across all of my teaching. If I am attempting to destabilise people's common sense understandings I do it carefully, often letting them provide me with the data to support

my position and then presenting differing viewpoints that lead them to certain broad conclusions.

As an example, I begin the first lecture with a story. It's about a school in Sydney that decided to hold a parade to celebrate multiculturalism where children were encouraged to come in 'national dress'. A group of Anglo-Australian parents complained to the Director-General of Education and also used the media to talk about the discrimination that White children faced. They argued that NESB children have an identifiable culture and national dress, while Australia has neither. They felt discriminated against because their children couldn't participate. You can see students nod their head when you tell this story, affirming, "Yes, that makes sense". A gentle comment from me, "But national dress isn't a law, it's just an imaginative way of representing your sense of identity." So I give them a task: "Take a minute and think about a national costume you could dress a child in to show they are Australian". I have also done this in some of my first year tutorials so in total it would be more than twenty times. After students have finished, I write up on the whiteboard what they say. The most common are:

Swagman with corks on the hat

Sportsperson (Australian cricket or football uniform)

Green and gold

Convict depicted through white pants and shirt with arrows on them

Colonial soldier

Ned Kelly

Man from Snowy River

ANZAC digger

Surfer with zinc on the nose

Clothes with an Australian flag on them

Don't know.

Of most fascinating aspects of this to me is that I have never had a student depict an Australian national costume in terms of feminine identities, or with an Indigenous or non-Anglo motif. This suits my purposes perfectly. We discuss how and why they've chosen to depict 'Australianness' in this way. Then I continue with the lecture, leaving the list of dress on the whiteboard behind me. When I introduce the idea that

Australian nationalism has a white male bias it has an addendum “And I suppose if we look at the list of national costumes that we’ve come up with that holds true. There aren’t any choices here that specifically include women, Aborigines or non-Anglo cultures.” I may still have the odd comment that defends this, but for the most part students then accept that criticism and moreover are prepared to incorporate it into their appraisal of the rest of the course.

In discussing ANZAC, the students are often still wary of dishonouring the ANZAC legend. I understand this, as I have my own family associations. Two great-uncles on my father’s side with distinguished World War II service- one as a pilot in Europe and the other a chaplain interned as a Japanese Prisoner of War. I also honour my Great Uncle Rube, an Aboriginal serviceman who proudly marched on ANZAC Day and remember with some humour the story of the Aboriginal men, including my grandfather, stationed at Newcastle who would go AWOL to Aboriginal communities further up the coast.

To make them comfortable I find that it is best to make very explicit ‘disclaimers’ at the beginning of the lecture. I reiterate that myth does not mean there is no fact base; that I know people felt very strongly about respecting the ANZAC legend; and that we aren’t attempting to dismiss the sacrifice of those who have died. Our job, I argue, is to look at how the legend has taken its particular form, how ritualised forms of remembrance can be and how some institutions can use the legend for their own ends. We discuss C.E.W Bean, and his deliberate attempts to construct the Anzacs according to the mythologies of Greece, his deliberate scholarship in linking the birth of the nation to classical ideas on the birth of civilisation. I juxtapose this with what I consider an artefact of WWI, an original copy of the ANZAC Book, a text published with soldiers’ accounts of the War and their condition published in 1917. I use photographs and small excerpts of footage. In the piece of footage that I show, there are several young Australians who are killed. I warn students before showing it that they may choose not to watch it because they may be distressed. For the most part they watch it with detachment, leading to a discussion on the saturation of death in the media and the way it has desensitised many of us. By introducing these as items I am able to introduce my notion of what constitutes an artefact breaking down the stereotypical notion that artefacts are only used by the Other. Discussion about



ANZAC provides an opportunity for students to flesh out the 'History from above' with their own 'History from below'. Students have and sometimes bring in and display 'their' artefacts.

It is also important to enfranchise students without a direct personal link to ANZAC. I talk about the hegemony about sending men to war; the torment that some men felt being ineligible because they worked in 'protected industry' and the distribution of white feathers as a marker of cowardice to those seen as shirkers. We discuss the possible exclusion of those who don't see themselves as having a direct link to the ANZAC tradition or Vietnam veterans and their families who felt betrayed by their public rejection and exclusion by the RSL for many years. In this way the majority of the class are able to participate from a variety of positions: those excluded and those enfranchised.

ANZAC forms the final part of the section on Foundation Myths; I then set the students two group problem-solving exercises. In each of these, they are advertising executives who must plan different campaigns. In the first, they must devise a new National Day that is inclusive of all Australians regardless of gender, race, religion, sexuality and class. In the second one group must represent the RSL, encouraging ANZAC participation, while the other must advocate for the government explaining why Australia needs a new national day of commemoration. These form some of the most enjoyable aspects of the class. Vigorous debate, a lot of laughter, creativity and an engagement with the dramaturgy are common. The students presenting often embody their presentation, being an older ex-military man in their RSL presentation or a conciliatory parliamentarian in another. RSL presentations tend to use the flag, the older generations, passing on the baton to the young, and very stereotyped images of the bush and beach. Even in those presentations calling for the removal of ANZAC Day students see that it is possible to be respectful of the tradition. For instance, one group said they would start with the Last Post, showing ANZAC troops running into a sunset. A voice over would say, "They fought to forge our nation. Now we, with respect, "Lay Our Dead to Rest"; reveille sounds; "We invite all Australians to carry with them the knowledge of their sacrifice as we move to a new era that celebrates a United Australia!" cheerful music; images of multicultural reconciliation, especially children.

In providing the scaffold of a specific task for students to approach the concepts that I want to discuss become enmeshed in a concrete reality. By allowing *them*, to enter into the manipulation of stereotypes, I believe student learning is enriched far more than a standard lecture and tutorial reading format. I still feel it is critically important for the lecturer to shape the discussion, to provide additional examples, theoretical rigour and to support the students with text. I also provide a brief Indigenous critique, comparing the way that New Zealand commemorates both Maori and Pakeha deaths in the Maori Wars (Veracini, 2004) of the nineteenth century as opposed to the Frontier myths of Australia. Further, I use the example of the package ‘Too Dark for the Light Horse’ that details the forgotten or ignored contribution of the Indigenous soldiers (Australian War Memorial, 2000), many of whom returned from fighting but were refused membership or even drinking privileges in the RSL because they were Aborigines (McCloud, 2007,1). There was therefore a dichotomy between fighting to defend one’s country and being marginalised and without full access to the “freedoms” one was supposed to be defending.

As with ANZAC, nationalist rhetoric has consistently featured men as the national icons. The song *We are Australian* includes a chorus

We are one;  
But we are many;  
And from all the lands on earth we come;  
We share our dream  
And sing with one voice

I am. You are. We are Australian (Woodley & Norton, nd).

In the verses however, all named examples of Australians to identify with are male. Ned Kelly, Clancy of the Overflow and Aboriginal painter Albert Namatjira. Although the iconic elements of Ned Kelly’s story as oppositional to state power are widely understood, Albert Namatjira is generally known only superficially as the ‘successful’ Aboriginal painter, described as the only Aboriginal person that most white students would have been able to name in the 1950’s and 1960’s (ABC, 2002). While on the one hand it is a general feature of the national consciousness to promote the cohesiveness, the quasi-historicism of *We Are Australian* neatly erases the dehumanising effects of the state’s ‘Aboriginal Protection’ under which Namatjira

was charged for the supply of alcohol to family members in Alice Springs. Jailed, he died not long after his release. The horrific 2006 death of his great-granddaughter in the Aboriginal Town camps of Alice Springs further attests to the failure of his “success” to emancipate his family (Skelton, 2006). Yet Namatjira’s status as an “Australian” icon continues in the mainstream.

In contrast, in Archie Roach’s *The Native Born*, Namatjira’s story is not one of a tolerant Australia capable of developing a reconciled multicultural populism, but an exemplar of the ‘Native Born’- premised on a pan-Aboriginal history of marginality:

And Albert Namatjira cried,  
As we all cry,  
The Native Born,  
We cry the Native Born (Rintoul, 1993, 7).

An important acknowledgement to be stressed here is that neither of these representations is ‘correct’. Each positions Namatjira within an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991). Which of these would Namatjira have embraced? I don’t know, but I can guess. What I can say is that Namatjira’s work was often derided by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal critics (Hardy, Megaw & Megaw, 1992) as assimilationist, a designation that is problematic. Although expressed in watercolours, Namatjira’s art almost always focussed on the Arrente country that he was a custodian of, a specific example of which can be seen in Figure 9.3.

In this painting, Namatjira has rendered an aspect of Arrente country that he has very specific responsibilities to as a kutungula/manager, inherited matrilineally (NGA, 2002), although until a recent National Gallery Namatjira retrospective this perspective was silenced. This highlights a number of pertinent points. Firstly, it shows that the apparent adherence to White forms does not necessarily constitute assimilation and negation of Indigeneity and spirituality. It may simply be another way in which the fundamental connectivity between land, self and kinship affiliation is visually manifested where, like other forms of art, Aboriginal art still has its roots within the past (Smith, 2006). Secondly, it alerts us that historical revisionism is both possible and I would argue desirable. History, and our understandings of it, can be rethought from a perspective of distance and a broader data selection than might have

been possible earlier. This holds as true for Indigenous specific issues, as for macro-agendas such as nationalism. The task of an inclusive National Dreaming is to find those stories that speak to multiple audiences according to shared values.



**Figure 9.3 *Palm Valley*: Albert Namatjira (NGA, 2002)**

This National Dreaming cannot be exclusively limited to Indigenous participation and must have the potential to enfranchise a national reconciliatory position. A case in point is the Wave Hill Walkout, widely acknowledged as the beginning of the modern Land Rights movement (Burney, 2007). Consistent with the national imaginary of the underdog, the Walkout of Gurindji people from Wave Hill, a cattle station owned by powerful British peer, Lord Vestey, posed the under-class struggle against the aristocracy and brought to international public attention the second-class citizenship of Indigenous Australians generally (Deane, 1996). Further, the Wave Hill Walkout received support from “ordinary decent Australians” (Burney, 2006, 16) and can be linked to the foundational mythic tradition of Australian unionism, which provided both financial support for strikers and penalised Vestey’s through the refusal of waterside workers to load beef from his stations at the docks (Ibid).

In the current debate on the crisis in Aboriginal communities, two paradigms on Aboriginal empowerment are advanced (Irabinna-Rigney, 2002). The first of these focuses on economic sustainability and an improvement of the Aboriginal statistical

profile to one that is comparable to mainstream Australians. Identified as a “Bread” discourse, this continues to empower the existing regimes of governmentality to improve their efficiency thus solving the Aboriginal problem. The second model for Aboriginal empowerment concerns the discourse of “Freedom”, that argues for the recognition of sovereign Aboriginal rights and the need for Aboriginal cultural autonomy to be central to any capacity building initiatives. The history of Aboriginal activism in Australia, which is exemplified in the Wave Hill Walkout recognises the centrality of Freedom within many Aboriginal agendas. The annual celebration of Wave Hill is aptly named Freedom Day.

Additionally, the return of Gurindji land also shows the intersection of two forms of law, Australian and Gurindji. As Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly’s song *From Little Things, Big Things Grow* concludes

That was the story of Vincent Lingiari  
But this is a story of something much more.  
How power and privilege cannot move a people  
Who know where they stand and stand in the law (Kelly & Carmody, 1992).

Viewed through a lens of Indigeneity, as part of Gurindji law and Dreaming the hand back of Wave Hill forms a part of the specific story of Lingiari a “Kadijeri man --the man in charge of the secret and chief male ceremony --of the Gurindji people” (Deane, 1996). One of the best-recognised Australian photographs of the Twentieth Century shows Gough Whitlam pouring dirt into the hand of Vincent Lingiari incorporating the symbolic and actual return of land (Bishop, 1975). Lingiari’s comment “They took our country away from us, now they have brought it back ceremonially” (Lingiari, cited in Deane, 1996) speaks to the importance of ceremony in processes of reconciliation and reparation.



**Figure 9.4 Vincent Lingiari & Gough Whitlam (Bishop, 1975).**

It is from this basis that new dynamics of interaction can be developed as evidenced in the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Walkout where Victor Lingiari, in a “re-enactment” with Gough Whitlam, reversed the power relations of the original image by pouring the dirt into Whitlam’s hands. It is significant to note that the symbolism of this interaction requires both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participation. The ABC website devoted to the online publication of the Vincent Lingiari lecture (see Figure 4) shows a portraiture rendition of Lingiari. I would argue though that it is an incomplete representation. In showing this image to students who are not familiar with Lingiari (or Gough Whitlam!) and asking them consider what it symbolises the consistent response is that it signifies the Aboriginal “beggar” who must constantly ask for white charity. As a metaphor for reconciliation this strongly attests to the necessity of the process involving both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in a way that is fluid, empowering and inclusionary.



**Figure 9.5 Vincent Lingiari Portrait: Lingiari lecture (Burney, 2007).**

The Gurindji and many other Aboriginal land rights claims can be linked to the intrinsic values of land as ‘sacred’ (Wooten, 2006). Even viewed through the dominant Judeo-Christian culture, the Aboriginal concern for the protection of sacred sites should resonate to a much greater degree than it seems to (Brett, 2003, 254). Far more readily there has been an eagerness within the public sphere to deny the continuity and importance of Aboriginal connections to land. For those Aboriginal claimants that succeed in the return of land or the cessation of land damaging practices of capital, there are accusations of being anti-progress and Un-Australian. In contrast, those who receive monetary compensation or who attempt to use land to allow for capital ventures that will generate economic self-sufficiency are branded fraudulent on a flawed conception that spiritual connection to land negates any other form of usage. The academy appears to have had a greater vested interest in furnishing “experts” to adjudicate on the authenticity of Aboriginal land claims than addressing the no-win situation that Aboriginal claimants are subjected to. The promotion of Understanding within both the academy and public sphere is paramount for the future.

The current interest in debate regarding an inclusive Australia offers a significant space for a meaningful sociological input in giving voice to those groups previously marginalised from nationalist tropes. From the more specific perspective of Indigenous sociology, the ongoing Gurindji Dreaming, Aboriginal mourning and attempts to reconfigure the representation of Aboriginal icons intersects with the Dreaming of repatriated country and cultural recognition for Indigenous peoples and mainstream Australian traditions seeking a socially just society- a Fair Go. This stands in stark contrast to the model of 'progress' in the celebration of national history where the Indigenous presence is primarily at the beginning, moving in a linear progression through the colonial period to the present. If however, we can encourage students to celebrate the Indigenous and non-Indigenous as concurrent, Indigeneity could begin to assume its rightful place as integral part of the national imagination as well as the sociological imagination. Mick Dodson (Dodson, cited in Australian Museum, 2004) described the possibility as follows:

We have extended our hand to other Australians. Those Australians who take our hand are those who dare to dream of an Australia that could be. In true reconciliation, through the remembering, the grieving and the healing, we become as one in the dreaming (sic) of this land.



## **Conclusion: Back to the Future: The Interventions and Beyond**

While attempting to finalise this thesis another issue exploded onto the consciousness of mainstream Australia, the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory and the Howard government's 'Interventions'. Given the significance of the issue I felt it must be addressed by the thesis, yet as I have not yet been able to factor these latest developments into my teaching it seems not to fit easily within the thesis. I therefore include my thoughts on this as a post-script to the thesis and as an example that there is a pressing need for sociologists to speak NOW. Further, the issues raised in this 'new' debate demonstrate the continuity of the stereotypes that my teaching has attempted to address.

The 'state of emergency' declared by the Australian federal government for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in 2007 was a matter of great concern to the national pan-Indigenous community. While no one denies the seriousness of the situations for many communities, the proposed interventions have reinvigorated the centuries long perceptions of the Aboriginal family as being inherently deviant, in perpetual crisis, necessitating the intervention of a state constituted on a supposed benevolent paternalism. Such is the pervasiveness of the demonisation of Aboriginal masculinity coupled with conceptions of flawed Aboriginal motherhood that to champion Indigenous self-determination is to risk opening oneself to ridicule. Despite this, I adopt the position that the self-determination of Indigenous families and communities must remain paramount in the current and future efforts to address the parlous conditions of Indigenous families. Further, I suggest that the current "crisis" must be contextualised within an understanding of the complex historical relationships that continue to be marked by a culture of fear and mistrust.

In June 2007, the Australian Prime Minister John Howard declared a state of emergency in the Northern Territory supposedly as a response to the *Little Children are Sacred Report* (Wilde, Anderson, 2007) that detailed serious child sexual abuse in

many Aboriginal communities. Announcing a series of interventions by health and welfare professionals in concert with police and armed forces, the government's responses were constituted on enforcing state power, while significantly marginalizing the input of Indigenous communities to participate in a dialogue for future community initiatives. For many Indigenous families these measures have reinforced long-standing fears of state intervention that date from the imposition of the colonial gaze to the present day. It needs to be considered how this seeming impasse can be overcome. This final commentary briefly sketches a number of historical contexts that have contributed to the current situation for Indigenous communities with the aim of creating a foundation for expanded discussion that is multifaceted rather than mono-dimensional.

### **Acknowledging the author's position**

To say that the Australian federal government's declaration of a state of emergency and suggested interventions in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory was met with concern among the broader Australian Indigenous population is an understatement. This is not because we were unaware of the seriousness of child sex abuse in many of our communities. Indeed, this has been so well documented in the last decade and debated within our own forums that it is doubtful anyone within Indigenous academia, politics or service provision was surprised by the revelations of the *Little Children are Sacred Report*. What was palpable in Indigenous responses, apart from anger was fear: of losing children; of ceding community autonomy; and of a new wave of public discourse constituting us and our cultures as inherently 'savage'. Underlying all of this was fear of the state, a commonality of many Indigenous families including my own.

I first came to critically consider this fear in my early twenties. Gordon Briscoe, an Indigenous academic, published a revised account of his doctoral thesis that provides an illuminating perspective on archival data related to Indigenous health. In a chapter examining the health of Indigenous peoples in Queensland, Briscoe detailed the practices of quarantine carried out during the pneumonic plague pandemic that occurred after World War I. While comparing rates of infection and death he notes that

[t]he difference for the Aboriginal victims of influenza was that, unlike the whites, they were taken to disease compounds on the government depots, fenced areas resembling huge wire cages built with 9-metre high wire mesh fence and topped with barbed wire to prevent entry and escape... These compounds, constructed earlier as places for punishing people infected with venereal disease, were now utilised to isolate the influenza victims from the other relief depot inmate (Briscoe, 2003, 271).

While I was impacted by the horror of this image in general, relaying it to the personal I wondered if similar efforts at containment had occurred for Bundjalung peoples in northern New South Wales. I had noted in a number of areas that Bundjalung experiences often mirrored the Queensland model rather than conforming to New South Wales directives.

In 1994, I travelled to Ballina for a conference on Aboriginal Education, but chose to hire a car and spend the nights with my elderly great-Aunts in Casino rather than at the conference venue. My mother and I were sitting at the kitchen table talking over family history with Aunty Gertie and Aunty Esther, born in 1911 and 1921 respectively. As Auntie Gertie talked over memories of her childhood I was prompted to ask her if she remembered the “big flu” after World War 1. “Yes”, she said, “that was the pneumonic flu”. The use of this specific terminology alerted me that she was probably referring to the pandemic identified by Briscoe. She stared down at her clasped hands for a moment and then began to tell her story:

When that flu came they rounded up all the Aboriginal people and put them in the [Casino] showground. On one side was the healthy people and on the other side was the sick ones. Every day the doctor would come round and look at everyone and decide who had to go. If you went over to the other side you didn't come back. One day the doctor looked at Pete [my grandfather], he was only a little fella then, and said he had to go. Our Aunty, Aunty Bella Walker stood up to that doctor and said “No you're not takin' him” and he went away. That saved his life you know because he would have died if that doctor took him. Mum lost a baby, that was our little brother.

I was twenty-two when I heard that story, but it has taken until now for me to clearly articulate the ramifications of it for me in both a personal and professional sense. Initially, the emotion was too raw to express, a lost child, brother and uncle, but also trying to place the piece of a puzzle. There is no doubt in my mind that the experience of the pneumonic flu was a major factor in the inculcation of terror that the older members of my family exhibited in relation to hospitals and doctors specifically and state intervention in general. The government and professionals considered its agents such as doctors were rendered with so much power, as to sometimes be considered almost omniscient. For my grandparent's generation this was expressed in a mantra that "you never know what the government is going to do. They can do anything to us".

I had thought I understood the genesis of this belief. I had lain in bed with my grandparents, my great-aunts and cousins and heard many stories that supported this view. I had walked with my grandparents through Redfern and seen them avert their eyes as police drove slowly by, surveilling the Aboriginal people on the footpath. This alerts me that when we hear oral family histories they are incomplete. We cannot know every experience of our Old people, even where we know their actions, we may not know their motivation. Indeed they may not have consciously comprehended their motivation either. What comes to us is a refined notion, a "truth" for us to internalize. Auntie Gertie lived to ninety, and for eight decades she carried with her the sure and certain knowledge that when, not if, governments chose to reassert their control of Aboriginal lives we would be powerless to stop them. Many of the "truths" she told me have been beautiful and empowering. This one is the saddest. So I shall leave the objectification of the Indigenous situation to others who can label and statistically quantify the extent of our dysfunction for the army of professionals waiting to intervene. In contrast, my perspective will be with other Indigenous academics and like-minded scholars who see that "figures are not just numbers; they reflect the lives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Behrendt, 2005, 3).

### **The historical perspective of Indigenous child abuse**

Since 1788, the Aboriginal body has been seen as a site to be transformed in the image of White civility, where assistance is conditional on conformity. This perspective was true of many of the Christian missionaries who distributed goods and

offered shelter on the condition of the surrender of the soul, claimed for God and sovereign from the depths of depravity. As the nineteenth century progressed Christian missionary initiatives received more power as apparatus' of state controlled infrastructure (McGregor, 1997; Gray, 1998, 58). The linkage of church and state institutionalised not only Christian morality but led to the systematic usage of techniques to reform the Indigenous cultures at macro-social levels as well as acting on individual bodies. While it would be possible to theorize on the ways in which these practices developed exclusively on the Australian continent, they are in fact part of the broader processes of Western governmentality that have been examined by Western scholarship. It is therefore possible to engage with wider intellectual traditions, while still providing the specificity of our particular experiences. As Foucault wrote:

[t]ake the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing: then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists. And we are now seeing a whole proliferation of different categories of social work.

Naturally it's medicine which has played the basic role as the common denominator. Its discourse circulated one instance to the next. It was in the name of medicine both that people came to inspect the layout of houses and, equally, that they classified individuals as insane, criminal, or sick (Foucault, 1980, 210).

This reflects the Indigenous Australian experience. Even a cursory examination of the missions and reserves developed under various Protection legislations reveals an underlying medical model as the professional justification for intervention, from the dispersal of town camps to the inspection of homes on the grounds of hygiene; the monitoring of sexuality; and the pathologising of Indigenous cultures. When linked to the Christian moral imperative, the Indigenous body became defined as a site of physical and spiritual malaise that necessitates external regulation for transformation to health and order. Indeed, following Foucault's template, Beckett has argued the extent of attempts to regulate the Indigenous body reflects a level of control that only

the orphan and insane are subject to (1988,7). Note however, that the other two categories are not essentialised from birth, but emerge through time and supposed behavioural offence against either the ordered normality or morality. In contrast, for Indigenous Australians the panoptic gaze is activated by the mere identification of the Aboriginal subject, who by virtue of their racial (read biological) type is deemed intrinsically in need of intervention, surveillance and control. In Twentieth Century New South Wales, the removal of Aboriginal children could be bureaucratically justified by virtue of “being Aboriginal” alone (McConnochie, 1988).

Of the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children, reports have been undeniably dire. They documented endemic child abuse, a shocking incidence of underage girls infected with sexually transmitted disease and high levels of teen pregnancy to impoverished and disempowered girls. Despite the haunting similarity to the current situation these are the findings of a Queensland Inquiry over one hundred years ago! The reports found however, that the abusers of these Indigenous girls were not from their own culture and kin networks, but rather White men, in positions of power through the placement of Aboriginal girls as domestic labour. The female witnesses to their subjugation were not the Aboriginal mothers and grandmothers, but their White mistresses (Kidd, 1997). I make this point, not to indulge in a simplistic shift of blame, but rather to problematise the Black/White dichotomy that is demonizing Aboriginal families as intrinsically abusive and empowering White authority as the objective arbiters for change. The realities are far more complex. Aboriginal child sex abuse is multi-generational, as is government knowledge of its occurrence. The current situation is not a failure specific to the Howard federal government, but a long-standing issue that has been poorly addressed across federal and state domains by all political parties. Aboriginal concerns that no positive action will be taken in response to this particular cycle of reportage cannot therefore be viewed as unfounded.

Given that the historical legacy of child abuse is well documented, the multi-generational cycles must be recognized. Further, these must be viewed through the lens of both micro and macro analysis. For many Aboriginal people, fear, powerlessness and shame associated with the individual experience of abuse are mirrored in the macro relations with the state. Some Aboriginal peoples are not

simply fearful of perpetrators and reprisals (Summers, 2003, 108-9), but of the processes of reportage to police or welfare authorities and the actions that they might take. Powerlessness to stop abuse, to protect children, to leave violent and violating situations is increased when the mainstream society is also perceived as threatening. Shame too is multifaceted- whether linked to the abuse itself, to doubts one will be believed or to the negative perceptions that will accrue against Aboriginal communities and cultures (Stanley, 2003).

With these dilemmas in mind, my task has as a core aspect the need to show the structural dynamics of Indigenous communities. One tendency in the contemporary media presents Indigenous communities as the anarchic product of a post-Holocaust trauma; where the savagery of Indigenous communities reinforces the Hobbesian dogma that lives will be “nasty, brutish and short” (Peabody, 2004). The alarming trends of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities that have emerged within the last decade are often assigned as predating the need for Indigenous culture to subside. The colonial tropes that decried the need for Aboriginal women and children to be emancipated from the savagery of Indigenous masculinity (Lake, 1994, 86-7) are reinvigorated. That domestic violence and sexual abuse occur across every sector of mainstream society and are widely regarded as under-reported goes unnoticed in this discourse. Moreover, that issues of alienation and dispossession act as strong causal factors in substance abuse and all forms of violence is virtually ignored, while it is presented as self-evident that it is the inherent inferiority of Aboriginal cultures that brings about these outcomes.

In a reinvigorated climate of Aboriginal denigration, how does one present alternatives? We are consistently placed in positions of significant tension where Aboriginal disadvantage is juxtaposed with stereotypes of “welfare bludging” (Behrendt, 2005, 6). The common sense wisdom that the extended family is important to Aboriginal people is undermined as elders particularly men are seen as either weak or predatory. In the early Twentieth Century, the feminist Bessie Rischbich suggested that the “system should be improved in order that [Aboriginal parents] might keep their children” (Paisley, 1997) yet the removal of Aboriginal children to boarding school and care is still being (re)presented as being in the “best interests of the child”. This is despite comments from Aboriginal children themselves who often articulate

that even where care situations are good they still want to go home (Higgins, Higgins, Bromfield & Richardson, 2007, 7) Adherence to Aboriginal culture is seen as central to 'authenticity', but culture is seen as a drawback from full economic citizenship. It is important to recognise that for many people, Aboriginal families continue to provide culturally stable frameworks from which individuals are emerging to positions of leadership within their families and communities. It is moreover important to tell the stories of elders who nurture the youth of their communities and programmes that have brought about positive changes (Collard, Palmer, 2006, 27). It is important that we do not allow ourselves to be spoken of and not with. We still live with the debilitating effects of a "protective" state that assumed responsibility for fixing the "Aboriginal problem" while attempting to silence Aboriginal voices. The need for dialogue is paramount with the continuity of our right to be distinct peoples central to our own destinies. As Mick Dodson (1994) relates

"I don't care how hard it is. You build Aboriginality or you get nothing. There's no choice about it. If our Aboriginal people cannot change how it is among themselves, then the Aboriginal people will never climb back out of hell".

We remain within a "raced" framework that inculcates fear, needing to provide discourses that will strengthen our communities and provide safe environments for children without ceding our cultural integrity. The achievement of economic independence, cultural autonomy and healthy families need not be seen as mutually exclusive. It is not possible for this to occur without a clear recognition of the past in contributing to the present and of the failure of both Black and White responses to address inequality. The remembrance of history remains central to Indigenous Australian cultures and to shaping responses to external relations with the Australian nation state. The late Oodgeroo Noonuccal appreciated the centrality of the historical experiences of Aboriginal people in our contemporary lives. She wrote:

Let no one say the past is dead.

The past is all about us and within.

Haunted by tribal memories, I know

This little now, this accidental present

Is not the all of me, whose long making

Is so much of the past...



Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.  
Now is so small a part of time, so small a part  
Of all the race years that have moulded me (Noonuccal, 1998, 256-7).

### **To the Future...**

Australian society is fundamentally moulded by the “race years” that Oodgeroo Noonuccal refers to. Australian Sociology has the potential to reveal the complexities of those times and to contribute to a better future. My hope is that it will do so. This thesis has aimed to present my ongoing journey to reflect on my own moulding as a “raced” individual who attempts to (re)present Aboriginal identity and issues within a sociological classroom. It is my contention that this cannot be adequately achieved within an orthodox academic framework. My discussion of the Dreaming, family, country and connectivity combines a survey across the available resources with examples on how these have been used within a sociological classroom situation to generate greater understanding among non-Indigenous students on Indigenous issues. This is in no way exhaustive it is part of an ongoing commitment. It is important to state this should not be seen as prescriptive. Indeed, one of the intended messages is that incorporating Aboriginal perspectives in any area requires a localised and personalised consideration even where broader principles may be adopted (Agrawal, 2004, 4).

My approach to teaching Indigenous Sociology synthesizes the three themes: My Koori identity, an expanded range of resources and the four principles of the Sociological Imagination. It is the reflection on the development, description and analysis of how these have been experienced within a sociological classroom situation that forms the basis of this thesis. It is not my aim to develop universal prescriptions on how an Indigenous sociology should be taught, but rather to contribute possibilities to the multidisciplinary nature of sociology as a political enterprise. This is a position that is not consistent with the desire of some sociologists for the development of a grand theory to explain race relations (Rose, 1983, 196), but is more consistent with a microanalysis that seeks to understand the localized and localizing dynamics of knowledge production.

For many other doctoral candidates the literature review is hampered by having to narrow the parameters of literature to be discussed. The opposite was true of this thesis however I have expanded on the orthodox concept of 'literature' to include other resources that can assist in the development of the sociology of Indigenous issues. These include literature from anthropology, cultural studies, history, pedagogy and Indigenous Studies; audio-visual and multi-media materials; self-reflection; photographic analysis and the classroom itself. In Chapter two, I examined how the distance of sociology from Indigenous issues occurred and how the paradoxical engagement between Western and Indigenous knowledges can be overcome. Chapter's three, four, and five are interlinked considerations on defining and representing some of the varying perspectives of what *being* Aboriginal can signify to the lecturer and also to the students.

Chapters six, seven, eight and nine were concerned with different elements of spirituality, including the Dreaming and Christianity. I argued that the Dreaming is one of the few terms connected with Aboriginal culture that has currency within mainstream Australia. Given that in learning about Aboriginal topics much is new and destabilising, using a concept that students feel they have some prior knowledge of can afford students a space of relative comfort. Their preconceived ideas also provide a useful tableau for addressing any misconceptions and adding to their understanding of Aboriginal spirituality. As an Indigenous cultural actor, the potential to have the Dreaming manifest its power, as a continuing force within a formal education setting is a major motivation. I am further compelled to do this by a conviction that many students only see Indigenous spirituality through a lens of "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo, 1989) as the audience to Indigenous dramaturgy, rather than as participants in an ongoing holistic frame of reference. In these chapters I explained the utility of The Dreaming in my teaching that is indicative of macro and micro trends in sociology and the politics of identity in a global context. My examples included discussion on the Aboriginal lifecycle contextualised in audio-visual material based on Yolngu culture and a consideration of the repatriation of Aboriginal remains from museums and universities. Several themes of contemporary manifestations to be considered are the lifecycle, interactions with Catholicism and Australian nationalism. Although I linked these examples into an explanation of how I teach sociology this has been fraught with some difficulty. It is in the integration of the Dreaming that I

feel the greatest disjuncture between my Indigenous sense of self and a professional sociological persona.

Given the work that has been done recently to make Australian sociologists aware of the disciplinary silence on Indigenous issues, a failure to speak in what are once again, critical times must be seen as wilful neglect. This thesis has made a contribution to considering what the practice of an Indigenous sociology might contain. With a growing forum in the Australian Sociological Association and Health Sociology I look forward to seeing how others have negotiated this complex task too.

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